

Stephen Haar
Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?

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James D. G. Dunn · Richard B. Hays
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Dedicated to

MICHAEL LATTKE

Professor for New Testament and Early Christianity
at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

*It is the supreme art of the teacher
to awaken a thirst for research, knowledge, and writing.*

Preface

This book is a revision of my dissertation accepted by the University of Queensland in May 2002 for the award of Doctor of Philosophy. The revision has been shaped in part by comments on the thesis by its examiners, Professor Kurt Rudolph of Philipps-Universität Marburg, Privatdozent Dr Ferdinand Prostmeier of the University of Regensburg, and Dr Johan Ferreira of Queensland. For their insightful and helpful criticisms I am deeply appreciative, but they have not seen this revised work and this book still reflects very much the standard of my own scholarship rather than theirs.

My most profound thanks go to my former PhD Supervisor, Professor Michael Lattke of the Studies in Religion Department at the University of Queensland, Brisbane. I am proud and privileged to call Professor Lattke my teacher and mentor. I am indebted to his patient tutelage and advice, and thankful for his encouragement and friendship. Special thanks are also due to Dr. Rick Strelan of the University of Queensland, for his hospitality and valued comments given over many hours spent in discussion about Simon. This is also an opportune time to thank Dr. Victor Pfitzner of Luther Seminary, North Adelaide, who instilled in me a love for the New Testament as well as an awareness of relevant Graeco-Roman and Jewish literature.

I don't know how any author could have a better experience with a publisher than I have had with the people at Walter de Gruyter. My thanks to the editors of BZNW—Prof. Michael Wolter, James D.G. Dunn, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Richard Hays—for reading and approving my work for publication. In particular I wish to thank Dr. Claus-Jürgen Thornton, who has overseen the preparation and presentation of my material in this published form with a remarkable degree of patience and expertise.

I also acknowledge the generous assistance provided by the staff of Löhe Library at Luther Seminary, North Adelaide; especially Jocelyn Morris, Don Keast, and Ms Lavinia Gent. Thank you for your good humour and unexcelled skills.

The LS Greek® and LS Hebrew® fonts for Windows® used in this book are TrueType fonts available from *Linguist's Software Inc.*, P.O. Box 580, Edmond WA 98020-0580 USA tel (206) 775-1130.

Finally, I thank my wonderful family, Janet, Nathan, Joshua, Jennifer, and Rachel, who remained loving and understanding towards their husband and father despite his being “under the spell” of Simon for so many years.

Stephen Haar

Adelaide 2003

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Abbreviations

AAR.AMA/SBL	American Academy of Religion. Annual Meeting Abstracts. Society of Biblical Literature. Missoula, Montana.
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary.</i>
<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review.</i>
ABRL	The Anchor Bible Reference Library.
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers. Westminster, Maryland etc.
<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus Haereses.</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums. Leiden 8,1970–15,1978.
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des späteren Judentums und des Urchristentums. Leiden 1,1961–7,1968.
AIIFCS	The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting. 5 Vols. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1993–1996.
AIIFCS 1	— 1. Literary Setting
AIIFCS 2	— 2. Graeco-Roman Setting
AIIFCS 3	— 3. Paul in Roman Custody
AIIFCS 4	— 4. Palestinian Setting
AIIFCS 5	— 5. Diaspora Setting
<i>AJT</i>	<i>American Journal of Theology.</i> Chicago, Illinois 1,1897–24,1920.
<i>AMI</i>	<i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran.</i> Berlin.
<i>Anaceph.</i>	<i>Anacephalaeosis.</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica.
ANFa	Ante-Nicene Fathers. New York 1–10, 1886–1887 [etc.]
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
ANRW I	— I. Von den Anfängen Roms bis zum Ausgang der Republik.
ANRW II	— II. Principat.

- Ant.* Josephus, *Antiquitates*.
- Apol.* Justin, *Apology*; Tertullian, *Apologeticum*.
- APt* *Apocryphal Acts of Peter, The*
- ARGU Arbeiten zur Religion und Geschichte des Urchristentums. Edited by G. LÜDEMANN. Frankfurt a.M./Berlin/Bern/Wien/New York/Bruxelles.
- ATLA Amercian Theological Library Association.
- Av. Avesta.
- BAGD A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature. Edited by BAUER, W./ARNDT, W./GINGRICH, F.W./DANKER, F.W. Chicago: University Press, 1979.
- BCNH Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi. Québec/Louvain.
- BCNH.E — Section «Études».
- BCNH.T — Section «Textes».
- BDF Blass/Debrunner/Funk.
- BEAT Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums. Frankfurt a.M. [etc.] 1,1984–
- Beginnings* *The Beginnings of Christianity*. Part One. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Edited by F.J. FOAKES–JACKSON and K. LAKE, 1920–1933.
- BETHL Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Lovanien-sium. Louvain [etc.].
- BEvTh Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie. München.
- BIDEZ/CUMONT *Les Mages hellénisés. Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque*. Edited by Joseph BIDEZ/Franz CUMONT. Volume I: *Introduction*. Volume II: *Texts*. Second Edition. Paris: Société d'édition «*Les Belles Lettres*», 1973 (=1938).
- BJ* Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*.
- BJRL* *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. University Library. Manchester.
- BWANT Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament. Stuttgart.
- BZAW Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. Berlin/New York.
- BZNW Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche. Berlin/New York.

- CAH Cambridge Ancient History. Edited by S.A. COOK/
F.E. ADCOCK/M.P. CHARLESWORTH. Volume X:
The Augustan Empire. Volume XI: *The Imperial Peace*.
Volume XII: *The Imperial Crisis and Recovery*. Cambridge.
- CAnt Christianisme antique. Paris.
- CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Washington D.C.
- CCER Cahiers du Cercle Ernest-Renan pour Libres
Recherches d'Histoire du Christianisme. Paris
1,1954ff.
- CChr.SL Corpus Christianorum. Turnhout. Series Latina.
1,1953ff.
- CD Cairo (Genizah text of the) Damascus (Document)
- CIG Corpus inscriptionum Graecarum. Berlin 1,1828–6.2,
1877.
- CIL Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum. Berlin.
- CQ *Classical Quarterly*. London [etc.]
- CRB Cahiers de la Revue biblique. Paris 1,1964ff.
- CRI Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad novum
testamentum. Assen.
—I. The Jewish People in the First Century.
1,1974ff.
—II. The Literature of the Jewish People in the
period of the Second Temple and the Talmud.
1,1988ff.
—III. Jewish Tradition in Early Christian Literature.
1,1990ff.
- CSCO Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium. Roma
[etc.]
- DCB *Dictionary for Christian Biography*.
- DECA *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du christianisme ancien*. Sous la
direction de Angelo DI BERARDINO. Adaption
française sous la direction de François VIAL. Vols. I–
II. [Paris:] Editions du Cerf, 1990.
- Dial.* Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*.
- DIOG. L. Diogenes Laertius.
- DK Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Translated by Her-
mann DIELS. Edited by Walther KRANZ. Sixth Edition.
Vols. I–III. Dublin/Zürich: Weidmann, 1951/52.
- DTbC *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*.
- DTV Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag. München.

- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1990-1993.
- EEC *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. Second Edition. Edited by Everett FERGUSON. 2 Vols. New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1992.
- EECh *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*. 2 Vols. Cambridge: James Clarke/New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- EKK Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar.
- EPRO Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain. Leiden.
- EQ *Evangelical Quarterly*. London [etc.].
- Eranos *Eranos*. Yearbook. Leiden 39,1970–
- ERE *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Edited by James HASTINGS. Edinburgh 1–13, 1908–1926 [etc.].
- EuChJ *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism*. Detroit: Wayne State University, 1992.
- FC Fontes Christiani. Zweisprachige Neuausgabe christlicher Quellentexte aus Altertum und Mittelalter. Herausgegeben von N. BROX/W. GEERLINGS/G. GRESHAKE/R. ILGNER/R. SCHIEFFER. Freiburg/Basel/Wien/Barcelona/Rom/New York: Herder.
- FGH Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker.
- FO French original.
- Fontes *Fontes historiae religionis Persicae*. Carolus CLEMEN (collegit). Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber, 1920.
- Fr. Fragment.
- FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Göttingen.
- FS Festschrift.
- FS Berger *Religionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments. Festschrift für Klaus BERGER zum 60. Geburtstag*. Herausgegeben von A. VON DOBBELER/K. ERLEMANN/R. HEILIGENTHAL. Tübingen/Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 2000.
- FS Dodd *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology. In honour of Charles Harold Dodd*. Edited by W.D. DAVIES/D. DAUBE. Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1956.
- FS Georgi *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World. Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*. Edited

- by L. BORMANN/K. DEL TREDICI/A. STANDHARTINGER. Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994.
- FS Goodenough *Religions in Antiquity. Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough.* Edited by J. NEUSNER. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968.
- FS Jonas *Gnosis. Festschrift für Hans Jonas.* Edited by B. ALAND. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978.
- FS Kuhn *Tradition und Glaube. Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt. Festgabe für Karl Georg Kuhn zum 65. Geburtstag.* Edited by G. JEREMIAS/H.-W. KUHN/H. STEGEMANN. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971.
- FS Meeks *The Social World of the First Christians. Essays in Honour of Wayne A. Meeks.* Edited by L.M. WHITE/O.L. YARBROUGH. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- FS Michel *Josephus-Studien. Untersuchungen zu Josephus, dem antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament. Otto Michel zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet.* Edited by O. BETZ/K. HAACKER/M. HENGEL. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974.
- FS Quispel *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions. Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday.* Edited by R. VAN DEN BROEK/M.J. VERMASEREN. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981.
- FS Schmid *Orientierung an Jesus.* Edited by P. HOFFMANN. Freiburg: Herder, 1973.
- FS Schneider *Der Treue Gottes trauen. Beiträge zum Werk des Lukas für Gerbard Schneider.* Edited by C. BUSSMANN/W. RADL. Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1991.
- FS Smith *Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults. Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty.* Edited by Jacob NEUSNER. SJLA 12. Four Parts. (1) New Testament, (2) Early Christianity, (3) Judaism before 70, (4) Judaism after 70. Other Greco-Roman Cults. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975.
- FS Stuhlmacher *Evangelium – Schriftauslegung – Kirche. Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher zum 65. Geburtstag.* Edited by J. ÅDNA/S.J. HAFEMAN/O. HOFIUS. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.
- FS Wilson *The New Testament and Gnosis. Essays in Honour of Robert McLachlan Wilson.* Edited by A.H.B. LOGAN/A.J.M. WEDDERBURN. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983.

- GCS Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- GMPT *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation. Including the Demotic Spells.* Edited by H.D. BETZ. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- GO German original.
- GOF.H Göttinger Orientforschungen. Reihe 6: Hellenistica. Wiesbaden.
- GRBS Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies. Cambridge, Massachusetts 1,1958ff.
- GrTS Grazer theologische Studien. Graz.
- GTA Göttinger theologische Arbeiten. Göttingen.
- Haer. Ps.—Tertullian, *Adversus omnes haereses (haereticos).*
- Hdt. Herodotus.
- H.E. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica.*
- HEChD *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea.* 3 Vols. Translated and Edited by J.A. BAKER. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Helios *Helios: Journal of the Classical Association of the South-western United States.*
- HNT Handbuch zum Neuen Testament. Tübingen.
- HO Handbuch der Orientalistik. Leiden.
- Hom. Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies.*
- HTbR *Harvard Theological Review.* Cambridge, Massachusetts 1,1908ff.
- HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual.* Cincinnati, Ohio.
- IDB *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.*
- IP Instrumenta patristica. 's-Gravenhage [etc.].
- IrAnt *Iranica antiqua.* Leiden.
- IVP Inter-Varsity Press.
- JAAR *Journal of the American Academy of Religion.* Boston, Massachusetts [etc.].
- JAC *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum.* Münster in W.
- JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature.* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- JJS *Journal of Jewish Studies.* London.
- JRAS *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.* London.
- JRS *Journal of Roman Studies.* London.

- JSJ *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period.* Leiden.
- JSNT *Journal for the Study of the New Testament.* Sheffield.
- JSNT.S — Supplement series.
- JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament.* Sheffield.
- JThS *Journal of Theological Studies.* Oxford [etc.].
- JWSTP *Jewish Writings in the Second Temple Period.* Edited by M.E. STONE.
- KEK Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament. Göttingen.
- KP *Der Kleine Pauly.* Lexikon der Antike. Stuttgart, 1–5 1962–1975.
- KST Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie. Edited by G. BITTER/E. DASSMANN/H. MERKLEIN/H. VORGRIMLER/E. ZENGER. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer.
- KTA Kröners Taschenausgabe.
- LACL *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur.* Edited by S. DÖPP/W. GEERLINGS/P. BRUNS/G. RÖWEKAMP/M. SKEB. Freiburg: Herder, 1998.
- LCA *Lexikon der christlichen Antike.* KTA 332. Edited by J.B. BAUER/M. HUTTER/A. FELBER. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1999.
- LCL [= LOEB] Loeb Classical Library.
- LS *A Latin Dictionary.* Edited by C.T. LEWIS/C. SHORT. Oxford: Clarendon.
- LSJ *Greek–English Lexicon.* Edited by H.G. LIDDELL/R. SCOTT. Revised and augmented throughout by H.S. JONES/R. MACKENZIE. 2 Vols + Supplement. Oxford: Clarendon.
- LSSW *Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen.* Freiburg: Herder, 1990.
- LTJ *Lutheran Theological Journal.* Adelaide.
- LTbK *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche.* Second Edition. Freiburg: Herder, 1,1957–10,1965.
- MM The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources. Edited by J.H. MOULTON/G. MILLIGAN. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1980.

- Mn.* *Mnemosyne: Bibliotheca Classica Philologica Batava.* Leiden 1,1852–11,1862.
- MSSNTS Monograph Series. Society for New Testament Studies. Cambridge.
- Nat. Hist.* Pliny, *Natural History.*
- NDIEC *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity.* Edited by G.H.R. HORSLEY/S.R. LLEWELYN. Macquarie University, North Ryde, Sydney, 1,1981–7,1996.
- NEB The New English Bible. Oxford: University Press, 1970–
- NHC Nag Hammadi codex (codices).
- NHMS Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies [Formerly Nag Hammadi Studies. Eds. J.M. ROBINSON/H.J. KLIMKEIT]. Edited by H.W. ATTRIDGE/R. CAMERON/W.-P. FUNK/C.W. HEDRICK/H. JACKSON/P. NAGEL/J. VAN OORT/D.M. PARROTT/B.A. PEARSON/K. RUDOLPH/H.-M. SCHENKE/W. SUNDERMANN. Leiden/New York/Köln.
- NHS Nag Hammadi Studies. Leiden.
- NIV New International Version. The Holy Bible.
- NovT* *Novum Testamentum. An International Quarterly for New Testament and related Studies.* Leiden.
- NovT.S — Supplements
- NP *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike.* Herausgegeben von H. CANKIK/H. SCHNEIDER. Stuttgart/ Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 1999–
- NPNFa A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series. Edited by P. SCHAFF. Grand Rapids, Michigan 1–14, 1952–1956.
- NS New Series.
- NTD Das Neue Testament Deutsch. Göttingen.
- NTOA *Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus.* Fribourg [etc.].
- NTS* *New Testament Studies.* Cambridge [etc.].
- NTTS New Testament Tools and Studies. Leiden.
- Numen* *Numen. International Review for the History of Religions.* Leiden.
- OCA Orientalia Christiana analecta. Roma.
- OCPM Oxford Classical and Philosophical Monographs. Oxford.

- ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Second Edition. Edited by F.L. CROSS/E.A. LIVINGSTONE, 1990.
- OHCW *Oxford History of the Classical World*. Oxford: University Press, 1995.
- ÖTK Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar. Gütersloh.
- Pan.* Epiphanius, *Panarion*.
- PatMS Patristic Monograph Series. Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- PG Patrologiae cursus completus. Accurante Jacques-Paul MIGNE. Series Graeca. Reprinted [1857–1866] Turnhout, 1959ff.
- PGM *Papyri graecae magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. Edited by Karl PREISENDANZ. Second revised edition by A. HENRICHs. Stuttgart.
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus. Accurante Jacques-Paul MIGNE. Series Latina. Reprinted [1857–1866] Turnhout, 1959ff.
- Praescr.* Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*.
- PRE *Pauhs Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Alterthums-wissenschaft*. Neuausgabe begonnen von Georg WISSOWA. Stuttgart.
—1. Reihe 1,1894–24,1963.
—2. Reihe 1(=25),1914–10(=34),1972.
—Supplement. 1,1903–16,1980.
- PRE.S —Supplement. 1,1903–16,1980.
- Ps. Pseudo.
- PsCl Pseudo-Clementine.
- PTS Patristische Texte und Studien. Berlin/New York.
- RA *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*. Paris.
- RAC *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. Edited by Th. KLAUSER. Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1950–
- RE *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*. Third Edition. Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1896–1913.
- REAug *Revue des études augustiniennes*. Paris.
- Rec. Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*.
- Ref. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*.
- REJ *Revue des études juives*. Paris.
- RevB *Revue Biblique*. Paris.
- RGG *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Third Edition, 1957–1965.

RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World. Edited by R. VAN DEN BROEK/H.J.W. DRIJVERS/H.S. VERSNEL. Leiden.
RGVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten. Berlin/New York.
RMM	<i>Revue de métaphysique et de morale</i> . Paris.
RSR	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i> . Paris.
RVV=RGVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten. (Giessen etc.) Berlin.
SBL.DS	Society of Biblical Literature. Dissertation Series. Missoula, Montana.
SBL.MS	Society of Biblical Literature. Monograph Series. Missoula, Montana.
SBL.SCS	Society of Biblical Literature. Septuagint and Cognate Studies. Chico, California.
SBL.SP	Society of Biblical Literature. Seminar Papers. Missoula, Montana.
SBL.TT	Society of Biblical Literature. Texts and Translations. Chico, California. 1,1972ff.
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien. Stuttgart.
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology. London.
SBT.SS	Studies in Biblical Theology. Second series. London.
SBW	Studien der Bibliothek Warburg. Leipzig.
SC	Sources chrétiennes. Paris.
SCHNT	Studia ad corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti. Leiden.
SCJud	Studies in Christianity and Judaism. Études sur le christianisme et le judaïsme. Waterloo, Ontario. 1,1981ff.
SCM	Student Christian Movement.
<i>SecCen</i>	<i>The Second Century. A Journal of Early Christian Studies</i> . Abilene: Abilene Christian University.
SEG	Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum.
<i>Self-Definition</i>	<i>Jewish and Christian Self-Definition. The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries</i> . Edited by E.P. SANDERS. 3 Vols. London: SCM, 1980–
<i>Semeia</i>	<i>Semeia. An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism</i> . Missoula, Montana.
SHG	Subsidia hagiographica.
SHR	Studies of the History of Religions. Leiden [= Suppl. to Numen].

SIG	<i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> . 4 Vols. Edited by W. DITTENBERGER. Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Georg Olms Verlag.
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in late antiquity. Leiden.
SMSR	<i>Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni</i> . Roma.
SPCK	Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge.
Spicq, <i>Notes</i>	<i>Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire</i> . Edited by Ceslas SPICQ. 3 Vols. (I) <i>Agathopoieo–Lupeo</i> , (II) <i>Mainomai–Pseudologoi</i> , (III) Supplement. Freiburg: Éditions universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978–1982.
SST	Studies in Sacred Theology. Washington, DC.
StAAA	Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. Edited by J.N. BREMMER. 1,1995–
StPB	Studia Post Biblica. Leiden. 1,1959ff.
Str.-B.	H.L. STRACK and P. BILLERBECK. Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch.
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement, <i>Stromata</i> .
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter. Tübingen/Basel.
TAPA	Translations of the American Philological Association.
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. FRIEDRICH/G. KITTEL. 10 Vols. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1933–1979.
Tert.	Tertullian.
ThHK	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament. Leipzig [etc.] 1,1928ff.
THNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament. Berlin.
ThR	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i> . Tübingen.
TLG	Thesaurus linguae Graecae.
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary.
Trans.	Translated.
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . Berlin/New York.
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i> . Woodstock, Maryland 1,1940–
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum. Tübingen.
TThZ	<i>Trierer theologische Zeitschrift</i> . Trier.
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. Purpose and Rationale

Simon does not feature like a Peter, James, or Paul, in the story of earliest Christianity. He is not mentioned as a key disciple, leader, or major witness to the life and teachings of Jesus. He is no hero or model of the faith. Instead, the image of Simon is painted with the shades of villainy and ignominy, and by some he is framed even as an anti-apostle if not an anti-Christ.

In the modern era it is said, “image is everything.” Business Corporations, Celebrities, and Politicians engage marketing consultants to shape their image in the public arena, and hire public relations specialists to enhance and protect that public identity; a task made more demanding in our digital age when anyone can be subjected to what has been termed “digital kidnapping.”¹ However, the misrepresentation and distortion of public *personae* is not a new phenomenon. Simon appears to be a case in point.

Details available to scholarship of the life and teachings of Simon are not first-hand; and the release of an authorised biography is no longer possible. The only surviving accounts have been written by Simon’s opponents and critics. Consequently, these reports should be treated with caution. In all likelihood they are prejudicial in their assessment, if not hostile; or, at the very least they manipulate the image of Simon to suit their particular narrative purpose. For the record, Simon is given many labels, including: Christian, Samaritan, pagan, founder of a religious sect,

¹ Cf. KUCHINSKAS, “Image is Everything” [Online].

magician, charlatan, philosopher, heretic, father of all heresies, a false messiah, pretended incarnation of God; and the first of the Gnostics.

According to Hippolytus, the third century CE Christian writer, a certain Simon of Samaria had himself buried alive by his followers, with the promise to rise on the third day; yet he remained in the grave because he was not the Christ.² Simon may well have been unable to rise from the dead, yet he has continued to enliven the imaginations of those who investigate the beginnings of Christianity. He has been the focus of controversy since the second century CE when Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, identified him as the “father of all heresies.” From that time until the nineteenth century there is almost unanimous testimony that Simon was the first individual to be called a Gnostic, and that Simonianism was the earliest form of Gnosticism.

However, while from the second century CE onwards Christian tradition is virtually unanimous that the Simon of Acts is the root of all heresy—founder of the Simonian sect, and the first of the Gnostics—modern scholarship is unconvinced, in light of more recent discoveries, that all forms of Gnosis can be traced back to Simon. In fact, rather than confirming his reported status in the writings of ancient Christian authors, as father of the Gnostic heresy which posed a severe threat to Christian communities of the second century CE, many modern scholars deny the existence of a historical Simon. FILORAMO (1990: 147) claims that a thankless task faces anyone who attempts to satisfy their curiosity over the historical figure of Simon through the means of original source criticism. MEEKS (1977: 141) was more despairing in his assessment that “the quest for the historical Simon is even less promising than the quest for the historical Jesus.”

The purpose of this book is to examine the literary portraits of Simon of Samaria, a contemporary of the Apostles of Jesus and of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, through a critical and analytical review of sources, including the New Testament account of Acts and other literature from the first four centuries of the common era. Its focus is not so much to uncover the “historical” Simon beneath almost 2000 years of tradition and legend, but to clarify the certainties and uncertainties surrounding the first century CE figure of Simon, the so-called “first Gnostic.”

Ernst HAENCHEN (1971: 307) and Gerd LÜDEMANN (1975: 42) both claimed that Luke—the author of Acts, the earliest extant source for the

² HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 20,3.

Simon story—knowingly recast Simon as a Samaritan magician in order to discredit a popular Gnostic hero. Charles BARRETT (1979: 286) disagrees, stating that “there is nothing in Acts 8 to suggest that Simon was a Gnostic.” More recently, in his widely acclaimed commentary on Acts in the *International Critical Commentary* series, BARRETT (1994: 407) claims that “the historical Simon may not have been a speculative Gnostic theologian downgraded by Luke but a very ordinary magician upgraded so as to appear as a divine man.” This amounts to a representation by BARRETT of the view already proposed in 1937 by Lucien CERFAUX,³ that Simon was not a Gnostic but a μάγος:

As, among others, Lucien Cerfaux has pointed out, for Luke Simon was not a Gnostic but a μάγος—and indeed it is possible through Irenaeus’ account of the Gnostic heretic to see traces of the μάγος, and conversely to discover a contribution of μαγεία to the development of Gnosticism. But the question that we have to ask is, what did Luke mean by μαγεύειν, μαγεία? He uses neither word elsewhere, though he describes the Jewish false prophet Elymas-Barjesus as a μάγος (13:6,8). Of this group, μάγος is the only word to occur elsewhere in the New Testament. This is in Matt 2, with reference to the “wise men”, where (though the meaning is different) there is equally little to suggest Gnosticism. What did the words mean to Luke? (BARRETT 1979: 286)

The opinions of LÜDEMANN and BARRETT represent the antipodes in modern scholarship and commentary on the story of Simon in the book of Acts. The aim of this book is to contribute towards the removal of that lack of clarity perceived by BARRETT concerning the meaning of μαγεύειν in the writings of Luke, and to pursue the question of a possible contribution from μαγεία and the history of the μάγοι in the development of Gnosticism. In addition to clarifying the meaning of the term μαγεύειν in Luke and tracing the development of the term γνωστικός in the literature of late antiquity, this book will argue that rather than being mutually exclusive perceptions and descriptions of Simon the categories of μάγος and γνωστικός can be viewed as complimentary. In other words, the observer can discern Simon’s Gnostic identity through aspects of his activity as a μάγος, and, conversely, perceive Simon’s “magos” identity through aspects of his interactions as a “Gnostic”. Finally, this book will test the counter-claims of BARRETT, who on the one hand denies anything Gnostic about Simon

³ Cf. CERFAUX 1937: 615–17.

in Luke's writings, and LÜDEMANN, who on the other hand argues that the phrase "the thought of your heart" in Acts 8:22 not only presents an ironical reference to Simon's σύζυγος—his female companion Helen—but also demonstrates Luke's knowledge of the foundations of Simonian Gnosis being present in a period "at least contemporary with earliest Christianity."⁴

2. Structure and Method

A study of the literary portraits of Simon in Christian literature of the first four centuries CE could be structured in any number of different ways. The approach I have adopted, as suggested by my declared aims, is to analyse the sources for the Simon story in order to determine to what extent they confirm or deny the assessment and categorisation of Simon as a "magician" and/or "Gnostic". A necessary step in this analysis will be the clarification of key terminology and an overview of how these key terms are used also in contemporary literature beyond the agreed sources.

The surviving primary sources will be dealt with sequentially, beginning with the earliest record in Acts 8 and then proceeding in order through the accounts of Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius. Finally, the portrait of Simon in the Pseudo-Clementine literature and the apocryphal Acts of Peter will be considered. This approach has the advantage of tracing the image of Simon step-by-step as it emerges from the sources, allowing issues of influence and interdependence, as well as various matters of continuity and discontinuity to be discussed concurrently. Further, a thematic and sequential approach enables various methodological matters appropriate to a particular text or literary unit under investigation to be dealt with as they appear in each chapter.

Chapter 2 traces the major responses of scholarship to questions raised by the portrayal of Simon in the sources. This history of research adopts a chronological approach to presenting the background debates that form part of the interpretative matrix for discussions about Simon. It observes that scholarship has largely applied only secondary focus on Simon, dealing with him more or less as a test case for larger questions

⁴ Cf. LÜDEMANN 1987: 425.

concerning the reliability of historiography in Luke-Acts, as well as the debate concerning the nature and origin of Gnosticism.

Chapter 3 examines the agreed primary sources for the Simon story. Introductory, background and biographical information is provided to ensure the accessibility of materials by allowing the Simon story to unfold itself before the reader, as it comes from the pens of those who authored it. In addition, an overview of references to the Magoi in classical Graeco-Roman literature is included since the perceived activities and social status of the Magoi in antiquity played a vital role in shaping the figure of Simon in popular Christian imagination.

Chapter 4 considers the reputation of Simon being a “magician”. It first provides a brief overview of magic in the Graeco-Roman world, and then, second, details how Jewish Magic was more than widely recognised in antiquity: it was revered. A third section responds to the claimed links between Simon and “other magicians” in the New Testament book of Acts.

Chapter 5 aims to provide clarifications and possible answers in response to the question of a Gnostic Simon. Issues surrounding the terminology of Gnosis and Gnosticism are discussed. An approach is outlined for determining claims of Simon being the first Gnostic. Fragmentary evidence from early Christian writers is analysed and considered.

Chapter 6 presents conclusions and provides an answer to the focal question: Was Simon Magus the first Gnostic? Commentary is provided to explain why an unqualified “yes” or “no” answer regrettably cannot be given. Embracing modern estimations of “identity” this study argues that the identity of Simon never existed as some inherent or abstract quality – always presenting the same face to researchers in every generation – but was generated in interaction with others, through the simultaneous contribution of a complex mix of cultural, sociological, psychological, and geographical factors. The question of Simon’s identity is approached from three perspectives: from the Messina definition of Gnosticism; the viewpoint of ancient Christian Writers prior to 400CE; and, from a select number of reconstructed original traditions of Simon.

In addition to those matters of method and structure detailed above, there are certain other broader interpretative issues and perspectives that have contributed to the completion of this work and need to be mentioned by way of general introduction. First, my interest in Biblical studies and the history of earliest Christianity began in 1972 with my enrolment and candidature as a Lutheran pastor in training at Luther Seminary, North Adelaide, South Australia. My professors were graduates

from various German universities. They not only taught me critical methodology, but also instilled in me a love of the New Testament and an awareness of relevant Jewish and Graeco-Roman literature. I admit that I maintain an interest in theological issues as these relate to the presentation of Simon in the book of Acts and other early Christian literature; especially those associated with the development of early Christian thought leading to the emergence of a normative form of Christianity from a variety of early Christian communities. Further, the scholarly dialogue in which this work is intended to engage is primarily with traditional New Testament and Simon researchers rather than modern literary or social-scientific critics.

Second, a thesis held by many historians is that the formative experiences of life, for both individuals and societies, are stubbornly imprinted and hold enormous influence. The 1960s and 1970s heralded periods of change in Australia with the meeting of countervailing social, racial, political, moral, religious, and intellectual forces. About the same time the field of New Testament studies was challenged by the proposal of a new method of investigating early Christianity that took seriously the dynamics of historical and cultural forces upon traditions from and about Jesus. J.M. ROBINSON and H. KOESTER proposed that rather than presupposing static backgrounds of early Christianity (for example, apocalyptic Judaism, rabbinic Judaism, Hellenism, Gnosticism) an approach to the sources was needed that recognised there is movement across the board.⁵ This trajectory-critical approach called for a rejection of lines of demarcation between canonical and non-canonical, orthodox and heretical. It served notice that the writings of the New Testament emerged from a context where boundaries between religious traditions and movements were not as fixed as some scholarship had assumed or suggested.

At that time, the *redaktionsgeschichtliche* approach typified by scholars such as CONZELMANN and HAENCHEN, still dominated investigations of Luke-Acts. It described Luke as a creative editor who shaped the traditions at his disposal to support his theological bias (*Tendenz*). Accordingly, it was proposed that Luke's theology is discovered by examining the way in which he altered his sources. More recent scholarship, however, argues that not only authors of ancient texts but also their interpreters have specific temporal, psychological, social, and

⁵ ROBINSON/KOESTER 1971: 13.

cultural contexts that affect and inform both their general perceptions and descriptions of events. In the investigation of early Christian history and the interpretation of early Christian writings it needs to be acknowledged that there is no such thing as “immaculate perception” (CARNEY 1975: 1).

So, third, we cannot entirely ignore or avoid the dangers of approaching an area of research apart from our pre-conditioning and pre-judgments, irrespective of whether the starting point is a faith perspective or a critically constructed model. There is no guarantee of an entirely objective starting point in historical reconstruction, even when methods from various other disciplines are introduced. The analytical commentary provided on Simon research in this book never intends to suggest that all prior scholarship has chosen the wrong way, and that this study is somehow more objective. Rather, it is my intention to engage in an ongoing scholarly dialogue by first making my own background and approach explicit, and in so doing to avoid possible mistakes in fact and method.

3. *Outlining an Approach*

While modern New Testament and Simon research remains broadly committed to the objective, historically orientated model formulated since the early days of BAUR and HARNACK, recent scholarship does not always endorse the specific interpretive conclusions of previous research. Indeed, a groundswell of opinion now suggests that an exclusive historical methodology no longer will suffice. For example, since the earliest days of form criticism it was generally acknowledged that there had been an oral stage prior to the written text of the New Testament. What was erroneously assumed, however, is that the transition from oral tradition to text had been a continuous and complete development, with written texts replacing oral tradition as soon as they were composed. The historical-critical method tended to equate Christianity with written documents, both surviving texts and hypothetical reconstructions. The challenge for modern scholarship is to fully appreciate the role of oral/aural media in the formation of earliest Christianity. Joanna DEWEY notes:

[W]e are still a long way from understanding the high degree of orality in ancient Mediterranean cultures and the ways orality and literacy interacted, working together and working against each other ... We do not yet have an overview of how orality and literacy affected the

development of the early churches and the formation of the New Testament canon. We have yet to consider fully how Christianity itself participated in orality and literacy. We are just beginning to develop a sense of the first-century media world and how Christianity fits within it. (DEWEY 1994: 38)

Contemporaneous with this focus in New Testament scholarship on the media and narrative worlds of the first-century, has been the publication of numerous studies in ancient historiography⁶ which highlight marked differences from those conventions followed in our modern era.⁷ The clear conclusion arising from these studies, in contrast to previous assessments, is that when considering the question of historical reliability in Acts—as with all ancient accounts of history—21st century readers need to re-evaluate their criteria before making any assessment. Luke appears to have worked within ancient conventions (Lk 1:1–4), and it is doubtful those who received his report would have expected more.

While scholarship during the last quarter of the twentieth century did not produce the collapse of the historical-critical method, it promoted a considerable shift in focus. As Sean FREYNE comments:

Insights and methods from various disciplines are increasingly brought to bear on the New Testament writings, since today, with a heightened hermeneutical awareness, many scholars have come to recognise that no one perspective can exhaust the possibilities of our texts, or adequately uncover their varied fields of reference. (FREYNE 1988: 3)

⁶ Cf. STERLING 1992; WINTER 1993.

⁷ For example, Thucydides, widely regarded as the greatest of ancient historians, records the following insightful comments in his history of the Peloponnesian War I 22,1–4: “As to the speeches which were made either before or during the war, it was hard for me, and for others who reported them to me, to recollect the exact words. I have therefore put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion, expressed as I thought he would be likely to express them, while at the same time I endeavoured, as nearly as I could, to give the general import of what was actually said: ὡς δ’ ἂν ἐδόκουν ἔμοι ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστ’ εἰπεῖν, ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων, οὕτως εἴρηται.” (JOWETT’S translation as quoted in BRUCE 1990: 34) Note JOSEPHUS, who, in parallel accounts of the one episode, places two distinct speeches into Herod’s mouth: *Bf* I 373–379; *Ant.* XV 127–146.

This observation carries important implications and generates new impetus for any interpretation of a first-century historical narrative such as Acts, and for the unravelling of traditions concerning Simon. In the current climate of postmodernism—where the intellectual and epistemological certainty that characterised more than a century of research is now questioned, and the aim for objectivity is denied as a myth—scholarship is being challenged to embrace new hermeneutical tools in an interdisciplinary approach to the New Testament and studies of Earliest Christianity, to better communicate in a research climate that is suspicious of the historical-critical metanarrative.

In general it can be said that modern critical approaches to the New Testament and other early Christian literature—including more conventional literary analysis, reader-response criticism, biographical criticism, and social world approaches—have made the research community much more aware of the fact that early Christianity was not just a movement of ideas, but rather a movement in which social realities emerged with implications that were economic, social, and political as well as religious and theological.

In summary, I intend to follow an interdisciplinary approach to the sources in order to clarify the certainties and uncertainties surrounding the first century CE figure of Simon, the so-called “first Gnostic.” This approach will employ a variety of analytical methods in the interest of illuminating the portrait of Simon more clearly than previous investigations have achieved. In particular, this work will proceed being cognisant of the narrative world of Luke-Acts, while not losing sight of the social-historical world of the various authors and critics who reported the story of Simon.

CHAPTER TWO

History of Research

1. Preliminary Remarks

Modern research, as Gerd LÜDEMANN (1987: 420) correctly observed, has treated Simon more or less as a test case for larger questions. In fact, for almost two centuries the shape and direction of Simon Magus research has ebbed and flowed with the tide of New Testament critical analysis. This has occurred first with questions concerning the reliability of historiography in Luke-Acts; and second, within the debate concerning the nature and origin of Gnosticism.

The following overview of research does not claim to present a complete history of these discussions, nor does it simply rehearse what is available elsewhere.¹ Nonetheless an adequate history of Simon Research cannot avoid recognising the background debates which provide the broad backdrop for discussions on Simon. So, the significant responses of scholarship to questions raised by the portrayal of Simon in the sources are traced chronologically, points of convergence are noted with the background debates of New Testament critical analysis, and commentary provided on how the figure of Simon has appeared either sharper or more diffused through the lens and foci adopted by his respective investigators.

¹ The monographs of Karlmann BEYSCHLAG, *Simon Magus und die christliche Gnosis*, and Gerd LÜDEMANN, *Untersuchungen zur simonianischen Gnosis*, provide extensive reports about the history of these discussions which have principally preoccupied German scholarship. Valuable introductions to Simon Research are likewise provided by Wayne MEEKS in his article "Simon Magus in Recent Research," and by Kurt RUDOLPH in his "Simon – Magus oder Gnosticus? Zum Stand der Debatte."

2. *Simon Observed within the Debate over the Historical Value of Acts*

The Tübingen School, founded by Ferdinand Christian BAUR (1792–1860), questioned the Eusebian model of church history; namely, that unity existed before division and truth must of necessity precede error.² BAUR and his colleagues embraced a conflict and tension model of history that viewed the record of earliest Christianity as the outworking of a clash between two rival parties. On the one hand there was the Jewish-Christian party championed by Peter. On the other hand there was Paul who represented a Gentile-Christian party, a newer broader Christianity, which rejected the practice of circumcision and a narrow Jewish interpretation of the Law.

BAUR's methodological starting point was the evidence of dispute—in the New Testament letters to the Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians—between Paul and the Judaizers, and Paul with Peter and the original “so-called” apostles. He concluded that this was not merely a temporary conflict but one which continued for a long period after Paul's death. BAUR claimed evidence in support of his hypothesis from the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, for which he argued an early date of composition (about 170CE). In the Pseudo-Clementine contest between Peter and Simon “the magician” BAUR discerned a disguised attempt to vilify the apostle Paul. On this identification BAUR rested his entire thesis, that a bitter dispute between Pauline (Hellenistic) and Jewish Christians continued late into the second century.

An investigation into the life and activity of the apostle Paul according to the sequence in Acts, in his *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi*, led BAUR to conclude that on the narrative level only a few sections of Acts have any positive historical value.³ BAUR cited two reasons for this conclusion: first, the miracle stories, which he considered patently unverifiable; and second,

² Cf. EUSEBIUS, *H.E.* IV 22,2–6, “They used to call the Church a *virgin* for this reason, that she had not yet been seduced by listening to nonsense. But Thebouthis, because he had not been made bishop, began to seduce her (by means of the seven sects to which he himself belonged) among the people. From these came Simon and his Simonians, Cleobius and his Cleobienes, Dositheus and his Dositheans ... every man introducing his own opinion in his own particular way. From these came false Christs, false prophets, false apostles, who split the unity of the Church by poisonous suggestions against God and against His Christ.”

³ BAUR 1845: 5, “Indem ich nun hier, um den Standpunkt für die folgende Untersuchung zu bezeichnen, daß ich in ihr keine rein objective, sondern nur eine durch ein subjectives Interesse alterirte Darstellung erkennen kann.”

the omission of any reference in Acts to the conflict between Paul and the other apostles. Having stated this BAUR maintained that the book of Acts nevertheless continued to be an extremely important source for the history of the apostolic period, once the researcher applied a strict historical criticism to its material.⁴

BAUR's conclusions about the historical reliability of Acts and other early Christian literature were correspondingly reflected in his portrait of Simon. BAUR concluded that Simon was as a purely mythological person.⁵ On the basis of an overestimation of the Pseudo-Clementine literature, he interpreted the Simon in Acts 8 as a characterisation of Paul fabricated by the Jewish-Christian party, which the author of Acts then neutralised through the historical differentiation of Paul in Acts chapter 9. That is, the author of Luke-Acts intended to protect Paul from disparaging associations by his depiction of Simon as someone entirely different from Paul. BAUR said the author's placement of two apostles in parallel—Peter appearing as Pauline and Paul as Petrine—is the peace proposal of a Paulinist who intended to purchase recognition for Gentile Christianity through accessions to Judaism. Further, through a *religionsgeschichtliche* approach, BAUR drew an interpretive link between the Lukan predication of Simon in Acts 8:10 as ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη and the Pseudo-Clementine description of Simon as “standing one”:

... der Name sollte im Ganzen dasselbe ausdrücken, was die Christen in Christus verehrten, das höchste göttliche Princip, durch welches alles geistige Leben in seinem Seyn und Bestand erhalten wird, den unwandelbaren, über alles Vergängliche erhabenen, Hort des Lebens. (BAUR 1967: 306)

Significant also for BAUR was the report in Justin Martyr⁶ that when Simon came to Rome under Claudius (41–54CE) he was honoured as a holy god for his magical miracles by a statue on the island in the river Tiber with the inscription: SIMONI DEO SANCTO. BAUR pursued this reference backward through the tradition, and outlined how the ancient Roman god

⁴ BAUR 1845: 13, “Sie bleibt ... eine höchst wichtige Quelle für die Geschichte der apostolischen Zeit, aber auch eine Quelle, aus welcher erst durch strenge historische Kritik ein wahrhaft geschichtliches Bild der von ihr geschilderten Personen und Verhältnisse gewonnen werden kann.”

⁵ BAUR 1968: 65–66. Supporters of this hypothesis, among others, were: ZELLER, LIPSIUS, SCHMIEDEL, and HILGENFELD; although, both LIPSIUS and HILGENFELD later changed their minds.

⁶ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,2; 56,2.

Sem(o) was also revered as an ancient-eastern deity, namely the sun-god Herakles; who, like Simon, was also conferred with the title “standing one.” BAUR (1967: 306) traced the derivation of the names “Simon,” and “Simeon” to the oriental stem “Sem,” and claimed that the magician Simon should be identified with the ancient regional deity of Samaria: namely, the oriental sun god Sem-Herakles.

In contrast, Adolf HILGENFELD—the first person to consistently apply BAUR’s historical principle to the question of Simon—concluded that the Simon “legend” in Acts does not arise from the mythology of nature religion but from the domestic history of earliest Christianity: “... der Magier Simon nicht aus der Mythologie der Naturreligion, sondern vielmehr aus der inneren Geschichte des Urchristentums zu stammen” (HILGENFELD 1868: 358).

HILGENFELD confirmed⁷ what BAUR had already argued; namely, that the Simon of the Pseudo-Clementines is not the historical person known in the Acts, but an idealised personality: “[Der Simon der Klementinen ist] ... nicht die historische Person, die wir aus der Apostelgeschichte ... kennen, sondern eine idealisirte” (BAUR 1831: 126). In addition, HILGENFELD’s source-critical analysis of the Pseudo-Clementine Simon-story, which identified four strata, provided a new contribution to scholarly investigation in conjunction with his assessment that even the report of Justin Martyr clearly understands that no one other than the apostle Paul is meant by the portrayal of Simon Magus, since Justin never calls the apostle by his own name:

[Justin soll unter dem Simon Magier niemand anders haben verstehen können] ... als den Apostel Paulus, welchen er bei seinem wirklichen Namen niemals nennt. (HILGENFELD 1848 cited in LÜDEMANN 1975: 10)

For decades the Tübingen School’s critical assessment of the historical value of Acts provided the springboard for scholarly analysis. While those literary hypotheses now have been universally discarded there are certain historical points of view established by those hypotheses which continue to be advanced: (1), the contrast between Paul and the “primitive” church; (2), the distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christianity; and (3), the

⁷ Later, following the research of RITSCHL and others, HILGENFELD (1966: 164) convinced himself about the historicity of Simon Magus. “Aber bei weiterer Forschung habe ich mich doch von der Geschichtlichkeit des Magiers Simon überzeugt ...”.

struggle of Paul with Judaizing groups.⁸ So, the legacy of BAUR cannot be ignored.⁹

The beginning of the end for BAUR's equation of Simon with Paul was heralded first in the publication of *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche* by A. RITSCHL (1822–1889), and then later through the writings of T. ZAHN, H. HOLTZMANN, and A. VON HARNACK.¹⁰ RITSCHL, a one-time protégé of BAUR, departed from his master's dictum about the conflict in earliest Christianity and demonstrated that early Christian history was not the story of two opposing forces grinding against each other. Peter needed to be distinguished from the Jewish Christians, and there was a Gentile Christianity distinct from Paul and little influenced by him. RITSCHL strongly argued that "catholicism"¹¹ was not the consequence of a reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, but was an identifiable stage within the movement and rise of Gentile Christianity, independent of Paul. RITSCHL's thesis was later developed by Adolf VON

⁸ Cf. LÜDEMANN 1983; 1989a.

⁹ The task of radical historical criticism in the twentieth century was championed for more than three decades by R. BULTMANN's "demythologizing" and "existential interpretation," and then by E. KÄSEMANN's observation of "early catholic" tendencies in the Pastoral Epistles. The literary-critical works of J. WELLHAUSEN, M. DIBELIUS, H. J. CADBURY, K. LAKE and F. J. FOAKES-JACKSON, as well as the redaction-critical work of W. ROHDE, W. MARXSEN, H. CONZELMANN, G. STRECKER, and E. HAENCHEN should also be mentioned. Further, BAUR's opinion that from the beginning the Christian community was divided over theology and practice has been developed by Walter BAUER (1904–1960) in his book *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. According to BAUER, in many geographical areas of antiquity so-called heresy was in fact prior to orthodoxy, and the heretical groups of the second century CE were the theological descendants of first century varieties of Christianity. BAUER's study, then, gave rise to the publication of J.M. ROBINSON's and H. KOESTER's argument for cultural and religious pluralism in the Hellenistic and Roman eras. ROBINSON and KOESTER proposed a method of investigating early Christianity that took seriously the dynamics of historical and cultural forces upon traditions about Jesus, and questioned established views about the background of early Christianity (eg. apocalyptic Judaism, rabbinic Judaism, Hellenism, Gnosticism). They advocated a trajectory-critical approach to the sources that rejected lines of demarcation between canonical and non-canonical, orthodox and heretical. They argued that the New Testament writings emerged from a context where boundaries between religious traditions and movements were not as fixed as previous scholarship had assumed or suggested.

¹⁰ HOLTZMANN 1892; VON HARNACK 1911a; ZAHN 1917.

¹¹ The term "Frühkatholizismus" was not coined by the Tübingen school. Yet BAUR and his disciples argued in effect for an ongoing "catholicism" in the compromise between two rival factions.

HARNACK in his famous statement about the acute hellenization of Christianity.

Diametrically opposed to the conclusions of BAUR, Adolf VON HARNACK produced a three volume work (between 1906 and 1911) in defence of the historical value of Acts;¹² a New Testament book that he regarded as one of the pillars of our historical knowledge of early Christianity, along with the letters of Paul and Eusebius' *Church History*. HARNACK labelled BAUR's description of Simon as a mythological person as a "critical loss of direction,"¹³ and claimed that "[t]he whole figure as well as the doctrines attributed to Simon ... not only have nothing improbable in them, but suit very well the religious circumstances which we must assume for Samaria."¹⁴ He asserted with considerable confidence that in the Apostolic age there were attempts to establish new religions in Samaria, which, in all probability, were influenced by the tradition and preaching concerning Jesus.

Dositheus, Simon Magus, Cleobius, and Menander appeared as Messiahs or bearers of the God-head, and proclaimed a doctrine in which the Jewish faith was strangely and grotesquely mixed with Babylonian myths, together with some Greek additions. (HARNACK 1905: 245)

HARNACK concluded (1905: 246) that the main point about Simon in the sources (including Acts!) was his endeavour to create a universal religion of the supreme God; and, this explained his success among the Samaritans and Greeks. HARNACK argued that Simon was portrayed as a rival to Jesus, and he was convinced that at some early period the Simon movement proved "a real temptation for the early Church: to what extent, however, we cannot tell" (HARNACK 1962: 45). By this assessment, the Simon movement was a caricature of earliest Christianity, and the impression given in the sources of the reported success of Simonianism even beyond Palestine into the West (HARNACK was thinking of Rome) seemed to support his opinion.¹⁵

¹² HARNACK 1906(I); 1908(III); 1911(IV).

¹³ HARNACK (1931: 270 n. 1), "Simon Magus für eine Fiktion zu halten, war eine schwere Verirrung der Kritik ...". Cf. BEYSCHLAG (1974: 79), "Die neuere Geschichte der Simon-Magus-Forschung beginnt mit einer enormen wissenschaftlichen Fehlleistung."

¹⁴ HARNACK 1905: 246 n. 1.

¹⁵ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,3: Καὶ σχεδὸν πάντες μὲν Σαμαρεῖς, ὀλίγοι δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔθνεσιν, ὡς τὸν πρῶτον θεοὺ ἐκείνου [sc. Σίμωνα] ὁμολογοῦντες, ἐκείνου καὶ προσκυνοῦσιν.

The flow of Simon Magus research took on a new direction with the publication of H. WAITZ's 1904 article "Simon Magus in early Christian literature." WAITZ abandoned the *Tendenzkritik* of the Tübingen School and applied a literary-critical analysis to the Pseudo-Clementine materials, placing the problem of the Pseudo-Clementines on a new source-critical foundation by arguing for two source documents in addition to the primary document; namely, the *Acts of Peter* and the *Preaching of Peter*. WAITZ claimed that the Pseudo-Clementines and the *Acts of Peter* shared the same underlying source, which reported the pursuit of Peter by Simon from Caesarea through Sidon to Antioch (and not to Rome).

WAITZ identified some congruence between the reports about Simon in the canonical Acts and the *Acts of Peter*. He argued that they originally presented a Peter story and not a Philip story. Also, WAITZ drew parallels between the Simon of Acts and a like-named Jewish magician and adviser of the Procurator Felix reported by Josephus in *Ant.* XX 7,2. These conclusions distanced him from other scholars who attempted to identify Simon as a Gnostic or messianic figure. WAITZ was convinced that the historical significance of Simon existed rather as he is portrayed in Acts – as a magician: "... was sein ständiger Beiname sagt, als Magier d.h. Zauberer" (WAITZ 1906a: 358).

In a series of articles produced between 1925 and 1926, the Belgian Catholic scholar Lucien CERFAUX continued the literary and source-critical work begun by WAITZ; although, CERFAUX expressed extreme scepticism over against the Pseudo-Clementines and placed greater trust in the writings of the Church Fathers. According to CERFAUX (1926: 272) the Simon of Acts came from the "pagan *milieu*" of Samaria and was principally a magician about whom the reports detail no clear boundary between Magic and Mystery. CERFAUX staunchly defended the historical accuracy of the Simon account in Acts 8 and pointed to the confirmation of details later reported by ancient Christian writers, in particular the text of Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I 23,4).

CERFAUX claimed that Simon belonged to a brotherhood of ancient magicians whose teachings and practices are now accessible through the Greek Magical Papyri. His thesis was that Simon was an historical first century figure, a magician who was much later elevated by the Gnostic tradition to the rank of a spiritual master, if not a quasi-divine figure. Further, CERFAUX sought through meticulous investigation to furnish proof that the Syntagma tradition of Hippolytus was the foundation for all early Christian descriptions of Simonianism. However, the *Apophysis Megale* ("Great Revelation")—considered by some later

scholars¹⁶ to be a genuine work of Simon himself—CERFAUX (1926: 18 n. 1) labeled as belonging to the extreme edge of any perspective; more like the work of some later disciples because of its strongly philosophic flavour.

Besides the methodological difficulties posed by CERFAUX's retrograde interpretation—viewing Acts 8 in light of later Patristic writings—his work can also be criticised for its lack of objectivity when dealing with the question of ancient magic, and for its disregard shown for the specific character and context of individual materials used in his comparative analysis. For example, the premise of CERFAUX about ancient magic corresponded with nineteenth century scholarship which distinguished between magic and religion. Accordingly, astrology and magic were considered as popular superstitions and mere shadows of genuine religion. “L’astrologie et la magie enchaînaient alors la superstition populaire et pénétraient toutes les dévotions” (CERFAUX 1926: 265).

Further, CERFAUX intentionally compared the figure of Simon in Acts 8 with the successful second century CE prophet and miracle worker Alexander of Abounoteichus, whose biography *Alexander, the False Prophet* was penned by Lucian of Samosata.¹⁷ Lucian reported the reactions of the people of Abounoteichus who believed Alexander to be “the god visible” (ἐναργῆ τοῦ θεοῦ) and therefore prayed to him and worshipped him. In this example it can be demonstrated that CERFAUX not only subscribed to Lucian's depiction of Alexander as a “charlatan without scruples” before considering the questions of authorial objectivity or intent, but also sketched the person of Simon with similar colours. So, CERFAUX interpreted Acts 8 by applying the insights and information recorded in Patristic and contemporary Graeco-Roman literature without pausing to consider their polemical, satirical, or apologetic tenor; neither did CERFAUX consider the possibility that the Lukan text presented a subjective or inaccurate picture of Simon.

In his *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (GO 1934) Hans JONAS mirrored the approach of CERFAUX to the question of Simon by attempting to identify the historical Simon in light of contemporary figures such as pseudo-

¹⁶ Cf. SALLES-DABADIE (1969: 143) who describes the *Apophysis Megale* as a genuine work of Simon which contains “... la gnose archaïque et rudimentaire.”

¹⁷ Lucian was a second century CE writer who considered religious beliefs, visions, ghosts, and magic to be the contemptible inventions of charlatans that needed to be exposed. Most of Lucian's books are satirical in form and aim to entertain. Yet, some works have a more serious link with the intellectual life of his time. Cf. *OHCW* 1995: 671.

messianic prophets, Apollonius of Tyana, and Alexander of Abounotichus.¹⁸ JONAS (1967a: 103) commented that with regards to the deification of Simon “the terms in which Simon is said to have spoken of himself are testified by the pagan writer Celsus to have been current with the pseudo-messiahs still swarming in Phoenicia and Palestine at his time about the middle of the second century.” However, a disappointing and frustrating feature of JONAS’ work is that he almost entirely neglects questions of time and context. In this regard Florent HEINTZ correctly observes the failure of JONAS to recognise the context or character of the passage he quotes from Celsus, and the impossibility of transferring to Simon a comment which originally was clearly meant to refer to Jesus:

Là encore, l’argument omet de prendre en compte que le texte de Celse est un libelle fortement polémique dirigé contre Jésus et les Chrétiens, englobant dans son attaque tous ceux qui se disent “fils de Dieu” et dont la nuance est loin d’être le souci premier. En somme, Jonas ... ne [fait] que transférer sur Simon une notice ouvertement tendancieuse que son auteur destinait à Jésus. (HEINTZ 1997: 11)

Ernst HAENCHEN was a chief exponent of the new hermeneutical approach to Luke–Acts, which initially dominated scholarly investigations after 1945. This *redaktionsgeschichtliche* approach asked not only about primary and secondary traditions, but also about authorial intention and social context. HAENCHEN described Luke as a creative editor who shaped the traditions at his disposal to support his theological bias (*Tendenz*). He proposed that Luke’s theology is best discovered by examining the way in which Luke altered his sources.

The book of Acts may be read properly as source material for early Christianity only if the reader frees himself from the charm of its simplified presentation and does not overlook the thread of what is edifying in the Lukan fabric. (HAENCHEN 1976: 265)

According to HAENCHEN¹⁹ the Simon of Acts 8 and the Simon reported by various Church Fathers were identical: a Gnostic worshipped by his followers as a redeemer god of Helen/Ennoia the female companion of Simon. Except for the Samaritan acclamation of Simon as “the great power of God” HAENCHEN considered that the Lukan account — a blend of

¹⁸ Cf. WILSON (1979: 491) who agrees that “[f]or Simon himself the prophets of Celsus, or such figures as Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abounotichus, still seem to provide the closest parallels.”

¹⁹ In particular reference is made to HAENCHEN 1952: 316–349; 1973: 267–279.

sources that originally contained separate stories of Simon and Philip, including a story of Simon's offer of money to Philip—no longer provided authentic information about the historical Simon. HAENCHEN radically contradicted the conclusions of CERFAUX when he argued that Simon was not a Samaritan Magus elevated after the event to the status of a divine redeemer, but a divine redeemer debased in the tradition to the status of a simple magician:²⁰

Simon ist also nicht vom Zauberer zum göttlichen Erlöser aufgestiegen, sondern in der christlichen Tradition vom göttlichen Erlöser zum blossen Zauberer degradiert worden. (HAENCHEN 1952: 348)

The key to HAENCHEN's argument rested in part on an hypothesis arising from source criticism. Like CERFAUX before him, HAENCHEN was criticised for an *a posteriori* reading of the Simon episode in Acts 8 in light of later ecclesiastical concerns and patristic discussions. Certainly, in his commentary on Acts 8:4–25 HAENCHEN concludes that Luke's intention was not merely to illustrate the superiority of Christian miracles over pagan practices, or to “demonstrate the antithesis between the power of God and demonic wizardry,” but to promote an early catholic concern for apostolic authority:

It is not the healings and exorcisms which are the supreme endowment constituting the church superior to pagan religions. No: its highest gift consists in its power to confer, to mediate God's Holy Spirit. (HAENCHEN 1971: 308)

In 1975 two significant monographs were published which not only presented extensive critical analyses of the sources for Simonian Gnosticism but also divergent conclusions to the question of an “historical” Simon. Gerd LÜDEMANN's *Untersuchungen zur simonianschen Gnosis* argued that Acts 8:10 is to be understood as a third person account of an ἐγώ εἶμι statement involving a claim of Simon to be the high God, or “the great power of God.” LÜDEMANN admitted that in all likelihood these claims were made by devotees of Simon rather than Simon himself.

²⁰ HAENCHEN's conclusions about Simon were contained within a broader project as announced by his 1952 article “Gab es eine vorchristliche Gnosis?” HAENCHEN promoted an affirmative answer to the vexing question which had occupied two generations of New Testament scholarship, and “became the rallying point for defenders of this position (MEEKS 1977: 137).”

Man wird die Zusammengehörigkeit von ἐγώ εἰμι und οὗτός ἐστιν anerkennen müssen, freilich mit einem Zusatz: es kann sich auch um Gemeindebekenntnisse handeln. Die Richtigkeit dieses Zusatzes wird durch den auch im NT vorkommenden "soteriologischen Redetypus", dem Gemeindebekenntnisse zugrunde liegen dürften, nahegelegt, vgl. nur Mt 16,16. Wir können somit nicht ohne weiteres voraussetzen, daß der historische Simon von sich als großer Kraft (Gottes) o.ä. geredet hat. (LÜDEMANN 1975: 40)

Consequently, since such claims are consistent with later reports by Justin and Irenaeus about the veneration of Simon as "first God," or Zeus, LÜDEMANN was convinced that the picture of Simon as a "magician" in Acts chapter 8 should be regarded as secondary because of the common practice in early Christian literature to discredit opponents by calling them "magicians."²¹ LÜDEMANN argued that attempts to identify Simon as magician, prophet, or Gnostic are incapable of proof, and that the matter of an "historical" Simon remains an open question.²²

Hinter dem in Apg 8,10b angerufenen Gott steht wahrscheinlich der synkretistische Gott Simon/Zeus, der, wie aus dem soteriologischen Redetyp zu erschließen ist, als ein rettender Gott aufgefaßt wird. Von diesem kultischen Hintergrund aus betrachtet scheinen mir die bisher gemachten Versuche, in Simon einen Zauberer/Magier (Quispel/Beyschlag), Propheten (Fascher, Colpe, Conzelmann) oder Gnostiker (Haenchen, Schenke, Kippenberg) zu sehen, unbeweisbar zu sein. (LÜDEMANN 1975: 54)

By contrast, Karlmann BEYSchLAG's *Simon Magus und die christliche Gnosis* presented an often vitriolic challenge to the method of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*,²³ and in particular to the thesis of Ernst HAENCHEN, of which BEYSchLAG said that it "zumindest in Deutschland so gut wie keinen Widerspruch, vielmehr allerwärts gläubige Anerkennung und Nachfolge gefunden hat" (BEYSchLAG 1974: 90). BEYSchLAG intended his

²¹ LÜDEMANN 1975: 41 "Den Christengegner als Magier abzustempeln, ist eine in der frühchristlichen Polemik oft gehandhabte Methode." For comment on documented accusations of magic to discredit opponents see the chapter below on Simon as Magician.

²² LÜDEMANN 1975: 81.

²³ BEYSchLAG's comprehensive agenda argued for a return from "probability knowledge" (Wahrscheinlichkeitswissen) to "historical research based on factuality" (Wirklichkeitsbezug historischer Forschung). Kurt RUDOLPH (1977: 283) criticised BEYSchLAG of presenting more theologically prejudiced conclusions than historical insight, and assessed his proposal of a return to "kirchen- und dogmengeschichtlichen Faktizität" as a naïvity.

work to be a “breaking of the spell” that identified Simon as a Gnostic, and, a dismantling of the almost dogma elevated hypotheses of prior decades of Gnosis research concerning the “so-called pre-Christian origin of Gnosticism” at one of its decisive points, namely with Simon Magus.

With BEYSCHLAG the historical reliability of the portrayal of Simon as a “magician” in Acts 8 was affirmed with force. For him Simon was probably a Samaritan magician whom Luke presented without polemical intention beneath the traits of an hellenistic θεῖος ἀνήρ.²⁴ BEYSCHLAG proposed a different reconstruction and explanation than HAENCHEN for the title “the great power of God” in Acts 8. BEYSCHLAG argued (1974: 78) that a retrograde interpretation of Simon through the Gnostic myths of the second century was no more defensible than to argue that the Gnostic gospels were historical reports about Jesus. While he agreed that the concept of “the great power” in Acts 8 may reflect a Simonian identification formula, he strenuously defended the point that this means only that in Acts 8 a magician of flesh and blood identified himself with the divine supreme power, through which he claimed to obtain his results:

Steht es nämlich so, dann hat auch die in AG 8,10 an das Volk delegierte Selbstaussage Simons von Hause aus das nicht besagt, was sie besagt haben müßte, wenn die gnostische Ableitung von Simons Gottestitel zuträfe, daß nämlich hier ein transzendentes höchstes Gottwesen in menschlicher Erscheinungsform unter Menschen erschienen sei und Wunder getan habe, sondern gerade umgekehrt, daß sich hier ein Magier aus Fleisch und Blut mit der göttlichen höchsten Kraft identifiziert hat, durch die er zu wirken vorgab. (BEYSCHLAG 1974: 102–103)

Since 1975 there have been some novel and interesting conjectures²⁵ proposed for the background and purpose of Luke’s story in Acts 8, but no further exclusive or extensive source-critical investigations into the question of Simon appeared until the 1997 publication of Florent HEINTZ’s *Simon ‘Le Magicien’. Actes 8, 5–25 et l’accusation de magie contre les prophètes thaumaturges dans l’antiquité*. Instead of attempting to resolve the question which formed the departure point for the majority of previous

²⁴ BEYSCHLAG 1974: 122–123.

²⁵ Eg. “A parenetic text directed against the threat of syncretism in the early church” (KLEIN 1967); “a condensed Lukan pneumatology” (BARRETT 1979); “a treatise against the purchase of ecclesiastical office” (DERRETT 1982); “a theological assessment of magic as a satanic phenomenon” (GARRETT 1989); and, “the patterning of Philip’s exploits in continuity with the *prophet like Moses*, against Simon’s ‘insidious masquerade’ as the expected Mosaic prophet and *Standing One*” (SPENCER 1992).

studies of Acts 8—“What is the correspondence between the figure of Simon the magician in Acts 8 and the Gnostic Simon described in the Fathers of the Church?”—HEINTZ (1997: 4) proposed a critical model for studying accusations of magic in ancient texts and then applied the results in an analysis of Acts 8. He identified (1997: 143–148) seven common features in accusations of magic, and five distinct phases in the defamation process of Simon. He concluded that the text of Acts (first phase) does not present a Gnostic redeemer or a syncretistic magician, but simply a Samaritan prophet who proclaimed the coming of the *Tabeb*:

S'il n'était ni un dieu gnostique (cf. Haenchen), ni un magicien syncretiste (cf. Cerfaux), le Simon historique devait bien se rattacher à une tradition religieuse ... Peut-être Simon était-il simplement un prophète Samaritan annonçant la venue du “restaurateur” (*Tabeb*), le messie semblable à Moïse. (HEINTZ 1997: 144–145)

In general HEINTZ is successful in locating the Simon story of Acts 8 alongside the invective and commonplace polemic used to discredit the thaumaturgic prophets of late antiquity. It is questionable, however, whether HEINTZ validly applies to Simon the interpretative model of accusation he distilled from diverse texts and contexts under his broad category of thaumaturgic prophets. Even the author himself indicates an awareness of difficulties both with his model and his proposed reconstruction of the development phases in the Simon story; namely, that the story may first have originated as an anecdote retold in Christian circles, itself the result either of rumour or redaction in response to a situation of conflict.

Il est malheureusement impossible de décider ce qui, dans le récit final des Actes, provient de la controverse initiale, de la rumeur ou du rédacteur. (HEINTZ 1997: 148).

3. *Simon Observed within the Debate over the Nature and Origin of Gnosticism*²⁶

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the traditional view²⁷ of Gnosticism was challenged especially by scholars of the Tübingen and the

²⁶ Note the comprehensive work of RUDOLPH 1971: 1–124; 1972: 289–360; 1973: 1–25; 1977: 279–359.

²⁷ Until the end of the nineteenth century, the traditional view of Gnosticism was that of IRENAEUS and the Church Fathers: namely, that Simon Magus was the

Religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Recognising their research was limited by mostly secondary evidence in the reports of the Church Fathers, scholars began to stress the need to take more into account the influence of the ancient Near Eastern heritage as well as the varied religious motifs and ideas of late antiquity. Researchers like BAUR, REITZENSTEIN, and BOUSSET made claims to have uncovered evidence for an eastern origin of Gnosticism: specifically in Iranian, Mandaean and Persian thought.

In his book *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1835) BAUR attempted “to treat the Gnostics as the starting point of a Christian philosophy of religion which culminated in Hegel.”²⁸ On the basis of evidence that was available to him, BAUR regarded Gnosis primarily as a philosophy and invested his energies to interpret its speculative system and to find its origin. BAUR’s assessment that Gnosticism was the starting point of a developing Christian philosophy of religion—that the Gnostics were “innovators”—had some notional connections with Adolf VON HARNACK’s later conclusion that Gnosticism was one phase of, and a stage in, the progress and development of Christian dogma. For BAUR, Simon was a purely mythological figure who had more typological than historical value. Any attempt to more closely identify the “true” Simon was considered illusory.

Adolf VON HARNACK, on the other hand, laid the groundwork for an understanding of Gnosticism from the point of view of Church history. In his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* we find his programmatic heading: “the attempt of the Gnostics to create an apostolic doctrine of faith and a Christian theology, or: the acute secularisation of Christianity.” HARNACK used a medical metaphor to contrast the “acute” process in these heretical developments from the more subtle or “chronic” shaping influence of Hellenistic culture in more orthodox forms of Christianity.²⁹ HARNACK viewed Simon as representative of numerous attempts in the syncretistic milieu of the first-century to establish a new religion—in all probability

progenitor of all heresies and Gnosticism repeated all previous (Christian) heresies. According to this view, the rapid growth of Gnosticism in the ancient world was attributed to an early Christian fascination with Greek philosophy and mythology. The culmination of this traditional view concerning the origin and nature of Gnosticism was paraded at the end of the century in Adolf VON HARNACK’s famous formula that Gnosticism was the acute hellenization of Christianity.

²⁸ RUDOLPH 1983: 31.

²⁹ Cf. WILLIAMS 1996: 80.

informed by the tradition and preaching concerning Jesus. Stephen NEILL echoes HARNACK's assessment when he comments:

Our more sympathetic eyes may see in Gnosticism a genuine though bewildered faith seeking a philosophy by means of which it could make itself intelligible in the Mediterranean world; and may recognise the immense service that Gnosticism rendered to the orthodox Church by compelling it to think out and formulate its own doctrine of Christ, of revelation, of Scripture, and of authority. (NEILL 1966: 307)

The person of Simon fared little better through the efforts of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, which extended the research of Gnosticism beyond the confines of Church history. In his book, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, Wilhelm BOUSSET (1865–1920) interpreted the Gnostic doctrines reported in the writings of the Church Fathers as being an adaptation and transformation of older oriental myths by Hellenistic philosophy. For BOUSSET (1970: 267) Gnosticism was essentially a mythological phenomenon; perhaps the last significant resurgence of mythical thought in antiquity. Following his investigation of Philo, the Hermetic literature, the Chaldaean oracles, and Persian traditions, BOUSSET concluded that: “Gnosticism is first of all a pre-Christian movement which has roots in itself. It is therefore to be understood in the first place in its own terms and not as an offshoot or a by-product of the Christian religion” (BOUSSET 1970: 245).

Richard REITZENSTEIN (1861–1931) was a noted philologist who claimed evidence for the roots of Gnosticism having existed in early salvation mysteries, detectable in Egyptian and Iranian literature. In his book, *Poimandres*, REITZENSTEIN argued the teaching concerning the “Primal Man” found in this text from the *Corpus Hermeticum* revealed the earliest strain of Gnosticism: the product of a long development in pre-Christian Egypt and Iran.

In the pattern of BOUSSET and REITZENSTEIN who searched for the pre-Christian origins of Gnosticism in oriental literature, scholars like BIDEZ, CUMONT, and CLEMEN collected, indexed, and analysed primary sources of the Persian and Hellenistic religious thought-world. It was claimed that a religion could be understood by identifying the mythological roots and composite strata of its ideas. But the accumulative result of such endeavours to explain by motif derivation, and the listing of parallels, was an endless atomisation of detail. Despite the meticulous efforts of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* the person of Simon proved no more discernible through the sum of his supposed constitutive parts.

In reaction to the “index-analysis” or “explanation by motif” approach of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, a new generation of scholars rebelled and adopted a phenomenological approach. Hans JONAS, a pupil of Rudolf BULTMANN, attempted to apply Martin HEIDEGGER’s philosophical categories of “authentic and unauthentic existence” in his two volume investigation of Gnosis (1934): *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*. I. *Die mythologische Gnosis*; and, II. *Von der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie*. JONAS answered the historical question of the origin of Gnosticism only generally, by a reference to the appearance of a “new understanding of existence” in the Orient before or parallel with the rise of Christianity. He maintained that Gnosticism could not be understood by dissection; rather, it needed to be understood as a whole. His stated approach was to understand the spirit (*Geist*) speaking through the voices of Gnosticism, and in its light to restore an intelligible unity to the baffling multiplicity of its expressions:

... one has to fix one’s attention upon certain characteristic mental attitudes which are more or less distinctly exhibited throughout the group, irrespective of otherwise greatly differing context and intellectual level. (JONAS 1967: 26)

JONAS was critical of the methods of BOUSSET, REITZENSTEIN and others, for their atomisation of the subject into motifs from separate traditions and for merely being content to describe without asking the question “why?”. He concluded his survey of scholarly investigation of Gnosticism by despairing that “all investigations of detail over the last half century have proved divergent rather than convergent.” JONAS then observed that the unifying character, the salient feature of Gnosticism was syncretism.³⁰ When introducing his chapter on Simon, JONAS writes:

Simon was a contemporary of the apostles and a Samaritan, and Samaria was notoriously unruly in matters of religion and regarded with suspicion by the orthodox ... even if we discount the story of the Acts as relating to a different person, and date the Gnostic prophet of the same name one or two generations later—Simonianism was from the start and remained strictly a rival message of obviously independent origin; that is to say, Simon was not a dissident Christian ... Gnosticism was not an inner Christian phenomenon. (JONAS 1967: 103)

³⁰ JONAS 1967: xvi.

The difficulty of JONAS's method and analysis is that he almost entirely neglected questions of time and context; and in doing so he effectively denied the reality and impact of time. For example, when he claimed Gnosis in its mythical form was "gestaltgeschichtlich (nicht nur chronologisch) die Primärform der gnostischen Selbstdarstellung überhaupt,"³¹ it is not surprising that he placed all available evidence on a Procrustean bed to remove all differences.³²

In 1952, Ernst HAENCHEN argued in his article "Gab es eine vorchristliche Gnosis" that Simon was a Gnostic before coming into contact with Christianity. He claimed that the book of Acts showed the intention of Christian tradition to downgrade Simon from a divine redeemer to a mere sorcerer. But HAENCHEN was broadly criticised for beginning his study with the latest and most difficult source, the *Apophysis Megale* quoted in Hippolytus *Ref.* VI 9–18.

HAENCHEN traced back the development of the Simon myth through the surviving texts in Irenaeus, Justin, and the canonical Acts, to a proposed pre-Lukan tradition. In this way he identified five reference points on a time-line reaching back to the historical Simon. HAENCHEN concluded that because the technical terminology used in the *Apophysis* (ie. 'the Great Power') was already used to describe Simon in the Acts, this was proof enough that the mythological connotations of Simon's title were already present in the source available to Luke. Therefore, "[t]here was a pre-Christian gnosis. It was mythological. The philosophical form is the product of a long development" (HAENCHEN 1952: 298).

In contrast, Robert McL. WILSON studied the relationship between the thought-world of Diaspora Judaism and second century Gnosticism, and argued:

[Judaism] ... provided a bridge across the gulf which separates the Graeco-Oriental and the Jewish-Christian worlds of thought. Its contribution to the development of Gnosticism was not only direct, through the absorption of Jewish ideas into Gnostic thought, but also in

³¹ JONAS 1967: 85.

³² Karlmann BEYSCHLAG (1974: 85) observed that JONAS failed to differentiate the individual sources of Simonianism and as the result derived a correspondingly syncretistic Simon Magus picture. "Dieser veränderte Typ der Simon-Magus-Forschung spricht bereits aus den Gesamtdarstellungen von Leisegang und Jonas, sofern beide, trotz stärkster Verschiedenheit im Ansatz, die einzelnen Quellen zum Simonianismus nicht mehr differenziert, sondern promiscue gebrauchen, um daraus ein entsprechend synkretistisches Simon-Magus-Bild zu formen." Cf. JONAS 1967: 353–358.

part indirect, since it was through the medium of Jewish speculation that certain pagan elements came into Gnosticism. (WILSON 1964: 182)

WILSON focused on the role of Philo and Alexandrian Judaism, and attempted to trace Jewish theories of a syncretistic nature which spawned later Gnostic ideas. He finally came to the conclusion that Gnosticism was a second-century phenomenon, “a phase of heathenism,”³³ “neither Jewish nor Christian, but a new creation.”³⁴ WILSON argued that there is nothing in the Acts account to indicate that Simon was a Gnostic. He affirmed the essential details of the ancient Christian writers by claiming that “Simon’s system is nothing more or less than an assimilation of imperfectly understood Christian doctrines to a fundamentally pagan scheme” (WILSON 1964: 100).

With the discovery and publication of the Nag Hammadi Library³⁵ scholarship finally abandoned the epic journey undertaken by previous generations of research to locate the roots of Gnosticism in Persia, and instead research focussed more on the “proximate channels”³⁶ through which various themes crystallised into the Gnostic vision(s) of the first and second centuries CE. Scholars were prompted to re-examine the possibility of links between Judaism and Gnosticism, and while some expressed their reservations about the role of Judaism,³⁷ a strong case was developed for the Jewish origins of Gnosticism. Leading representatives of this group were PEARSON, QUISPTEL, GRANT, and MACRAE.

³³ WILSON 1964: 256.

³⁴ WILSON 1967: 697.

³⁵ Simon is not mentioned in the Nag Hammadi texts, although attempts have been made to connect the teachings of Simonian Gnosticism with the *Sophia* myth and the *Hymn of the Pearl*. The discovery of the NHC reduced the primary importance of Patristic accounts and has promoted a more balanced appreciation of their value. The NHC revealed a picture of earliest Christianity that looked anything but the systematic, orthodox, and theologically harmonious community claimed and perpetuated through Eusebius. However, as J.M. ROBINSON has observed, the questions for historian and exegete alike concerning the relation of Gnosticism to early Christianity have multiplied since, rather than decreased: “The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices and the making of them accessible has not provided a simple solution” (ROBINSON 1986: 127).

³⁶ A phrase coined by WILSON 1972: 265.

³⁷ JONAS (1965: 293) would only admit a “zone of proximity;” STROUMSA (1984: 9) observed, “it goes without saying that Jewish influences by themselves in no way provide a complete explanation for the emergence of such a syncretistic phenomenon as Gnosticism.”

PEARSON supported the thesis of Moritz FRIEDLÄNDER³⁸ that “Gnosticism is not, in its origins, a Christian heresy, but in fact a Jewish heresy;”³⁹ and, nominated apostate Jews in Egypt and Syria-Palestine as possible sources. QUISPÉL (1965: 252–271) likewise argued for the roots of Gnosticism to be found in Jewish heresy,⁴⁰ attributing its development to heterodox Jews living in Palestine or Egypt during the first century CE. Robert GRANT (1959: 27–38) claimed instead that disillusionment and despair among Palestinian Jews, after the military defeats of 70CE and 135CE, provided the background for the Gnostic movement. The publications of RUDOLPH,⁴¹ BÖHLIG,⁴² and POKORNÝ,⁴³ also have emphasised the role of heterodox Judaism in the formation of Gnosticism.

However, not all efforts to identify the original wellsprings of Gnosticism within Judaism have met with overwhelming or compelling success. Among these has been the attempt to locate the beginnings of Gnosticism, and in particular “Sethian”⁴⁴ Gnosticism, on the fringes of

³⁸ FRIEDLÄNDER 1898.

³⁹ PEARSON 1973: 35.

⁴⁰ Cf. MACRAE (1978: 150) who nominated Hellenistic Judaism as the seedbed for Gnosticism. Also, in his work *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, Jarl FOSSUM (1985: 281) argued that the Gnostic teaching concerning the demiurge arose from the teachings of the Magharians, a Jewish sect which FOSSUM located in the second temple period. Motivated by a concern to protect God from the dangers of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language, the Magharians credited a vice-regent ‘Angel of the Lord’ with the creation of the world, and identified this Angel with every instance of anthropomorphism in the Scriptures. FOSSUM countered objections that the Magharians represent very slim evidence from late attestation by claiming to have identified a wider base of evidence in “other Jewish texts which propound the same doctrine” (FOSSUM 1985: 18–19), by which he meant the Samaritan branch of Judaism. FOSSUM argued that reasons for the initial and critical movements towards a Gnostic demiurge can be identified within Samaritan-Jewish mythology itself; although, Platonic philosophy undoubtedly inspired negative attitudes toward creation.

⁴¹ RUDOLPH 1969: 121–175, 181–231.

⁴² BÖHLIG 1967: 109–140.

⁴³ POKORNÝ 1967: 94–105.

⁴⁴ In an attempt to reconstruct the historical evolution of Gnosticism R.A. LIPSIVS had postulated what he called Ophitism to be the first stage of the Gnostic movement. According to LIPSIVS the theology of Ophitism was developed in a dialectical interaction with Judaism, and that the Sethians described by Hippolytus were a later offspring of the early Ophites. The modern use of the term “Sethianism” is based upon the agreed assessment of scholarship that certain trends described by the Church Fathers, and also in the Nag Hammadi codices, held enough features in common to be studied under a single rubric. It was this

Judaism in Samaria. This “Samaritan” thesis, of course, was originally proposed by the Church Fathers, who were united in proclaiming Simon—the “magician” from Gitta identified in Acts 8—as the heresiarch *par excellence* who corrupted the teaching of Jesus. Hippolytus claimed Simon was the author of the *Apophysis Megale*, a Gnostic text which Hippolytus quotes at length (*Ref.* VI 9–18).

Arguments which attempt to link the origins of Gnosticism with early Samaritanism encounter considerable historical problems, not the least being the paucity of data available on Samaritanism in the first century CE. Further, what little agreed evidence exists does not support the conclusion that Gnostic mythology arose within Samaritan circles. Consequently, as PERKINS (1993: 28) suggests, “attempts to revive the Samaritan hypothesis simply lead to scholars attempting to explain one near unknown with a second unknown.” Even the appearance of the name “Dositheos” in the Nag Hammadi text *The Revelation to Dositheos about the Three Steles of Seth*, which prompted some scholars to rethink the idea of a Samaritan origin for Gnosticism—since Dositheos was the founder of one of the major Samaritan sects in antiquity⁴⁵—has proven ultimately inconclusive. A simple identification of “Dositheos” in the *Steles of Seth* with the Samaritan teacher is impossible because “Dositheos” was a common name in the ancient world.⁴⁶ Further, as Stanley ISSER (1976: 159–160) concluded in his monograph *The Dositheans: A Samaritan Sect in Late Antiquity* there is no evidence in the sources of traditional Dosithean literature being directly used or transformed by the Sethian Gnostics, and that the close association of Dositheos and Simon in Patristic literature was a “fabrication for dramatic purposes.” ISSER’s comments echo Edwin YAMAUCHI’s (1973: 57) earlier conclusion: “[t]here is no indication that Dositheos himself was a Gnostic.”

In similar vein, Gilles QUISPEL argued in his study *Gnosis als Weltreligion* that Simon was not an “all round Gnostic” in the latest sense of the term.⁴⁷ QUISPEL introduced his explanations of Simon and Helen with the provocative claim that the Church fathers had more rational, sensible recollections concerning the origin of Gnosis than modern interpreters. He

assessment that was seminal for the International Conference on Gnosticism held at Yale in 1978, which focussed on Sethianism and Valentianism. Cf. LIPSIUS 1860: 140–143; PEARSON 1981: 472–504; TARDIEU 1978: 188–209; ISSER 1976; PUMMER 1977: 27–33; SCHENKE 1974: 165–173.

⁴⁵ Cf. DORESSE 1960: 188–190.

⁴⁶ Cf. KP 2, 153–154.

⁴⁷ QUISPEL 1972: 51–52, 60–62, 70.

enthusiastically endorsed the tradition which presented Simon as the first heretic and founder of Gnosticism, commenting that "... diese Überlieferung ... im ideellen Sinne durchaus richtig scheint" (QUISPEL 1972: 51).

Karlmann BEYSCHLAG (1974: 77–78) argued even more strongly that the Acts presents a non-Gnostic Simon who becomes a Gnostic in the writings of Justin. BEYSCHLAG devoted the fifth chapter of his monograph to outline how the basic themes of Simonian Gnosis, as described in Irenaeus especially, are neither Samaritan nor pre-Christian but are borrowed from Christian Gnostics, perhaps Valentinians. He concluded that it was not necessary, and perhaps impossible, to date anything about Simon as a Gnostic teacher or redeemer earlier than the middle of the second century CE.

Yet, at the same time when investigations into Gnosticism and a Gnostic Simon seemed to have reached an impasse, new research published by Gerd LÜDEMANN (1975) argued that essential elements of Simonian Gnosis can be attested already prior to 150CE.⁴⁸ He linked the term "the Great Power" in Acts 8:10b with the reports in Justin (*Apol.* I 26,2–3) that "almost all the Samaritans" worshipped Simon as *πρωτον θεόν* and that the Romans honoured Simon with the erection of a statue on the island of the Tiber. LÜDEMANN concluded that prior to Justin's *Apology* Simon was already worshipped in Rome as a manifestation of Zeus. "Simon wurde schon vor Justin mit Zeus identifiziert und die in Rom weilenden Simonianer nahmen die Zeus/Semo-Statue mit für sich in Anspruch, um ihren Simon/Zeus zu verehren" (LÜDEMANN 1975: 51). Further, that reports of syncretistic worship on mount Gerazim are plausible indications that the same was true in Samaria also:

Andererseits wird man aber weiter vorsichtig folgern dürfen, daß die Tradition vom Zeus Hypsistos auf dem Garizim auch in der Zwischenzeit, den für uns dunklen Jahrhunderten, weiterlebte und in einem Kult zum Ausdruck kam. Das letztere wäre hochbedeutsam für die frühen Simonianer, denn ihre Simon/Zeus-Verehrung könnte mit diesem Kult irgendwie in Verbindung gestanden haben und wäre dann wohl in das 1. Jahrhundert zu datieren ... Weiter zeigte das Beispiel des Marinus, daß auch Samaritaner einem heidnischen Kult auf dem Garizim zugewandt waren. (LÜDEMANN 1975: 53–54)

⁴⁸ LÜDEMANN (1975: 36) argued that Justin's Syntagma underlies Irenaeus' (*Adv. Haer.* I 11; 23–24; 27) report.

In a follow-up article to his dissertation LÜDEMANN made the sensational claim that “the Simonian religion was already Gnostic when Philip came into contact with it” (LÜDEMANN 1987: 101). He argued for a clear reference to the feminine σύζυγος of Simonian Gnosis in the phrase ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας (Acts 8:22). However, the largely mediocre response by critics has been in concert with a previous assessment of LÜDEMANN’s original thesis, that “[w]e may justly admire the originality of LÜDEMANN’s hypothesis without necessarily being convinced by it” (MEEKS 1977: 139). On the basis of his research LÜDEMANN concluded:

Our analysis of Acts 8 thus does not confirm the opinion that all attempts to bridge the gap between the Simon of Acts and the Simon of the heresiologists will fail. On the contrary, the Gnostic system of the Simonians that must be assumed for the middle of the second century seems to have been presupposed already in Acts 8. Simonian religion is thus a sure candidate for a Gnosis at least contemporary with earliest Christianity. (LÜDEMANN 1987: 425)⁴⁹

4. *Concluding Remarks*

The preceding overview of research confirms the observation made by LÜDEMANN (1987: 420) that in modern research Simon has been treated more or less as a test case for larger questions; namely, either in support of the views of various writers on the reliability of historiography in Luke-Acts, or views concerning the nature and origin of Gnosticism. To preempt a possible criticism that Simon is not always observable within some more general sections of the overview, I would counter that this precisely reflects the dilemma confronting the study of Simon and his commentators. An adequate history of research cannot avoid recognising the background debates which provide the broad backdrop for discussions

⁴⁹ LÜDEMANN’s article was first presented as a short main paper for the 41st General Meeting of SNTS in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1986. This paper was published in English in NTS 33 (1987: 420–426)—with minor revisions and limited reference to and discussion of scholarly literature—for W.D. DAVIES on the occasion of his 75th birthday. A third version appears in LÜDEMANN’s edited *Studien zur Gnosis* (1999: 7–20). This latest revision includes previously omitted materials and critical comments that reflect the scholarly discussions that have transpired since LÜDEMANN’s paper was first presented.

about Simon, yet reference to Simon is sometimes confined to a footnote, or appears merely as a supporting example to views expressed within a document with a much broader focus.

As already described in the introduction, the contribution this book intends to make to scholarship is to further clarify the certainties and uncertainties surrounding the first century CE figure of Simon as it addresses the focal question of whether Simon can be called the first Gnostic. This will require a review of relevant sources, as well as an investigation into two previously considered mutually exclusive characterisations of Simon; namely, Simon as “magician” and as “Gnostic.” Clearly, one question to be resolved is whether these two major perceptions and descriptions of Simon are irreconcilable disparate portraits—which support the view that the Simon of ancient Christian writings and the Simon of Acts cannot be descriptions of the same figure—or, could these portraits present two faces of the same identity?

CHAPTER THREE

The Sources

1. Introduction

The elusive figure of Simon has been the focus of controversy ever since Irenaeus (2nd century CE) identified him as the “father of all heresies:” *ex quo universae haereses substiterunt*.¹ Christian literature of the first four centuries is consistent in its testimony that Simon was a Magician, a Samaritan, and the first person to be called a Gnostic.

Modern writers, however, cannot claim such a consensus of opinion. Conclusions about the person of Simon have ranged from denying his existence² to agreeing with the assessment of Irenaeus that he was the father of the Gnostic movement which threatened the existence of Christianity in the second century.³ Unfortunately, despite the efforts of critical scholarship—including the discovery and translation of new sources (the Nag Hammadi Corpus)—fundamental questions surrounding Simon are no closer to agreed solutions; and, the figure of Simon remains an open and much debated issue. Gerd LÜDEMANN (1987: 420) notes correctly that “these contradictory results reflect the particular difficulty of the Simon question, which consists not least in the span of time that lies between the two oldest sources (Acts and Justin).” Other generally recognised limitations encountered by Simon Research have been the distinct hostile nature of most accounts—we only hear about the activities/teachings of Simon through the voice of his opponents—and the decontextualization of these source materials through generations of collation, comparison, and commentary on their contents.

¹ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2.

² BAUR 1966: 84.

³ DANIELOU 1964: 69–76; VAN GRONINGEN 1967: 148.

Establishing context is of paramount importance for any interpretation of the key details in surviving reports about Simon; in particular, the source of any opinion or information and the reason for its inclusion within the larger work in which it is found. The social, intellectual, political and cultural worlds of Simon are embedded—in the sense of not being developed in all their details—in the Acts and later sources of the Simon story. So these outlines, portrayed and hinted at by various writers, need to be deciphered from the texts. This recovered material provides invaluable information to explain the motivation for and effective labelling of Simon as a “magician” and “Gnostic,” and also contributes to any attempt to describe a pre-Christian Simon.

The burden of this chapter includes an identification and clarification of the agreed primary sources for the Simon story; although, this will not be simply a re-presentation of detailed source-critical analysis available elsewhere. In a departure from previous literature in the field, an overview of references to the μάγοι in classical Graeco-Roman literature has been included, precisely because a pre-judgment suggests that the perceived activities and social status of the Magoi in antiquity played a vital role in shaping the figure of Simon in popular Christian imagination.

Further, I have tried to strike a balance between providing a comprehensive elucidation of the agreed sources, and simply assuming specialised knowledge of the subject. The inclusion of introductory, background and biographical information is intended to ensure the accessibility of the materials, and to allow the growth of the Simon story to unfold itself before the reader as it comes from the pens of those who have authored it.

While testimonies concerning Simon span a period from the first century CE (Acts 8) to the Middle Ages,⁴ this chapter will focus on the major witnesses to Simon prior to the fifth century CE: Acts 8:4–25; Justin, *Apol.* I 26; 56; *Dial.* 120; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,1–4 (cf. Tertullian, *De anima* XXXIV); Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI 1–18; Epiphanius, *Pan.* XXI 1–6; the Pseudo-Clementine literature, and the Apocryphal Acts of Peter.

⁴ Cf. FERREIRO 1996.

2. *References to the Magoi in the Literature of Graeco-Roman Antiquity*

2.1 Introduction

The words *mageia* (=magic) and *magos* share a common linguistic history: the former being derived from the latter, not unlike the words “action” and “actor” (Lat. *actio*, *-ionis* < *agere* do | *actor* < *agere* do). “Literally, magic is what a magus does” (BOYCE 1991: 511).

The word μάγος first appears in Greek literature from the late sixth century BCE. Its background arises from Persia,⁵ where the activities of Magoi were reported by various Greek observers as being hereditary priests, experts in astrology, divination, and the interpretation of dreams; or, as specialists in religious things.⁶ Various Greeks were said by tradition to have visited the Magoi in search of wisdom: for example, PYTHAGORAS,⁷ DEMOCRITUS,⁸ CELSUS,⁹ PYRRHO,¹⁰ and APOLLONIUS of Tyana;¹¹ but, circumstances prevented PLATO.¹²

In his 1997 publication, *Traditions of the Magi*, Albert DE JONG made a significant contribution to the study of Zoroastrianism, providing an answer to the research question: “to what extent do the Classical sources confirm or modify conventional reconstructions of ancient Zoroastrianism?” In this project, a similar question might be posed: to what extent do references to the Magoi in the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity confirm or modify the interpretation of Acts 8, in which a certain Simon is described as having been active for a considerable time in (the) city of Samaria: μαγεύων?

On balance, DE JONG’s overview and analysis of references to the Magoi in Classical Greek and Latin sources—from the early archaic

⁵ NOCK (1972: 164) comments that the name originally was given to members of the Median tribe by outsiders; and, that it may have etymological connections with the Persian word *magha* = ‘might,’ ‘power.’ DE JONG (1997: 387) identifies the complex of words relating to the Magoi, such as μάγος, μαγεία, μαγικός, μαγεύω, and claims, “These words derive from the Old Persian appellative for a priest *magu-* (nom. *magus*), etymologically related to Av. *magu-* which appears to have meant ‘(member of a) tribe.’”

⁶ Cf. BICKERMANN/TADMOR 1978: 239–261; MOMIGLIANO 1975: 123–150.

⁷ DIOG. L., *Lives* VIII 3.

⁸ DIOG. L., *Lives* IX 34–35.

⁹ ORIGEN, *c. Celsum* I, 13.

¹⁰ DIOG. L., *Lives* IX 61.

¹¹ PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius* I 26.

¹² DIOG. L., *Lives* III 6–7.

period of Greece to the late Roman Empire—confirmed previous observations¹³ that the nuances of *mageia* and *magos* have been transmitted in uneasy juxtaposition. Already in 1930, Giuseppe MESSINA noted how there is a great variety and number of conflicting opinions about the Magoi in ancient traditions:

Die Schwierigkeit der Lösung dieser Frage liegt darin, daß wir in der alten Überlieferung die mannigfaltigsten und sich widersprechenden Ansichten über die Magier vertreten finden. (MESSINA 1930: 11)

However, the inconclusive and sometimes contradictory opinions advanced by scholars on this subject not only serve to underline the diverse and fragmentary nature of most of the materials, but also the failure of investigators to fully appreciate the evolutionary and social dimensions of the term(s) under consideration.

The following select compendium of significant references to the Magoi in classical Graeco-Roman literature attempts to contribute to a more comprehensive interpretative matrix for the figure of Simon, through commentary that includes biographical, historical, and cultural information. For it is not simply who the Magoi were, but what observers—historians, philosophers, and other writers—supposed them to be that has determined their place in recorded history.

2.2 Magoi in the Pre-Socratics

Pre-Socratic¹⁴ knowledge and assessment of the Magoi is a matter of conjecture, since many of their works were already lost or scarce in late antiquity, and the rest perished thereafter. Only fragments—in some cases merely a sentence—have been preserved in the writings of others.

Apuleius of Madaura (2nd century CE) claimed that EPIMENIDES, ORPHEUS, PYTHAGORAS and OSTANES were commonly called μάγοι. This accusation by “the uneducated,” wrote Apuleius, reflected a common misunderstanding of the true nature of philosophers—who spent great care in the investigation of simple causes and elements of

¹³ Cf. NOCK 1972, 1972a; BOYCE 1991: 361–490; GRAF 1996: 24–57.

¹⁴ When speaking about “pre-socratics” this is not to be understood in a strict chronological sense, but includes contemporaries of Socrates, and even some who survived him. In this context, “pre-socratic” means all those whose thought is pre- or non-socratic.

matter (φύσις), the exploration of the workings of providence in the world, and worshipped the gods with great devotion: *Partim autem, qui providentiam mundi curiosius vestigant et impensius deos celebrant, eos vero Magos nominent ... ut olim fuere Epimenides et Orpheus et Pythagoras et Ostanes.*¹⁵ This claim finds support in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* where Ζωροάστρης ὁ Μήδος appears in a list alongside PYTHAGORAS and EPIMENIDES.¹⁶

In his work, *Life of Pythagoras* 6: I 101,3–4, Porphyry¹⁷ listed the Magoi—next to the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and so-called Chaldeans—as being determinative influences for the teachings of PYTHAGORAS¹⁸ of Samos (c.560–c.480 BCE): *περὶ τὰς τῶν θεῶν ἀγιστείας καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν περὶ τὸν βίον ἐπιτηδευμάτων παρὰ τῶν Μάγων φασὶ διακοῦσαι τε καὶ λαβεῖν.*¹⁹ Likewise, Philostratus comments²⁰ that EMPEDOCLES of Acragas (5th century BCE), PYTHAGORAS, and DEMOCRITUS had conversations with the Magoi: *ὁμίλησαντες μάγοις.* Further, that PROTAGORAS of Abdera (5th century BCE) conversed with the Magoi: *ὠμίλησε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἐκ Περσῶν μάγοις.*²¹ Indeed, that the father of Protagoras, one of the wealthiest citizens of Abdera, obtained instruction for his son by the Magoi who accompanied Xerxes' invasion of Greece (DK A2: II 255, 17–34).²²

The tradition²³ that DEMOCRITUS of Abdera (5th–4th century BCE) also was educated by the Magoi left behind in DEMOCRITUS' father's

¹⁵ APULEIUS, *Apology* 27; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 268, Nr. 2.

¹⁶ CLEMENT, *Strom.* I 133,2; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 25 [B 12b].

¹⁷ PORPHYRIUS (Porphyry), probably of Tyre (233–305CE). Studied under Origen of Caesarea; settled in Rome and became a pupil of Plotinus; moved to Sicily where he wrote against the Christian religion; this treatise was ordered destroyed by the Emperor Theodosius (378–395CE).

¹⁸ For claims about the influence of the Magoi on the Pythagorean synthesis of *θεῖα φιλοσοφία* and *θεραπεία*, see IAMBlichOS, *Pyth.* 151 (ALBRECHT, *Iamblichos* 154–155).

¹⁹ CLEMEN, *Fontes* 79.

²⁰ PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius* I 2.

²¹ PHILOSTRATUS, *Lives of the Sophists* I 10.

²² DIELS, Hermann/KRANZ, Walther, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Volumes I–III, Sixth Edition, Dublin/Zürich: Weidmann, 1951/52 (=DK). References are to division of chapter, number of quotation, volume, page and lines: eg. B14: I 154, 13–17 = Heraclitus*, Fragment, No. 14, Volume I, page 154, lines 13–17 [*Subject understood by section heading in DK].

²³ Cf. DK A1: II 81, 12–13; A2: II 84, 32–34; A16: II 86, 36–39; B299: II 208, 1–12.

house by Xerxes²⁴—and that, later, DEMOCRITUS travelled to India to learn from the naked philosophers, to Egypt to learn from the priests, and to Babylon to learn from the astrologers and Magoi—is repeated by Hippolytus the third century CE Greek ecclesiastical writer and heresiologist: πολλοῖς συμβαλὼν γυμνοσοφισταῖς ἐν Ἰνδοῖς καὶ ἱερεῦσιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ ἀστρολόγοις καὶ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι μάγοις (DK A40: II 94, 30–31).²⁵ Clement of Alexandria also refers to this connection, in an uncertain fragment: “For he went to Babylon and Persia, and Egypt to learn from the Magoi and the Priests: ἐπήλθε γὰρ Βαβυλῶνά τε καὶ Περσίδα καὶ Αἴγυπτον τοῖς τε μάγοις καὶ τοῖς ἱερεῦσι μαθητέων.”²⁶ Then, finally, Diogenes Laertius reports how ANAXARCHUS of Abdera (4th century BCE)—who accompanied Alexander the Great on his campaigns—together with PYRRHO of Elis, met the Magoi and the naked philosophers of India: ξυνακολουθῶν πανταχοῦ, ὡς καὶ τοῖς Γυμνοσοφισταῖς ἐν Ἰνδίᾳ συμμίξαι καὶ τοῖς Μάγοις (DK A2: II 236, 5–8).²⁷

In light of this reported fascination and contact with the East by eminent Greek thinkers, a number of scholars (REITZENSTEIN, BURKERT, DUCHESNE-GUILLEMIN, BIDEZ/CUMONT, WEST) argued the case for Persian religious thought having influenced the beginnings of Greek philosophy. The elevation of Time to a primeval God in PHERECYDES, the identification of Fire with Justice in HERACLITUS, and ANAXIMANDER’s astronomy placing the stars nearer to the earth than the moon, are tempting to explain by the influence of Persian (Iranian) cosmology. Martin WEST (1971) identified the second half of the sixth century BCE as being a time in which the Magoi could have exported their theories to a Greek world ready to listen.²⁸

However, it is important to remember, as in dealing with other aspects of archaic and classical Greek culture, that, just as different towns

²⁴ HERODOTUS records how Xerxes stayed at Abdera (HDT. VII 109; VIII 120), but it is debatable whether the overseers left behind were Magoi (cf. FREEMANN 1953: 290).

²⁵ HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* I 13,1.

²⁶ CLEMENT, *Strom.* I 15 (69,6). Given the parallelism in DIOG. L., *Lives* IX 34, Democritus learnt “theology” from the Magoi and “astrology” from the Chaldeans: οὗτος μάγων τιγῶν διήκουσε καὶ Χαλδαίων... παρ’ ὧν τὰ τε περὶ θεολογίας καὶ ἀστρολογίας ἔμαθεν ἔτι παῖς ὢν (DK A1: II 81, 11–14).

²⁷ DIOG. L., *Lives* IX 61.

²⁸ Cf. MOMIGLIANO 1975: 127.

and regions had their own traditions, we cannot assume every philosopher's pronouncements were public knowledge, or affected others throughout the Greek world as soon as they were made.

Early Greek philosophy was not a single vessel which a succession of pilots briefly commanded and tried to steer towards an agreed destination... it was more like a flotilla of small craft whose navigators did not start from the same point or at the same time, nor all aim for the same goal; some went in groups, some were influenced by the movements of others, some travelled out of sight of each other. (*OHCW*: 113)

Excursus: Heraclitus of Ephesus

A separate section in this compendium is devoted to HERACLITUS (c.535BCE–c.475BCE) because of the scholarly interest shown to a testimony found in Clement of Alexandria concerning the Magoi. Clement's testimony seems to argue an early pejorative application of the term μάγος.

The prime activity of Heraclitus is identified by tradition²⁹ as being between 504–501 BCE, which locates him a generation later than Pythagoras and Xenophanes. While highly critical of other contemporary thinkers Heraclitus shared some concepts with them, including that of a unifying intelligence (*logos*/wisdom) that governs all things.³⁰ This *logos* was never attributed any material substance. It was, however, knowable as a law. Human senses were necessary in any search for this wisdom, but the *logos* could only be apprehended by the mind. This explains why Heraclitus was critical of poets,³¹ whom in his opinion only described impressions of the world but left out the "main theme." Likewise, Heraclitus thought religious leaders to be not merely foolish but harmful, since they taught people to chatter to idols and to participate in obscene and intemperate rituals. Heraclitus denounced their mysteries as unholy revelations because they hindered people from grasping the truth.³²

These observations sharpen our critical appraisal of a reference to the Magoi by the 2nd century CE Christian Theologian, Clement of Alexandria;

²⁹ DK A1: I 139, 37–38.

³⁰ DK B50: I 161, 14–17.

³¹ DK B56: I 163, 1–6.

³² DK B15: I 154, 18–19; I 155, 1–2.

a reference³³ in which tradition considers a fragment survives from the hand of Heraclitus. Testimony is made to Heraclitus by Clement, in a polemical section of his work *Protrepticus* XXII 2, when appealing against Christian participation in divinatory rites and mystery cults. This passage presents classicists with syntactical problems and questions of authenticity, due to the arguable interpolation of exegetical comments by Clement:

τίσι δὴ μαντεύεται Ἡράκλειτος ὁ Ἐφέσιος; νυκτιπόλοις, μάγοις, Βάκχοις, λήναις, μύσταις, τούτοις ἀπειλεῖ τὰ μετὰ θάνατον, τούτοις μαντεύεται τὸ πῦρ· τὰ γὰρ νομιζόμενα κατὰ ἀνθρώπου μυστήρια ἀνιερωστὶ μενεῦνται.

[And in truth], against these Heraclitus the Ephesian prophesies as “*the night-walkers, the Magoi, the Bacchanals, the Lenaean revellers, the Initiated.*” These he threatens with what will follow death, and predicts for them fire. For what are regarded among men as mysteries, they celebrate sacrilegiously. (CLEMENT, *Protrepticus* XXII 2 [trans. ANFa II, 177])

How faithfully Clement appeals to Heraclitus is disputed. What is certain, however, is that Heraclitus argued religious teachers knew nothing of what they professed to know; namely, the next world “where awaits humankind, after death, things that are not even dreamed about now: ἀνθρώπου μένει ἀποθανόντας ἄσσα οὐκ ἔλπονται οὐδὲ δοκέουσιν.”³⁴ Curiously, then, Clement claims that Heraclitus threatened the followers of various mysteries and Bacchanal rites with hell-fire: τούτοις ἀπειλεῖ τὰ μετὰ θάνατον, τούτοις μαντεύεται τὸ πῦρ.³⁵ Further, whether Heraclitus referred to the Magoi in an original or derived sense remains as unclear as the philosopher himself.

Briefly, the historical problem is as follows: if the Magoi were seen through Greek eyes of antiquity as Persian “priests” they could not be found in a list alongside mystery peddlers;³⁶ or, if they were considered “sorcerers” and “quacks,” then they could not appear in a text by Heraclitus, because the pejorative sense of the word μάγος is a later development.³⁷

³³ DK B14: I 154, 14–17; DIOG. L., *Lives* IX 1.

³⁴ DK B27: I 157, 1–2.

³⁵ DK B14: I 154, 15–16.

³⁶ Itinerant mystery peddlers were called νυκτιπόλοι (night walkers/erring in the night) because they lived and performed their rituals on the fringes of society. Their activities were secret and mysterious, ridiculed by some, dreaded by others. Cf. BURKERT 1992: Chapter 2.

³⁷ Cf. MARCOVICH (1965: II 63–65, col. 260), “μάγος ist zu streichen: das Wort konnte um 490 v. Chr. nicht in diesem Sinn gebraucht werden.”

2.3 Magoi in the Historians of Graeco-Roman Antiquity

2.3.1 Xanthos

In an introductory paragraph to the life of Zoroaster, BIDEZ/CUMONT nominate Xanthos of Sardis (465BCE–425BCE) as being first among the early Greek historians to transmit information about the legendary founder of Mazdaism; commenting that already in his time emigrant Magoi had lit their fires in Lydia:³⁸ *Déjà de son temps, des Mages émigrés d'Orient—ou Maguséens—avient allumé leurs pyrées en Lydie.*³⁹ Xanthos was not a Greek but wrote in Greek. Living in a country that was the gateway between Asia and Europe, he was ideally placed to observe and report details of eastern religion for a western audience.⁴⁰

Reconstruction of Xanthos' work, *Λυδιακά*, from fragments preserved in the writings of XENOPHILOS,⁴¹ EPHOROS,⁴² and perhaps NICHOLAS of Damascus,⁴³ is an extremely controversial matter.⁴⁴ An accidental remark in DIOGENES claims that Xanthos dated Zoroaster 600 years prior to the arrival of Xerxes (c.1080 BCE) and that he published a succession list of Magoi down to the time of Alexander:

Ξανθὸς δὲ ὁ Λυδοῦς εἰς τὴν Ξέρξου διάβασιν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ζωροάστρου ἑξακισχίλια φησι καὶ μετ' αὐτὸν γεγονέναι πολλοὺς τινὰς Μάγους κατὰ διαδοχὴν ... μέχρι τῆς τῶν Περσῶν ὑπ' Ἀλεξάνδρου καταλύσεως.⁴⁵

However, a contemporary of Herodotus (5th century BCE) could not have reported a succession list continuing until the time of Alexander the

³⁸ Cf. HDT. I 131–132.

³⁹ BIDEZ/CUMONT I 5.

⁴⁰ Cf. KINGSLEY 1995: 173.

⁴¹ XENOPHILOS of Chalcidice, first half of 4th century BCE. Pythagorean.

⁴² EPHOROS of Cyme, c.400–333 BCE. Greek Historian, pupil of ISOCRATES. His writings were later used by DIODORUS of Siculus (historian and contemporary of CICERO).

⁴³ NICHOLAS of Damascus, 1st century BCE–1st century CE (time of Herod the Great and Augustus). He wrote an Autobiography, in part extant; a World History; a Life of Augustus; commentaries on Aristotle; and other philosophical works, as well as tragedies and comedies (*KP* 4, 109–111).

⁴⁴ Cf. *KP* 5, 1403: “äußerst kontrovers.”

⁴⁵ DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 1–2; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 7 [B 1a].

Great. Significantly, a parallel passage in SUDA⁴⁶ omits any reference to Alexander.

According to Clement of Alexandria,⁴⁷ Xanthos wrote that it was the custom of the Magoi to make love to their own mothers, daughters and sisters. Further, because women were considered common tribal property when a man wanted to take another's wife as his own he did so without using force or secrecy but with mutual consent: *μίγνυνται... οἱ μάγοι μητράσι καὶ θυγατράσι καὶ ἀδελφαῖς μίγνυσθαι θεμιτὸν εἶναι κοινὰς τε εἶναι τὰς γυναῖκας οὐ βία καὶ λάθρα ἀλλὰ συναινούντων ἀμφοτέρων, ὅταν θέλη γῆμαι ὁ ἕτερος τὴν τοῦ ἑτέρου.*⁴⁸

While there is widespread evidence detailing that the Magoi practised incest as part of ritual duty and as a means of preserving the caste,⁴⁹ PEARSON (1939: 117–118) is surely correct in his assessment of Xanthos' supposed statement about wife-swapping: "Anti-Persian and staunch nationalist though Xanthos may have been, it is hardly credible that he should have written this seriously." Or, as Arthur Darby NOCK (1972b: 688) suggests, "the quotation is at best a genuine text which reached Clement in garbled form."

When Clement's reported quotation of Xanthos is compared with the vast amount of classical literature on wife-swapping and indiscriminate sexual activities, it is clear that early Greek historians routinely ascribed these alluring practices to foreign peoples; often with the added commentary that these acts were performed in full view of everyone else, "just like the beasts of the field."⁵⁰

Clement lived at a time when a normative form of Christianity was still developing. As a writer, Clement appears to have practised the art of creative quotation; not even sacred writings were immune. Just like his opponents, he would rip words out of their original context and give

⁴⁶ Cf. BIDEZ/CUMONT II 7 [B 1b]. A Greek Lexicon survives under the name SUDA. The author is unknown, but was probably a Byzantine of the 10th century CE. The work is poorly organised, but preserves valuable material.

⁴⁷ CLEMENT of Alexandria remarks also that when Persian crown princes are maturing to adulthood they relate sexually with their sisters and mothers: *ἠβήσαντες δὲ ἀδελφαῖς καὶ μητράσιν καὶ γυναιξίν γαμεταῖς τε ἅμα καὶ παλλακίσιν ἀναρίθμοις ἐπιμίσγονται, καθάπερ οἱ κάπροι εἰς συνουσίαν ἠσκημένοι* (CLEMENT, *Paed.* I 55,2; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 68).

⁴⁸ CLEMENT, *Strom.* III 2 (11,1); CLEMEN, *Fontes* 3.

⁴⁹ BIDEZ/CUMONT I 78–80.

⁵⁰ Cf. HDT. I 203, 216; III 101; IV 104, 172, 180; EPHOROS (FGH 70, Fr. 42); THEOPOMPOS (FGH 115, Fr. 204).

them a completely different meaning from the sense they had naturally.⁵¹ The context in which Clement quotes Xanthos' statement about incest is within a chapter devoted to an attack on free love as reputedly practised by some of the Gnostics. The opening sentence presents a theme that reappears throughout the chapter: "They maintain that women belong to everyone in common: κοινὰς εἶναι τὰς γυναῖκας ἀξιούσιν."⁵² These are, of course, the same words that Clement uses in his quotation from Xanthos, providing a transition from incest references to the theme of free love.

Clement's report about indiscriminate sexual practices among the Magoi, therefore, bears tell-tale signs of intentional shaping. As KINGSLEY concludes, "It is not that the quotation reached him in a garbled form ... it was Clement himself who garbled it, as is quite clear when one reads the passage in its context."⁵³

2.3.2 Herodotus

Halicarnassus, the birthplace of HERODOTUS (c.484BCE–c.425BCE), was then a city under Persian rule in the most international region of the Greek world; for the colonies of Asia Minor were on the outermost edge of the ancient Near East. Herodotus considered himself ethnically Carian (the native population of the coast of Turkey where Halicarnassus was founded), as well as a Greek.

The *Histories* of Herodotus, published between c.430–c.425 BCE, are the earliest surviving Greek account of Eastern History.⁵⁴ In the relevant Persian sections of Herodotus' work the Magoi are frequently mentioned

⁵¹ Cf. SMITH 1973: 53–54 (on Clement's "ambiguous attitude towards truth"); SMITH 1973: 58 (on Clement's "willingness to alter quotations to suit his purposes").

⁵² CLEMENT, *Strom.* III 2.

⁵³ KINGSLEY 1995: 181.

⁵⁴ "Research" or "inquiry," a word often used in Herodotus' text, is in Greek ἱστορία; and its specialised meaning of *history* was born there. Generally it is agreed that Herodotus' history can be divided between his twin assertions of "I know" (οἶδα) and "as it seems to me" (ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ δοκέειν). In other words, between personal experience and deduction. With regard to his description of the Persians, it appears that he "relied on earlier written sources on Iran and the Persians, on travel reports from Greeks and others who had visited Iran, and on the expatriate life of Persian settlers and conquerors, but—as opposed to his testimony on Egypt—Herodotus did not personally witness things Iranian in Iran itself" (DE JONG 1997: 79).

(eg. I 101 [listed as one of the Median tribes], 107, 108, 120, 128, 132, 140; III 65–67, 73, 79; VII 19, 37, 113, 191). Yet, while important cultural and religious information is especially evident in paragraphs 131–140 of Book I, we find almost nothing about the teachings of the Magoi in Herodotus.

Generally Herodotus' description of the ritual practices of the Magoi are both contrastive and comparative: comparing Greek beliefs and practices with those of Persia. First, Herodotus claims personal knowledge that the erection of statues, temples, and altars were not accepted Persian practice, because, "as it seems [to him]," Persian religion was not anthropomorphic like the Greek: ἀγάλματα μὲν καὶ νηοὺς καὶ βωμοὺς οὐκ ἐν νόμῳ ποιευμένους ἰδρῦεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖσι ποιεῦσι μωρίην ἐπιφέρουσι, ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ δοκέειν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀνθρωποφυέας ἐνόμισαν τοὺς θεοὺς κατὰ περ οἱ Ἕλληνας εἶναι.⁵⁵ However, this interpretation is clearly mistaken as both the Avesta (Yt. V 126–129) and art from the Achaemenian period⁵⁶ clearly show that divinities were considered to have human form.⁵⁷ This assessment of Herodotus more likely then reflects contemporary Greek religious debate, or a catalogue of what was considered essential items in Greek cults: temples, altars, and statues.

Herodotus' descriptions of foreign gods are—with few exceptions—interpreted with Greek categories. So, for example, Herodotus claimed the Persians called Zeus⁵⁸ τὸν κύκλον πάντα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ and sacrificed to him from the tops of mountains. Further, he writes how they offered sacrifices to the Sun, Moon, Earth, Fire, Water, and Wind, observing that these were their original deities: τούτοισι μὲν δὴ θύουσι μόνουσι ἀρχῆθεν.⁵⁹ In a similar paraphrase of the religion of the Magoi, STRABO writes: "And they also honour the Sun—whom they call Mithra—and the

⁵⁵ HDT. I 131.

⁵⁶ Cf. SHAHBAZI 1980: 119–147.

⁵⁷ Cf. HECATAEUS of Abdera, philosopher and cultural historian (4th–3rd century BCE), who, when commenting on the religion of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Jews, was puzzled by the Greeks's concept of anthropomorphic gods. He considered Moses' avoidance of any statues of the gods praiseworthy, because Hecataeus considered the only true god(s) were the celestial bodies, or the cosmos itself. In this context we note his observance that according to the Magoi, the gods became people (beings): γεννητοὺς τοὺς θεοὺς εἶναι (DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 9; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 67–70 [D 2]).

⁵⁸ For the Persians, Ahura Mazda was the supreme being, and he was described as the one who wears the firmament as a garment (Yt. XIII 3; cf. Ps 104:2).

⁵⁹ HDT. I 131.

moon and Aphrodite and fire and earth and the winds and water.”⁶⁰ Curiously Herodotus fails to mention Mithra—a prominent deity in the Persian religion—in his paraphrase.

Further, Herodotus’ description of how the Magoi exercised an important sacrificial and liturgical role is reflective more of the priestly role within Greek cults, rather than adequately detailing the functions of the Magoi. Certainly they were more than priests, but Herodotus portrays them in the classic dual role of the priest, to be present at sacrifices and to be guardians of sacred texts and songs, without which no sacrifice is possible: διαθέντος δὲ αὐτοῦ μάγος ἀνὴρ παρεστῶς ἐπαείδει θεογονίην, οἷν δὲ ἐκείνοι λεγοῦσι εἶναι τὴν ἐπαιδίην.⁶¹ Herodotus also notes how Persian worshippers were not permitted to pray for any personal or private blessing, but only for the king and for the general good of the community: ἔωυτῷ μὲν δὴ τῷ θύοντι ἰδίη μούνῳ οὐ οἱ ἐγγίνεσται ἀρᾶσθαι ἀγαθὰ, ὁ δὲ τοῖσι πᾶσι Πέρσησι κατεύχεται εὖ γίνεσθαι καὶ τῷ βασιλεί.⁶² However, as DE JONG (1997: 115) notes, “most scholars are at a loss as to the real meaning of the text [here].”

Herodotus makes special mention of the burial customs—involving exposure⁶³—and comments how the Magoi are a peculiar caste, quite different from the Egyptian priests and indeed from any other sort of person; for, whereas the Egyptians make it a tenet of their religion not to kill anything except for sacrifice, the Magoi indiscriminately killed everything, except dogs and men: οἱ δὲ δὴ μάγοι αὐτοχειρίη πάντα πλὴν κυνὸς καὶ ἀνθρώπου κτείνουσι, καὶ ἀγῶνισμα μέγα τοῦτο ποιέονται.⁶⁴

More important, however—for any proposal of a broader context for interpreting the designation of Simon as someone active in [the] city of Samaria μαγεύων—are Herodotus’ statements that during the reign of Xerxes the Magoi were valued as dream interpreters,⁶⁵ astrological prophets,⁶⁶ and esteemed for making offerings and casting spells to appease the gods. Also, a report by Herodotus concerning the uneasy political relationship between Medes and Persians during the reigns of

⁶⁰ STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,13.

⁶¹ HDT. I 132.

⁶² HDT. I 132.

⁶³ HDT. I 140; HDT. III 16 describes how Cambyses ordered the embalmed corpse of Psammenitus to be treated with every possible indignity; and ultimately burnt, an action which was anathema in the eyes of Egyptian and Persian alike.

⁶⁴ HDT. I 140.

⁶⁵ HDT. VII 19.

⁶⁶ HDT. VII 37.

Astyages and Cambyses—and then the usurpation of the throne by a false Smerdis (not the son of Cyrus, but a Mede: a μάγος)⁶⁷—appears to contribute to a developing litany within some circles which rehearses the assumed treasonous activities of the Magoi and their avarice. That these Magoi were to be considered as a distinct group from the Persians is underlined by Herodotus' account of the massacre of the Magoi under Darius; an event commemorated as a Festival called Magorhonia: Μαγοφόνια ... ἐν τῇ μάγον οὐδένα ἕξεστι φανῆναι ἐς τὸ φῶς, ἀλλὰ κατ' οἶκους ἑαυτοὺς οἱ μάγοι ἔχουσι τὴν ἡμέρην ταύτην.⁶⁸

2.3.3 Xenophon

In addition to his *Hellenica*, or Greek History, Xenophon (c.444BCE–c.357BCE) authored a number of well-known works, including *Anabasis*, *Agésilas*, the *Memoirs of Socrates*, and the *Cyropaedia*. On face value the *Cyropaedia* of Xenophon is a biography of Cyrus the Great, but in reality it presents Xenophon's own views on politics, education, social institutions and military tactics.⁶⁹ As Cicero notes: *Cyrus ille a Xenophonte non ad historiae fidem scriptus, sed ad effigiem iusti imperii*.⁷⁰ Cyrus is described in terms of an ideal soldier–statesman equipped with all the virtues admired by Xenophon; and where the facts did not enhance the image of Cyrus, Xenophon altered them.⁷¹ In freely manipulating the facts of history to serve his purpose Xenophon was instrumental in the development of the historical novel.⁷²

So, questions of accuracy and historical reliability are of no small consequence when considering details in the *Cyropaedia*. Nonetheless, Xenophon is reported to have served in the Greek contingent that accompanied Cyrus into Upper Asia against Artaxerxes in 401 BCE. From his observation of interactions between Cyrus and the Magoi, Xenophon

⁶⁷ HDT. I 120–130; III 65–67.

⁶⁸ HDT. III 79.

⁶⁹ Cf. PEASE 1973: 119–120.

⁷⁰ CICERO, *Ep. ad Q. frat.* I 1,23.

⁷¹ Cf. MOMIGLIANO (1975: 134) who comments, "... Xenophon did not intend to write the history of Cyrus, but to present the picture of an ideal king." For example, Cyrus died in an unsuccessful military campaign, yet Xenophon describes Cyrus' peaceful death at home in his palace, after delivering a philosophical address (*Cyropaedia* VIII 7,1–28). Further, to increase the importance of Cyrus, Xenophon claimed the Medes never ruled an empire, but Cyrus conquered all of Asia and Egypt as well.

⁷² Cf. OHCW 1995: 661.

reports how Cyrus enlisted the Magoi to select appropriate tributes for the gods,⁷³ and notes how Cyrus “... never failed to sing hymns to the gods at daybreak and to sacrifice daily to whatsoever deities the Magoi directed:” ὑμνεῖν τε ἀεὶ ἅμα τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοὺς θεοὺς καὶ θύειν ἄν’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν οἷς οἱ μάγοι θεοῖς εἴποιεν.⁷⁴ Xenophon also notes how the college of the Magoi was instituted from this time: “... τότε πρῶτον κατεστάθησαν οἱ μάγοι ...”.⁷⁵

In commenting why the Persians [and Cyrus] followed the directions of the Magoi, Xenophon notes how the Persians thought “they ought to be much more scrupulously guided by those whose profession is with things divine:” πολὺ Πέρσαι χρῆσθαι τοῖς περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς μᾶλλον τεχνίταις χρῆσθαι ἢ περὶ τᾶλλα.⁷⁶ Clearly, Xenophon portrayed the Magoi as “experts in everything with regards to the gods:” οἱ περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς τεχνίται.⁷⁷

2.3.4 Strabo

Amaseia, the birthplace of Strabo (c.64BCE–c.19CE), was a hellenized town in the region of Pontus (along the Black Sea). Incidental references in his work *Geography* detail his instruction in Caria under Aristodemus before moving to Rome.⁷⁸ Strabo travelled widely from Armenia to Etruria and from Euxine to Ethiopia.⁷⁹

Four centuries elapsed between the Herodotus *Histories* and the *Geography* of Strabo, during which the Persian empire had disappeared into the desert landscape of Iran, to be first replaced by the Greek empire of Alexander and then by several smaller kingdoms. By the time of Strabo’s birth the super-power of Rome had been established for more than two centuries, and it lived in uneasy co-existence with the Parthian kingdom to the East.

Strabo, like Herodotus, never visited Iran.⁸⁰ However, a remarkable similarity exists between Strabo’s description of Persian customs and

⁷³ XENOPHON, *Cyropaedia* IV 5,14; 5,51; 6,11; V 3,4; VII 3,1; 5,35.

⁷⁴ XENOPHON, *Cyropaedia* VIII 1,24; see VII 5,57; VIII 3,24.

⁷⁵ XENOPHON, *Cyropaedia* VIII 1,23–24.

⁷⁶ XENOPHON, *Cyropaedia* VIII 3,11.

⁷⁷ XENOPHON, *Cyropaedia* VIII 3,1.

⁷⁸ STRABO, *Geography* XIV 1,48.

⁷⁹ STRABO, *Geography* II 5,11.

⁸⁰ STRABO, *Geography* II 5,11.

Herodotus' account.⁸¹ The commonly held explanation is that Strabo was dependent on Herodotus.⁸² Yet, while Strabo's details of Persian religion in general appear to follow the pattern of Herodotus, his detailed information about rituals are unlike anything else in Greek literature.

Strabo notes in Herodotian fashion various Persian customs. In particular, he reports that in Cappadocia—where there were many temples for various Persian deities—the Magoi tribe is well established and they are known as “fire kindlers:” ἐν δὲ τῇ Καππαδοκίᾳ πολὺ γὰρ ἐκεῖ τὸ τῶν Μάγων φύλον, οἷ καὶ πύραιθοι καλοῦνται.⁸³

Earlier Strabo makes the comment that the “Council of the Parthians, according to Poseidonius, consists of two groups, one that of kinsmen, and the other that of wise men and Magoi, from both of which groups the kings were appointed:” τὸ μὲν συγγενῶν τὸ δὲ σοφῶν καὶ μάγων, ἐξ ὧν ἀμφοῖν τοὺς βασιλεῖς καθίστασθαι.⁸⁴ Strabo not only records the loyalty of the Magoi who attended the Persian kings,⁸⁵ but also the murdering treachery of some Magoi against Cambyses: ὑπὸ τῶν Μάγων κατελύθη.⁸⁶ Strabo likewise repeats the tradition that “these [Magoi], by ancestral custom, consort even with their mothers:” τούτοις δὲ καὶ μητράσι συνέρξεσθαι πάτριον νερόμισται, τοιαῦτα μὲν τὰ ἔθη.⁸⁷

2.4 Magoi in the Philosophers of Graeco-Roman Antiquity

2.4.1 Plato

The earliest surviving biographies of Plato (c.428BCE–c.349BCE) were written centuries after his death by Apuleius (2nd century CE) and Diogenes Lærtius (c. 3rd century CE). For this reason, most of what can be read about Plato's life and chronology consists of hypotheses built on top of hypotheses by generations of scholars, starting with the surviving works that constitute our primary sources. What can be said about Plato's life, with some degree of certainty, is that he was born into one of the noblest families of Athens. He was supposedly descended from Codrus,

⁸¹ STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,13–20; cf. HDT. I 131–140.

⁸² Cf. CLEMEN 1920a: 100–110; BOYCE 1991: 294–295.

⁸³ STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,13–15.

⁸⁴ STRABO, *Geography* XI 9,3.

⁸⁵ STRABO, *Geography* XV 1,68.

⁸⁶ STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,24.

⁸⁷ STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,20; cf. CLEMEN, *Fontes* 36.

the last legendary king of Athens by his father, and was related to Solon by his mother.

Perhaps one of the most important and formative events in his life was his youthful encounter with Socrates, of whom he became a “disciple” until Socrates’ trial and death in 399 BCE. Under Socrates’ influence, and disillusioned by what he saw of Athenian politics, Plato decided to open a school to educate the future leaders of cities. After a trip to Sicily and Italy (where he most likely met with Pythagoreans), Plato founded his Academy in Athens, named after the park in which it was located.

Plato, or more likely one of his unnamed students, recounts the instruction of the crown-princes of Persia by royal tutors, saying these educators were named according to the cardinal virtues: the “wisest,” the “most just,” the “most temperate,” and the “bravest.”

Ὦν ὁ μὲν (ὁ σοφώτατος) μαγείαν τε διδάσκει τὴν Ζωροάστρου τοῦ Ὀρομάζου – ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο θεῶν θεραπεία – διδάσκει δὲ καὶ τὰ βασιλικά.

The first of these teaches him the *magic* of Zoroaster, son of Horomazdes (Ahura Mazda); that is, the worship of the gods; he teaches him also what concerns the role of king. (PS-PLATO, *Alcibiades* I 122a)

Plato defines *μαγεία* as *θεῶν θεραπεία* and this passage is referred to by APULEIUS as proof in his legal defence that a Magos was a *sacerdos* and that magic should be considered a professional skill: *artem ... dis immortalibus acceptam, colendi eos ac venerandi pergnaram, piam scilicet et divinis scientem*.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ APULEIUS of Madaura (Platonist. Teacher c.124–170 CE), accused of using magic to lure the affections of a wealthy widow, defended himself in a trial held before the Roman proconsul, Claudius Maximus, in a speech that provides the modern reader with a good insight into a second century CE understanding of magic. Apuleius counters the charge that he is a Magus (=μάγος) with an appeal to the authority of Plato. Then he argued that traditionally magic had more to do with religion and philosophy than sorcery, “[What is a magician?] I have read in many books that *magus* is the same thing in Persian as *priest* in our language. What crime is there in being a priest and in having accurate knowledge, a science, a technique of traditional ritual, sacred rites and traditional law, if magic consists of what Plato interpreted ... [as the service of the gods]: *Nam si, quod ego apud plurimos lego, Persarum lingua magus est qui nostra sacerdos, quod tandem est crimen, sacerdotem esse et rite nosse atque scire atque callere leges cerimoniarum, fas sacrorum, ius religionum, si quidem magia id est quod Plato interpretatur ...* (*Apology* 25; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 59).

After quoting [Ps.] Plato’s *Alcibiades* I 121–122, Apuleius summarises the reasons for holding a Magus in esteem rather than with contempt, “Listen to this,

2.4.2 Aristotle

Aristotle (c.384BCE–c.322BCE) was born in Stagira, near Macedonia at the northern end of the Aegean Sea. His father died when he was a boy, and Aristotle was left under the care of a guardian. When Aristotle was seventeen he was sent to study at Plato's Academy in Athens, where he remained for twenty years, until Plato's death in 347 BCE.

Although a most promising student, Aristotle did not succeed Plato as head of the Academy because of their opposing views on several fundamental philosophical issues, specifically regarding Plato's theory of ideas. In 335 BCE Aristotle founded his own school, the Lyceum—often called the Peripatetic School—and ran it for twelve years. During his time at the Lyceum, Aristotle wrote extensively on a wide range of subjects: politics, metaphysics, ethics, logic and science.

In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle comments that the Magoi, like Pherecydes⁸⁹ and certain others (poets), do not say anything apart from myths and allegories (μη μυθικῶς πάντα λέγειν), and make the primary generator the Supreme Good: οἶον Φερεκύδης καὶ ἕτεροί τινες τὸ γεννήσαν πρῶτον ἄριστον τιθέασι καὶ οἱ μάγοι.⁹⁰ Aristotle claimed the Magoi were more ancient than the Egyptians, and attributed them with one of the first dualistic conceptions; namely, that they taught there were two sources (ἀρχαί); on the one hand ἀγαθὸς δαίμων = Zeus = Ahura Mazda, and on the other κακὸς δαίμων = Hades = Ariman.⁹¹

you who rashly slander magic! It is an art acceptable to the immortal gods, an art which includes the knowledge of how to worship them and pay them homage (...*artem esse dīs immortalibus acceptam, colendī eos ac venerandī pergnarum*...). It is a religious tradition dealing with things divine (...*pīam scilicet et divini*...) and it has been distinguished ever since it was founded by Zoroaster and Ormazd (*Oromazde*), the high priests of divinities. In fact, it is considered one of the chief elements of royal instruction, and in Persia no one is allowed lightly to be a 'magus' any more than they would let him be king: *nec ulli temere inter Persas concessum est magum esse, haud magis quam regnare* (*Apology* 26; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 59).

So, Apuleius concludes, "Why should I not be permitted to learn the priestly traditions of Zoroaster: *quod si ita est, cur mihi nosse no liceat... Zoroastri sacerdotia?*" (*Apology* 26; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 59).

⁸⁹ PHERECYDES of Syros (c.600–c.525BCE) made Zeus one of the three primary beings, and together with Pythagoras and Thales is classed among the first of the Greeks to philosophise about things heavenly and divine. Cf. DK A11: I 76, 20–21.

⁹⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* 1091b; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 24.

⁹¹ Cf. DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 8; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 9 [B2].

2.4.3 Sotion

Sotion of Alexandria (3rd–2nd century BCE),⁹² known through his major work *Διαδοχαὶ τῶν φιλοσόφων* (Successions of the Philosophers) which was written between 200–170BCE,⁹³ notes that the Persians had their μάγοι like the Babylonians and Assyrians had their Chaldeans, and the Indians their Gymnosophists. However, there were differences in function. While the Chaldeans are said to engage in ἀστρονομία and πρῶρησις, the Magoi make great efforts in the service of the Gods, sacrifice and prayers, being convinced only they could be heard: τοὺς δὲ Μάγους περὶ τε θεραπείας θεῶν διατρίβειν καὶ θυσίας καὶ εὐχάς, ὡς αὐτοὺς μόνους ἀκουμένους.

The task of the Magoi was also to make declarations (ἀποφαινέσθαι) about the essence (οὐσία) and issue (γένεσις) of the Gods, Fire, Earth, and Water: οὓς καὶ πῦρ εἶναι καὶ γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ. Sotion comments the Magoi have no statues or images and do not differentiate between male and female deities.⁹⁴ He also repeats the widespread claim of sexual peculiarities among the Magoi.⁹⁵

2.4.4 Cicero

We know more about the later Roman Republic than about any other period of Roman history, because of Marcus Tullius Cicero. Born in a well-to-do family at Arpinum in southern Italy in 106BCE, he rose to be a leading legal figure in 70, consul in 63, and a prominent figure in the political intrigues of the 50s. He died in the proscriptions of 43BCE.

Cicero uses the word “magos”—in what appears the first time in Roman literature⁹⁶—in his second book dealing with religious laws.

⁹² SOTION was one of the main sources of Diogenes Laertius, the second century CE compiler of *Lives of the Philosophers*.

⁹³ Cf. *KP* 5, 290–291.

⁹⁴ SOTION, *Successions* XXIII.

⁹⁵ Cf. BIDEZ/CUMONT II 7–9 [B 1a], 67–70 [D 2]; DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 1–2, 6–7.

⁹⁶ Not much earlier than Cicero’s *De legibus* appeared Catullus’ brief collection of poems, in which Catullus used the term ‘magus’ in its strict ethnographic sense. In Poem 90, which in his translation WEINREICH (1974: 151) gives the heading “Ein dunkler Ehrenmann V [A dubious man of honour],” Catullus associates Gellius’ relationship with his mother, and the alleged toleration of incest by the Magoi: *Nascatur magus ex Gelli matrisque nefando, Coniugio et discat Persicum aruspicium: Nam magus ex matre et gnato gignature oportet, Si verast Persarum impia religio, Gratus ut accepto veneretur carmine divos Omentum in flamma pingue liquefaciens.* (CLEMEN, *Fontes*

When, among other things, reporting concerning the Persians—in this case, the Persian μάγοι—Cicero notes that Xerxes torched the Greek temple on the advice of the Magoi: *Delubra esse in urbibus censeo, nec sequor magos Persarum quibus auctoribus Xerses inflammasse templa Graeciae dicitur.*⁹⁷

In the *Tusculan Disputations*, which primarily defends the Stoic view of happiness and duty, Cicero makes particular reference to opposing customs in burial ritual, when he reports the Egyptians and Persians desire the dead body to be preserved as soon as possible, but the Magoi⁹⁸ and Hyrcanians lay out the body for animals to tear and devour.⁹⁹

Sed quid singulorum opiniones animadvertam, nationum varios errores perspicere cum liceat? conduunt Aegyptii mortuos et eos servant domi, Persae etiam cera circumlitos conduunt, et quam maxime permaneant diuturna corpora. Magorum mos est non bumare corpora suorum, nisi a feris sint ante laniata. in Hyrcania plebs publicos alit canes, optumates domesticos. nobile autem genus canum illud scimus esse...

But why should I notice the beliefs of individuals, since we may observe the varied deceptions under which races of mankind labour? The Egyptians embalm their dead and keep them in the house; the Persians even smear them with wax before burial; it is the custom of the magi not to bury the bodies of their dead unless they have been first mangled by wild beasts; in Hyrcania the populace support dogs for the benefit of the community, while the nobles keep them for family use... (CICERO, *Tusculanae disputationes* I 108).

In his extensive commentary, GIGON notes that Herodotus had already drawn attention to the distinctive burial customs observed in various nations, and claims that the Sophists and early Socratics took this fact as confirmation of their opinion that customs are relative and all laws are equally a matter of choice: "... alle Gesetze und Sitten relativ und gleichermaßen unverbindlich seien."¹⁰⁰

Yet, perhaps the most significant comments provided by Cicero are found in his work *De divinatione*, in which he formulates a brief definition

27). GRAF (1996: 38) assesses the ethnographic detail that the true Magoi were the fruit of a Son–Mother incestuous relationship, as marginal, even if since Xanthos in the fifth century BCE incest has been claimed to be typical of them. Cf. LATTKE 1994: 29–55 who argues a case for the πορνός in 1 Cor 5:1 being a μάγος.

⁹⁷ CICERO, *De legibus* II, ix, 26; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 29.

⁹⁸ Zoroaster taught that earth, fire, and water were the pure creations of Ahura Mazda and must not be polluted by contact with a dead body. Cremation and interment were therefore out of the question. The “towers of silence,” the well-known cemetery of the Parsee community in Bombay, India, represent a modern survival of such rites.

⁹⁹ Cf. HDT. I 140.

¹⁰⁰ CICERO in GIGON 1976: 484.

of the Magoi: “that clan of wise men and teachers dwelling in Persia.”¹⁰¹ The term “magos” is obviously unfamiliar to Cicero’s readers, and needs explanation. As noted above, the Latin words *magus* and *magia* were borrowed terms from the Greek, and appeared first in the literature of Cicero and the poet Catullus. The evident connection of the words with Persian realities is strong in both authors. For Cicero, the Magoi were clearly Persian religious specialists: *Eaque divinationum ratio ne in barbaris quidem gentibus neglecta est, siquidem ... et in Persis augurantur et divinant magi* (CICERO, *De divinatione* I, xc). These Magoi explained the dreams of Darius, practiced divination, and initiated every King through their traditions: *nec quisquam rex Persarum potest esse, qui non ante magorum disciplinam scientiamque perceperit* (CICERO, *De divinatione* I, xci).

2.5 Magoi in the Writers of Graeco-Roman Antiquity

2.5.1 Philo

Little is known about the life of Philo (c.20BCE—c.50CE), who is variously acknowledged as the foremost Jewish philosopher of the Hellenistic age. Philo was born in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, which had already been almost exclusively Greek-speaking for nearly three centuries. His education, most probably consisted of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, harmonics, philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, and logic.¹⁰²

In his writings, Philo mentions a wide range of Greek writers—especially the epic and dramatic poets—and displays a mastery of Greek rhetorical techniques. His commentaries on the Septuagint are thoughtful and synthesise Platonic, Stoic and Jewish values and ideas. Another significant legacy is Philo’s idea that the wisdom (logos) of God mediates God’s absoluteness to creation by communicating divine wisdom in nature and in human intelligence.

The influence of Philo on the Christian tradition can be demonstrated from the writings of Clement onwards. But, to date no one has been able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Philo was known to Christian writers prior to Clement. Certainly, for example, in Justin Martyr there are texts that provide strong echoes of Philonic themes, but

¹⁰¹ CICERO, *De divinatione* I, xxiii, 46: “... quod genus sapientium et doctorum habebatur in Persis.”

¹⁰² Cf. PHILO, *De congressu eruditionis gratia* (*On the Preliminary Studies*) 74–76; BORGES 1997: 16–17.

there is insufficient evidence to argue direct dependence. Again, there are evident similarities with the New Testament. For example, the Logos doctrine in John's Gospel, Paul's tri-partite anthropology, the Christ-hymn in Colossians, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. But, any talk about influence must take into account that at the time when Christian thought began the writings of Philo formed part of a much broader body of Hellenistic-Jewish literature that was being disseminated throughout the Diaspora. Not all of this literature had its origin in Alexandria, and not all of it shared the intellectual level of Philo's works. Of course, due recognition must also be given to the fact that Philo's thought shares together with much of the New Testament tradition, and early Christian literature, a common heritage in the Septuagint.

Given this background we approach Philo's portrayal of the Magoi. In one text he reports the time-honoured tradition that, among the Persians, the Magoi research into facts of nature to gain knowledge of the truth, and through visions ... give and receive revelations of divine excellency: ἐν Πέρσαις μὲν τὸ μάγων, οἳ τὰ φύσεως ἔργα διερευνώμενοι πρὸς ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας καθ' ἡσυχίαντας θείας ἀρετὰς τραυτέραις ἐμφάσεσιν ἱεροφαντοῦνται τε καὶ ἱεροφαντοῦσιν.¹⁰³ Philo makes similar remarks in *De specialibus legibus*, commenting:

Now the true magic (ἀληθῆ μαγικὴν), the scientific vision by which the facts of nature are presented in a clearer light, is felt to be a fit object for reverence and ambition and is carefully studied not only by ordinary persons, but by kings and the greatest of kings, and particularly those of the Persians ... no one in that country is promoted to the throne unless he has first been admitted into the caste of the Magi: τοῦ μάγων γένους. (PHILO, *De specialibus legibus* III 18)¹⁰⁴

It's a matter of debate what Philo means by "true magic," but there is some correspondence with a distinction made in Cicero's *De divinatione* between "artificiosa divinatio" and "naturalis." In *De divinatione* "artificiosa" refers to augury and the like; whereas, "naturalis" refers to inspiration and the prophetic spirit received through oracles and dreams. However, any estimation of the Magoi in the thought of Philo is complicated by his reference—in the very next paragraph—to the existence of a base form of magic, properly called a perversion of the art (κυριώτατα φάναι κακοτεχνία). This counterfeit he considered the

¹⁰³ PHILO, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 74.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. CICERO, *De divinatione* I, xci: *Nec quisquam rex Persarum potest esse qui non ante Magorum disciplinam scientiamque perceperit.*

provenance of those who make it their profession to deal in purifications and disenchantments.¹⁰⁵

In the ancient world, φαρμακοί (= poisoners) appear as the stereotypical villains. Their knowledge and expertise in the preparation of “love potions” and other made-to-order medications, to help or harm human life, is legendary.¹⁰⁶ τὰ φάρμακα interestingly appears in 2 Kings 9:22 LXX in connection with the πορνεία of Jezebel. Then there are numerous references to beguiling Egyptian women in the *Testament of Joseph*, who are energised by various preparations, in this case supplied by various Magoi.¹⁰⁷ However, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, in its present form dates from about the 2nd/3rd century CE. These testimonies are composed of narrative, eschatological, and homiletic material similar in style and content to a group of early Christian works: the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. It is not unexpected that several occurrences of the dual category μάγοι καὶ φαρμακοί¹⁰⁸ are found in these more recent writings.

Philo’s observations about the Magoi—one clearly positive and the other arguably negative—are reported in uneasy juxtaposition within broader comments made in a section of the *De specialibus legibus* concerning the divine prohibition against murder. This immediate context is significant for understanding Philo’s comments about the Magoi. Yet, before pursuing that claim further, the reader needs to note how Philo’s argument develops the thought that in the eyes of the Lawgiver homicidal intent equally deserves condemnation as the act itself. The pre-meditated actions of poisoners are no less an act of violence against the “image of God” than the passionate actions of murderers. Both deserve summary execution (Exod 21:14; Num 35:16–17, 33–34), to remove their offence from the Land and the Temple; for holy places are not to provide asylum for the unholy.

The same should be the lot of anyone who craftily lies in wait, and, though not daring to attack outright plots and schemes to shed blood treacherously, for he too is under the curse in his soul at least even though his hands are innocent as yet. (PHILO, *De specialibus legibus* III 15)

¹⁰⁵ PHILO, *De specialibus legibus* III 18.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. HOMER, *Odyssey* X 290ff.; PLUTARCH, *Antonius* LX 1.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Testament of Joseph* III 1–6; IV 3; VIII 1; XVI 5.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Dan 2:2; Did. II 2; V 1; Barn XX 1.

Philo's reference to the Magoi, in the context of a discussion about obedience to divine Law, becomes clearer in meaning when read in connection with two theological concepts that Philo develops. First, the idea that God is ὁ ἕστῶς—the stable, immobile one. Second, the view that human beings are basically a συναμφότερον consisting of two parts, the body and the rational soul or mind. In Philo, God's stability is regularly contrasted with the mutability of created things. However, the concept of stability acquires a transferred sense when it is applied to those who are wise—in particular the wise man *par excellence*, Moses (or Abraham)—who cleave to God and attain the same stability of thought and purpose. Again, in response to a question posed about Abraham—if it is said he believed in God, why did he doubt in God's promise?—Philo comments that it is vain to think that human stability can match God's, because there is an essential difference between God and human beings. God is not a composite being (σύγκριμα), yet humans are mixtures (κράματα), consisting of a body and the rational soul or mind—a mortal and a divine part—which are harmoniously combined, but distinguishable. A person becomes wise and free when the greater part of his or her life is inclined to the divine portion.¹⁰⁹

Philo's line of argument in *De specialibus legibus*, and his reference to the Magoi, is that while “true magic ... is a fit object for reverence and ambition,” knowledge of the truth is evident in human lives by the degree that divinely created and related souls/minds emulate God in right living; abandoning wordly concerns and ways to participate in the perfect and the good. Philo clearly conceives the possibility of the human νοῦς being able to divest itself entirely from the body and the irrational soul. As such, the Magoi are chosen as representatives of the highest possible achievements in human reason. Yet, Philo concludes that even this knowledge is σοφιστείαν, not truly wise, if the activity of reason does not result in submission to the wisdom of God mediated by the Logos through the law and the prophets.

There is one other notable reference by Philo to the Magoi. In *De vita Moysis* Philo portrays Balaam¹¹⁰ as a widely respected and famous soothsayer (ἐπὶ μαντεία περιβόητος).¹¹¹ While Philo once identifies Balaam as a Magos,¹¹² he otherwise uses various forms of the verb μαντεύομαι

¹⁰⁹ Cf. PHILO, *De mutatione nominum* 181–185.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Num 22:5–24:25.

¹¹¹ PHILO, *De vita Moysis* I 264.

¹¹² PHILO, *De vita Moysis* I 293. Cf. Midrash Rabbah 1.9 and b.Sotah 11a for the identification of Balaam's sons as Pharaoh's magoi referred to in Exod 7:11.

when referring to Balaam, which is the more common way in Graeco-Roman literature to refer to practitioners of divination, and the bearers of oracles and prophecy.¹¹³ In the Old Testament account, Balaam was summoned by the king of Moab to pronounce a destructive curse upon Israel. But instead Balaam speaks a series of blessings, and acknowledges that he is unable to go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad (Num 24:13). The point at issue is who legitimately and accurately speaks for God. Philo uses the incident involving Balaam and the donkey to highlight Balaam's "insensibility:" the unreasoning animal is shown to be superior in sight to the one who claimed to see divine things.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, the purpose of Philo is not to expose Balaam as an ignorant fool, or to debase the Magoi, but to argue that only by the inspiration of the Holiest can someone genuinely perceive and prophesy divine things; in fact God can even use a donkey.

2.5.2 Pliny the Elder

Pliny (c.23CE–c.79CE.) was born in Novum Comum, Italy, but went to Rome at an early age. When he was about 23 years old he entered the army, serving in a campaign in Germany. Returning to Rome, he studied Law, but, being unsuccessful as a pleader, he devoted himself to scholarly study and writing.

Pliny wrote many historical and scientific works. His great encyclopedia of nature and art in 37 books, the *Historia Naturalis*, is the only one of his works that has been preserved. The encyclopedia concerns astronomy, geography, ethnology, anthropology, human physiology, zoology, botany, horticulture, medicine and medications from plant and animal substances, mineralogy, metallurgy, and the arts.

In Book 30 of his *Natural History* Pliny mentions the Magoi in attempting to describe the origins of magic. Pliny considered magic a gross fraud, and hardly disguises his revulsion for the supposed cures of magic. He begins Book 30 by writing:

Magicas vanitates saepius quidem antecedente operis parte, ubicunque causae locusque poscebant, coarguimus detegemusque etiamnum. In paucis tamen digna res est, de qua plura dicantur, vel eo ipso quod

¹¹³ Cf. JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* VI 330; *BJ* I 80; BAGD; MM.

¹¹⁴ PHILO, *De vita Moysis* I 272 (ὑπὸ γὰρ ἀλόγου ζώου παρευημερεῖτο τὰς ὄψεις ὁ μὴ μόνου τὸν κόσμον ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν κοσμοποιὸν αὐχῶν ὄραν).

fraudentissima artium plurimum in toto terrarum orbe plurimisque saeculis valuit.

Previously in my work I have often shown the lies of the Magi for what they are, whenever the argument or occasion demanded, and I shall continue to expose their untruths even now. It is hardly surprising that the influence of magic has been very great since, alone of the arts, it embraces three others that exert the greatest power over men's minds, and these it has made subject to itself alone. (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 1 [trans. J. F. HEALY, Penguin])

Despite the popular and universal appeal of magic at the time of his writing, Pliny states his object as to describe its origin and expose its lies (*vanitates*). According to Pliny the origins of magic were to be found in medicine (*natam primum e medicina nemo dubitabit*), where it was claimed to be a higher form of the healing art.¹¹⁵

Pliny outlines a traditional view of the origin of magic, tracing it back to Zoroaster who lived 6,000 years before the death of Plato; and records the interesting comment of EUDOXOS, who desired magic to be recognised as the “most noble and useful of the sects (schools) of philosophy:”

sine dubio illic orta in Perside a Zoroastre, ut inter auctores convenit. Sed unus hic fuerit an postea et alius, non satis constat. Eudoxus, qui inter sapientiae sectas clarissimam utilissimamque eam intellegi voluit, Zoroastren hunc sex milibus annorum ante Platonis mortem fuisse prodidit; sic et Aristoteles.

Undoubtedly magic began in Perisa with Zoroaster, as authorities are agreed. But there is insufficient agreement about whether he was the only man by that name, or whether there was another and later Zoroaster. Eudoxus, who wished magic to be recognised as the most noble and useful of the schools of philosophy, asserts that this Zoroaster lived 6,000 years before the death of Plato, and Aristotle confirms this. (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 3 [trans. J. F. HEALY, Penguin])

Pliny mentions that Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato went abroad to learn magic, and that on their return they taught this art and considered it among their special secrets: *Certe Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato ad hanc descendam navigavere, exiliis verius quam peregrinationibus susceptis, hanc reversi praedicavere, hanc in arcanis habuere* (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 9).

In addition to ideal religious specialists and priests, however, there were practitioners of darker incantations and *defixiones*. Pliny indicates his awareness of this different form of magic: *est et alia magices factio a Mose et*

¹¹⁵ PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 2.

Janne et Lotape ac Judaeis pendens... (*Nat. Hist.* XXX 11; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 42).¹¹⁶

2.5.3 Josephus

Joseph ben Mattathias was born in Jerusalem in 37CE, a few years after the time of Jesus, during the time of the Roman occupation of Palestine. He was of priestly descent and received a thorough education based on the study of the Jewish Law (*ODCC* 1990: 759). In 66CE he was drafted into becoming commander of the revolutionary forces in Galilee, and was captured when the city of Jotapata fell to the Roman general Vespasian in 67CE. Josephus presented himself to Vespasian as a prophet, claiming that an ancient oracle foretold a world ruler would arise from Judaea. Josephus said that this referred to Vespasian, who was destined to become Emperor. Intrigued, Vespasian spared his life. When this prophecy came true, and Vespasian became Emperor, he rewarded Josephus by giving him freedom and eventually adopting him into his family, the Flavians. In this way Josephus became known as Flavius Josephus.

Living at the Flavian court, Josephus wrote a history of the war he had witnessed. His *Περὶ τοῦ Ἰουδαϊκοῦ πολέμου* was published a few years after the end of the war, in about 78CE. Josephus subsequently undertook to write the history of the Jews for a non-Jewish audience. He emphasized that the Jewish culture and the Hebrew scriptures were older than any other then existing, and called his work the *Jewish Antiquities*. (*Ἰουδαϊκὴ ἀρχαιολογία*), which was published in 93/94CE.

¹¹⁶ Commentators observe that at about the time of Emperor Augustus an emerging distinction can be detected in popular opinion over magic on the one hand and both religion and science on the other. Fritz GRAF makes the instructive comment that: “[O]ne important factor must have been the overwhelming influence of Greek thinking conspicuous in Pliny’s account and in the invasion of Eastern magical practice evident from Tacitus’ account of the death of Germanicus (*Annals* II 69). Another factor was political. The reigns of Augustus’ heirs, from Tiberius to Nero, were littered with the victims of witchcraft accusation: it proved a horribly efficient weapon for the removal of unwanted opponents. Thus the combination of enlightenment and political ruthlessness might, in the end, have laid the foundation of the concept of magic as we now use it” (GRAF 1995: 41–42).

Josephus wrote at least two smaller books, including his autobiography, in which he recounts his life from birth until the writing of the *Antiquities*. The year of his death is unknown (c.100CE). His works were highly valued by early Christian writers, and since they are a geographically and chronologically similar source to the New Testament and other early Christian literature, they provide important materials for our investigation of the image of Simon.

In book 10 of *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus includes a report concerning Daniel, from the family of Zedekiah, who lived in Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The king was impressed with Daniel and his three brothers because of their application to learning, and the advances they had made in wisdom. The book of Daniel is an example of Jewish apocalyptic literature dating from about the second century BCE. Its author is a visionary who reinterprets history, with much allegorising, covering a period of time from Nebuchadnezzar to Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabees. An underlying theme encouragement is evident throughout the work—to hold fast to God during times of trial—since God will bring the faithful through in the end.

The first six chapters of Daniel recount through the trials of Daniel and his friends the temptations and dangers experienced by the Jewish exiles in sixth century BCE Babylon. Yet this dangerous situation became an occasion for proclaiming the God of Israel through the opportunity and abilities given to Daniel to interpret dreams. In narrative style Josephus provides detail that the royal courts in Babylon included various seers and Magoi who, because of their revelations, were held in high regard as they were considered links with the divine. But a crisis occurs when the Magoi fail to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dreams—not once, but several times (*Ant.* X 195, 198–199, 203, 216, 234, 236; XI 31).

Like Joseph centuries before him, Daniel is called to interpret dreams in a foreign court. In fact, God gave him and his friends wisdom that was “ten times better” than all the Babylonian seers and Magoi (Dan 1:20); and, the superiority of Daniel over against every earthly authority is affirmed in every chapter (cf. Dan 1:17–19; 2:21, 46; 3:29; 4:37; 5:21; 6:26). When Daniel approached the king, he excused himself first, saying that he did not pretend to be wiser than the other Babylonians and magicians, for his insight was not by his own skill, or an indication of greater understanding and learning; but he said, “God has shown me what is entirely above the reach of human wisdom.”

Yet, of more immediate relevance for our research into the image of Simon are the reports in Josephus about Theudas, and Atomos. Both

reports appear in Book 20 of *Jewish Antiquities*, and initially provoked interest from New Testament scholars because it appeared they might provide insight into two passages in Acts; namely, Acts 5:36 and 8:9.

During the period when Fadus was procurator of Judaea, a certain imposter (γόης τις ἀνήρ) named Theudas persuaded the majority of the masses to take up their possessions and follow him to the Jordan River. He stated that he was a prophet and that at his command the river would be parted and would provide them an easy passage. With this talk he deceived many. Fadus, however, did not permit them to reap the fruit of their folly, but sent against them a squadron of cavalry. These fell upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many prisoners. Theudas himself was captured, whereupon they cut off his head, and brought it to Jerusalem. These, then, are the events that befell the Jews during the time that Cuspius Fadus was procurator. ([Loeb 433] JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* XX 97–99)

While not described by Josephus as a μάγος, but by the more pejorative term γόης—in the sense of a false prophet standing within the community who leads people astray—Theudas is one of many charismatic figures Josephus claims to have gained large followings for short periods of time before succumbing to the forces of the Roman procurator. Some of these were explicitly linked to revolutionaries during the time of Nero, and others were religious leaders, such as the Samaritan killed by Pontius Pilate (*Ant.* XVIII 85–87). They all seemed to claim that Deut 18:15–22 referred to them. The historical importance of these accounts about Theudas and other charismatic figures is that Jesus of Nazareth was not seen by his contemporaries as a wholly unique figure. There were other personalities revered and respected as prophets and miracle-workers.

In our second report, Josephus claims that when Felix was procurator of Judaea (c.52–c.60CE) a Cypriot Jew by the name of Atomos¹¹⁷ assisted in attracting and enticing a married Jewess away from her husband to marry Felix.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Marginal notation in some manuscripts, and the Latin version have the name as Simon. *Codex Ambrosianus* (cent. xi) and the *Epitome* (cent. x): Σίμωνα. There have been numerous attempts to identify this individual. These have included nineteenth century efforts to connect Simon with the apostle Paul, but more recent scholarship views this matter of identity as an open and unanswered question because the name of Simon was extremely common during that era, and magicians were plentiful.

After receiving this gift from the emperor, Agrippa gave his sister Drusilla in marriage to Azizus king of Emesa, who had consented to be circumcised. Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus, had excused himself from marrying her since he was not willing to convert to the Jewish religion, although he had previously contracted with her father to do so ... Not long afterwards Drusilla's marriage to Azizus was dissolved under the impact of the following circumstances: At the time when Felix was procurator of Judaea, he beheld her; and, inasmuch as she surpassed all other women in beauty, he conceived a passion for the Lady.¹¹⁸ He sent to her one of his friends, a Cyprian Jew named Atomus, who pretended to be a magician (μάγον εἶναι σκηπτόμενον), in an effort to persuade her to leave her husband and to marry Felix. Felix promised to make her supremely happy [*felix*] if she did not disdain him. ([Loeb 433] JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* XX 139–142)

The casual candidness of these personal details speaks for their authenticity. Josephus, of course, is more interested in Felix than Atomus [Simon]. Yet, the term “friend” (ἄτομον ὀνόματι τῶν ἑαυτοῦ φίλων) socially locates Atomus and indicates the position of trust he enjoyed with an important regional imperial authority.¹¹⁹ The notice that Atomus was a Jewish Cypriot Magos is not meant to characterise him as either a renegade Jew or outsider. Instead, this reflects the widely accepted ancient perception that Jews were adept in magic and divinatory arts, and Cypriot magic commanded respect even though Pliny considered it a more recent phenomenon (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 1).

During the time of Emperor Claudius Felix was well-behaved, but like the other governors under Nero, he became corrupt. The New Testament records that Paul was arrested (c.57CE), near the end of Felix's term in office, so the claim that Felix wanted Paul to bribe him agrees with Josephus' account, as does an implied criticism of Felix for lacking “justice” and “self-control” (Acts 24:24–26). Drusilla, sister of Agrippa II, married Felix about 54CE, at the age of 16. We don't hear anything else about her in Josephus after this. However, as has already been stated, Josephus is more concerned with Felix, and undoubtedly considered his governorship and others like his to be principal causes of the Jewish Wars. For our immediate purpose, the chronological and geographical coincidence of this story in Josephus with the composition of the book of Acts provides support for certain exegetical conclusions regarding the non-pejorative use of the participle μαγεύων in Acts 8.

¹¹⁸ Cf. TACITUS, *Annals* V 9. Felix indulged in every kind of barbarity and lust.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Acts 13:6–12.

2.5.4 Plutarch

Plutarch (c.50CE–120CE) travelled extensively throughout the Mediterranean world, but lived most of his life on the Greek mainland in Chaeronea near the city of Delphi. Plutarch was both a citizen of Rome (with the official name of Mestrius Plutarchus) and a Greek with a strong sense of tradition—he even served many years as a Delphian priest.¹²⁰ Plutarch wrote numerous essays on religion, philosophy, science, and morals. Nonetheless, he is best known for his biographies.

Plutarch wrote extensively on the Persians and their religion, but there is reasonable certainty that he never visited Iran, neither did he ever meet Zoroastrian priests or any Magoi. Plutarch never reveals his sources, but his detailed descriptions give silent witness to the volume of information on Persian religion and customs available to educated Greeks. As a Platonist Plutarch claimed that dualism was the view of the majority and was held by the wisest among the Persians also:

For some believe (νομίζουσι) that there are two gods who are rivals (θεοὺς εἶναι δύο καθάπερ ἀντιτέχνους) as it were, in art, one being the creator of good, the other of evil; others call the better of these a god and his rival a demon, as, for example, Zoroaster the Magos (Ζωροάστρης ὁ μάγος), who lived, so they record, 5000 years before the siege of Troy. Zoroaster used to call the one Ahura Mazda and the other Ahriman, and showed also that the former was especially akin, among objects of perception, to light and the other, on the contrary to darkness and ignorance.” (PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride* 46–47; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 48)

This passage is thought to derive from a 4th century BCE source, either THEOPOMPUS¹²¹ (whom Plutarch cites explicitly) or EUDOXUS. A far more difficult question is the meaning and importance of Plutarch’s statement: “In between the two was Mithres, and this is why the Persians call Mithres the Mediator: μέσον δ’ ἀμφοῖν τὸν Μίθρην εἶναι· διὸ καὶ

¹²⁰ PLUTARCH, *Moralia* 792 F.

¹²¹ THEOPOMPUS of Chios wrote an epitome of Herodotus’ *Histories*, a history of Greece *Hellenica* (a continuation of Thucydides), and *Philippica*—a view of history with Philip, King of Macedon, at its centre. Diogenes records the claim of Theopompos that, according to the Magoi, humankind will be awoken to new life (ἀναβιώσεσθαι) and become immortal (ἔσεσθαι ἀθανάτους). The remainder of the reference is both textually uncertain and difficult (DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 9; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 68 [D 2]).

Μίθρην Πέρσαι τὸν Μεσίτην ὀνομάζουσιν.”¹²² Plutarch’s comment on Mithras appears to be intricately intertwined with a personal conviction about the importance of a third power or nature in the cosmos, which Plutarch thought corresponded to the role of Mithras. That is, a power which is neither good nor evil but an intermediary power sharing both natures.¹²³

2.5.5 Dio Chrysostom

Dio Chrysostom (c.40CE–c.120CE)—“the golden mouthed”—was a leading citizen of Prusa in Bithynia, and a celebrated travelling orator. Around the end of the first century CE (roughly contemporaneous with the dating of Acts) virtuoso orators like Dio, Polemo of Laodicea, Favorinus of Arles, and Herodes Atticus, enjoyed huge popularity as they taught and entertained with their “ingenious historical or grimly comic fantasies.”¹²⁴

In his thirty-sixth oration—called the Borysthenitic¹²⁵ Discourse—Dio refers to a myth sung in secret rites by the Magoi, praising “this god of ours” [Zeus] as being the perfect and original driver of the most perfect chariot: ἕτερος... μῦθος ἐν ἀπορρήτοις τελεταῖς ὑπὸ μάγων ἀνδρῶν ᾄδεται θαυμαζόμενος, οἳ τὸν θεὸν τοῦτον ὑμνοῦσιν ὡς τέλειόν τε καὶ πρῶτον.¹²⁶ Dio continues by claiming that Zoroaster sings this myth, as do the children of the Magoi who learnt it from him: καὶ μάγων παῖδες ᾄδουσι παρ’ ἐκείνου μαθόντες.¹²⁷

Dio notes that, because of his passion for wisdom and truth, Zoroaster deserted his peers ... “and only associated with those best

¹²² PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride* 47; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 48; cf. DE JONG (1997: 171–177) who provides an extensive treatment of the problems and solutions associated with this passage.

¹²³ PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride* 48.

¹²⁴ *OHCW* 1995: 658.

¹²⁵ Borysthenes, in Pontus, was an ancient Greek trading-centre near the mouth of the Hypanis. Dio states that he had gone there in the hope of travelling through Scythia to visit the land of the Getae at Dacia (*Discourses* XXXVI 1). NOCK (1972a: 607) and MOMIGLIANO (1975: 146) consider the Borysthenitic Discourse to be entirely Dio’s own creation, including Dio’s details about the Magoi. “This Zoroaster and these Magi were to a great extent the work of the imagination of the Greeks themselves or of Hellenized foreigners—perhaps connected with the Iranian communities of the West” (MOMIGLIANO 1975: 147).

¹²⁶ DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses* XXXVI 39; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 44.

¹²⁷ DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses* XXXIX 40.

endowed with regard to truth, and best able to understand the god, men whom the Persians named Magoi, that is to say, people who know how to cultivate the divine power, not like the Greeks, who in their ignorance use the term to denote wizards:” συγγίγνεσθαί τε μετὰ ταῦτα οὐχ ἅπασιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἄριστα πρὸς ἀλήθειαν πεφυκόσι καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ξυνιέναι δυναμένοις, οὓς Πέρσαι μάγους ἐκάλεσαν, ἐπισταμένους θεραπεύειν τὸ δαιμόνιον, οὐχ ὡς Ἕλληνες ἀγνοία τοῦ ὀνόματος οὕτως ὀνομάζουσιν ἀνθρώπους γόητας.¹²⁸

2.6 Observations

Demonstrably, educated Greeks understood that the original Magoi were “priests”¹²⁹ of the Persian religion¹³⁰ and that their activities did not include magic in a shady sense, but provided what PS.-PLATO *Alcibiades* I 122a described as “the service of the gods.” Likewise, DINON and ARISTOTLE confirmed that the real Magoi “knew nothing about sorcerer’s magic.”¹³¹ Aristotle’s statement is noteworthy because of his particular interest in and knowledge of the Persians. As NOCK (1972: 167) summarises, “The observations made by those Greeks who had studied the Magi of any particular place are in striking contrast to the generalisations of those Greeks who talked vaguely.”

Yet, it is also clearly apparent that not every Greek observer, even from the earliest times, viewed the Magoi in a positive light. It is frequently claimed that the earliest references to Magoi in a derisive, secondary sense of “magician” are found in post-Persian Wars authors.

¹²⁸ DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses* XXXIX 41, trans. by H.L. CROSBY [Loeb]; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 45.

¹²⁹ STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,15; HDT. I 132; NOCK (1972: 165) comments that the Magoi are a dignified priestly tribe like that of Levi; yet, BICKERMANN and TADMOR (1978: 253–255) forcefully argue that they were not priests, and were unlike any priesthood throughout the Persian Empire.

¹³⁰ BOYCE (1991: 363) comments that Zoroastrianism was regularly characterised by the Greeks as the “Persian religion,” as if it were an ethnic faith like the others which they encountered.

¹³¹ Cf. D(E)INON of Colophon (Historian. 4th century BCE). Dinon echoes the description of others that the Magoi were interpreters of dreams (FGH 690, Fr. 10) and that the Magoi knew no “magic spells” and therefore no “magic:” Τὴν δὲ γοητικὴν μαγείαν οὐδ’ ἔγνωσαν (*History of Persia* 5; DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 8; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 67 [D 2]). He also claimed the Persian expedition against Athens was undertaken because of a predilection for Athenian figs (FGH 690, Fr. 12).

For example, in his fifth century BCE tragedy, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 387, Sophocles has Oedipus accuse Teiresias of being Creon's puppet in an attempt to usurp Oedipus' office:

[380] O wealth, and empire, and skill surpassing skill in life's keen rivalries, how great is the envy in your keeping, if for the sake of this office which the city has entrusted to me, a gift unsought, Creon the trustworthy, Creon my old friend, has crept upon me by stealth, yearning to overthrow me, and has "suborned such a scheming juggler as this, a tricky quack, who has eyes only for profit, but is blind in his art! [390]: ὑφείς μάγον τοίουδε μηχανορράφου, δόλιον ἀγύρτην, ὅστις εὐ τοῖς κέρδεσιν μόνον δέδορκε τὴν τέχνην δ' ἔφυ τυφλός." (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, trans. CRANE [Online] 1998)

There is a clear note of contempt expressed in Sophocles' script for the involvement of Teiresias, and the use of ἀγύρτης is a taunt suggesting Teiresias is a mercenary imposter.¹³² Yet, it is difficult to see how Sophocles and his audience would have viewed Teiresias as an archetype of religious fraud. Certainly, Herodotus never portrayed the Magoi as sorcerers or tricksters.¹³³ Rather, as the context shows, it is with some irony that Sophocles has Oedipus call Teiresias a μάγος. Oedipus does not accuse Teiresias of using magic or any sort of arcane knowledge; rather, he interprets Teiresias' reluctance to divulge what he knows as treasonous conspiracy and avarice, and the words chosen to make this charge are μάγος and ἀγύρτης.¹³⁴ So it is reasonable to agree with RIGSBY (1976: 112) that the word μάγος "meant to Sophocles no more or less than it did to Herodotus."

The political activities and ambitions of the Magoi during the reign of Cambyses are well documented by Herodotus.¹³⁵ In fact, the religious functions of the Magoi are almost overshadowed by repeated mention of their treachery and political maneuvering; and, as Kent RIGSBY observes, in the ears of an Athenian audience perhaps newly familiar with

¹³² Cf. RIGSBY (1976: 109) who cites the traditional view of Teiresias as Magus. "The passage shows how Asiatic superstitions had already spread among the vulgar, and were scorned by the educated, in Greece...". So Eur., *Or.* 1496 (Helen has been spirited away), ἡ φαρμάκοισιν (by charms), ἡ μάγων | τέχναισιν ἢ θεῶν κλοπαῖς.

¹³³ Cf. NOCK (1972: 309) who comments on the view of Teiresias as Magus: "It is with some surprise that we find μάγος used in the fifth century B.C. to mean 'quack'."

¹³⁴ Cf. RIGSBY 1976: 112 "We may contrast the language of the parallel scene in the *Antigone* (1033ff), where the priest's greed and (by implication) charlatanism are invoked but not political conspiracy, and he is not called 'Magus'."

¹³⁵ HDT. III 61–79.

Herodotus, the word μάγος is precisely what the Oedipus passage needed to encompass “an allusion and a metaphor, graphic, forceful and economical” (RIGSBY 1976: 114).

Reference is also made to the Magoi in the writings of Hippocrates and Plato. On closer examination of the texts in question their apparently derisive comments reveal more about the express scientific and political agenda of their authors than a common view of the Magoi in the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity.

In the first section of his work, *On the Sacred Disease*, HIPPOCRATES argues against the view that epilepsy is a divine sickness, saying that those who peddled this opinion must have been “of the type of our present-day magoi, purificators, mendicants, and charlatans who claim to be more religious, and as knowing more than other people.” ὅστις γὰρ οἴός τε περικαθαίρων ἐστὶ καὶ μαγεύων ἀπάγειν τοιοῦτον πάθος.¹³⁶ A number of early treatises in the so-called *Hippocratic Corpus* reveal attempts by the nascent medical profession to distance and distinguish itself from the activities of natural philosophers and sophists. Although both considered themselves as a guild under the patronage of Aesclepius the relationship between the medical profession and the various healing cults appears analogous to the co-existence of orthodox medicine and homoeopathy today.¹³⁷

In his *Republic* 364b, PLATO draws the picture of religious specialists who appear to produce rites for a professional fee (ἀγύρται δὲ μάντις); those who “go to rich men’s doors and make them believe that they by means of sacrifices and incantations have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals.” Fritz GRAF (1991: 26), however, correctly observes that: “Freilich ... spricht Plato gerade nicht von μάγοι, sondern von Bettelpriestern und Sehern.” In Plato, secret rituals practiced by individuals (including the Magoi) on the fringes of the community were punishable offences. For his ideal city, Plato proposed laws against magic; especially against those who practiced necromancy, and cast spells with sacrifices, prayers, and incantations: θυσίαις καὶ εὐχαῖς καὶ ἐπωδαῖς γοητεύειν.¹³⁸

Plato, who generally identified the “godly” with the good, expressed a strong rejection of magic and fringe religious activity. His use of the adjective θηρώδης (like wild animals) in *Laws* X 909b underlines the

¹³⁶ HIPPOCRATES, *The Sacred Disease* I 60.

¹³⁷ Cf. *OHCW* 1995: 230–231.

¹³⁸ PLATO, *On the Laws* X 909b.

imagined danger posed by these practitioners living on the edges of society.¹³⁹ They threatened the peace between the gods and humankind, inasmuch as they rejected the recognised gods of the city or state in which they lived.

Consequently, since the Magoi were, through Greek eyes, the authorities and practitioners of an alien religion, they were increasingly associated with and disparaged among the “shady arts” which existed on the boundaries of established Hellenistic culture and religion. By a gradual process of transference the purveyors of various native remedies and spells were also called Magoi and their arts became commonly known as *mageia*. By means of the same process the term *magos* arose not so much from actual observation of Persian religious activities, but from the prejudicial desire to nominate certain rituals and ideas as “foreign, unwanted, and dangerous, from inside Greek (or Athenian) religion, not from outside it” (GRAF 1995: 36). In this way, the Persian Magoi were effectively marginalised and delegitimised; their “magic” perceived as foreign, culturally distant, sinister and dangerous.¹⁴⁰

For our purposes, it is important to recognise that from the sixth century BCE onwards the Magoi were classified by various observers among the ecstasies, beggar-priests, and mystery cults; not to decide ultimately who the Magoi actually were, but to discern more closely what certain Greeks supposed them to be. Arthur Darby NOCK reminds us that “it must always be remembered that the Greek was seldom a good observer of strange religions, prone as he was to hasty conclusions and identifications and to a contempt or veneration which were equally uncritical” (NOCK 1972: 167).

Undoubtedly, the experiences of protracted conflict with the Persians assisted in the devolution of Magoi—in the Greek language and consciousness—into “quacks” and “magicians.” The arrival of Harpagus the Mede on Ionian soil and his conquest of the Lydian kingdom on behalf of Cyrus the Persian, ultimately involved all the Greeks of Asia Minor. These defeats, together with a succession of events between the invasion

¹³⁹ Cf. Heraclitus’ use of *νυκτιπόλοις* in the above-mentioned fragment (DK B14: I 154, 14), which appears to be an adjectival qualification rather than a substantive. As an expert in secret rites, necessarily he is a “wanderer in the night.”

¹⁴⁰ NOCK (1972: 172) cites an example from the *Acta disputationis S. Achatii* 5, of how the word “magos” was used, not only to describe Persian priests and Greek magicians, but also to practitioners of foreign and suspect cults. The examining magistrate charges some Christians, “so you’re magi, because you’re bringing in some new fangled cult or other:” *ideo magi estis quia novum necio quod genus religionis inducitis*.

of Lydia (c.545BCE) and the Ionian rebellion against Persia (c.500BCE), had a profound effect on the collective memory of Greeks everywhere,¹⁴¹ as is evidenced by the remarks of Xenophanes and Strabo:

Such things should be said beside the fire in winter-time when a man reclines full-fed on a soft couch, drinking the sweet wine and munching chick-peas—such things as: “Who and whence are you? And how old are you, good man? How old were you when the Mede came?”: τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν, πόσα τοι ἔτε’ ἔστί, φέριστε; πηλίκος ἦσθ’, ὄθ’ ὁ Μῆδος ἀθήκετο; (XENOPHANES, DK B22: I 134, 16–17).

The Persians of all the barbarians became the most famous among the Greeks, because none of the other barbarians who ruled Asia ruled Greeks; neither were these people acquainted with the Greeks, nor yet the Greeks with the barbarians, except for a short time by distant hearsay. (STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,23 [Loeb])

However, there are critical limitations to our knowledge of Greek reactions to the invasion and occupation of western Asia Minor. No official Persian materials have survived, and almost nothing in Greek literature pre-dates the Ionian rebellion.¹⁴² What have been preserved are texts that reflect a different historical situation. This traditional material describes the Persians as militarily inferior and records their defeat at Marathon (490BCE) and Salamis (480BCE).

The results of these victories over the Persians were many, and are variously formulated by Greek poets, historians and philosophers (eg. Aeschylus’ *The Persians*; Herodotus’ *History*; Hippocrates’ *Airs, Waters and Places*). Previously the Greeks had distinguished between themselves and “those who spoke other languages” (βαρβαροί) but now two further notions were added to this factual description: one of hostility and the other of superiority.¹⁴³ With the passage of time the popular distinction

¹⁴¹ MOMIGLIANO 1975: 123 “Cyrus was as epoch-making for the Greeks as he was for the Jews—though the reasons were different.”

¹⁴² The work of Hecataeus called *Genealogies* has disappeared. A fragment in Felix Jacoby’s monumental *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* provides a tantalising glimpse into a lost treasure: “Hecataeus the Milesian speaks thus: I write these things as they seem true to me; for the stories told by the Greeks are various and in my opinion absurd” (FGH 1, Fr. I).

¹⁴³ Cf. BOYCE (1991: 514) who writes, “From the Greek perspective, then, the magi were the authorities of a religious system which was first alien, secondly dangerous, thirdly inimical to the established cultus of their cities, and fourthly inferior to that cultus because vanquished in the ultimate test of battle.”

between Greek and Barbarian as foreigner, became one of Greek and Barbarian as national enemy.

2.7 Conclusions

The above selected references concerning the Magoi in Graeco-Roman literature of antiquity clearly demonstrate that, when not distorted by the conflation of μάγος and magician, or the dislocations of protracted conflict, the image of the Magoi in Classical sources is a positive and respectful one. In fact, “in Republican Rome, as in Archaic Greece, magic was never thought as something special and radically different from religion or medicine.”¹⁴⁴ Our overview revealed a development in the understanding of the noun μάγος and related terms from the 5th century BCE to the 3rd century CE. This development accompanied other significant changes in Greece and Rome, including politics, philosophy, religious mentality, and the rise of Hippocratic medicine. To counter-balance any suggestion that the noun μάγος was only used in a pejorative sense by the 1st century CE, reference can be made to the description of the Magoi recorded in the prologue of DIOGENES LAERTIUS,¹⁴⁵ the Philosopher and Historian, who lived and worked towards the end of the 3rd century CE. This report includes portrait details that, with reasonable certainty, we may conclude were known by educated Greeks from the 5th century BCE to the 3rd century CE.

The [Magoi] spend their time in the worship of the gods, in sacrifices and prayers, implying that none but themselves have the ear of the gods, whom they hold to be fire, earth and water. They condemn the use of images, and especially the error of attributing to the divinities difference of sex. They hold discourse of justice, and deem it impious to practice cremation. But they see no impiety in marriage with a mother or daughter...

Further, they practice divination (μαντικήν) and forecast the future, declaring that the gods appear to them in visible form. Moreover, they say that the air is full of shapes which stream forth like a vapour and enter the eyes of keensighted seers. They prohibit personal ornament and the wearing of gold. Their dress is white, they make their bed on the ground, and their food is vegetables, cheese, and course bread ... With the art of magic they are wholly unacquainted ... Aristotle ... declares that the [Magoi] are more ancient than the Egyptians; and further that they believe in two

¹⁴⁴ Cf. GRAF 1995: 41.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. BIDEZ/CUMONT I 73–80; II 67–70 [D. 2].

principles, the good spirit and the evil spirit, the one called Zeus or [Horomazdes], the other Hades or Areimanos ... [Theopompus] says that according to the [Magoi] men will live in a future life and be immortal ... (DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 6–9, trans. R.D. HICKS [Loeb 184]; cf. BIDEZ/CUMONT II 67–68 [D. 2]).

The body of evidence presented in the preceding overview, of references to the Magoi in the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity, demands a modification of all simplistic translations of the participle *μαγεύων* in Acts 8—for example, as “practising magic.” It also questions the popular interpretation of Simon’s image, portrayed in early Christian literature, as a charlatan and sorcerer. As will be outlined, in chapter four, there is nothing in the Simon story of Acts 8, no inner-textual necessity, that compels Simon to be understood as a sorcerer.

3. *The New Testament Account of Simon*

3.1 Introduction

The earliest¹⁴⁶ surviving witness to Simon Magus is the account in Acts 8:4–25. From chapter eight Luke begins to chart the course of Christian missionary activity outside of Jerusalem. Driven from Jerusalem by the first persecution of the church, the evangelist Philip makes converts in Samaria and later baptizes an Ethiopian proselyte on the road to Gaza. Simon is introduced into the narrative as a powerful opponent to Philip:

Now for some time a man named Simon *μαγεύων* [=practicing as a *μάγος*] in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low,

¹⁴⁶ Diverse opinions have been expressed about the dating of Acts, ranging from the early 60s (VON HARNACK 1911a: 92–93, 114–116) to the middle of the second century (TOWNSEND 1984: 58, “In summary, the date when Luke–Acts was written cannot be determined conclusively because of a lack of evidence; however, whatever evidence exists is compatible with a date that approaches the middle of the second century.”). Those who argue an earlier date point to the complete absence of any reference to the letters of Paul. Some attempt to argue a literary dependence on Josephus, and date Luke–Acts after 93CE. But, without a doubt, Luke’s theology is of an earlier type than Justin.

gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. (Acts 8:9–11 NIV)

However, the people of Samaria respond to the words and actions of Philip and many are baptized, *including* Simon. Simon is amazed by the cures and miracles performed through Philip, and is especially attracted by the laying on of hands by Peter and John (v 17) to confer the Holy Spirit. Simon is said to offer money in exchange for the power to transmit the Spirit (vv 18–19). Peter curses Simon, and urges him to repent; and, although Simon begs for Peter's intercession (v 24) so that he might not be punished for his "sin," the reader is left to ponder the final outcome.

From this brief, original report arose the use of the term "simony"—to describe the sale of ecclesiastical offices—and enduring traditions concerning Simon the so-called "Magician." However, as already outlined in this chapter, the figure of Simon still remains a much debated issue in modern scholarship. Conclusions about Simon range from denying his existence to agreeing with the assessment of Irenaeus that he was the first heretic and father of the Gnostic movement which threatened the existence of Christianity in the second century CE.

Ernst HAENCHEN and Gerd LÜDEMANN, in particular, claim Luke knowingly recast Simon in the person of a Samaritan magician in an effort to discredit a popular Gnostic hero.¹⁴⁷ However, critics of their thesis claim that serious methodological and historical problems arise whenever later descriptions of Simon are simply read back into the Acts 8 account; especially those scholarly judgments that argue an underlying Gnostic controversy to Luke's story of Simon similar to that combated by the Christian heresiologists¹⁴⁸ of the second and third centuries. Kurt RUDOLPH is correct to observe that later more detailed reports about Simon cannot be reconciled with the earliest witness(es) without violence or a vivid imagination: "die Angaben ... lassen sich nicht ohne Gewalt und Phantasie aufeinander abstimmen" (RUDOLPH 1977: 289).

¹⁴⁷ HAENCHEN 1971: 307; LÜDEMANN 1975: 42; BARRETT 1994: 407, "The historical Simon may have been not a speculative Gnostic theologian downgraded by Luke but a very ordinary magician upgraded so as to appear as a divine man."

¹⁴⁸ Heresiology can be characterised as the description and refutation of religious groups, systems and views which the writer regards as dangerous and hostile to his, or her own belief and practice. The Christian Heresiologists of the second and third centuries include Hegesippus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus.

Our analysis of Acts 8:4–25, both within this chapter dealing with primary sources and also in following chapters on Simon as “Magician” and as “Gnostic,” will consider the body of evidence available and propose a resolution to the question whether Simon is to be considered a Gnostic in either a restricted or specific sense,¹⁴⁹ a μάγος, or something else.

3.2 Some Textual Considerations in Acts 8:4–25

3.2.1 A Brief History of Literary-Historical Scholarship

Much ink has been used in the history of scholarship while attempting to explain the curiosities and problems present in Acts 8:4–25. The following brief overview outlines the critical context within which important questions concerning the relationship between traditional sources and redaction in this passage have been debated.

The nineteenth century Tübingen school defended an argument, based on the Pseudo-Clementine portrait of Simon—where Simon was described with carbon-copy characteristic traits of Paul—that Luke deliberately disguised the fact that his original source for Acts 8:4–25 contained a Peter versus Paul story.

At the turn of the century Hans WAITZ argued the existence of a Petrine *Grundschrift* underlying 8:4–25. His conclusion was that verses 5–13 originally described the actions of Peter and have been secondarily attached to Philip.¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, Luke was forced to replace Peter with Philip, because of his claim about the apostles remaining in Jerusalem (8:1) at the time of persecution which introduces the events described in 8:4–40.¹⁵¹

Julius WELHAUSEN adopted an opposite position, that Peter is really the intruder in this passage. He argued that verse 18b originally followed on from Simon’s “amazement” in 8:13, and Luke’s source contained a

¹⁴⁹ A terminological proposal was formulated at the international congress on “the origins of Gnosticism,” held at Messina in 1966. In the final protocol it was decided to use the term “Gnosis” to mean “knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an élite.” In contradistinction to this broad use of Gnosis is the restricted term “Gnosticism,” chosen to indicate a specific historical phenomenon and, in particular, the Gnostic systems of the second century CE.

¹⁵⁰ WAITZ argues from the evidence of the *Acts of Peter*, which he considers are not dependent on Acts 8, but on its source.

¹⁵¹ WAITZ 1906: 352–353.

story of Simon's offer of money to Philip for the ἐξουσία to heal the sick.¹⁵² Therefore verse 19b is an addition, and it is necessary to read δός in verse 19a and Φίλιππος for Πέτρος in verse 20.¹⁵³

Otto BAUERNFEIND commented¹⁵⁴ how difficult it is to unravel the strands of tradition and composition in Luke's story. He concluded that Luke merged a story of Philip's missionary success in Samaria with a tradition about an encounter between Simon and Peter; observing that Luke was responsible for the connection between Simon and Philip.

Oscar CULLMANN argued¹⁵⁵ that verses 14–17 contained a later tradition than the Philip–Simon encounter. This source described the intervention of Peter and John, who, as representatives of the twelve, were sent to take over¹⁵⁶ a “Hellenist” mission in Samaria; an intervention which CULLMANN claimed was independently verified by John 4:38.

Ernst HAENCHEN claimed¹⁵⁷ that the stories of Philip and Simon were originally separate but joined together by Luke to illustrate the superiority of the Spirit and Philip's success over Simon. He expressed agreement with the position of WELLHAUSEN, that Luke's original source contained a story of Simon's offer of money to Philip, and viewed the introduction of Peter into 8:14–25 as a Lukan construction. In his view the Simon story allowed Luke (as in 13:6–12 and 19:13–20) the possibility “of vividly illustrating the superiority of Christian miracles over the magical practices current in the area and of demonstrating the antithesis between the power of God and demonic wizardry” (HAENCHEN 1971: 306).

Hans CONZELMANN discerned three layers of traditional material in Acts 8:4–25: a story about Philip's success in Samaria; a merged account concerning Philip and Simon; and, a tradition that combines a Philip story with a story about Peter and John. CONZELMANN argued that Luke inherited this third and final layer.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² WELLHAUSEN 1914: 25.

¹⁵³ Cf. DIBELIUS 1956: 17, “Originally, Simon probably asked Philip himself if he could buy the gift of performing miracles and was refused by him; but our text misses the point of this refusal as it takes place in an atmosphere half of cursing and half of regret and with no results.”

¹⁵⁴ BAUERNFEIND 1939: 124.

¹⁵⁵ CULLMANN 1966: 232–240.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. EHRHARDT 1969: 47, “St Peter trampled down the new plantation of St Philip.”

¹⁵⁷ HAENCHEN 1971: 307.

¹⁵⁸ CONZELMANN 1987: 64 (GO 1972).

Gerhard SCHNEIDER echoed the conclusion of HAENCHEN in claiming the Simon episode in Acts was intended to illustrate the superiority of Christian miracles: “Die Funktion der Simon-Magus-Erzählung dürfte in diesem Rahmen vor allem darin liegen, daß sie ‘die Überlegenheit der christlichen Wunder über das Zaubrerwesen der Umwelt’ veranschaulicht” (SCHNEIDER 1980: 485). He argued that Luke initially had two traditions—the story of Philip in 8:4–12, and the baptism of an Ethiopian proselyte 8:26–40—which he extended by an interpolation¹⁵⁹ detailing the activities of the apostles Peter and John, with Simon providing the link between 8:4–13 and 8:14–25.

SCHNEIDER suspected that Luke chose the Philip traditions from a larger collection of similar stories, to which was added a Simon story comprising of two distinct pieces of tradition; namely, one which described his conversion and baptism, the other his offer of money to purchase the right to confer the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁰ Further, SCHNEIDER approvingly quoted HAENCHEN saying this latter tradition in the Simon story originally contained an account of Simon offering Philip money: “Nach HAENCHEN, Apg 298, fand Lukas eine Tradition vor, nach der Simon dem *Philippus* die Wundermacht abkaufen wollte” (SCHNEIDER 1980: 484 n. 5).

Given this scenario SCHNEIDER argued that verses 14–17 are a pure Lukan invention allowing two initial traditions to be woven together (Lukas habe sie miteinander erworben). Also, since Luke added the visit of Peter and John, it is distinctly possible he was aware of two separate missionary efforts into Samaria, and was supportive of the one from Jerusalem: “... so ist es doch möglich, daß er sich dabei einer Nachricht über die von Jerusalem ausgehende Samaria-Mission bediente” (SCHNEIDER 1980: 480).

Gerd LÜDEMANN provided a statistical analysis¹⁶¹ of the vocabulary and syntax of Acts 8:4–25, and agreed that linguistically the entire section is clearly Lukan. LÜDEMANN even described the scene in verses 14–17 as being “redactional in both language and content.” By identifying Luke as the author of both 8:14–17 and 8:18–24 LÜDEMANN departs from the

¹⁵⁹ SCHNEIDER 1980: 480, “... ist durch eine Einschaltung über das Wirken der Apostel Petrus und Johannes in Samaria (8:4–25) erweitert ...”.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. CONZELMANN 1987: 64, “The circles of the Hellenists and the Twelve disciples touch but do not overlap—a hint as to the history of this particular bit of tradition: the two pieces were secondarily combined but certainly prior to Luke.”

¹⁶¹ LÜDEMANN 1989: 94–97; cf. HAENCHEN 1971: 301–5; KOCH 1980: 68–72.

conclusions of WELLHAUSEN, HAENCHEN, CONZELMANN, and SCHNEIDER, who postulated an earlier tradition behind verses 18–24. LÜDEMANN argued¹⁶² that Luke's source reflected one layer of traditional material which detailed both the missionary success of Philip and the conflict between Philip and Simon.

Dietrich-Alex KOCH argued¹⁶³ for a traditionally based Peter–Simon scene underlying Acts 8:18–24. He identified three pre-Lukan elements in 8:4–25: (1) a miscellaneous report about Philip's missionary activity in Samaria; (2) a story about Simon's worship and work; and, (3) an account of a confrontation between Peter and Simon. Yet, while providing exegetical evidence to support the first two elements, KOCH failed to supply any analysis to substantiate his third pre-Lukan element, apart from a claim to detect oral tradition behind the scene. KOCH suggested that the awkward conclusion to the confrontation between Peter and Simon in 8:22–24 is Lukan, because an oral tradition concerning sharp conflict would have been unambiguous.¹⁶⁴

Charles BARRETT noted¹⁶⁵ that while Acts 8:4–25 appears in the form of a single connected story it really consists of several component parts: verses 4–8, Philip's work in the town of Samaria; verses 9–13, a continuation of Philip's work in the conversion of former followers of Simon Magus and Simon himself; verses 14–17, an editorial passage describing the intervention of Peter and John; verses 18–24, Peter's rebuke to Simon; verse 25, an editorial conclusion. BARRETT suggested¹⁶⁶ a primary literary argument for Luke having merged a Philip tradition with a Simon tradition is in the fact that Simon and Philip are not actually mentioned together until 8:13. However, BARRETT discounted SCHNEIDER's proposal of two distinct Simon traditions being available to Luke, counter-claiming that:

it seems more likely that there should have been available to Luke a number of scraps of information about Simon than that there should have been two distinct and sharply contrasting stories, one describing his conversion and faithful attendance (προσκατερῶν, v.13) upon Philip, the other his magical misapprehension of Christian truth and stern reprimand by Peter. (BARRETT 1994: 399)

¹⁶² LÜDEMANN 1989: 93–102.

¹⁶³ KOCH 1986: 67–80.

¹⁶⁴ KOCH 1986: 71.

¹⁶⁵ BARRETT 1994: 398.

¹⁶⁶ BARRETT 1979: 283–284.

3.2.2 Pre-Lukan Oral and Literary Traditions

Previous scholarship has exclusively followed accepted literary and historical critical methodology in the analysis of Acts 8:4–25.¹⁶⁷ However, more recent observations,¹⁶⁸ that the first- and second-century CE Mediterranean world was a “residually oral” rather than “literate” culture, compel critics of the Philip-Simon-Peter episode in Acts to re-evaluate, if not abandon altogether, the notion of an original written tradition behind the received text. So, rather than simply continuing to appeal to Lukan editorial intention, or arguing the incomplete and poor quality of pre-Lukan written traditions as explanation for the textual problems and obvious seams in the narrative unit Acts 8:4–25, critics need to respond to the possibility and implications for precisely these previously identified “literary” features to be evidence of oral thought, oral composition, and a written text originally intended for oral proclamation. The Simon story survives in narrative form yet there are identifiable oral presuppositions behind it. For example, verses 6–13 are largely a narrative written in the third person, in no particular chronological order, although there is an understood first person claim by Simon in verse 10. However verses 14–24 are written as a dialogue primarily in the second person.

In her investigation of the oral world of early Christianity in Rome, Carolyn OSIEK (1998: 156) observes that “while literacy was present and was the medium for most official transactions, ancient Mediterranean culture was characterised more by oral than literate thinking.” Harry GAMBLE (1995: 10) confirms that literacy levels in the Christian

¹⁶⁷ For example, this is evident in conclusions such as—considering Luke’s attitude toward the apostles in Jerusalem—within the overall context of Acts an initial mission by Philip to Samaria appears the more difficult reading, which supports its claim to be original; and, also, in comments like “[h]ad there been an original tradition which attributed the conversion of Samaria to Peter and John, a later tradition which credited the same accomplishment to a lesser figure would hardly have arisen” (HAENCHEN 1973: 277); cf. KOCH (1986: 77) who argued from purely historical grounds that Peter’s status in the earliest Palestinian Christian community better supported a Peter/Simon tradition here. MATTHEWS’ critique of Koch’s position still holds: “Had there been an original tradition which depicted the rejection of Simon by Peter, Luke would hardly have diluted this by parcelling out some of the best material to a lesser figure. The reverse, however, is quite easy to imagine. An old tradition credited Philip with the conversion of Simon the magician. Later, Luke expanded upon this tradition and cast Peter in the lead role” (MATTHEWS 1992: 145).

¹⁶⁸ Cf. HAVELOCK 1982; 1986; GEE 1986/87; ONG 1982; KELBER 1983; 1994; HENAUT 1993; DEWEY 1994; OSIEK 1998.

population of the period are in his estimation comparable to the general population, “no more than 10–15 percent.” While no culture ever is completely literate—degrees of oral and literary modes of thinking and operating will always continue to co-exist—it can be demonstrated how literate modes of thinking gradually influence non-literate segments in society. OSIEK comments:

One way this must have happened in the culture that concerns us is through the promulgation of official and legal documents which had an effect on the lives of the majority of the populace. Other ways for Jews and Christians included the public proclamation of sacred texts, and the use of the circular letter, which seems to have been a literate composition intended for oral proclamation to communities that were either predominantly non-literate or did not have access to a written copy. (OSIEK 1998: 158)

A recognised function and power of literacy is the assertion of authority. Do we then find something of this in Luke’s intention “to write an orderly account” (Lk 1:3; cf. Acts 1:1)? Surely Luke’s purpose is more than hermeneutical.¹⁶⁹ In addition to explaining the significance of the “things which have been fulfilled among us,” Luke makes claims about what is significant and provides early Christianity with a sense of definition, identity, and legitimisation. As David AUNE succinctly comments:

Christianity needed definition because during the first generation of its existence, it exhibited a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices, sometimes manifest in splinter groups making exclusive claims ... Christianity needed identity because unlike other ancient Mediterranean religions, it had ceased to remain tied to a particular ethnic group ... Christianity needed legitimation because no religious movement or philosophical sect could be credible unless it was rooted in antiquity. Luke provided legitimation by demonstrating the Jewish origins of Christianity and by emphasising the divine providence which was reflected in every aspect of the development and expansion of the early church. (AUNE 1987: 137)

In weighing the available evidence it appears highly probable that the reported missionary journey by Philip to Samaria depends on pre-Lukan traditions containing a cycle of stories about Philip. Further, as

¹⁶⁹ Cf. GREEN 1996: 283–299. GREEN argues that the issue for Luke was not validation but signification. In other words, “Luke’s purpose is hermeneutical. He is not hoping to prove *that* something happened, but rather to communicate *what these events signify*” (GREEN 1996: 288).

LÜDEMANN (1989: 98) comments, it is unlikely that Luke was the first to merge Simon and Philip, because “in that case he could have arranged an immediate confrontation between Peter and Simon Magus.”

To some oral traditions concerning the activities of Philip and a certain Simon in Samaria, Luke added other details about Simon and the apostle Peter—perhaps from numerous sources of information. This resulted in a narrative that includes what appears to modern readers as an awkward time sequence involving the so-called *Rückblende* in verses 9–11. These verses report Simon’s previous activities before providing details about Simon’s conversion in verses 12–13.

While the surviving text of Acts 8:4–25 does not represent the total oral tradition concerning Philip and Simon—as is evident in the details of the Simon story that surface in the second century CE and beyond—it does represent Luke’s attempt to engage with an undisclosed situational context and a complex of issues which evidently required mention of the three personalities of Philip, Simon, and Peter. As detailed below, the entire narrative and especially verses 14–24 exhibit the hallmarks of being Lukan in construction. And, notwithstanding comments made above about the Simon story in Acts being initially part of an oral/aural episode in the history of earliest Christianity, it has been transmitted to us in written form as a snapshot for us to ponder and analyse with our available tools.

3.2.3 Language and Structure

The majority opinion of scholars is that Acts 8:4–25 displays tell-tale signs of strong Lukan shaping.¹⁷⁰ In particular, the appearance of a favourite Lukan form of introduction,¹⁷¹ involving verses 4–5 and verse 25, indicates that Acts 8:4–25 is a separate literary unit.

Οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες διήλθον εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον.
 Φίλιππος δὲ κατελθὼν εἰς τὴν πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας ἐκήρυσσεν
 αὐτοῖς τὸν Χριστὸν (8:4–5).

¹⁷⁰ Cf. LÜDEMANN 1989: 94–98. LÜDEMANN outlines elements of Lukan style.

¹⁷¹ μὲν οὖν is a frequent transition and summary formula used in Acts as a literary hinge (1:18; 2:41; 5:41; 8:4, 25; 9:31; 11:19; 12:5; 13:4; 15:3, 30; 16:5; 23:2). Hence, 8:4 can be seen as the conclusion to the Stephen story, as well as the introduction to Philip’s mission.

*Οἱ μὲν οὖν διαμαρτυράμενοι καὶ λαλήσαντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου
ὑπέστρεφον εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα, πολλὰς τε κόμας τῶν Σαμαριτῶν
εὐηγγελίζοντο (8:25).*

Other features which support this view of Acts 8:4–25 as a distinct literary unit include: (1), a common theme of preaching the word (εὐαγγελίζομαι: νν 4, 12, 14, 25); (2), the repetition of key words (προσέχω: νν 6, 10, 11; ἐξίστημι: νν 9, 11, 13; πόλις: νν 5, 8, 9; δύναμις: νν 10, 13; and μεγάλη: νν 7, 10, 13); (3), a single geographical locality (Samaria: νν 5, 9, 14[25]); (4), a structure which presents narrative material within an alternating pattern, first between Philip and Simon, and then between Peter and Simon [a–b–a–b–c–b–c–b]; and (5), unique references to Philip and Simon, who are not mentioned together anywhere else in the Acts.

However, as a result of probing behind the present form of the text, source and redaction critics have pointed to a number of seams in this narrative unit which betray a patching together of discrete traditions.¹⁷² Among the textual problems exposed by source and redaction criticism are the following:

- (a) The shift in focus from Philip, who is the central actor in 8:5–13, to Peter, who assumes this position in 8:14–25, and the presence of Simon in both episodes.
- (b) The strange interruption of time sequence in 8:9–11 by a report concerning Simon's prior activities.
- (c) The hiatus created in 8:14–17 between baptism and reception of the Spirit. With no mention of Philip after verse 13, Peter and John arrive from Jerusalem and are instrumental in the Samaritans' reception of the Spirit, which curiously had not accompanied their baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus."
- (d) The description of Simon in verse 13 as someone having been baptised, who closely followed Philip, stands in stark contrast to the authority/power hungry individual in verses 19–22 (δοτε κάμοι τὴν ἐξουσίαν) who still needs to repent.
- (e) Acts 8:5–13 and 26–40 present unique Philip material, whereas verses 14–25 contain information that would more naturally be preserved in a cycle of Petrine stories.

¹⁷² KOCH (1980: 68) speaks strongly about the "uneinheitlichen Gesamteindruck(s), der sich in Act 8,5–25 bietet."

- (f) The question of Spirit reception raised in verses 14–25 appears also in Acts 10:44–48, another Petrine narrative; whereas the issue is not raised in the Philip cycle of stories found in 8:5–13 and 26–40.
- (g) The appearance of two unusual expressions in verses 5–13. First, Philip is said to proclaim τὸν Χριστὸν in Samaria (8:5), and then there is the unusual combination of preaching about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12, εὐαγγελιζομένῳ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) which seems to say that the people who believed Philip were baptised ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Constructions involving the name of Jesus with the titles “Christ” and “Lord” in Acts	
Form	Frequency
Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν	3:20; 5:42; 18:5, 28; 24:24
κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν	[8:37] 11:17
Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	2:38; 3:6; 4:10; 8:12; 10:48; 16:18
κύριε Ἰησοῦ	7:59
κυρίου Ἰησοῦ	4:33; 8:16; 11:20; 15:11; 16:31; 19:5, 13, 17; 20:24; 21:13
εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ	8:16; 19:5
κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	11:17; 15:26; 28:31
κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν	20:21
κύριον καὶ Χριστὸν	2:36; [4:26]
κύριον Ἰησοῦν	11:20

An analysis of language in Acts reveals that the construction “in the name of Jesus Christ” is the more common way of describing either an exorcistic/healing action or baptism. Whereas the construction εἰς τὸ

ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (8:16; 19:5) is considerably more rare,¹⁷³ and lends further credence to different Lukan sources for verses 5–13 and verses 14–25.

- (h) LÜDEMANN (1989: 96–98) has raised the question whether, on the basis of Luke’s own knowledge of the tradition, Luke had made some ironic allusion to Helen as Simon’s ἐπίνοια in his reference to the state of Simon’s heart: ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας (8:22). If so, as LÜDEMANN argued, the two essential elements of Gnostic Simonian religion are already found in Acts: “the god Simon and his syzygos, ἐπίνοια.”

As an extension of this view DICKERSON (1997: 221) has proposed that “the phrase ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου is a corruption of the title given by Simon to Helen, just as the phrase ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη Μεγάλη is a corruption of Simon’s own title Δύναμις Μεγάλη.” DICKERSON offers a plausible argument for Luke’s use of the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος, noting that it is a favourite¹⁷⁴ Lukan word, and detailing how it typically refers back to a previously mentioned character, or sometimes marks the transition to a different type of material.

So, claims DICKERSON (1997: 222), Acts 8:10 appears to be an insertion from the source of verses 14–25. The οὗτος in 8:10 is transitional and the title Δύναμις Μεγάλη in verse 10 arguably fits better with the phrase ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου in 8:22 rather than with verses 5–13. This literary observation further supports the idea that Luke operated with at least two sources which contained stories about Philip-Simon (vv 5–13) and Peter-Simon (vv 14–25).

3.3 Summary Conclusions

The weight of internal evidence supports the view that Luke operated with at least two sources: a Philip/Simon source in verses 5–13, and a Peter/Simon source in verses 14–25. Two distinct episodes are discernible within Acts 8:4–25: (1) a Samaritan mission of Philip, who is one of those expelled from Jerusalem following the death of Stephen

¹⁷³ Cf. HEITMÜLLER (1903), QUESNEL (1985), DUNN (1970) for a discussion of different Christian baptismal formulae in Acts.

¹⁷⁴ Οὗτος appears 39 times in the Gospel of Luke and 35 times in the Acts.

(8:4–13); and, (2) a Samaritan mission by Peter (and John), who represent the Jerusalem community (8:14–25). Episode one is held together by internal themes surrounding a contest between Philip and Simon. Episode two focuses on a sharp disagreement between Peter and Simon.

The conclusions of Source and Redaction criticism are broadly divided between two main opinions: namely, (1) that verses 14–17 are a Lukan construction to link together two originally independent traditions, involving either a Philip/Simon or Peter/Simon confrontation; or, (2) that only one mission encounter with Simon has a traditional basis, the other being introduced by Luke.

Yet, whatever the historical traditions of Acts 8:4–25, Luke's *inclusio* technique¹⁷⁵ and various narrative features underline the claim that he moulded these stories into a distinct literary unit. For example, the audience remains the same in both scenes; namely, the people of Samaria (vv 5–7, 12, 14, 16). Also, Simon plays a leading role (vv 10, 13, 18–19). And thirdly, there is an alternating pattern involving Simon and a Christian missionary: Philip/Simon (vv 6–13), and Peter/Simon (14–24) sequences.

4. *The Accounts of Simon in Ancient Christian Writers prior to 400CE*

4.1 Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr¹⁷⁶ (c.100–c.165CE) was born early in the second century at Flavia Neapolis in Samaria near ancient Shechem. Autobiographical comments suggest that he was of Roman descent; although, curiously, on one occasion he calls himself a Samaritan,¹⁷⁷ while otherwise always regarding himself as a Gentile.¹⁷⁸ Justin is popularly recognised in the history of Christian dogma as the “first Christian thinker to seek to reconcile the claims of faith and reason” (ODCC 1990: 770). Also, as Eric

¹⁷⁵ Cf. LEVINSOHN 1987: 141–150.

¹⁷⁶ TERTULLIAN (*Adv. Val.* 5) calls him *philosophus et martyr* (cf. Hippolytus, *Ref.* VIII 16); Eusebius (*H.E.* IV 11,8) calls him “a genuine lover of the true philosophy,” who “in the guise of a philosopher proclaimed the divine word and defended the faith by writings.” Eusebius later notes that “Justin ... was crowned with divine martyrdom” (*H.E.* IV 16,1).

¹⁷⁷ *Dial.* 120,6.

¹⁷⁸ *Dial.* 41,3.

OSBORN (1973: 13–14) comments, as “the greatest of the apologists” who “defend[ed] the Christians against their four great enemies—against the ridicule of intellectuals, the power of the state, the hostility of the Jews and the strife of heretics.” In the course of this work Justin is identified as the earliest surviving source of the Simon story after the report in Acts.

The writings of Justin record his efforts to grapple seriously with the questions, misunderstandings and prejudices of his contemporaries. He tried to re-interpret the Christian message in the idiom of middle Platonism. His concept of the “generative word” (λόγος σπερματικός) allowed traces of truth to be found in Greek philosophical thought. Yet, Justin found no such accommodation for what he called the continuing activity of demons. In popular Greek thought and later Platonism demons were intermediate beings, higher than humans but lower than the supreme deity, who dwelt in the changeable heavens between earth and the moon.¹⁷⁹ In writing about the origin of demons (*Apol.* II 5) Justin employs the Septuagint description πάντες οἱ Θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια (Ps 96:5a [95 LXX], “all the gods of the nations are demons”) as part of his critique of the demonology of the ancient world, and so brings together a number of widely different traditions; although, biblical and Jewish ideas stemming from Gen 6 are dominant.¹⁸⁰

For Justin, the actions of demons performed an opposite work to the Logos. They spread falsehood, and worked to destroy truth. In chapter 14 of his first Apology Justin identifies the deceptions of demons, who, sometimes by appearances and dreams (καὶ ποτὲ μὲν δι’ ὄνειρων ἐπιφανείας), and sometimes by magical impositions (διὰ μαγικῶν στροφῶν), subdue and divert people from embracing the Christian message (*Apol* I 14,1).

In Justin’s writings—in comparison with other contemporary Greek writings—the term/concept “demons” implies a similar ambiguity of use and meaning as was observed in our overview of μαγ- words in the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity. This is further borne out in a statement found in chapter 26 of Justin’s *Apology*, that after the ascension of Christ demons promoted certain individuals who claimed they were gods: προεβάλλοντο οἱ δαίμονες ἀνθρώπους τινὰς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς

¹⁷⁹ Cf. ARMSTRONG 1967: 32–37.

¹⁸⁰ Justin describes the sin of the angels (Gen 6) as their desertion of the post given by God, and stepping over the boundaries of appointed order. This disruption and disobedience to God led to exploitation and enslavement of those committed to their care. Cf. OSBORN 1973: 55–65.

εἶναι θεούς (*Apol.* I 26,1). So the reader is introduced to a certain Samaritan, named Simon, a native of the village Gitton: Σίμωνα μὲν τινα Σαμαρέα τὸν ἀπὸ κώμης λεγομένης Γιττώων. Without direct reference to the account in Acts 8 Justin confirms the existence of a Samaritan Simon,¹⁸¹ but includes additional details¹⁸² about his alleged activities in Rome and his female companion Helen.

CASEY (1933: 154) comments that all of Justin's information about Simon "appears to have been derived from other sources."¹⁸³ This broader context arguably included Justin's lost *Σύνταγμα κατὰ πασῶν τῶν γεγενημένων αἰρέσεων*, to which he refers in chapter 26,8 of his *First Apology*.¹⁸⁴ Justin describes how Simon performed mighty acts of magic in the city of Rome, through the agency of demons at work within him: διὰ τῆς τῶν ἐνεργούντων δαιμόνων τέχνης δυνάμεις ποιήσας μαγικὰς ἐν τῇ πόλει ὑμῶν βασιλίδι Ῥώμῃ. This Simon, writes Justin, was considered a god (θεὸς ἐνομίσθη) and was honoured by the Romans. His statue was erected between the two bridges on the river Tiber, bearing the inscription: SEMONI SANCO DEO FIDIO SACRUM SEX(TUS) POMPEIUS SP(URII) F(ILIIUS) COL(LINA TRIBU) MUSSIANUS QUINQUENNALIS DECUR(IAE) BIDENTALIS DONUM DEDIT.¹⁸⁵ Then Justin claims that

¹⁸¹ Cf. my comments and critique of Justin's claim about "Samaritans" and Simon below, in an *Excursus* "[The] City of Samaria and a 'Samaritan' Simon in Acts 8:4–25," in chapter 4 (pp. 160–166).

¹⁸² The geographical location of Simon's birthplace; background information on Simon's companion Helen, and details about her role in Simon's theology; Simon's presence in Rome under Claudius; and the naming of Menander as Simon's disciple.

¹⁸³ Cf. BEYSCHLAG 1974: 10, "Justins Mitteilungen wirken wie Exzerpte aus einem größeren Zusammenhang. Da er in *Apol.* 1,26 (vgl. 1,56) nach Simon Magus auch dessen 'Schüler' Menander samt Marcion behandelt und den ganzen Abschnitt mit einem ausdrücklichen Hinweis auf sein—verlorenes—"Syntagma wider alle Häresien" beschließt, so dürfte dies auch die Quelle der antihäretischen Ausführungen Justins gewesen sein."

¹⁸⁴ Evidently used by later heresiologists—Hegesippus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus—Justin's *Syntagma* is understood to have been written in opposition to Simon Magus, Menander, and Marcion (perhaps also the Valentinians, Basilidians, and Saturnilians).

¹⁸⁵ CIL 6,567. The sixteenth century discovery of a monument, on the island in the river Tiber, bearing this inscription seems to discredit Justin's report about the veneration of Simon at Rome. It is commonly accepted that Justin, or his informant, saw and misinterpreted a dedication to an ancient Sabine god *Semo Sancus*, who was often identified with Jupiter and Ζεὺς ὄρκιος or πίστιος. Lingering arguments for this monument's use by the Simonian cultus in Rome, or noting the allegorical attraction provided by the similarity of the names *Semoni* and *Simoni*, are thinly veiled attempts to restore Justin's credibility. Greater scholarly

almost all Samaritans (καὶ σχεδὸν πάντες μὲν Σαμαρεῖς) and a few even of other nations worship Simon and acknowledge him as the first god: ὀλιγοὶ δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔθνεσιν, ὡς τὸν πρῶτον θεὸν ἐκείνον ὁμολογοῦντες ἐκείνον καὶ προσκυνοῦσι (*Apol.* I 26,3).

RUDOLPH (1983: 295) offers a plausible suggestion that the Simonians themselves were responsible for the identification of Simon with a dedication to the old Roman god of oaths—since they worshipped their founder as a divine being—but it is not nearly so clear why Justin should have chosen precisely this flawed claim in his defence to the emperor “on behalf of those from every race of men who are unjustly hated and ill-treated, being one of them myself.”¹⁸⁶ However, what can be demonstrated from the testimony of history and Justin’s own hand is that the reason had more to do with rhetoric than reality. OSBORN succinctly reports the objections of Rome against the Christian movement:

The imperial government objected to Christianity on one ground alone: the exclusiveness by which it refused to worship the gods of the Roman people. Christians were charged with being Christians, nothing more and nothing less. They had abandoned the religion of their fathers. The people suspected them and the state coerced them. Their refusal to conform endangered a state which, everyone believed, depended on the good-will of the gods for its wellbeing. They were political Jonahs who must be thrown overboard if the ship of state were to keep a steady course. (OSBORN 1973: 1)

In his appeal to Antoninus Pius Justin absorbs the accusations levelled by his accusers and develops an apologetic approach that admits the truth of certain charges but also defends itself against false claims. For example, he writes “we have been called atheists and we admit that we are atheists as far as these so-called gods are concerned.”¹⁸⁷ While, in similar vein, Justin writes in *Apol.* I 26,6 that Simon, Menander, and Marcion called themselves “Christians” (Χριστιανοὶ καλοῦνται), yet the context shows Justin denies this claim. Not only is Justin concerned to distance the Christian community from those whom he considers falsely deemed followers of Christ, but also to demand from the authorities that they be equitable in the administration of their laws. Whether Justin’s argument

focus ought to be given to the broader purpose intended by Justin in mentioning this statue in his written defence to Emperor Antoninus Pius and the Roman Senate.

¹⁸⁶ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 1.

¹⁸⁷ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 6,1.

was intended as an appeal for consistency or to point out the establishment of some precedent is unknown; yet Justin mentions the statue erected to Simon's honour in the Tiber between two bridges as an example of how Rome had not only failed to defend herself against the inroads of "demonic cults" but had allowed public approval for their existence.

Τρίτον δ' ὅτι καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἀνάλευσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς οὐρανὸν προεβάλλοντο οἱ δαίμονες ἀνθρώπους τινὰς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς εἶναι θεοὺς· οἳ οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἐδίωχθησαν ὑφ' ὑμῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τιμῶν κατηξιώθησαν.

Thirdly, that even after Christ's ascent into heaven, the demons promoted certain individuals who claimed to be gods. Those you have not only not persecuted but have even glorified. (JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,1)

Justin is first to report that Simon was accompanied by a former prostitute called Helen, who was considered, by those who claimed Simon to be the first god, the first thought generated by him: τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἔννοιαν πρώτην γενομένην λέγουσι (*Apol.* I 26,3). The mythological character of Helen has long been argued. Hans WAITZ claimed the Samaritan veneration of Simon and Helen was a syncretistic development due to the blending of Phoenician moon-goddess (Selene) worship with Simonianism at the close of the first century:

Werden wir nämlich mit der Helenageschichte von Samarien auf einmal nach Tyrus versetzt, so können wir uns diese Entwicklung nicht anders vorstellen, als dass sich die samaritanische Verehrung Simons als des obersten Gottes mit der phönizischen, speziell tyrischen Verehrung des Sonnengottes (Sem, Schemesch, Herakles, Melkart, Baal) und der Mondgöttin (Helena, Selene, Luna, Astarte) verbunden hat. (WAITZ 1904: 134)

Even though certain obscure passages in the Pseudo-Clementines (*Hom.* II 23; *Rec.* II 8) could be offered as evidence for the connection, there is nothing to support this view in Justin's writings or any of the accepted accounts of Simonian teaching.¹⁸⁸ Rather, as it is generally reported, the Simonians identified Helen with Pallas Athena (Roman = Minerva).¹⁸⁹ The legendary story of Athena's birth from the forehead of Zeus¹⁹⁰ was

¹⁸⁸ Cf. CASEY 1933: 155.

¹⁸⁹ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,4; HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 20,1; EPIPHANIUS, *Pan.* XXI 4. In the Olympian pantheon, Pallas Athena was considered the goddess of wisdom and protectress of civilized life.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. GRANT 1990: 41–42; KAUER 1959.

clearly supportive of the notion that Helen was the Primal Thought of Simon's divine mind.¹⁹¹ This emphasis on a feminine principle of knowledge has been identified as a literary fibre from the fabric of early Gnostic speculation. T. ADAMIK (1998: 52–64) and B.A. PEARSON (1972: 457–470) refer to various Gnostic documents, in particular to the Nag Hammadi writing *Testimony of Truth*, as providing examples of interpretation based on Jewish haggadic discussions of the serpent and Eve in Gen 3. The conclusion drawn is that Helen—as the *ennoia* of Simon—should be considered as part of widespread early traditions that emphasise woman as principle of knowledge.

This emphasis on woman as principle of knowledge is in harmony with the midrash on Eve mentioned by Pearson, and with Greek mythology concerning Metis, the counsel personified, the consort of Zeus, and wisest of gods and men (Hesiod, *Theog.* 886ff.). It is also in harmony with the figure of Diotima, the legendary priestess from Mantinea and teacher of Socrates (Plato, *Sympos.* 201d), who is the mouthpiece for his metaphysics of love, and finally with the love lyric of Sappho, to which Socrates, too, refers, when he explains the divine love in Plato's *Phaedrus* 235c. (ADAMIK 1998: 58)

4.1.1 The Image of Simon in Justin

Justin reports that Simon first lived in Samaria but under Claudius he went to Rome where he continued to perform mighty acts of magic (δυνάμεις ποιήσας μαγικός) through the agency of demons (διὰ τῆς τῶν ἐνεργούντων δαιμόνων τέχνης, *Apol.* I 26,2). As William ADLER (1990: 477) noted, “[The] Christian apologists of the second and third centuries followed their Jewish antecedents in attributing human depravity, especially idolatry, to the malevolence of demons.” Certainly Justin's account of the origin of demons rests firmly on the account in Gen 6, and he copies the septuagintal practice of calling the gods of the nations “demons” (Ps 96:5 [95 LXX]). Again, in his identification of the five principal foci of demonic operation as dreams (*Apol.* I 14,1), magic (*Apol.* I 18,3), pagan religion (*Apol.* II 5,4), myths and heresy, Justin shared the view of many of his contemporaries that “paganism”

¹⁹¹ Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2 “... hic Helenam quandam ipse a Tyro civitate Phoeniciae quaestuariam cum redimisset, secum circumducebat, dicens hanc esse primam mentis eius Conceptionem... Hanc enim Ennoiam exsipientem ex eo, cognoscentem quae vult Pater eius, degredi ad inferiora, et generare Angelos et Potestates, a quibus et mundum hunc factum dixit.”

represented visible as well as invisible forces; hostile foes that infested the air.¹⁹²

Clearly Justin's interest in Simon lies beyond the mere chronicle of history. This fact is underscored not only by his lack of any direct reference to the report of Acts, but also in his concentration on details obviously drawn from other sources, including oral traditions: Simon's place of birth, the nature of Helen and her place in Simon's teaching, Simon's presence in Rome, the connection between Simon and Menander, and Justin's concern that many falsely deemed "Christian" are responsible for those activities considered dangerous by Rome for which true believers suffered unjustly.

While BEYSCHLAG (1974: 10–11) evaluated the report of Justin as having little historical worth—because Justin had no direct contact with Simon or Simonians—Justin's image of Simon as a "non-Christian" from Samaria, who taught a different source of wisdom and was generally revered from Rome to Palestine, in the words of RUDOLPH (1977: 291) remains "beachtenswert."

4.2 Irenaeus

Few details about Irenaeus' life are known with any certainty prior to his becoming successor to the martyred Photinus as prelate of the Gallic churches in 177–178 CE, little more than a decade after the death of Justin (EUSEBIUS, *H.E.* V 5,8). The significance of Irenaeus and his contribution to Christian thought has been acknowledged since the time of Eusebius. He is celebrated as the "first systematic theologian" and one of the chief architects of the Catholic system of doctrine.¹⁹³ Yet, as the preface of his principal work *Ἐλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπὴ τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως* (*Adversus Haereses*) indicates, Irenaeus' primary concern was to write as a pastor and teacher of the church to inform other pastors how to protect their "flocks" from dangerous teachings that Irenaeus considered a serious threat to the existence of the church and its message.¹⁹⁴ His use of the term "Gnosis," in this context, was a

¹⁹² Cf. Eph 6:12.

¹⁹³ Cf. ALTANER 1960: 150; ENSLIN 1947: 144; ELTESTER 1959: 892, "... er hilft durch die Berufung auf Bibel, Glaubensregel und bischöfliche Sukzession die Fundamente des kath[olischen] Kirchentums festzulegen."

¹⁹⁴ *Adv. Haer.* I, Preface: "... so then, lest some should be made prey ... like sheep by wolves, not recognising them because of their outwardly wearing sheep's clothing—

comprehensive expression to characterise all the heretical teachings he was addressing.¹⁹⁵

Irenaeus was convinced that a common denominator (*regula*) allowed the Gnostics to be treated as one. However many heads the “Lernean Hydra” had there was a single beast to be combated (*Adv. Haer.* I 30,15). Irenaeus largely concerned himself with exposing and refuting the teachings of Valentinus and Marcion, yet he was also responsible for identifying Simon as the “father of all heresies:” *ex quo universae haereses substituerunt*.¹⁹⁶ In his section against the heretics in chapters 23–28 of Book I, Irenaeus structures his material in such a way that each heretic mentioned shares at least one feature of what Simon is said to have taught. Irenaeus employs this formal approach in providing proof for his assertion that all heresies derive from Simon.

Further, Irenaeus employed contemporary rhetorical methods of argument¹⁹⁷ when debating his opponents. His style is liberal in the use of irony and the technique *ad hominem*. His basic assessment was that Gnostic teachings were plagiarised from the philosophers (*Adv. Haer.* II 14,2–7; IV 33,3), contradictory, contrary to good reason, casual in the way they deal with truth,¹⁹⁸ recent, and “originating from Simon.” Irenaeus’ knowledge of philosophy has been called “somewhat superficial,”¹⁹⁹ although perhaps a more generous assessment would call his philosophical arguments “popular.” Certainly, Irenaeus is more decisive

whom the Lord warned us to guard against—and because they talk like us, though thinking differently (*similia quidem nobis loquentes dissimilia vero sentientes* ...) I thought it necessary ... to expound to you [their] profound mysteries ... then you, being informed ... may be able to make them clear to your people, and to warn them to be on their guard against this blasphemy against Christ.”

¹⁹⁵ JAESCHKE 1978: 260, “... zu beachten, daß er ‘Gnosis’ nicht eingeschränkt im modernen (freilich immer noch unpräzisen) Sinn versteht. Neben Marcion und anderen können darum auch Kerinth, die Ebioniten und Nikolaiten unter den Begriff fallen.”

¹⁹⁶ *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2.

¹⁹⁷ SCHOEDEL 1959: 22–32; GRANT 1949: 41–51; PERKINS 1976: 193–200.

¹⁹⁸ Irenaeus accused the Gnostics of removing thoughts from their proper contexts and “dismembering” the truth: *solventes membra veritatis*. Irenaeus compared this with the action of breaking up of a beautiful mosaic of a king to make one of a fox or a dog (*Adv. Haer.* I 8,1; 31,4). VALLÉE (1981: 18) notes 24 verbal expressions used by Irenaeus to describe the casual way Gnostics dealt with truth: *adaptare, assimilare, adulterare, calumniare, transvertentes, abutentes, transferunt, auferentes, transfingunt, transfigurant, transformantes, solvens, compingentes, confingentes, figmentum, transfectio, fictio, in captivitate docunt a veritate, falsi testes, frustrantur speciem evangelii, circumcidentes evangelium, eligentes, decurtantes, intercidentes deminoraverunt*.

¹⁹⁹ VALLÉE 1980: 176.

in his scriptural arguments, and the mere fact that Irenaeus the rhetorician presents philosophical arguments first in his pattern is a concession of their relative value and weakness.

Central for Irenaeus' critique of Gnostic teachings was his application of three theological principles: the rule of faith, scripture and tradition. In refuting the Gnostic claim that knowledge had not been openly divulged (because not all were capable of receiving it), but was mystically revealed by Christ through parables (*Adv. Haer.* II 27,1), Irenaeus argued God's revelation was openly announced by the prophets, taught by Jesus, delivered by the apostles, and preserved by the traditions of the church. So, unlike the Gnostics, for Irenaeus there was no need to seek other opinions (*Adv. Haer.* II 28,1) or to ask other questions. Ultimately Irenaeus accuses the Gnostics of blasphemy because they introduce theological fictions and in so doing destroy the substance of faith; and, their thinking about God is blasphemous because they introduce "divisions" to the concept of God (*Adv. Haer.* II 28,2; 28,8) by denigrating the God of the Old Testament and teaching another God beyond the Creator.

It should be noted, however, that there are remarks in addition to obvious theological and philosophical arguments in Irenaeus' work which betray other motives in his refutation of the Gnostics. Biographical references indicate that Irenaeus enjoyed a reputation for being a peacemaker, and was politically active in preserving the reputation of the Church in the eye of civil authorities. So, when he perceived a divisive element in the teaching of certain Gnostics, and a clear and present danger to the mission of the church, Irenaeus took action to dissociate himself and his "flock" from various Gnostics—magicians and instruments of Satan²⁰⁰—whom Irenaeus concluded were "socially subversive in addition ... to being theologically so."²⁰¹

Men hearing the things which they speak, and imagining that we are all such as they, may turn away their ears from the preaching of the truth (*avertant aures suas a praeconio veritatis*); or, again, seeing the things they practice, may defame us all, who have in fact no fellowship with them (*in nullo eis communicantes*), either in doctrine or in morals, or in our daily conduct. (*Adv. Haer.* I 25,3)

²⁰⁰ *Adv. Haer.* II 31,1–3.

²⁰¹ VALLÉE 1981: 30.

According to Irenaeus, Simon and his followers reinterpreted the Christian Trinitarian mystery in claiming it was Simon himself who appeared among the Jews as the Son (*inter Iudaeos quidem quasi filius apparuerit*), then later (in the guise of Simon) as the Father in Samaria: *in Samaria autem quasi pater descenderit*. Finally, as the Spirit, he descended upon the nations: *in reliquis vero gentibus quasi spiritus sanctus adventaverit*. Irenaeus further outlines the teachings of Simon and his followers as follows:

Simon is the first god (*super omnia pater*—the father of all), called “great” power (*Hic est virtus dei quae vocatur magna*), and Helen his “Ennoia” (*primam mentis eius Conceptionem*—First Thought) is the mother of all, who created the angels and in turn they created the world. Out of envy the angels, who did not want to be considered descendants of anyone and were unaware of a God superior to them, prevented “Ennoia” from returning to the “Father of all,” and caused her every kind of suffering: *et omnem contumeliam ab his passam* (perhaps a reference to her being violated sexually). Imprisoned by the powers she once had generated, enclosed by a human body, she continues across the centuries, passing from one woman’s body to another, until finally she appears as a prostitute in a brothel in Tyre: *Transmigrantem autem eam de corpore in corpus ex eo et semper contumeliam sustinentem, in novissimis etiam in fornice prostituisse*.

The pre-existing God then assumed the bodily form of Simon to find and release Helen, in order to bring salvation to others. In liberating Helen, Simon frees the soul dispersed in matter and saves all human beings who not only recognise themselves in the fall and liberation of the “Ennoia,” but acknowledge Simon: *Quapropter et ipsum venisse uti eam adsumeret primam et liberaret eam a vinculis, hominibus autem salutem praestaret per suam agnitionem*.

Irenaeus claimed that Simon’s “incarnation” was also necessary due to the incompetent government of the world through the Angels, who competed for leadership. So Simon descended transfigured in the form of the Potencies, Powers and Angels, in order to appear to the world as a man, although he was not a man, and he seemed to suffer in Judaea, without suffering really: *cum enim male moderarentur angeli mundum, quoniam unusquisque eorum concupisceret principatum, ad emendationem venisse rerum et descendisse eum transfiguratum et adsimilatum virtutibus et potestatibus et angelis, uti et in hominibus homo appareret ipse, cum non esset homo, et passum autem in Iudaea putatum, cum non esset passus*.

Irenaeus reports that the followers of Simon considered themselves no longer bound to the prophetic guidelines of the Jewish scriptures which were inspired by the angels who created the world: *Prophetas autem a mundi fabricatoribus angelis inspiratos dixisse prophetias*. Instead, they considered themselves free to do as they choose since they were saved by [Simon’s] grace and not by meritorious conduct: *et ut liberos agere quae velint: secundum enim ipsius gratiam salvari homines, sed non secundum operas iustas*. For human actions are not righteous by nature, but only by convention: *Nec enim esse naturaliter operationes iustas, sed ex accidentia*.

Irenaeus concludes by noting that Simon's followers lived profligate lives (*libidinose quidem vivunt*), practised magic (*magias autem perficiunt*), exorcisms and spells; and, as Justin had previously claimed (*Apol. I 18,3: ὄνειροπομποὶ καὶ πάρεδροι*), they used dream senders and familiar spirits: *paredri et oniropompi*. A final note of condemnation includes reference to their worship of Simon and Helen before images of Zeus and Minerva (*Imaginem quoque Simonis habent factum ad figuram Iovis, et Helenae in figuram Minervae, et has adorant*), and that these "Simonians" derive their name of Simon, from whom the falsely called knowledge [Gnosis?] began: *vocati Simoniani, a quibus falsi nominis scientia accepit initia*.

This report of Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer. I 23,1–4*), while obviously dependent upon Justin and Hegesippus,²⁰² reveals a more developed system and a further stage in the transformation of Simon. Adelin ROUSSEAU and Louis DOUTRELEAU²⁰³ have identified how the significant features of Gnosticism are found in this work: the opposition of the supreme God and the demiurgical angels, the devaluation of the physical realm, salvation by "scientia," and the indifferent character of individual acts concerning morality.

4.2.1 The Image of Simon in Irenaeus

In contrast to the image of Simon as μαγεύων—a religious practitioner who claimed to be "the power of God"—in the Acts, or among the deluded peddlers of magic spells through "demonic" energies as described by Justin, Irenaeus pictures Simon as someone who feigned faith in God out of selfish ambition to become superior to the apostles and with the course of time accepted the accolades of his followers and ultimately claimed to be God. While Irenaeus is clearly focussed on describing the teachings of Simon and his followers, his report includes the accusation of Simon's apprenticeship and association with magic because it serves to underscore the subversiveness of Simon and his teachings.

There is considerable doubt whether Irenaeus had direct personal contact with any Simonians, although it is clear that in attacking the Valentinians, Irenaeus was convinced he could refute all other heretics at the same time.²⁰⁴ Irenaeus projected his own principle of tradition into

²⁰² *Adv. Haer. IV Preface; 6,2; V 33,3–4.*

²⁰³ ROUSSEAU/DOUTRELEAU 1979: 151–152.

²⁰⁴ Cf. *Adv. Haer. II 31,1*: "Since those who are of the school of Valentinus have been refuted, the whole multitude of heretics are in fact also overthrown."

the teachings of those he opposed; and, as with his own dogma assumed that all Gnostic teaching and practice could be derived from persons in the apostolic period. Thus Irenaeus located the origin of all heretical teachings in the person of Simon reported in Acts 8. This being the case, in Irenaeus' estimation, every contemporary Gnostic teaching could be rejected because Peter the apostle had already rebuked and repudiated them in Simon.

Among the features of Gnosis exposed by Irenaeus throughout his entire work, and singled out for special attack, were the dualistic teachings and outlook of many Gnostics. Irenaeus concluded that these teachings had dangerous social and political implications since they challenged what he considered universally received.²⁰⁵ So, Irenaeus could not reconcile their subversive character with the life of the church. Norbert BROX (1966a: 34) observes that while the Gnostics sought acceptance and recognition—"Sie wollen nicht ausserhalb als Häretiker, sondern in der Kirche als Pneumatiker gelten"—Irenaeus helped to force them out of the community, labelling their gatherings as "unauthorised assemblies" and even as "rival communities."²⁰⁶ Clearly Irenaeus not only presents Simon as the author of a rival message, and a false "gnosis," but as a dangerous divine pretender.

4.3 Hippolytus

Hippolytus²⁰⁷ is considered "the most important 3rd century theologian of the Roman Church."²⁰⁸ Yet it remains an historical curiosity why the personal details of his life are enveloped by the deepest obscurity.²⁰⁹ The

²⁰⁵ *Adv. Haer.* I 10,2; 30,13. Gnostics challenged scripture and tradition.

²⁰⁶ *Adv. Haer.* III 4,2.

²⁰⁷ Hippolytus was a presbyter in Rome under Pope Victor I (*Ref.* IX 12) and Pope Zephyrinus (*Ref.* IX 11–12). However, a conflict arose between Hippolytus and Pope Callistus concerning the nature of Christ. Following the death of Callistus (*Ref.* IX 12) Hippolytus claimed to be bishop. Hippolytus called the see of Callistus a "philosophical school" (*Ref.* IX 7,3: διδασκαλείον) and introduced his own "orthodox" church; although, Callistus claimed to represent the true catholic church: καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία (*Ref.* IX 12,25).

²⁰⁸ Cf. *ODCC* 1990: 652; MARCOVICH 1986: 381–387.

²⁰⁹ QUASTEN 1953: 165, suggests three possible reasons for this obscurity: his "heretical" christology; his "schismatic" position; and, the fact that knowledge of the Greek language gradually disappeared in Rome. Yet the volume and variety of oriental manuscripts testify to his popularity and favour in the East.

public life of Hippolytus spans the closing decade of the 2nd century and the first three decades of the 3rd century (c.195–235CE).²¹⁰ Although a representative of western Christianity, he was probably a native of the Greek East.²¹¹

Hippolytus was a prolific writer and has been compared with his contemporary Origen; although he was without the scholarly depth and independence of thought shown by the Alexandrian master. Hippolytus was a skilful compiler rather than an original writer.²¹² His major anti-heretical works include his *Refutatio omnium haeresium* and the *Syntagma* or *πρὸς ἀπάσας τὰς αἱρέσεις*. Although lost in its original form, it is generally accepted that this latter work can be reconstructed from the writings of Tertullian (*Praescr.* 46–53), Philaster (PL XII, 1111–1302), and Epiphanius (*Pan.* I–XLVI).

As the title for each of the ten books of his *Refutatio* indicates (τοῦ κατὰ πασῶν αἱρέσεων ἐλέγχου βιβλος ...) Hippolytus' concern is to refute every heresy known to him. KOSCHORKE (1975: 60–73) has proposed that his secret purpose²¹³ was to denounce Callistus and his supporters, using a standard polemical technique of retrojecting contemporary controversies into the heresies of the past. This, he claimed, explains why *Refutatio* IX presents the heresy of Callistus as the culmination of a process involving the degradation of truth. However, VALLÉE correctly notes that internal textual evidence more strongly supports another conclusion; namely, that Callistus is only one among many heretics whom the *Refutatio* intends to unmask:

The unity of the Book is broken if it is said to aim at unmasking Callistus: why then would Hippolytus, after dealing with Noetus and Callistus, make such a long report on the Elchasaites and the Jews [*Ref.* IX 13–30, that is, more than half of the Book], which would be completely alien to his presumed goal: Callistus? (VALLÉE 1981: 46)

²¹⁰ MARCOVICH 1986: 381, “Die schriftstellerische Tätigkeit Hippolyts scheint in die Jahre 195–235 zu fallen.”

²¹¹ An argument for Hippolytus' eastern origin is made by his extensive knowledge of Greek philosophy, his informed knowledge of Greek mystery cults, and his evident eastern mindset.

²¹² Cf. MARCOVICH 1986: 382, “Tatsächlich bietet die jüngere *Refutatio* ausgiebige und wörtlich entlehnte Passagen aus Irenäus' *Adversus Haereses*.”

²¹³ Callistus is identified as “der Zielpunkt der Polemik der *Refutatio*.”

Hippolytus introduces his “Refutation of all Heresies” (Books I–IV [II and III are missing]) with a survey of the ancient Greek philosophers, identifying how their ideas—often infected with magic²¹⁴—were seminal for current religious error. Hippolytus claimed that Heretics in his own era plagiarised²¹⁵ their teachings from ancient philosophical teachings, and he labelled these heresiarchs as sorcerers and magicians²¹⁶ (Simon: *Ref.* VI 2; 7; 9; 19; 20; Marcus: *Ref.* VI 5; 39; Carpocratians: *Ref.* VII 32; Elchasaites: *Ref.* IX 14; X 29). This plagiarism of the Greeks by the heretics is conclusive for Hippolytus and disqualifies their teachings as being godless (ἀθεός), even though they attempt to present them as being from God (*Ref.* IX 31,1).

In succeeding to uncover the source of their doctrine, and by exposing their “godlessness,” Hippolytus considers all heresiarchs and their teachings effectively refuted, even in the absence of cogent argumentation (cf. *Ref.* V 18; 28; VI 37,1; VII 31,8; IX 31). “To refute, for Hippolytus, is to expose; more precisely, it is to expose some tenets of a heresy and to point to its dependence upon non-Christian sources.”²¹⁷ By way of association Hippolytus locates all heretics in a *successio haereticorum*, a perverse genealogy whose seed promotes a continual degradation and loss of truth (*Ref.* VII 36,2; IX 7–12).

²¹⁴ *Ref.* I 2–22. Among others, Hippolytus notes how Pythagoras touched on magic; Empedocles explored the nature of demons; Heraclitus taught about the demonic inhabitation of regions as far as the moon; Democritus received instruction from occultic specialists in India, Egypt and Babylon; Plato and Aristotle taught the existence of demons; and the Druids practice magic rites.

²¹⁵ Cf. MARCOVICH 1986: 383, “Hippolyt freilich wertete diese Zitate als Beweis dafür, daß die Häretiker nichts weiter als ‘Plagiatoren’ (κλεψίλογοι und κλεψιλογεῖν scheinen seine eigenen Neubildungen zu sein) griechischer Philosophie, heidnischer Mythologie, Mysterien, Astrologie und Magie seien.” There is a certain irony in the fact that, while evidence of plagiarism by Gnostic sects described in the *Refutatio* cannot be proven, it can be clearly demonstrated that Hippolytus is consistently guilty of plagiarism from the works of Sextus Empiricus (*Ref.* IV 1–7), Flavius Josephus (*Ref.* IX 18–29), and Irenaeus (*Ref.* VI 42–54; VII 28; 32).

²¹⁶ In Book Four of the *Refutatio* Hippolytus attempts to give a rational explanation of various magical phenomena in an effort to expose them as fraudulent activities. Hippolytus details simple deceptions such as invisible writings and speaking through hidden voice tubes (*Ref.* IV 28); more involved illusions such as divination by cauldron and certain appearances (*Ref.* IV 35–38); and various activities that indicate a knowledge of basic physics and chemistry (*Ref.* IV 28; VI 39–40).

²¹⁷ VALLÉE 1981: 52.

Book Six contains Hippolytus' report about Simon, including unique material (*Ref.* VI 9–18) popularly known as “the Great Revelation” or *Apophasis Megale*. Some commentators have labeled this material as a remnant of Simon's teaching, either from his own hand or preserved through the activity of some unknown disciple(s).²¹⁸

Prior to 1950 the general consensus among scholars—including VON HARNACK²¹⁹ and CERFAUX²²⁰—was that the clear philosophic character of the *Apophasis Megale* indicated it was almost certainly the later work of Simon's disciples. However, since 1952—in the aftermath of HAENCHEN's *Gab es eine vorchristliche Gnosis?*—scholars have re-examined the *Apophasis* in an attempt to find conclusive evidence for its authorship by Simon and/or the existence of a pre-Christian Gnosticism. A contrary voice is raised by BEYSCHLAG who objects that among the challenges this material poses for critics is not only its completely different literary form from other Simon sources, but also the fact that not even a hint regarding this ostensibly Simon(ian) writing appears in earlier reports about Simon, that:

... keiner der älteren kirchlichen Simon-Magus-Referenten, also weder Justin, noch Irenäus, noch Hippolyt im Syntagma, von Existenz oder Inhalt der Apophasis irgendeine Kenntnis verrät. (BEYSCHLAG 1974: 39)

Monographs by Josef FRICKEL (1968) and J.M.A. SALLES-DABADIE (1969) argued a case for the *Apophasis* being a genuine work of Simon; although, more correctly, FRICKEL claimed that the material used and discussed by Hippolytus was not the *Apophasis* but a “paraphrase” or “commentary” on it,²²¹ and that it is the original *Apophasis* which goes back to Simon. SALLES-DABADIE (1969: 143–144) argued that the *Apophasis* provides an example of an archaic gnosis (a primitive, philosophic Gnosticism) which might easily be dismissed as being

²¹⁸ Cf. HILGENFELD 1966: 181; WAITZ 1904: 138; CERFAUX 1926: 15; RUDOLPH 1972: 338.

²¹⁹ VON HARNACK 1888: 271 n. 1, “So wenig die gnostischen Evangelienapokalypsen des 2. und 3. Jahrhunderts mit dem historischen Jesus zu tun haben, obwohl derselbe darin unaufhörlich zu reden scheint, ebensowenig ist es gestattet, die Megale Apophasis, nur weil sie angeblich eine Rede Simons sein soll, mit dem ‘historischen’ Simon in Verbindung zu bringen.”

²²⁰ CERFAUX 1926: 18 n. 1.

²²¹ FRICKEL 1968: 203, “Aus der literarischen Eigenart dieses Berichtes ergab sich damit der Schluss, dass Hippolyts Vorlage nicht die *Apophasis Megale*, sondern nur eine Paraphrase zu dieser war.”

entirely non-Gnostic if scholarship did not possess the evidence of later Gnostic systems having been influenced by it: “une gnose tellement archaïque, qu’elle ne mériterait même pas le nom de ‘gnose’, si nous savions ... que plusieurs systèmes gnostiques se sont inspirés de sa doctrine.”

Generally the research community²²² has been unimpressed by SALLES-DABADIE’s work. Despite some worthwhile observations, SALLES-DABADIE was not successful in proving either that the *Apophysis* was an early Gnostic document, or that Simon was its author.

Insgesamt wird man über die referierten Arbeiten sagen müssen, daß es ihnen trotz wertvoller Einzelbeobachtungen weder gelungen ist, die MA als altes gnostisches Dokument zu erweisen, noch—damit zusammenhängend—Simon Magus als ihren Verfasser bzw. ihren engen Zusammenhang mit ihm plausibel zu machen. (LÜDEMANN 1975: 28)

The study by FRICKEL provided a literary-critical analysis of the *Apophysis* and other sections in the *Refutatio* where Hippolytus’ *Vorlage* could be discerned, or reconstructed from his epitome in Book 10. FRICKEL concluded that in those places Hippolytus almost never summarises but quotes verbatim. Also, whenever he abbreviates he does so by omitting entire blocks of information. Further, the appearance of the verb φησί in the *Apophysis* is not a sign of omission or summary, as in other literature, but only the separator of paragraphs or, more frequently the introduction of an explanatory comment.²²³

MEEKS (1979: 140) considered FRICKEL’s work a sober and persuasive argument. Despite the fact that FRICKEL restricted his analysis to “formal criteria”—promising a future volume to discuss content, which has yet to appear—MEEKS (1979: 141) claimed “he has made his basic case, which has important implications for the way Hippolytus’

²²² Cf. WILSON 1979: 488. Wilson comments that the work of Salles-Dabadie “has on the whole met with rather a cool reception.” BEYSCHLAG (1974: 92–93) describes the conclusions of Salles-Dabadie as “sensational” and “naïve.”

²²³ FRICKEL 1968: 203, “Dazu wurden zuerst zwei literarische Eigenheiten des Berichtes untersucht, die beim Lesen den Eindruck erwecken konnten, als ob H. seine Vorlage frei zusammengefasst oder gekürzt hätte: das mit auffälliger Häufigkeit im Text sich findende φησί ... Die Untersuchung des φησί ergab, dass dieses in erster Linie ein Kriterium für eine in der Vorlage selbst vorhandene Erklärungen, d.h. aus dem kommentarischen Charakter der Vorlage. Ähnlich zeigen auch die beiden Kurzfassungsformeln keine Zusammenfassung H.s an, sondern jeweils eine solche in der Vorlage selbst.”

report can be used.” However, RUDOLPH,²²⁴ BEYSCHLAG²²⁵ and LÜDEMANN²²⁶ have argued that FRICKEL was unsuccessful in establishing a clear link between Simon and the authorship of the *Apophasis*. WILSON directly identifies the important point at issue:

The problem here is that we have no means of proving for this period that the alleged author of a book ever actually wrote it. In an age when the traditional ascriptions of the books of the New Testament are widely disputed, it is no longer possible to accept without more ado the statements of early Fathers about works attributed to heretical leaders. (WILSON 1979: 489)

Today the authorship of the *Apophasis Megale* remains as much a question in dispute as the person of Simon himself. However, what is beyond question is that the *Apophasis* contains tantalising material of greater importance for Simon Research than the bold ascription:

λέγει γὰρ Σίμων δια(ρρή)δην περὶ τούτου ἐν τῇ Ἀποφάσει οὕτως·
«ὡμῖν οὖν λέγω ἢ λέγω καὶ γράφω ἢ γράφω, τὸ γράμμα τούτου».

For Simon expressly speaks of this in the Revelation after this manner: “To you, then, I address the things which I speak, and (to you) I write what I write.” (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 18,2)

There are certain details in the *Apophasis* which suggest a degree of correspondence with the earliest Simon source, the report in Acts. Among the more significant of these details we can list the following:

- (a) When Hippolytus describes the “heavenly” (ἄνωθεν) offshoot of the invisible Σιγή as a “great power” (μεγάλη δύναμις)²²⁷ the

²²⁴ RUDOLPH (1977: 304) comments, “In welchem Verhältnis die AM daher zu ihm steht, ist wieder ganz unsicher geworden. Frickel müßte dieses Problem in seinem angekündigten 2. Band näher zur Sprache bringen.”

²²⁵ BEYSCHLAG (1974: 92) is dismissive of Frickel’s project and his conclusions. “Daß eine solche Hypothese, zumal wenn sie fast ohne Seitenblick auf das religionsgeschichtliche Problem der Apophasis und die übrigen Simon-Magus-Texte vertreten wird, im Grunde ein ‘Ritt über den Bodensee’ ist, liegt auf der Hand. Wirklich kontrollieren läßt sie sich jedenfalls nicht, vom Verhältnis der Apophasis zu ‘Simon’ ganz zu schweigen.”

²²⁶ LÜDEMANN (1975: 26) observes that the two parts of Frickel’s theory can be separated, and that the identification of Simon as the author of the *Apophasis megale* (= MA) remains in doubt. “Frickel betrachtet im übrigen Simon als Verfasser der MA, doch ließe sich diese These auch ohne weiteres von dem Hauptergebnis seiner Arbeit abtrennen.”

²²⁷ *Ref.* VI 18,3.

obvious question arises of a possible correspondence with Luke's report about the public acclamation of Simon as "the power of God called great: οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη."²²⁸

- (b) The description of the "earthly" (κάτωθεν) offshoot of the invisible Σιγή as feminine and "a great intelligence—source of all: Ἐπίνοια, μεγάλη θήλεια, γεννώσα τὰ πάντα (*Ref.* VI 18,3)" raises questions about possible relationships with Justin's πρωτὴ ἔννοια (*Apol.* I 26,3) and Peter's discernment of Simon's heart in Acts 8:22, ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου.
- (c) The reference to Simon as "the one who stood, stands, and will stand: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐστὼς στὰς στησόμενος"²²⁹ is suggestive of Samaritan expectations for an eschatological figure called "the Standing One," and the triadic formula has divine overtones which are reported as explicit claims by the disciples of Simon, that "he suffered in Judaea as 'Son,' and in Samaria as 'Father,' and among the rest of the nations as the Holy Spirit: καὶ παθεῖν δὴ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ... ὡς υἱόν, ἐν δὲ τῇ Σαμαρείᾳ ὡς πατέρα, ἐν δὲ τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν ὡς πνεῦμα ἅγιον" (*Ref.* VI 19,6).²³⁰
- (d) The accusation of sexual promiscuity (deviancy?) by Simon and his followers (οἱ δὲ αὐτοῖς, μιμηταὶ τοῦ πλάνου καὶ μάγου Σίμωνος γινόμενοι, τὰ ὅμοια δρῶσιν, ἀλογίστως φάσκοντες δεῖν μίγνυσθαι),²³¹ and the nomination by Simon of "fire" as the originating power/principle of the universe (Γέγονεν οὖν ὁ κόσμος ὁ γεννητὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγεννήτου πυρός),²³² raise questions about cultural and religious syncretism in the teachings of Simon and the Simonians.

These are some of the research issues posed by the *Apophysis* that still need to be evaluated in greater detail. They will be given more focus within a later chapter dealing with Simon as "Gnostic."

²²⁸ Acts 8:10.

²²⁹ *Ref.* VI 18,4.

²³⁰ Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,1.

²³¹ *Ref.* VI 19,5.

²³² *Ref.* VI 12,1.

4.3.1 The Image of Simon in Hippolytus

Hippolytus presents information about Simon commonly reported by others, although often expanding, abbreviating, and even rearranging details. For this reason it is difficult to provide a concise overview of Hippolytus' treatment of the Simon story. However, already in the opening sentences of Hippolytus' major treatment of Simon (*Ref.* VI 2) there are indications that this author's primary concern is with the successors to Simon:

Ἔσα μὲν οὖν ἐδόκει τοῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄφως τὰς ἀρχὰς παρειληφόσι καὶ κατὰ μείωσιν τῶν χρόνων εἰς φανερόν τὰς δόξας ἐκουσίως προενευκαμένοις, ἐν τῇ πρὸ ταύτης βίβλῳ οὕση πέμπτη τοῦ ἐλέγχου τῶν αἱρέσεων ἐξεθέμην, νυνὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν ἀκολούθων τὰς γνώμας οὐ σιωπήσω.

Whatever opinions, then, were entertained by those who derived the first principles from the serpent, and in process of time deliberately brought forward into public notice their tenets, we have explained in the book preceding this, (and) which is the fifth of the *Refutation of Heresies*. But now also I shall not be silent as regards the opinions of (those) who follow these ... (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 6,1).

Whereas Justin²³³ and Irenaeus²³⁴ portray Simon as the source of all subsequent heresies, Hippolytus concludes that the remaining sects derive from the Naassenes (the Ophites)!²³⁵ Hippolytus argued that since the Naassenes had derived their name from the Hebrew word for "serpent," they were to be considered the progenitors of all following Gnostic sects. Certainly the Naassene claim to be Gnostics *par excellence* only galvanised Hippolytus' opinion:

Οἱ οὖν ἱερεῖς καὶ προστάται τοῦ δόγματος γεγέννηται πρῶτοι οἱ ἐπικληθέντες Ναασσηνοί, τῇ Ἑβραϊδί φωνῇ οὕτως ὀνομασμένοι – νάας γὰρ ὁ ὄφης καλεῖται – μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐπεκάλεσαν ἑαυτοὺς γνωστικούς, φάσκοντες μόνοι τὰ βάθη γινώσκειν. ἐξ ὧν ἀπομερισθέντες πολλοὶ πολυσχιδῆ τὴν αἴρεσιν ἐποίησαν οὖσαν μίαν, διαφόροις ὀνόμασι τὰ αὐτὰ διηγούμενοι, ὡς διελέγξει προβαίνων ὁ λόγος.

The priests, then, and champions of the system, have been first those who have been called Naasseni, being so denominated from the Hebrew language, for the serpent is called *naas* [in Hebrew]. Subsequently, they have styled themselves Gnostics, alleging that they

²³³ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,1–3; 56,1–4.

²³⁴ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 22,2–23,4. Irenaeus calls Simon *fons et radix haereticorum*.

²³⁵ *Ref.* V 6,3–4; 11,1; VI 6,1.

alone have sounded the depths of knowledge. Now, from the system of these [speculators], many, detaching parts, have constructed a heresy which, though with several subdivisions, is essentially one, and they explain precisely the same [tenets]; though conveyed under the guise of different opinions, as the following discussion, according as it progresses, will prove. (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* V 6,3–4).

Hippolytus retells the story of Apsethus the Libyan to provide a counter to the witness of Simon's disciples (the "parrots" of Simon) that Simon was the "Standing One;" that is, the Christ. According to the story, Apsethus desired to become a god (ἐπεθύμησε θεὸς γενέσθαι) and Hippolytus concluded that Simon was subject to similar passions: καὶ πέπουθεν ὁ μάγος πάθος τι παραπλήσιον Ἀψέθῳ. Rather than being of divine descent, Hippolytus aimed to prove by his exposé that Simon was a man:

ἀλλ' ἄνθρωπος ἦν, ἐκ σπέρματος γέννημα γυναικός, ἐξ αἱμάτων καὶ ἐπιθυμίας σαρκικῆς καθάπερ καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἄνθρωποι γεγεννημένος.
[but] was a man, offspring of the seed of a woman born of blood and the will of the flesh, as also the rest of humanity. (HIPPOLYTUS *Ref.* VI 9,2)

Apart from the ethnic background and geographical location of Simon's activities, the only clear connection between Hippolytus' account and the Acts is the detail that Simon was "reproved by the Apostles, and was laid under a curse, as it has been written in the Acts" (*Ref.* VI 20,2). Beyond that, Hippolytus' material provides obvious expansions and additions: including, (1) details about Simon's appearance and actions in Rome; (2) long extracts from an alleged Simonian source entitled "the Great Revelation;" and (3) claims that Simon's followers were libertines.

Justin had already described the "magic activities" of Simon in Rome (*Apol.* I 26,2: ποιήσας μαγικὰς) during the reign of Claudius (41–54CE), but Hippolytus transposed these events to the time of Nero (54–68CE), and appends his unique description of Simon's demise. Apparently in a bold attempt to verify his claims, Simon stated that if he were to be buried alive, he would rise three days later. But, concluded Hippolytus, Simon remained in the grave because he was not the Christ: οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὁ Χριστός (*Ref.* VI 20,3).

This expansion of the "Simon in Rome" story deserves to be read with suspicion. BEYSCHLAG (1974: 20) is correct to identify these additional details as pure Christian propaganda. "Daß solche Erweiterungen der Simon-Rom-Legende rein kirchlicher Herkunft sind, bedarf keines Beweises."

4.4 Epiphanius

Epiphanius was born early in the 4th century (c.310–320CE) near Eleutheropolis in Palestine.²³⁶ Raised in a Christian home²³⁷ Epiphanius received his early education from monks (Sozomen, *Hist.* VI 32) and completed his training in Egypt under the mentorship of several famous monks.²³⁸ Upon returning to Palestine (c.335CE) he founded a monastery at Eleutheropolis (*Ancoratus*, Praef.) and served as its abbot. A significant life-long influence upon Epiphanius, was his friend and teacher the ascetic Hilarion (c.291–371CE), who undoubtedly supported the election of Epiphanius as Bishop of Salamis (Cyprus) in c.367CE.

This brief thumbnail sketch of Epiphanius' life reveals a narrow, austere, chaste, and controlled formation in the Christian faith. Those early years offer some explanation for his later narrow mindset and sharp criticism of any expressions of belief inconsistent with his own.²³⁹ Further, Epiphanius' claim of firsthand contact with a sexually-orientated group in Egypt (whom he later identified as "Gnostic"), not only details how both chastity and faith were threatened in his youth (*Pan.* XXVI 17,4–9) but exposes some reason for his blanket rejection of anything labelled or claiming to be Gnostic.

Epiphanius composed two major treatises: *Ancoratus*, written in 374CE, and *Panarion* which was commenced in 375CE and completed three years later. Epiphanius described the focus and design of *Panarion*—or "Medicine Chest" of antidotes for a list of eighty afflictions—as being like the investigations of Greek naturalists and botanists (*Pan.* I 1,3); saying that, in both cases, the process of identification required the precise description of "roots and origins." According to Epiphanius the classification of any sect required the identification of its founder, the tracing of a succession back to this founder, and the existence of devotees to this particular mode of thought and life.

²³⁶ Biographical information for Epiphanius is found chiefly in his own writings, and the ecclesiastical histories of Sozomen and Socrates.

²³⁷ His *Letter to Theodosius*, cited in NICEPHORUS' *Adv. Epiphanium* XV 61, claims that he was raised in "the faith of the fathers of Nicaea." Cf. WILLIAMS 1987: xi [n. 8].

²³⁸ DECHOW 1988: 32–34.

²³⁹ Cf. ODCC 1990: 465. "His unbending rigidity, his want of judgement, and his complete inability to understand any who differed from him were reflected in his writings no less than his life."

Documentary sources cited by Epiphanius include the works of Hippolytus, Clement, and Eusebius, but his chief source of information was Irenaeus²⁴⁰ whom he greatly admired (*Pan.* XXXI 33,1–2). As POURKIER summarises:

Épiphane utilise Hippolyte comme source de base mais ne se contente pas de cette source unique; il fait appel en particulier à Irénée et n'hésite pas à faire des additions personnelles, ce qui nous permet de mieux discerner certains caractères de son hérésiologie. (POURKIER 1992: 255)

The writings of Epiphanius have continuing value because they record many sources now lost in their original form;²⁴¹ yet, his work is also described as superficial, verbose, and often inaccurate. One example is his extensive and lurid description of licentious “Gnostic” sects: Phibionites, followers of Epiphane, Stratotics, Levitics, and Borborites (*Pan.* XXV 1,1–XXVI 19,6). Epiphanius even claimed that:²⁴²

Simon instituted mysteries consisting of dirt and—to put it more politely—the fluids generated from men’s bodies through the seminal emission and women’s through the menstrual flux, which are collected for mysteries by a most indecent method. (*Pan.* XXI 4,1)

Historically, Epiphanius’ claim about firsthand contact with so-called gnostics in Egypt has generally been accepted as reliable and important due to the extensiveness of his description and the inclusion of mythical names and motifs found in other recognised Gnostic materials.²⁴³ Yet, perhaps this report is equally famous because of its description of bizarre sexual rituals.

Epiphanius says he was lured into the group by certain beautiful women who were committed to rescuing people not strong enough to save themselves. Yet his reference to Joseph and the wife of Potiphar (*Gen* 39) alerts the reader to the seductive intentions of his would-be saviours. Mercifully, Epiphanius says, like Joseph he was snatched by God’s help from their murderous grasp (*Pan.* XXVI 17,5), and the

²⁴⁰ It is clear that sixteen out of the twenty-two sects mentioned in sections I and II of *Panarion*, are almost entirely dependent on Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses*.

²⁴¹ TREU 1958: 531, “Es enthält eine Fülle von kritiklos verwandtem Stoff, ist aber wichtig für die Rekonstruktion verlorener Quellenschriften (zB griech Irénäus, Syntagma des Hippolyt) und für unsere Kenntnis früher Häresien.”

²⁴² Perhaps this charge is based upon the accusation of “lewdness” leveled in IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,3.

²⁴³ Cf. LAYTON 1987: 202–214.

women lamented “we cannot save the youngster; we leave him in the hands of the archon to perish!” (*Pan.* XXVI 17,6). However, as WILLIAMS astutely observes:

the interesting point is that Epiphanius does not say that he avoided being caught in their trap by discovering firsthand their lascivious designs. That is, he does not say that they actually brought him close to having intercourse with them, or that he fled in horror from some meeting in which he finally saw others performing the sexual rites mentioned ... Instead, he says that it was only “after we read their books and truly understood their intention” that we escaped entanglement and fled without being caught by the bait. (WILLIAMS (1996: 181)

In other words, this appears to be the extent of Epiphanius’ “firsthand contact” with sexually-orientated gnostics: his claim that the group’s writings revealed everything to him, even though he fails to quote any of his descriptions from these alleged writings. Epiphanius concluded that the roots of Gnostic sects were grounded in soil alien to the catholic faith. Expanding upon the observations of previous heresiologists Epiphanius argued that Gnostic opinions were shaped by the influences of magic, astrology, devil inspiration, misreading of scripture, moral failure, and Hellenic education (*Pan.* XXXII 3,8; LXIV 72). SCHNEEMELCHER (1960: 923–926) details how Epiphanius drew a sharp contrast and opposition between “Antike und Christentum.”

4.4.1 The Image of Simon in Epiphanius

Epiphanius introduces his major report on Simon (*Pan.* XXI 1–7) by repeating the common thread of tradition available to him, that Simon was a Samaritan Magos from the village of Gitthon at the time of the apostle Peter: Σίμωνος τοῦ Μάγου, ἐπὶ Πέτρου τοῦ ἀποστόλου, κώμης Γιτθῶν τῆς Σαμαρείας (*Pan. Anaceph.* II 21,1). His report also contributes significantly to the metamorphosis of Simon, and introduces an entirely new tone and character to the story. In quick succession the reader is told, in addition to not believing in Christ’s name in a “right or lawful way” (οὐκ ὀρθῶς οὐδὲ εὐαγῶως), that Simon and his followers are guilty of sexual immorality, moral indifference, idolatry, blasphemy, the denial of resurrection, and rejection of God as Creator:

[Simon] was originally a Samaritan, but he assumed Christ’s name through only that. But he taught that an unnatural act, sexual congress for the purpose of polluting women, is a matter of moral indifference.

He rejected the resurrection of bodies, and claimed that the world is not God's. He gave his disciples an image of himself in the form of Zeus to worship, and one <in the form> of Athena of the whore who accompanied him whose name was Helen. He said that he was the Father to Samaritans, but Christ to the Jews. (*Pan. Anaceph.* II 21,1)²⁴⁴

Simon is no longer identified by the more neutral title of μάγος but is denounced as a γόης (=sorcerer). Simon is said to have impressed and deceived the Samaritan people with his magic (μαγεία), and that he—no longer the population of Samaria, but Simon himself—claimed to be the supreme power of God come down from on high: ἔλεγεν ἑαυτὸν εἶναι τὴν μεγάλην δύναμιν τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἄνωθεν καταθεθῆκέναι (*Pan.* XXI 1,2).

Epiphanius' comment on Simon's baptism by Philip (Acts 8:13), suggests that Simon acted out a charade in taking the name of Christ. Further, that his baptism was incomplete (even invalid?) because Simon did not wait with the others for the arrival of the chief apostles (τὴν τῶν μεγάλων ἀποστόλων παρουσίαν) and receive the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands. Epiphanius adds the eexegetical comment that Philip, as a deacon, was not authorised to give the imposition of hands (οὐκ εἶχεν ἐξουσίαν τῆς χειροθεσίας) for the conferral of the Holy Spirit (*Pan.* XXI 1,4).

According to Epiphanius, the nefarious motives and actions of Simon are exposed by his "mimicking of the apostles" (ὑπεκορίσθη δὲ οὗτος τοὺς ἀποστόλους) and in his "devotion to sordid covetousness and avarice" (θιλοχρημοσύνη) by offering to pay for the authority to convey the Holy Spirit. Then Simon's deviant status is indelibly underlined by Epiphanius' assessment that he was "deranged and hallucinated from the devilish deceit in magic" (ἔχων τὴν διάνοιαν πεπονηρευμένη ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν τῇ μαγείᾳ διαμονιῶδους πλάνης), and that this conman "... poisoned the dignity of Christ's name" for those whom he had caught in his baneful error (αὐτοῦ πλάνην παρενθελὶς τῷ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀξιώματι Χριστοῦ), and that he induced death in his converts (*Pan.* XXI 2,1).

Epiphanius continues his evidence of Simon's morally deficient character and lecherous propensity by recording his "unnatural relationship" with Helen of Tyre. The structure of this Legend is the same as in Irenaeus, but some details are clarified and others added (cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,1–3; HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 14; TERTULLIAN,

²⁴⁴ Unless otherwise specified, English citations from the first sections of the *Panarion* are from Frank WILLIAMS' translation (NHS 35. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987).

De Anima XXIV 3; PS.-CLEMENT, *Hom.* II 25; *Rec.* II 12).²⁴⁵ For example, Epiphanius' report concerning a triumphant Helen who ascends to heaven clearly transcends the "suffering" Helen evident in Hippolytus and Irenaeus. Indeed, Epiphanius styles his description of Helen on the Gnostic myth of Barbelo or Prounikos²⁴⁶ (cf. *Pan.* XXV 2,2–4). Barbelo or Prounikos appeared to the archons and, because of her beauty, she caused the emission of their semen, which she gathered in order to recapture the spiritual power stolen from her by the evil angels.

The main sources for Epiphanius' report on Simon and the Simonians (*Pan.* XXI 1–7) are: Acts 8:4–25; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,1–4; Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI 1–18; and a further unidentified source, which BEYSCHLAG (1974: 24) claimed contained "nicht weniger als fünf Originalzitate aus dem Munde 'Simons' selbst." These original sayings are identified as follows:

- (i) Simon's transfiguration and descent to release his Ennoia:

Ἐν ἑκάστῳ δὲ οὐρανῷ μετεμορφούμεν, φησί, κατὰ τὴν μορφήν τῶν ἐν ἑκάστῳ οὐρανῷ, ἵνα λάθῃ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς μου δυνάμεις, καὶ κατέλθῃ ἐπὶ τὴν ἔννοιαν ... (*Pan.* XXI 2,4)

[He said] "I was transformed in each heaven to correspond with the appearance of the inhabitants of each, so as to pass my angelic powers by unnoticed and descend to Ennoia..." (WILLIAMS 1987: 58)

- (ii) An example of Simonian cosmology in the identification of Simon's companion as an incarnation of Helen known in Greek and Trojan times:

Ἦν δὲ αὕτη τότε ἢ ἐπὶ τοῖς Ἑλλησὶ τε καὶ Τρωσὶ καὶ ἀνωτάτῳ πρὶν ἢ τὸν κόσμον διὰ τῶν ἀοράτων δυνάμεων τὰ ἴσα ἰσότυπα πεποιηκυῖα. Αὕτη δὲ ἐστὶν ἢ νῦν σὺν ἐμοί, καὶ διὰ ταύτην κατελήλυθα. (*Pan.* XXI 3,1).

This woman was then, she who by her unseen powers has made replicas of herself in Greek and Trojan times and immemorially, before the world and after. She is the one who is with me now, and for her sake I am come down. (WILLIAMS 1987: 59)

- (iii) The ignorance displayed by the Greeks when facing the Trojan horse is a Simonian analogy for the ignorance of persons outside the sphere of Simon's gnosis:

²⁴⁵ Epiphanius gives more detailed accounts of Simonian exegesis, of Helen's transmigrations, and of her redemption by Simon. Cf. *Pan.* XXI 3,1–5.

²⁴⁶ Cf. *Adv. Haer.* I 29,4 where the Holy Spirit is equated with Prounikos. Epiphanius (*Pan.* XXI 2,4) equates the Holy Spirit and Prounikos with Simon's Ennoia.

Διὸ καὶ τὸν παρ' Ὀμήρῳ θούριον ἵππον μεμηχανημένον, ὃν νομίζουσιν Ἕλληνες ἐπίτηδες γεγενῆσθαι, ἔλεγε πάλιν ὁ γόης, ὅτι ἀγνοία ἐστὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ ὡς Φρύγες, ἔλκοντες αὐτὸν ἀγνοία, τὸν ἴδιον ὄλεθρον ἐπεσπάσαντο· οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἔθνη, τουτέστιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἐκτὸς τῆς ἐμῆς γνώσεως διὰ τῆς ἀγνοίας ἔλκουσιν ἑαυτοῖς τὴν ἀπώλειαν (*Pan.* XXI 3,3).

Thus again, the charlatan said that the wooden horse, the device in Homer which Greeks believe was made for a ruse, is the ignorance of the gentiles. And “as the Phrygians, in drawing it, unwittingly invited their own destruction, so the gentiles—the persons outside the sphere of my knowledge—draw destruction on themselves through ignorance.” (WILLIAMS 1987: 59)

- (iv) Simon identifies his Ennoia with Pallas Athena and makes an allegorical identification between Athena/Ennoia and the spiritual weapons of Eph 6:14–17.

τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀποστόλου εἰρημένα διὰ σπερεδὸν λογισμὸν καὶ πίστιν ἀγνῆς ἀναστροφῆς, καὶ δύναμιν θείου λόγου καὶ ἐπουρανίου, εἰς χλεύην λοιπὸν καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον μεταστρέφων. Τί γάρ, φησί, ταῦτα πάντα εἰς Ἀθηνᾶς τύπους μυστηριωδῶς ἐσχημάτιζε. (*Pan.* XXI 3,4)

[the cheat now] turned all these things, which the apostle had said with reference to firm reason, the faith of a chaste life, and the power of sacred, heavenly speech, into a mere joke. “What does this mean?” he said. “Paul was using all these figures mystically, as types of Athena.” (WILLIAMS 1987: 60)

- (v) Simon called his companion from Tyre by all these names: Ennoia, Helen, Athena, and the rest, saying that she was the lost sheep referred to in the Gospel and he had come to rescue her:

τὰ πάντα ταύτην καλῶν, καὶ ἔννοιαν, καὶ Ἀθηνᾶν, καὶ Ἑλένην, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα. Καὶ διὰ ταύτην, φησί, καταβέβηκα. Τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ γεγραμμένον ἐν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ τὸ πρόβατον τὸ πεπλανημένον. (*Pan.* XXI 3,5)

He would call her by all these names—Ennoia, Athena, Helen, and the rest—and say, “For her sake I am come down. For this is that which is written in the Gospel, the sheep that was lost.” (WILLIAMS 1987: 60)

BEYSCHLAG concluded his discussion of these excerpts from Epiphanius’ report, by saying that they most probably date from a second century CE Simonian tradition:

Daraus folgt, daß wahrscheinlich alle fünf Zitate einer simonianischen Offenbarungsschrift entstammen, in der Simon Magus als Verkünder seiner eigenen Gnosis, d.h. als gnostischer Erlöser auftrat. Wenn man annehmen kann, daß diese Zitate, wie es das wahrscheinlichste ist, bereits im Syntagma des Hippolyt gestanden haben (vgl. Hippolyt. *Ref*

VI 19,1f.), so dürfte die hier benutzte simonianische Tradition aus dem 2. Jahrhundert stammen. (BEYSCHLAG 1974: 31–32)

However, as RUDOLPH (1977: 293) notes, while BEYSCHLAG's train of thought is demonstrably astute (scharfsinnig) there is little chance of its meeting with approval because his reconstruction of key original sayings of Simon(ianism) depends on an even greater unknown; that is, the ability of scholarship to historically verify the *Syntagma* tradition of Hippolytus hypothetically distilled from the writings of Epiphanius. LÜDEMANN (1975: 34, 38) concluded that such a reconstruction is impossible, because "das Syntagma Hippolyts ein dunkles Blatt ist," that "für seine Untersuchungen keine Grundlage abgeben kann" (LÜDEMANN 1975: 35).

While the literary-historical issues connected with the unidentified source for Epiphanius' report on Simon and Simonianism remain a matter of debate, there can be no question about the authorial intention and effect of chapter XXI. Simon is convicted by words from his own mouth as Epiphanius used the first person to report some of Simon's "fairy tale:" "Ἐλεγε δὲ μῦθον τινα εἰς ταῦτα (*Pan.* XXI 2,5). These "quotations" are common in any process of status degradation, and Epiphanius effectively wields his labels to confirm Simon's deviant status.

4.5 The Pseudo-Clementine Literature

The "Pseudo-Clementines" is a term given to several writings that describe the life of Clement of Rome, and claim him as their author. The texts include (1) the Greek *Homilies*; (2) the Latin translation of *Recognitions*; and (3) the Syriac Clementines which consist of parts of the Greek *Recognitions* I–IV, and *Homilies* X–XIV. This section will not attempt to deal with critical questions regarding authorship, source traditions, text histories, editions and translations of the Pseudo-Clementines. The reader is referred elsewhere²⁴⁷ to comprehensive surveys, studies and critical editions.

The importance and value of the Pseudo-Clementine Literature (dated variously as early third, or fourth century CE) is still keenly debated today. Generally these materials are considered to have a Judaistic-

²⁴⁷ JONES 1982: 1–33, 63–96; STRECKER 1992. F. Stanley JONES provides comprehensive details on the current state of research. STRECKER's third edition has an improved text apparatus.

Gnostic tendency. In the “Recognitions” Christ is considered a Divine Aeon who had previously been revealed in Adam and Moses. These documents (Homilies: Ὁμιλίαι; and Recognitions: Ἀναγνώσεις) were of great importance to the Tübingen School, who dated them early, and saw in their narratives about Simon Magus a reflection of a conflict between Peter and Paul in earliest Christianity. Hence their place in our investigations.

However, the Pseudo-Clementines not only provide details about Simon too numerous and diverse to discuss within the confines of this thesis, they also clearly represent a different literary genre to earlier Simon sources: namely, they are an example of religious and philosophical romance. In addition to biographical details, testimonies are given about the Teachings of Simon, his Personal Claims, the origin of Magic, and the progress of the Christian message.

Both BEYSCHLAG²⁴⁸ and LÜDEMANN²⁴⁹ separately concluded that the Pseudo-Clementine Literature represents only minor worth for Simon Research, yet clearly (1), the legend of Simon and Dositheus—as detailed in *Hom.* II 24—and (2), the alleged claims of Simon to be the “Standing One: ὁ ἑστῶς,” and (3), the description of Helen in *Hom.* II 25 (cf. *Rec.* II 12) as “wisdom” and the “mother of all” are worthy of further consideration in chapters discussing Simon as “Gnostic.”

4.5.1 The Pseudo-Clementine Image of Simon

As in the reports of Justin and Epiphanius, the Pseudo-Clementine Simon is introduced as a Samaritan from the village of Gitton (*Rec.* I 12; II 7; *Hom.* I 15; II 14; 22). Not only is Simon located geographically, but also, through the naming of his parents—Rachel and Antonius—he is socially located. Biographical details continue with a description of Simon’s formative period in Alexandria, where he is said to have been schooled in Greek culture (Ἑλληνικῆ παιδεία) and magic (μαγεία). Further, Simon’s personality is described in megalomaniac terms with Simon not merely being ambitious, but desirous of recognition as “a certain supreme power” (θέλει νομίζεσθαι ἀνωτάτη τις εἶναι δύναμις)—greater than the God who created the world. The claim is also made that Simon paraded as the Christ (Χριστὸν ἑαυτὸν αἰνισσόμενος), welcoming the epithet “the Standing One:” ἑστῶτα προσαγορεύει (*Hom.*

²⁴⁸ BEYSCHLAG (1974: 67), “vollständig wertlos.”

²⁴⁹ LÜDEMANN (1975: 91), “allesamt wertlos.”

II 22). Essentially, these are the common details of Simon's life shared by the *Recognitions* and *Homilies*, together with the information that Simon was formerly a disciple of John the Baptist (*Hom.* II 23).²⁵⁰

The Pseudo-Clementines also contain scattered testimonies about Simon provided by numerous witnesses. The collective weight of these eye-witness accounts serves to denounce Simon; culminating in a classic piece of Christian propaganda when Faustianus, wearing the face of Simon, confesses to the people of Antioch: "whatever you have wondered at in me was done, not by means of truth, but by the lies and tricks of demons, that I might subvert your faith and condemn my own soul" (*Rec.* X 66).

Simon is frequently called a magician²⁵¹ (*arte magus*), and commonly a deceiver (*Rec.* II 5: *agnovissemus quod deceptor esset et magus*; cf. *Hom.* II 25). The book of *Recognitions* claims that "diverse and erratic superstitions took their beginning in the magic art:" *diversae et erraticae superstitiones ab arte magica initium sumpserunt* (*Rec.* IV 29), and that through the miracles of Simon some were made to doubt and others fell away to him: *alios dubitare, alios declinare fecerit ad se* (*Rec.* I 72,3). Now it is clear that, although the origins and practices of magic are given in considerable detail (*Rec.* I 30; II 9; III 57; IV 26–29; *Hom.* VIII 14; IX 3–5), including some interesting assertions about Zoroaster being of Noah's lineage and author of the magic art (*Rec.* IV 27: *primum magicae artis auctorem*), a common link with deception indicates that being called a magician can mean more than just being skilled in prestidigitation.²⁵²

Clement recounts how, in his youthful doubts and speculations about life after death, he had resolved to consult a "magician:" καὶ μάγον ζητήσας καὶ εὐρῶν χρήμασι πολλοῖς πείσω, ὅπως ψυχῆς ἀναπομπήν, τὴν λεγομένην νεκρομαντείαν, ποιήσῃ (*Hom.* I 5,1). At the time a certain friend convinced him to do otherwise in order to keep a good conscience in light of laws which prohibited such practices, and to avoid being prevented from growing in matters of piety: τὰ τῆς εὐσεβείας σου μηκέτι προχωρεῖν (*Hom.* I 5,7). For, "magicians" (including Simon)

²⁵⁰ Cf. *Rec.* II 8. Note that *Rec.* I 54 gives these details: that "some of the disciples of John, who seemed to be great ones, have separated themselves from the people, and proclaimed their own master as the Christ."

²⁵¹ *Rec.* I 72,3,5; II 5,6; 6,5; 7,1; 9,1; 19,8; III 12,4; 48,1–2; 56,2; 63,2,9; VII 33,1,3; IX 36,5; X 57,2; 58,2; 68,4; *Hom.* I 22,2; II 20,3; 36,3; III 30,1; IV 2,1; 2,3; VII 11,2,4; XIII 8,1; XVIII 9,1; XX 14,1; 15,2.

²⁵² Cf. *Rec.* I 72 where James commissions Peter to refute the magician, and to teach the words of truth. Also, *Rec.* II 5, where Simon is deemed a gifted orator.

performed their wonders to “astonish and deceive,” whereas *miracles of truth*—observes the Pseudo-Clementine Peter—were performed to “convert” and “save” (*Hom.* II 33).

4.6 The Apocryphal Acts of Peter

While Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius are intent on exposing and refuting the teachings of Simon, the *Apocryphal Acts of Peter* (= *APt*)—like the Pseudo-Clementine literature—focus on the magical activities of Simon. According to SCHNEEMELCHER (1992: II 283), the place of origin of the *APt* “cannot be certainly determined;” although there are positive indications for an origin in Asia Minor.²⁵³ The surviving manuscripts of the *APt* (c.150–200CE) are a long Latin text from Vercelli, dating from the seventh century CE, and an earlier Greek text containing only the martyrdom of Peter. The Vercelli manuscript does not bear a title, but is often referred to as *Actus Petri cum Simone*, a title penned by the nineteenth century Lutheran scholar Richard Adelbert LIPSIVS (1830–1892). This text of the *APt* concentrates entirely on the magical exploits of Simon. The author recounts these activities of Simon by adopting a dramatic literary form that can be divided into six Acts. In addition to providing early Christian entertainment, the story defends the divinity of Jesus Christ against the denials and opposition of Simon Magus.

In Act I (chapters 1–4) the author outlines the necessary background details to set the scene for future competition between Simon Magus and the apostle Peter. The claim is made that Simon travelled to Rome to dismantle the missionary achievements of Paul, and as a result the Christian community was in danger of collapse when Simon attracted many converts. Those who remained firm in belief were few in number and at the point of despair. Simon is introduced in chapter 4 as living in Aricia, a small town on the Via Appia south of Rome, which possessed an important cult of Diana/Artemis²⁵⁴ and Hekate. Simon claimed to be the great power of God: *se diceret magnam vitutem esse Dei* (*APt* 4, 31).²⁵⁵ But the author casts Simon as a messenger of Satan, a deceiver, a magos, and

²⁵³ Cf. BREMMER 1998: 14–20.

²⁵⁴ Cf. *KP* I 546.

²⁵⁵ It is noteworthy how the author introduces Simon when he first arrives in Rome. Simon is described as speaking to the people *voce gracili dicens* (a shrill, soft/weak voice). This clearly is a comic contrast to Simon’s public acclamation as “the great power of God.”

an enemy of Christ.²⁵⁶ His reputation in Roman circles is underlined by reference to his being called *in Italia deus* and *tu Romanorum salvator*.²⁵⁷ The divinization of Simon is reasserted later in chapter 10 when Marcellus confesses to Peter that he had erected a statue for Simon with the inscription *Simoni juveni deo*.²⁵⁸

In Act II (chapters 5–6), Peter is introduced en route to Rome on a divine rescue mission. Along the way he converts the boat captain, before receiving urgent news of the dire state of believers left in the wake of the magical activities of Simon. Peter hurries to Rome, and before he arrives he already exposes and condemns Simon as a magician (cf. *APt* 5, 6, 8, 16, 17, 23, 28: *Simonem ... multa mala facientem magico carmine ... Simonem magica arte usum fuisse et fantasma facta*).

In Act III (chapters 7–15), Peter arrives in Rome and arrangements are made for Peter to meet with Simon, who is now living in the home of Marcellus, a Roman senator, who has deserted the Christian faith under the influence of Simon. Simon initially refuses to speak with Peter, who in response sends an enormous dog into the house who speaks a message to Simon in a human voice. Simon is terrified and Marcellus is converted by this miraculous event, and in repentance Marcellus evicts Simon from his home. Further miracles are performed to confirm Marcellus in the faith. For example, Peter orders a smoked fish to become alive again and to swim,²⁵⁹ and so proves that he and not Simon is the servant of the living God. Later Simon returns and visits the house of Peter. He vilifies Jesus but Peter sends a nursing mother to Simon, whose child speaks to Simon with a mature voice, presenting Peter's challenge to a debate at the Forum of Julius Caesar. Then the infant invokes a curse in the name of Jesus Christ that Simon becomes dumb and leaves Rome until the next Saturday. So it happens.

You abomination of God and men, you destruction of the truth and
most wicked seed of corruption, you fruitless one of nature's fruits.
But you appear briefly and for a minute, and after this everlasting
punishment awaits you. Son of a shameless father, striking no roots

²⁵⁶ Cf. *APt* 17, 18, 31.

²⁵⁷ Cf. *APt* 4, 5.

²⁵⁸ Cf. JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,2. There is wide evidence for the practice of divinizing people who performed impressive deeds (eg. Acts 14:12; 28:6; PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* I 19).

²⁵⁹ Cf. BREMMER (1998: 12) who suggests there may be a connection here with Tertullian's reference to Christians as *pisciculi* (*De baptismo* 1), or to the image of Peter as "fisher of men."

for good but only for poison; unfaithful creature, devoid of any hope ... Jesus Christ says to you, "Be struck dumb by the power of my name, and depart from Rome until the coming Sabbath." (*APt* 15)

In Act IV (chapters 16–21), Peter prays for divine power to overcome Simon in a pre-arranged contest. Peter then speaks to the gathered Christian community and teaches them how to read and interpret the Scriptures, to defend the divinity of Jesus Christ, and to counter the continual denials of Simon. Peter then cures some blind women, who then receive a vision of Jesus Christ appearing in dazzling light.

Act V (chapters 22–29) begins with a dream sequence. Marcellus sees an ugly black woman dancing, who is the demon of Simon Magus. Then someone chaped like Peter kills her. The dream is interpreted as a favourable omen from God. They go and meet with Simon at the Forum. Simon is abusive and denounces Jesus Christ as a mere carpenter, but Peter expounds proofs from the Scriptures that Jesus is God. At that point the contest of power begins. Agrippa, the Prefect, orders Simon to kill a young man by magic, and then Peter to raise him from the dead. Simon kills him, but fails to raise him to life again. Peter prays to God, and after first raising a widow's son to life (cf. Luke 7:12–14), Peter raises the young man. With this miracle Peter confirms that Jesus Christ is the true God, and that Simon is not divine: simply a skilfull magos. The crowd responds: "There is only one God, the God of Peter" (*APt* 26).

In Act VI (chapters 30–32) Simon refuses to accept defeat and declares he will provide undeniable proof that Peter does not believe in the true God, but in an invented god. Simon then boasts he will fly up to God, whose power he is. The most impressive feat a magician can do other than a resurrection, is to fly. This theme is not uncommon in ancient literature.²⁶⁰ Simon flies, but falls to the ground and breaks his leg when Peter prays to Jesus Christ for Simon's downfall. Simon is taken to Kastor magus, who wants to perform surgery, but Simon dies on the operating table.

²⁶⁰ Cf. LUCIAN, *Philopseudeis* 13; PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* III 15, 17; VI 10–11.

4.6.1 The Image of Simon in the Apocryphal Acts of Peter

The *APt* gives a substantially different portrait of Peter and Simon compared with the New Testament picture. Rather than his deeds confirming his commission as God's messenger, the miracles attributed to Peter are intended to verify Peter's power and personality as opposed to Simon. Simon is clearly a negative copy of Peter. More than that, Simon is the embodiment of evil, whose anti-Christian speeches and open confrontation with Peter and the Roman Christian community is virtually described as a righteous battle between good and evil. Simon is introduced as creating a commotion in Rome through strange things (*mirabilia*) seen by many eyewitnesses. Those who spread the word concerning Simon claim he was *magna virtus dei* and that he did nothing without God. Christian enquirers even wondered if Simon was the Christ? LUTTIKHUIZEN notes how the storyteller initially avoids unequivocally negative statements about Simon:

Obviously he wishes to create tension in the introductory scene of his story about the contests between Peter and Simon: There is commotion (*turbatio magna*) in the church because some people had witnessed the miraculous deeds of a man who pretended to be or to represent the great power of God. To the Christians in Rome, a man who calls himself God's power, who does not do anything without God, and who performs miraculous deeds, can hardly be anyone other than Christ himself. The Christian readers or listeners, for their part, will wonder how in the course of the story this serious problem will be solved. (LUTTIKHUIZEN 1998: 42–43)

However, the sharpest contours of Simon's image are drawn by the author when describing his relation with Peter, and in the reactions of the crowd. As soon as Peter is introduced into the narrative the debasement of Simon begins. In particular, details of Simon being addressed first by a dog and then by a very young child are meant to humiliate Simon. When the dynamics of honour and shame in the ancient world are considered the chronicle of Simon's fall from grace is crowned with laughter in chapter 31 and rejection when Simon dies an unheroic death in a failed attempt to imitate the ascension of Christ.²⁶¹ Clearly, the assessment of Hippolytus would not be out of place in the *APt*; namely, Simon's failure

²⁶¹ Cf. *APt* 32, "I by ascending will show to all this crowd what manner of being I am."

to achieve what he claimed to be able to do proves that he was not the Christ: οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὁ Χριστός (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 20,3).

5. *Summary Conclusions*

A fundamental challenge facing modern attempts to clarify the certainties and uncertainties surrounding the first century CE figure of Simon of Samaria—the so-called “first Gnostic”—remains the fact that a great distance of time separates us from the story of Simon. Although some may consider such a comment almost entirely vacuous, the burden of Simon Research is never to underestimate the methodological and analytical issues involved in the interpretation of primary documents from temporal, social, cultural, and psychological contexts totally different from that of the opening decade of the twenty-first century.

Among the recognised limitations facing modern critics it was noted above that (1), the voice of Simon is silent apart from the reports of his often hostile opponents; that (2), of necessity all previous collation, comparison, and commentary has contributed to the decontextualisation of Simon sources and their contents; and (3), that modern scholarship is yet to appreciate fully the degree of orality in ancient Mediterranean cultures and how episodes like the Simon story developed within the media world of the first four centuries of the common era.

The burden of this chapter was to identify and clarify necessary data—through an interdisciplinary reading of the sources—for understanding the nature of the labels applied to Simon within a more realistic historical agenda; and, if possible, to describe a pre-Christian Simon. An overview of references to the μάγοι in classical Graeco-Roman literature demonstrated how the words *magic* and *magos* are etymologically linked; and, that the two nuances of μαγεία and μάγος have been transmitted down through the centuries in uneasy juxtaposition. Yet, it was concluded that when not distorted by the conflation of μάγος and “magician,” or the dislocations of protracted conflict, the image of the μάγοι in Classical sources is a positive and respectful one. Reference was made to the description of the μάγοι in the writings of the third century CE philosopher and historian Diogenes Laertius, to counter suggestions that the noun μάγος was only used in a pejorative sense by the first century CE.

From the sixth century BCE onwards the μάγοι were classified by some observers among the ecstasies, itinerant priests, and mystery cults.

While this does not ultimately determine who the μάγοι were, it clearly demonstrates how certain Greeks—who it appears were seldom good observers of other religions—supposed the μάγοι to be. These perceived activities and social status of the μάγοι in antiquity are to be counted among the contributing factors to the shape of Simon as a figure in popular Christian imagination during the first four centuries CE. Further, information from classical sources does suggest necessary modifications to the interpretation of Acts, which describes a certain Simon having been active for a considerable time in [the] city of Samaria: μαγεύων.

An analysis of Acts 8:4–25 considered the various literary-historical theories surrounding this earliest surviving witness to the Simon story; and (1), briefly outlined the position I have adopted regarding the underlying traditions in Luke’s text; then (2), detailed various textual considerations to be further discussed within later chapters on Simon as “Magician” and “Gnostic.”

An overview of the accounts of Simon in early Christian writers from Justin to Epiphanius—together with brief notes on the so-called Pseudo-Clementine literature and the Apocryphal Acts of Peter—included, alongside literary commentary, biographical, historical, and cultural information in order to provide a broader and more historically accurate matrix for our interpretation of Simon’s metamorphosis in early Christian literature. Questions and issues arising especially from the writings of Hippolytus and Epiphanius will be discussed within the pages of following chapters.

Finally, included with these summary remarks is Table 1, detailing the “Changing Shape of Simon in early Christian Literature.” In addition to its value as an overview and comparative tool, the Table suggests some possible pre-Lukan traditions.

TABLE 1 The Changing Shape of Simon in Early Christian Literature			
Pre-Lukan Traditions?	New Testament Acts 8:5–25	Justin Martyr <i>Apol.</i> I 26; <i>Dial.</i> 120	Irenaeus <i>Adv. Haer.</i> I 23,1–4
	A certain man called Simon; in that city [of Samaria]: Ἀνὴρ δέ τις ὀνόματι Σίμων προὔπηρχεν ἐν τῇ πόλει ... ἐξιστάνων τὸ ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας	Simon, a certain Samaritan (Σίμων μὲν τινα Σαμαρέα); native of the village Gittae	Simon the Samaritan: <i>enim Samarites</i>
There are practitioners in Samaria who follow the traditions of the μάγοι.	Simon was μαγεύων (= Doing what a μάγος does).	Simon did mighty acts of magic (μαγικός); assisted by demons: διὰ τῆς τῶν ἐνεργούντων δαιμόνων τέχνης	That magus (<i>magus ille</i>) of whom Luke says used magical arts: <i>magiam exercens.</i>
A certain Simon is amazing people in Samaria [Rome].	Amazed the people of Samaria: ἐξιστάνων τὸ ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας	Considered a god (ὡς θεός τεπίμηται) and honoured by the Romans with a statue. Simon deceived many.	Led people astray in Samaria. Drove them 'mad' by his magic activities (<i>multo tempore magicis suis dementasset eos</i>). Honoured with a statue in reign of Claudius. Glorified as a god: <i>quasi deus glorificatus est.</i>
Simon claimed to speak by and/or in the power of God. Simon claimed to be God's special/chosen messenger.	Simon claimed to be someone great: λέγων εἶναι τινα ἑαυτὸν μέγαν		Simon claimed to be great: <i>dicens se esse aliquem magnum.</i> He said he appeared as Son to the Jews, Father in Samaria, and Spirit to nations. Simon represented himself as Father over all: <i>super omnia pater.</i>

Tertullian <i>Haer.</i> I 3–4; <i>De Anima</i> 34; 57; <i>De Idol.</i> 9,6	Hippolytus <i>Ref.</i> VI 2–18	Epiphanius <i>Pan.</i> XXI	Pseudo-Clement <i>Recognitions & Homilies</i>
Simon Magus. The [infamous] Simon of Samaria	Simon, a native of Gitthon, a village of Samaria: Σίμωνος τοῦ Γειττηνοῦ κώμης τῆς Σαμαρείας	Simon Magus from the city of Gitthon in Samaria: ὁ Σίμων ... ἀπὸ Γιτθῶν ... ἐν τῇ Σαμαρείᾳ	Simon, a Samaritan from Gitthon (<i>Samaritanus ex castello Getthomum</i>); his father was Antonius, and his mother Rachel
	A deceiver and magos (πλάνος καὶ μάγος), adept in sorceries (μαγείας ἔμπειρος), assisted by demons	Simon was a sorcerer (γοήης)	A Samaritan magician (<i>Samaraeum magum</i>), by profession a magician (<i>arte magus</i>), trained in Greek literature
	Simon deceived many in Samaria with his magic (μαγείας)	Simon impressed and deceived people with magic (ἐφάντασάζε). He was deranged from the devilish deceit of magic: τῆς ἐν τῇ μαγείᾳ δαιμονιώδους πλάνης	Simon was a deceiver and a magician (<i>deceptor esset et magus</i>). He showed many miracles, and made some doubt: <i>mirabilia plurima ostendens alios dubitare ... fecerit</i>
	Simon tried to deify himself: θεοποιῆσαι ἑαυτὸν ἐπεχείρησεν. He claimed to be the <i>Standing One</i> (ὁ ἐστὼς στὰς στηρόμενος). He was a sorcerer, full of folly: γόης καὶ μεστὸς ἀπονοίας		Simon claims he is the <i>Standing One</i> (ἐστῶτα προσαγορεύει)—that is, the Christ, and the great power of the High God, which is superior to the Creator of the world

TABLE 1 The Changing Shape of Simon in Early Christian Literature			
Pre-Lukan Traditions?	New Testament Acts 8:4–25	Justin Martyr <i>Apol.</i> I 26; <i>Dial.</i> 120	Irenaeus <i>Adv. Haer.</i> I 23,1–4
Simon highly respected as a specialist in all matters religious The powers of Simon considered to be without peer	All the people acclaimed him as “the power of God known as the Great Power:” πάντες ... λέγοντες οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ καλουμένη μεγάλη	Almost all Samaritans and some from other nations worship Simon as the first god: πρῶτον θεόν. They claim Simon is God above all power, authority, and might: θεὸν ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως	All the people acclaimed him as “the power of God known as the Great Power:” <i>Hic est virtus dei quae vocatur magna</i>
During his mission to Samaria the (Hellenist?) Philip encounters a certain Simon—a spiritual figure	Simon heard the preaching of Philip, believed, and was baptized: ὁ δὲ Σίμων καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπίστευσεν καὶ ἐβαπτισθεὶς		Simon feigned faith (<i>Hic igitur Simon, qui fidem simulavit</i>)
Oral traditions about a clash between the Christianity in Samaria—perhaps a disagreement over who possesses the Spirit and is full of wisdom (Sophia/Ennoia). Compare description of the ‘seven’ in Acts 6:3, πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας	Simon followed Philip (ἦν προσκαρτερῶν τῷ Φιλίππῳ) and was amazed (ἐξίστατο) by the miracles he saw		Simon thinks apostles [Philip?] perform cures by magic (<i>per magicam et non virtute Dei</i>)
	Simon sees Spirit given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands: διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἀποστόλων		Simon supposes apostles give Spirit by magic: <i>per maiorem magicam scientiam et hoc suspicians fieri</i>

Tertullian <i>Haer.</i> 13–4; <i>De Anima</i> 34; 57; <i>De Idol.</i> 9,6	Hippolytus <i>Ref.</i> VI 2–18	Epiphanius <i>Pan.</i> XXI	Pseudo-Clement <i>Recognitions &</i> <i>Homilies</i>
Simon called himself the Supreme God: <i>summum deum.</i>	Simon became a god to his silly followers: Γέγονεν οὐν ὁμολογουμένως ... τοῖς ἀνοήτοις Σίμων θεός. The “parrots” of Simon (τοῦ Σίμωνος τοὺς ψιττακοὺς) claim that he was the Christ	Simon claimed he was the Supreme power of God: ἔλεγεν ἑαυτὸν εἶναι τὴν μεγάλην δύναμιν τοῦ θεοῦ	Who would not think that he was not a god come down from heaven for the salvation of humankind? (<i>et putet eum de caelis deum ad salutem hominum descendisse?</i>) [Rec. II, 6 cf. II, 10]
Simon became a believer		Simon mimics the apostles. He was baptized by Philip, but did not receive the Holy Spirit (οἱ δὲ πάντες χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ... οὐκ δὲ ἔλαβον πνεῦμα ἁγίου)	Simon once believed in Jesus but was deluded by demons: <i>quod et Iesu nostro crediderat</i> [Rec. III, 49]
			Simon the first and foremost disciple of John: πρῶτος καὶ δοκιμώτατος ἦν ὁ Σίμων (<i>Hom.</i> II, 23; <i>Rec.</i> II, 8 = Dositheus) Simon works wonders to astonish and deceive (<i>Hom.</i> III, 33)

TABLE 1 The Changing Shape of Simon in Early Christian Literature			
Pre-Lukan Traditions?	New Testament Acts 8:4–25	Justin Martyr <i>Apol.</i> I 26; <i>Dial.</i> 120	Irenaeus <i>Adv. Haer.</i> I 23,1–4
Certain ‘beggar-priests’ and wandering religious practitioners charge for their services	Simon offers money and asks for the ability (ἐξουσίαν) to confer the Spirit		Simon offers money and asks for the ability (<i>potestatem</i>) to confer the Spirit
Authority claims and counter-claims between dominant religious groupings and minor sects	Peter rebukes Simon (τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἶη εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὅτι τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνόμισας διὰ χρημάτων κτᾶσθαι) Peter urges Simon to repent		Peter rebukes Simon (<i>Pecunia tua tecum sit in perditionem</i>)
	Simon asks Peter to pray for him: δεήθητε ὑμεῖς ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ πρὸς τὸν κύριον		Simon ceases to believe in God: <i>Et cum adhuc magis non credidisset Deo.</i> He determines to be in conflict with apostles in order to make a name for himself. He intensifies his study and practice of magic to increase his power over people.

Tertullian <i>Haer.</i> 13–4; <i>De Anima</i> 34; 57; <i>De Idol.</i> 9,6	Hippolytus <i>Ref.</i> VI 2–18	Epiphanius <i>Pan.</i> XXI	Pseudo-Clement <i>Recognitions & Homilies</i>
Simon barterers for the Holy Spirit: <i>redemptor Spiritus sancti</i>		Simon's heart and reason are defective (οὐκ ὀρθὴν δὲ ... ἔχων τὴν καρδίαν οὔτε τὸν λογισμὸν) Simon was greedy. He offers Peter money for authority (ἐξουσίαν) to confer Holy Spirit	Simon has a <i>power</i> of the left hand of God, and <i>authority</i> to do harm to those who do not know God (<i>Hom.</i> VII 2) He is minister of the wicked one (<i>Rec.</i> III 49)
Simon received a just sentence from Peter. He was cursed by the apostles and ejected from the faith: <i>maledictum ab apostolis de fide eiectus est</i>	The apostles reproved Simon in the Acts, and Simon was laid under a curse: ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἠλέγχθη· καὶ ἐπάρατος γενόμενος	Peter says Simon has no part or share in the heritage of true religion: μὴ κλῆρον μηδὲ μερίδα ἔχειν ἐν τῷ μέρει τῆς θεοσεβείας	Peter calls Simon an “enemy of God:” <i>adversatur deo</i> [<i>Hom.</i> III 52] Simon is rebuked by an angel (<i>vehementer correptus</i>) and beaten (<i>vehementissime flagellatus</i>) for speaking against Peter [<i>Rec.</i> X 66]
Simon deceives many by his sorceries (μαγείας πλανῶτα πολλούς). Simon applies his energies for the destruction of the truth, as if to be con- soled with revenge. Peter opposes him repeatedly	Simon renounces the faith: ἀπευδοκήσας ὑστερον Peter opposes him repeatedly: πολλὰ Πέτρος ἀντικατέστη		Simon resists Peter as magicians did in opposition to Moses [<i>Rec.</i> III 56] Simon challenges Peter to a debate [<i>Rec.</i> I, 74]

TABLE 1 The Changing Shape of Simon in Early Christian Literature			
Pre-Lukan Traditions?	New Testament Acts 8:4–25	Justin Martyr <i>Apol.</i> I 26; <i>Dial.</i> 120	Irenaeus <i>Adv. Haer.</i> I 23,1–4
		Simon has a travel companion—a former prostitute named Helen	Simon rescued Helen from slavery in Tyre. He found her in the form of a common prostitute
Jewish opinion considered worshipping the ‘god’ of the nations as a <i>bitter root of poison</i> [Deut 29:17b; cf. Peter’s words to Simon in Acts 8:23, εἰς γὰρ χολὴν πικρίας καὶ σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας ὁρῶ σε ὄντα]	Peter urges Simon to repent ... so the thought of his heart may be forgiven: μετανόησαν οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας σου ταύτης ... εἰ ἄρα ἀφεθήσεται σου ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου	People say Helen is the first thought generated by Simon: τὴν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ ἔννοιαν πρώτην γενομένην λέγουσι	Simon says Helen is his first thought (<i>primam mentis eius Conceptionem</i>). Helen descended to create angels and archangels who created the world. The angels captured Helen because of jealous motives. Helen was imprisoned in one human body after another, suffering insults in each of them, and at last became a prostitute

Tertullian <i>Haer.</i> 13-4; <i>De Anima</i> 34; 57; <i>De Idol.</i> 9,6	Hippolytus <i>Ref.</i> VI 2-18	Epiphanius <i>Pan.</i> XXI	Pseudo-Clement <i>Recognitions &</i> <i>Homilies</i>
Simon uses proceeds of his magic (<i>ad praestrigitias uirtutis</i>) and buys Helen, a prostitute from Tyre, with the same money he used to barter for the Holy Spirit	Simon's primary purpose in coming to Tyre was to rescue Helen. Simon purchased Helen (as his slave) and enjoyed her person: ὠνησάμενος εἶχε	Simon was naturally lecherous. He had a secret relationship with prostitute from Tyre named Helen (μη ὑποφαίνων συνάφειαν ἔχειν πρὸς ταύτην)	[Simon] fell in love with that woman whom they call Luna [<i>Rec.</i> II 9]. Simon is going about in the company of Helen [<i>Hom.</i> II 25]
Simon pretended that Helen was his primary thought	Simon teaches that the earthly (κάτω-θειν) offshoot of the invisible Σιγή is "feminine," a "great intelligence"—source of all (Ἐπί-νοια μεγάλη θήλεια γεννώσα τὰ πάντα). Simon allegorizes the story of Helen of Troy. The transmigrations of Helen's soul until residing in Helen of Tyre	Simon taught Helen was the Holy Spirit (τὴν δὲ σύζυγον πορνάδα Πνεῦμα ἅγιον εἶναι τετόληκε λέγειν). Simon passed on his angelic powers to his Ennoia (first thought): ἵνα λάθω τὰς ἀγγελικὰς μου δυνάμεις καὶ κατέλω ἐπὶ τὴν ἔννοιαν.	Helen transformed appearance on her descent from on high; transmigrating from female bodies into various human bodies, cattle and the rest
[Largely the same information as provided by Irenaeus]			

TABLE 1 The Changing Shape of Simon in Early Christian Literature			
Pre-Lukan Traditions?	New Testament Acts 8:4–25	Justin Martyr <i>Apol.</i> I 26; <i>Dial.</i> 120	Irenaeus <i>Adv. Haer.</i> I 23,1–4
		Menander, a disciple of Simon, deceived by magic art: πολλοὺς ἐξ-απατήσαι διὰ μαγικῆς τέχνης οἶδαμεν. Menander claimed immortality for his followers	Menander a successor of Simon, also a Samaritan (<i>Samarites genere</i>) adept in magic (<i>ad summum magiae pervenit</i>)
		Those who follow the opinions of Simon, Menander, and Marcion, call themselves Christians: Χριστιανοὶ καλοῦνται	
	“The nations ... listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” [Deut. 18:14–15]		All heresies derive their origin from Simon: <i>ex quo universae haereses substituerunt</i>
	The image of the μάγοι in the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity	Mystic priests (<i>mystici sacerdotes</i>) in this sect are libertines. They practice magic arts, exorcisms, spells. They use love potions, charms, and familiar spirits. They are dream-senders. They worship Simon and Helen in images of Zeus and Minerva	

Tertullian <i>Haer.</i> I 3–4; <i>De Anima</i> 34; 57; <i>De Idol.</i> 9,6	Hippolytus <i>Ref.</i> VI 2–18	Epiphanius <i>Pan.</i> XXI	Pseudo-Clement <i>Recognitions &</i> <i>Homilies</i>
Menander a disciple of Simon: <i>similiter magnus</i> . Claimed the same status/role as Simon			
The first heretic to make his starting point the gospel was Simon: <i>qui ex evangelio haereticus esse uoluerunt</i>		Simon appeared under the name of Christ (καὶ προσχήματι ὀνόματος Χριστοῦ). Simon poisoned the dignity of Christ's name, and induced death in his converts	
Simonians use magic rites and incantations: μαγείας ἐπιτελοῦσι καὶ ἐπαιδαῖς. They transmit love-spells, dreams, and use familiar spirits. They worship Simon and Helen as Jupiter and Minerva: τὸν μὲν καλοῦντες κύριον, τὴν δὲ κυρίαν·		Simon gave his followers images of himself and Helen to worship, in the form of Zeus and Athena (καὶ προσκυνοῦσιν αὐτὴν ἐν εἶδει Διός)	By cunningly explaining certain things of this sort made up from Grecian myths, Simon deceives many [Hom. II 25]

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Pre-Lukan Traditions ?	New Testament Acts 8:4–25	Justin Martyr <i>Apol.</i> I 26; <i>Dial.</i> 120	Irenaeus <i>Adv. Haer.</i> I 23,1–4
<p>The alluring practices (wife-swapping and indiscriminate sexual activities) ascribed to foreign peoples by historians and popular writers in Graeco-Roman antiquity.</p> <p>Considerable evidence that the μάγοι practised incest as part of ritual duty and as a means of preserving the caste</p>			
<p>‘Popular’ observations of an apparent congruence between the teachings of ‘gnostics’ and the Greek philosophers Heraclitus and Empedocles concerning ‘fire’</p> <p>Well-known burial customs of Persians (μάγοι), including exposure.</p>		<p>Gnosis began with the Simonians <i>(vocati Simoniani a quibus falsi nominis scientia accepit initia)</i></p> <p>Simon appeared to have suffered in Judaea <i>(in hominibus homo appareret ipse, cum non esset homo, et passum autem in Iudaea putatum cum non esset passus)</i></p>	

Tertullian <i>Haer.</i> 13–4; <i>De Anima</i> 34; 57; <i>De Idol.</i> 9,6	Hippolytus <i>Ref.</i> VI 2–18	Epiphanius <i>Pan.</i> XXI	Pseudo-Clement <i>Recognitions &</i> <i>Homilies</i>
	Simonians applaud indiscriminate intercourse: μακαρίζουσιν ἑαυτοῖς ἐπὶ τῇ ξ(έ)νη μίξει	Simon instituted mysteries using seminal emission and menstrual flux (Μυστήρια δὲ ὑπέθετο αἰσχροτήτος)	This magician (Jupiter [cf. Simon?]) of many transformations ... committed incest with his sisters (<i>sororibus struprum intulit multiformis magi</i> [<i>Rec.</i> X 23])
	Simon teaches the generation of all from originating principle of fire (Γέγονεν οὖν ὁ κόσμος ὁ γεννητὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγεννήτου πυρός) [special material called <i>Apophasis Megale</i>]	Simon teaches a death and destruction of the flesh, but purification of souls only—and only if these are initiated through his erroneous knowledge. This is how the imposture of the so- called Gnostics begins: καὶ οὕτως ἄρχεται τῶν γνωστικῶν καλου- μένων ἡ ἀρχή	
In a phantom-like form of God, Simon [Christ?] experienced a quasi- passion	Simon appears to have visible form (ὡς καὶ ἄνθρωπον φαίνεσθαι) as the Son in Judaea (μὴ πεποιθότα), the Father in Samaria, and the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles	Simon ‘suffered’ without actually suffering [only in appearance]: μὴ πεποιθέναι, ἀλλὰ δοκῆσει μόνον	

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Tertullian <i>Haer.</i> 13–4; <i>De Anima</i> 34; 57; <i>De Idol.</i> 9,6	Hippolytus <i>Ref.</i> VI 2–18	Epiphanius <i>Pan.</i> XXI	Pseudo-Clement <i>Recognitions &</i> <i>Homilies</i>
	Simon gives a different application to various texts of Scripture from that intended by their writers (<i>Ref.</i> VI 14,1–2)	Simon claimed the Law is not God’s, but the power on the left (μη εἶναι δὲ τὸν νόμον θεοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἀριστερᾶς δυνάμεως ἔφασκε). Whoever believes the Old Testament must die: Πάντα δὲ τὸν πιστεύοντα τῇ Παλαιᾷ Διαθήκῃ θάνατον ὑπέχειν	Simon debates Peter, armed with false chapters of the Scriptures: ὁ Σίμων ταῖς ψευδέσιν τῶν γραφῶν περικοπαῖς ὀπλισμένος πολεμεῖν ἡμῖν προσέρχεται (<i>Hom.</i> III 3; cf. II 39)
	Simon appears among the apostles in Rome (ἕως καὶ τῇ Ῥώμῃ ἐπιδημήσας ἀντέπεσε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις). Simon claims ability to copy resurrection of Christ. Simon is buried but remained in the grave after three days “because he was not the Christ:” οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὁ Χριστός	Simon died in Rome one day when his turn came—when this wretched man fell down and died right in the middle of Rome (ἐπὶ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀποδοῦς, ὅτε ἐν μέσῃ τῇ τῶν Ῥωμαίων πόλει)	Simon debates Peter in Caesarea Stratonis (<i>Rec.</i> I 12; <i>Hom.</i> I 15). Many ‘repent of the evil thoughts’ they entertained about Peter because of Simon (<i>Rec.</i> X 69). People from Laodicea and Antioch are baptised (<i>Hom.</i> XX 23; cf. <i>Rec.</i> X 68–71)

CHAPTER FOUR

Simon the Magician

1. Introduction

A fresco painted by Felippion Lippi in the Brancacci Chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence, Italy, depicts Simon Magus falling to his death during a contest of power with Peter and Paul in the presence of Emperor Nero. According to early Christian legend, in an effort to demonstrate greater magical power than Peter, Simon Magus threw himself from a high tower and flew over Rome aided by demons, but was brought crashing to earth when Peter invoked the name of Christ.

The preservation of this episode from early Christian romance literature in Lippi's fresco and numerous other works of art,¹ which extend well into the sixteenth century, fuels the claims of FERREIRO that:

The applications, metaphors and typological lessons derived from the flight of Simon Magus are as diverse as the sources that conserved the story. The flight became more specifically a medium through which the Church censured heresy, insubordination to Church authority, and magic and witchcraft. (FERREIRO 1996: 164)

The tantalising prospect of exploring adaptations of the Simon Magus story in art and their relationship to the various literary traditions that circulated at every stage of development, however, I will leave to the dedicated efforts of FERREIRO.² Further, the pains-taking task of peeling

¹ COOK 1980: 29–43.

² FERREIRO 1996: 165. “We have not yet arrived at the full implications of the convergence of apocryphal and canonical sources into what the patristic and medieval Church called Orthodoxy and the central place the arch-villain Simon

back and cataloguing the layers of significance applied by almost two millennia of social and cultural presuppositions about magic and magicians, which have guaranteed the enduring censure of Simon, is beyond the scope of this project.

In this chapter, after a brief overview of the practice of magic in the Graeco-Roman world — including reference to the persistence and reputation of Jewish magic — our focus will be directed to investigating the claimed links between Simon and other magicians in the book of Acts. These efforts to detail an understanding of the nature and function of magic in the Graeco-Roman world are an unavoidable and necessary step in providing a clearer focus on the image of Simon and his reputation of being a “magician.” Alan SEGAL was correct in his observation that:

The most interesting question for scholarship, as I see it, is not whether the charge of magic ... is true or not ... [since] there can be no possible demonstration or disproof of a charge which is a matter of interpretation in the Hellenistic world. The most interesting question for scholarship is to define the social and cultural conditions and presuppositions that allow such charges and counter-charges to be made. (SEGAL 1981: 369–370)

The earliest and most extensive twentieth century study of magic in the Graeco-Roman world was the two volume work of T. HOPFNER, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber* (Leipzig, 1921–1924), republished in condensed form by the author under the title of “Mageia” in PAULY-WISSOWA, *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, XIV, 1 (1928) 301–393. Yet, his categorisation of the major varieties of magic — “Theurgie, Magie, and Goëtie” — and the primary objectives of magic (protection, healing, success, and knowledge) are no longer tenable in light of almost four generations of scholarly research including new archaeological and papyrological discoveries.

More recent studies have concluded that there never was an unambiguous, universally accepted meaning of magic in the Graeco-Roman world. This “lack” of meaning contributed to its use in a variety of contexts with wholly different meanings. As SEGAL (1981: 350–351) has observed, the meaning of magic changed as the context in which it

Magus type had in this complicated fascinating process. My efforts in the next several years will be dedicated to bringing such a study to fruition.”

was used changed.³ Further, anthropological research this century has confirmed that magic is as much a *relational* category as a substantive one: serving to differentiate between the person making accusation of magic and the person(s) labelled.⁴

2. Magic in the Graeco-Roman World

The practice of magic is frequently mentioned in the earliest examples of literature from Greece and Rome. For example, HOMER named the enchantress Agamende in his *Iliad*; and, in his *Odyssey* popularised the legend of Circe, who possessed the ability to turn men into swine. The Athenian author DEMOSTHENES (c.383–322BCE) mentions the beguiling activities of a certain Theodoris of Lemnos, who was sentenced to death for her use of occultic powers; and, the Greek historian HERODOTUS (c.480–c.425BCE) confirms the reputation of Lemnos for the practice of witchcraft. Arguably, though, the greatest sorceress in Greek mythology was Medea the sorceress Queen, who was the focus of the tragic epilogue to the adventures of Jason, prince of Iolus in Thessaly, as dramatised by EURIPIDES.

According to PLINY the Elder the first person to write a book on magic was Osthanes, who accompanied Xerxes on his war campaign against Greece (*Nat. Hist.* XXX 8). Pliny underscored his observation that magic arts “held complete sway throughout the world for many ages” (*Nat. Hist.* XXX 1–4), by recording opinions that Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato went overseas to learn magic arts and taught them on their return:

Certe Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato ad hanc descendam navigaverunt, exiliis verius quam peregrinationibus susceptis, hanc reversi praedicaverunt, hanc in arcanis habuere (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 9; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 10 [B 2]).

Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Plato went overseas to learn magic, going — to put it more accurately — into exile rather than on a journey. On their return they taught this art and considered it among their special secrets.

³ Cf. GARRETT 1989: 19. GARRETT comments that this ambiguity “... casts a shadow on those recent studies of magic and the New Testament that employ rigid definitions of or sets of identifying criteria for magic. Such definitions or criteria take for granted that which early Christians regarded as open to dispute.”

⁴ Cf. J.Z. SMITH 1978: 425–439.

The satirical writings of LUCIAN of Samosata (c.120–180CE), published in a period roughly contemporaneous with some of the earliest reports concerning Simon Magus, provide valuable commentary on the extent to which belief in magic occupied popular Greek imagination. For example, the legend of Glaukias and Chrysis, told by Lucian, reports one of the great love spells of the ancient Greeks. Glaukias asks for the intervention of a Hypoborean medium, who invokes Hekate, the goddess of magic and the underworld, to assist Glaukias in his unrequited love for Chrysis by “drawing down the moon.” In addition to detailing other love spells involving images and charms, Lucian records examples of visions, and necromancy; and in his *Menippus* and *The Lover of Lies* (*Philopseudeis*) Lucian describes various encounters with professional magicians.

To date, the Greek magical papyri⁵ continue to provide our most valuable source of information about magic rituals used by Graeco-Roman practitioners, and together with more recent archaeological discoveries—including magical paraphernalia, curse tablets, and other epigraphic evidence—complement extant literary sources about the prevalence and practice of magic.

⁵ ‘The Greek magical papyri’ (= *GMPT*) is the name given by scholars to a collection of magical spells and formulas, hymns, and rituals from the Graeco-Roman world. These surviving texts from an arguably larger corpus of materials, date from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE. According to Hans Dieter BETZ (1992: xli) these documents provide a rare glimpse into the vast religious “underworld” of late classical and early Christian times, and restore balance to modern research into Greek and Roman religions, which previously had been “unconsciously shaped by the only remaining sources: the literature of the cultural elite, and the archaeological remains of the official cults of the states and cities.” Further, that “[t]heir discovery is as important for Greco-Roman religions as is the discovery of the Qumran texts for Judaism or the Nag Hammadi library for Gnosticism” (BETZ 1992: xlii).

Yet as significant as the *GMPT* are for the history of religions, they do not provide primary information for this project which focuses on Simon Magus. Certainly, the *GMPT* give insights into religious functions of so-called magicians, however there is no single, unambiguous description in regard to their figure which might serve as a historical referent for Simon. Further, the task of this project is not to research ancient magic in either a general or phenomenological sense, but to analyse the historical worth and significance of the names (or titles) ascribed to Simon by history. To the extent that the *GMPT* assist this defined task, they will be referred to. Details of the discovery, compilation, translation and enduring significance of the *GMPT* have been thoroughly and competently documented elsewhere (PREISENDANZ 1973; NOCK 1972; FESTUGIÈRE 1932; NILSSON 1960; EITREM 1934; BETZ 1992).

The use of magic was firmly established in Rome before its invasion of Greece; in fact, the Sabine and Etruscan peoples enjoyed reputations for being necromancers, rainmakers, and water diviners.⁶ The Romans absorbed myths of their conquered subjects, and to the modern observer the result is an apparently contradictory array of images – temples of native Roman deities side by side with those of Greek and Eastern gods. The earliest reference to magic in Roman writings appears in a legal tablet known as the Twelve Tables (c.450BCE).⁷ One of its edicts prohibits the transplanting of crops from one field to another by spells. Pliny makes the comment that “the Twelve Tables still retain traces of magic among Italian tribes. It was only in AUC 657 [i.e. 97BCE] that the Senate passed a decree forbidding human sacrifice” (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 12).

Roman poets and authors, including HORACE (65–8BCE), VIRGIL (70–19BCE), OVID (43BCE–17CE) and LUCAN (39–65CE) occasionally refer to the activities of sorcerers and enchanters. In his uncompleted epic on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, known as the *Bellum civile* or *Pharsalia*, the poet LUCAN tells the story of Erichtho, a sorceress who practices magic and necromancy.⁸ TACITUS (c.55CE–after 115CE)⁹ the historian reports the work of Libro Drusus,¹⁰ a necromancer, and details activities of Vellada, a priestess-prophetess (and suspected sorceress). In his eighth *Eclogue*, VIRGIL describes the weaving of a love spell involving sympathetic actions: the burning of incense, the reciting of an incantation while circling a sacred altar, and the burning of two figurines of the lover, one of wax and one of clay.¹¹

*Effer aquam et molli cinge haec altaria vitta,
verbenasque adole pinguis et mascula tura,
coniugis ut magicis sanos avertere sacris
experiar sensus; nihil hic nisi carmina desunt.*
(VIRGIL, *Eclogue* VIII 64–67)

Bring water, tie a soft fillet around this altar
And burn on it fresh twigs and male frankincense,
That I may succeed in turning my lover from sanity
To madness by magical rites: all we need now is songs.

⁶ Cf. OGDEN 1998: 93.

⁷ Cf. KP 5, 1470; PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 18.

⁸ Cf. LUCAN, *Pharsalia* VI 508–610.

⁹ Cf. KP 5, 486. The year of Tacitus' death is unknown.

¹⁰ TACITUS, *Annals* II 27–32.

¹¹ Cf. VIRGIL, *Eclogue* VIII 74–75, 79–80, “... *terque haec altaria circum effigiem duco; numero deus impari gaudet ... limus et hic durescit et haec ut cera liquescit uno eodemque igni, sic nostro Daphnis amore.*”

Several of Rome's Emperors were fascinated by the occult, and were even reputed to be sorcerers. Beyond the recorded superstitions¹² of AUGUSTUS (r. 30BCE–14CE) and his respect for omens, TIBERIUS (r. 14–37CE) studied occult subjects in the company of his astrologer Thrasyllus,¹³ and Pliny claims that NERO (r. 54–68CE) attempted to learn magic but was unsuccessful. Nero's teacher, Tyridates of Armenia, had travelled to Rome by land rather than by sea because of certain religious views:

He refused to travel by sea, for the Magi consider it sinful to spit into the sea or defile its nature by any other human function. He brought the Magi with him and initiated Nero into their magic banquets (*magos secum adduxerat magicis etiam cens eum initiaverat*). Yet, although Tiridates had given Nero a kingdom, he was unable to teach him the art of magic (*non tamen cum regnum ei daret hanc ab eo artem accipere valuit*). This should be sufficient proof that magic is execrable, achieves nothing and is pointless. (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 17)

The Emperor VESPASIAN (r. 69–79CE) is credited with two effective healings. Following his occupation of Alexandria, he entered the temple of Serapis, alone, to consult the auspices concerning the duration of his rule. Concerned over a certain lack of authority and what might be called the divine spark, this is how SUETONIUS records both being given to Vespasian:

As he sat on the Tribunal, two labourers, one blind, the other lame, approached together, begging to be healed. Apparently the god Serapis had promised them in a dream that if Vespasian would consent to spit in the blind man's eyes, and touch the lame man's leg with his heel, both would be made well. Vespasian had so little faith in his curative powers that he showed great reluctance in doing as he was asked; but his friends persuaded him to try them, in the presence of a large audience, too – and the charm worked. (SUETONIUS, *The Twelve Caesars* X 7)

Although belonging to the later Empire, Emperor JULIAN (r. 361–363CE), the nephew of Constantine the Great and cousin of Constantius, provides testimony to the enduring attraction of magic and to its adherence by people from all levels of society.¹⁴ Julian had a reputation for religious eclecticism, on which Philip SCHAFF comments:

¹² PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* II 24; 93; XV 136–137; SUETONIUS, *The Twelve Caesars* II 96.

¹³ Cf. KOESTER 1982: I 308; SUETONIUS, *The Twelve Caesars* III 14.

¹⁴ LIBANIUS the Antiochene rhetorician provided the eulogy for Julian, in which he says of him: *μαντέων τε τοῖς ἀρίστοις χρώμενος, αὐτὸς τε ὧν οὐδαμῶν ἐν τῇ*

It sought to spiritualise and revive the old mythology by uniting with it oriental theosophemes and a few Christian ideas; taught a higher, abstract unity above the multiplicity of the national gods, genii, heroes, and natural powers; believed in immediate communications and revelations of the gods through dreams, visions, oracles, entrails of sacrifices, prodigies; and stood in league with all kinds of magical and theurgic arts. (SCHAFF 1981: III 43)

In summary, there is overwhelming evidence of the practice of magic in the Graeco-Roman world, and to its survival despite official prohibitions.¹⁵ This discordance between senatorial sanctions and widespread sympathetic supplications reveals a deep-seated ambivalence among the general populace towards magic arts. This ambivalence is cleverly identified through the reflections of Lucius in Apuleius of Madaura's *The Golden Ass*:

But as soon as Byrrhaena mentioned the magical art (*artis magicæ*), which has always aroused my curiosity, so far from feeling inclined to be on my guard against Pamphilë I had an irresistible impulse to study magic under her, however much money it might cost me (*ut etiam ultro gestirem tali magisterio me volens ampla cum mercede tradere*), and take a running leap into the dark abyss against which I had been warned.¹⁶

So, it seems that on an official communal level there was general agreement that magic was a dangerous and deviant activity, but privately there were many devotees who dallied with demotic spells and charms. However, Graeco-Roman magic was more than just a random collection of ancient remedies and rituals. As Georg LUCK (1991: 25) describes it, from the first century CE there was “a kind of curriculum of occult sciences” that included divination, astrology, and alchemy. The continuation of these magic arts and arcane rites into late antiquity cannot simply

τέχνη δεύτερος (Ἐπιτάφιας ἐπ' Ἰουλιανῶ: as quoted in SCHAFF 1980–1981: III 43). The fourth century CE Syrian historian from Antioch, AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS calls Julian: *praesagiorum sciscitationi nimiae deditus, superstitionis magis quam sacrorum legitimus observator*.

¹⁵ Ramsey MACMULLEN details how the foundation for anti-magic legislation was laid by the dictator of Rome Lucius Cornelius SULLA (138–78BCE), and that it could support a broad ban and array of punishments against magic practices due to the “very looseness of thought on the whole subject ... There was thus no period in the history of the empire in which the magician was not considered an enemy of society, subject at the least to exile, more often to death in its least pleasant forms” (MACMULLEN 1966: 125–126). Further, on survival of magic arts, see: BARB 1963; GOLDIN 1976; P. BROWN 1972.

¹⁶ APULEIUS, *The Golden Ass* II 6.

be attributed to their exotic allure or promise of personal advantage, but this social phenomenon needs to be understood within a complex matrix involving particular religious traditions,¹⁷ ancient cosmology and demonology. The ancient world, as Ramsey MACMULLEN (1966: 103) correctly observed “was as tangled in a crisscross of invisible contracts, so it might be thought, as our modern world is entangled in radio beams.”

As was argued in the introduction to this chapter, a necessary step in establishing reliable historical focus on the person of Simon – in particular, his reputation of being a “magician” – is to understand the nature and function of magic in the Graeco-Roman world. Details provided in the preceding pages, together with the following section on the reputation of Jewish Magic, provide a brief yet accurate thumbnail sketch of magic in the Graeco-Roman world. These details clearly demonstrate that magical beliefs and practices can hardly be over-estimated in their importance for the daily life of people in the ancient Mediterranean world.¹⁸

3. Jewish Magic

In *The Magic of Magic and Superstition* – an insightful contribution to Elizabeth SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA’s edited volume *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* – Judah GOLDIN probes the “astounding persistence, and universal diffusion, and success” of magic practices among Jews and Christians, despite direct commands to the contrary from Holy Writings and the Rabbis. Certainly, the evidence of literature from other than Jewish or Christian sources, including both novels and histories, supports the view that magic and miracles – or at least belief in them – were prevalent in the first century CE; and, that Jews in particular enjoyed a considerable reputation for magic practices. In fact, as the following pages describe, Jewish Magic was more than widely recognised: it was revered.

POMPEIUS TROGUS (Roman Historian, Augustinian period: *KP* 4, 1031–1033 [B 1]) is reported by Justin (3rd–4th century CE) as having

¹⁷ Cf. AUNE 1980: 1519.

¹⁸ Cf. BETZ 1992: xli.

described the biblical Joseph as a master magician and inventor of the science of interpreting dreams:

The youngest of the brothers [the sons of Jacob] was Joseph, whom the others, fearing his extraordinary abilities, secretly made prisoner and sold to some foreign merchants. Being carried by them into Egypt, and having there, by his shrewd nature, made himself master of the arts of magic, he found in a short time great favour with the king; for he was eminently skilled in prodigies, and was the first to establish the science of interpreting dreams; and nothing indeed of divine or human law seemed to have been unknown to him ... His son was Moyses, whom, besides the inheritance of his father's knowledge, the comeliness of his person also recommended. (JUSTIN, *Epitome* II 6–10)¹⁹

PLINY the Elder (23–79CE) acknowledged the role of Moses and the Jews in magic and the occult, commenting that “there is yet another branch of magic, derived from Moses, Jannes, Lotapes, and the Jews, but dating from many thousand years after Zoroaster: *est et alia magices factio a Mose et Janne et Lotape ac Judaeis pendens, sed multis milibus annorum post Zoroastren*” (PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 11; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 42).

APULEIUS of Madaura (c.124–170CE) referred to Moses in a listing of famous magicians as “of whom you have heard,” implying his reputation was well-known in the field of magic:

si quamlibet modicum emolumentum probaveritis, ego ille sim Carmendas vel Damigeron vel his Moses vel I(ob)annes vel Apollobex vel ipse Dardanus vel quicumque alius post Zoroastren et Hostanen inter magos celebratus est. (APULEIUS, *Apology* XC; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 59–60)

I am ready to be any magician you please—the great Carmendas himself or Damigeron or Moses of whom you have heard, or Iohannes or Apollobex or Dardanus himself or any sorcerer of note from the time of Zoroaster and Ostanen till now.

LUCIAN of Samosata (Sophist and Satirist; c.120–180CE) described how Jews practiced exorcism of evil spirits from possessed persons. Lucian derides those who think that “the spells” of Jews can cure the sick:

For my part, I should like to ask you what you say to those who free possessed men from their terrors by exorcising the spirits so manifestly? I need not discuss this; everyone knows about the Syrian from Palestine, the adept in it [i.e. exorcism], how many he takes in hand who fall down in the light of the moon and roll their eyes and

¹⁹ JUSTIN produced a Latin epitome of Pompeius Trogus' *Philippic Histories*. Translation is by Menahem STERN in FELDMAN 1996: 113.

fill their mouths with foam; nevertheless he restores them to health and sends them away normal in mind, delivering them from their straits for a large fee. (LUCIAN, *Philopseudeis* 16; trans. Loeb)

Some purge themselves with sacred medicine, others are mocked by chants imposters sell, and other fools fall for the spells of Jews. (LUCIAN, *Tragic Gout* 171–173; trans. Loeb)

DIOGENES LAERTIUS (c.200–250CE) reported the view that Jews were descended from the μάγοι (*Lives of Philosophers* I 9). Referring to Clearchus of Soloi (Peripatetic. 4th–3rd century BCE) in his tract *On Education*, Diogenes noted the claim that the Magoi were descended from the Gymnosophists; and that some traced the Jews also to the same origin: Κλέαρχος δὲ ὁ Σολεὺς ἐν τῷ Περὶ παιδείας (FGH II, 313 Fr. 28) καὶ τοὺς Γυμνοσοφιστὰς ἀπογόνους εἶναι τῶν Μάγων φησὶν· ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἐκ τούτων εἶναι (DIOG. L., *Lives*, Prooem. 9; BIDEZ/CUMONT II 67–70 [D 2]).

EUSEBIUS quotes Pseudo-Eupolemus²⁰ who claimed that Abraham was the discoverer of Astrology: “He [Abraham] excelled all men in nobility of birth and wisdom. In fact, he discovered both astrology and Chaldean science ...” (EUSEBIUS, *Preparation for the Gospel* IX 17,3). Hermippus of Smyrna (c.200BCE), quoted by Vettius Valens (second century CE), also referred to Abraham’s innovative astrological ideas:

On travelling, from the works of Hermippus ... The most wonderful Abramós has shown us about this [astrological] position in his books ... and he himself on his part invented other things and tested them, especially on genitures [nativities] inclined to travelling. (VETTIUS VALENS, *Anthologies* II 28; trans. Menahem STERN in FELDMAN 1996: 114)

In the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (end of the fourth century CE), an unknown author claims that all the heads of the Jewish communities, without exception, are adept in astrology and foretelling the future through inspection of entrails:

From [the emperor] Hadrian Augustus to Servianus the consul, greeting ... [In Egypt] there is no chief of the Jewish synagogue, no

²⁰ Eupolemus was an historian (some say Jewish) who wrote in Greek in the middle of the second century BCE a work *Concerning the Kings in Judaea*. Pseudo-Eupolemus was an anonymous historian, perhaps a Samaritan, who wrote in Greek in the first half of the second century BCE. See: DORAN 1987: 270–274; WACHOLDER 1963: 83–113.

Samaritan, no Christian presbyter, who is not an astrologer, a soothsayer, or an anointer. (*Four-horse Chariot of Tyrants* VIII 1,3; Loeb)

DAMASCIOS of Damascus (Orator and Philosopher; 5th–6th Century CE) mentions the invocation of “the God of the Hebrews” in exorcising an evil spirit:

Hierocles married a child-bearing woman. As evil could not be persuaded to leave the woman by gentle words, Theosebius compelled it to do so by an oath, although he was not versed in magic, nor practiced any theurgy. He adjured it by invoking the rays of the sun and the God of the Hebrews. The bad spirit was expelled while crying out that he both revered the gods and felt shame before Him. (DAMASCIOS, *Life of Isidore*, as in PHOTIUS, *Bibliotheca* 242, 339a–b; trans. Menahem STERN in FELDMAN 1996: 381)

It appears with good reason, therefore, that Hans Dieter BETZ (1992: xlv) asserts “Jewish magic was famous in antiquity.” BETZ points to the growing number of epigraphic²¹ and textual materials that have been identified as Jewish; including sections within the body of papyri entitled by scholars the *Greek Magical Papyri*. Clearly, the majority of these surviving papyri texts that contain magic spells and rituals date from the later Roman Empire, however, some papyri may date as early as the second century BCE.²²

That Jews had long engaged in the practice of magic is further confirmed variously in the Old Testament by repeated prohibitions against the use of magic in both the Levitical code²³ and the impassioned pleas of the prophets.²⁴ Also, as John P. MEIER observes: “... the regular retelling of the stories of such biblical miracle-workers as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha in synagogue celebrations, references to exorcisms at Qumran,

²¹ Recent research has differentiated Jewish charms and amulets from their counterparts. ARNOLD (1992: 31) notes that “The chief criterion employed is to observe where the text is centred; for example, if Ptah and Thoth are added to a charm that is otherwise essentially Jewish, the provenance of the text can be said to be Jewish. A good example of this is the *Prayer of Jacob* ... [which] has recently been included in the second volume of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* edited by J.H. CHARLESWORTH because of the prominence of Jewish ideas and terminology in the text.”

²² GARRETT (1989: 142–165) states, “There are ... strong indications that many of the texts [of the *GMPT*] have been copied one or more times, so that it is reasonable to assume that the core of the traditions in them dates back to a much earlier period.”

²³ Lev 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27.

²⁴ Isa 44:25; Jer 27:9–10; Ezek 22:28; Zech 10:2.

and some stories and strictures in the Mishna give us united witness that traditions about miracle and/or magic were alive and well among Palestinian Jews around the turn of the era” (MEIER 1994: 538).²⁵ Interestingly, the Talmud reports events that assume widespread magical practices²⁶ and even decrees at one point that no person could be a member of the Sanhedrin unless that person also had a knowledge of sorcery.²⁷ Of course, as Paul ACHTEMEIER (1976: 152) comments, this “does not mean its practice is required,” but such a stipulation underscores the commonplace nature of magic practices in Jewish communities, and the necessity of having Judges familiar with them.

Some scholars have attempted to isolate the distinctive characteristics of Jewish magic.²⁸ Judah GOLDIN (1976: 135) was right, however, to

²⁵ For details about the growth and widespread interest in magic in the Roman Empire, see AUNE 1980: 1519; DODDS 1965: 37–101; KOESTER 1982: I,379–381; FERGUSON 1987: 177–186; ROUCHE 1987: 519–536; P.BROWN 1972: 119–146; BARB 1963: 100–125.

²⁶ For example: the hanging of witches (*b. Sanhedrin* 45b); the practice of necromancy (*b. Shabbath* 152b; *b. Baba Mezja* 107b).

²⁷ Cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 17a, *b. Menaboth* 65a.

²⁸ SIMON (1964: 399–404), GOODENOUGH (1953: II 161), and CHARLESWORTH (1985: 716) characterise Jewish magic as having: (1) respect for Hebrew phrases thought to have magical power; (2) respect for the efficacious power of the name of God; and (3) respect for the powers of angels and demons. The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (cf. GINZBERG 1913–1938: VI 468) lists more than 180 Old Testament verses that were used for omens and spells.

Jewish respect for the efficacious power of God’s name is witnessed by frequent reference and instructions in the Talmud. For instance, the Talmud provides instructions as diverse as the cure for a bite from a rabid dog, to the preparation of amulets bearing the sacred tetragrammaton (cf. BLAU 1898: 102–103). Reputedly, Solomon’s power over demons was focussed by a ring on which the divine name was inscribed (*b. Gittin* 68a, b) and, as Josephus reports, Solomon himself was so powerful that demons could be exorcised in his name (cf. JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* VIII 2).

Jewish traditions about the power of angels and demons were assimilated readily into the Graeco-Roman world of magic. The number of angels familiar to a certain Jewess in JUVENAL (*Satires* VI 542–547), for example, who divined the future and interpreted dreams for Roman matrons, is unknown. Yet, if the *Sefer Ha-Razim* is any indication, there was no lack of them to choose from. The index of the *Sefer Ha-Razim* lists 704 angels (although some of these may be reduplications). The *Testament of Solomon* also provides evidence linking Jews, and Solomon in particular, with magic and the manipulation of demons.

In three of the four occurrences of the name “Salaman” in the *GMPT* the name is used in connection with other magical names for the binding of “the scorpion Artemis” (*GMPT* XXVIIIa.2; XXVIIIb.6; P3.2). Further, epigraphic evidence supports the view that Jews – particularly those of the diaspora – utilized a

advise caution in speaking of “Jewish magic” as if there was something ethnic about magical practices among Jews of the period; or, that beliefs and practices observed geographic and cultural boundaries. With interest in everything miraculous and magical so widespread in antiquity, it is difficult to defend a unique Jewish system and practice of magic.

However, the twentieth century rediscovery of the *Sefer Ha-Razim* provides further confirmation of a Jewish preoccupation with magic in antiquity. In 1963 Mordecai MARGALIOTH discovered a number of magical fragments among Kabbalistic texts from the Genizah collection, which he used to reconstruct a magical handbook dating from the early Talmudic period (3rd–4th century CE);²⁹ yet, it is widely recognised that the text contains a much earlier folk tradition.³⁰

The *Sefer Ha-Razim* (Book of Secrets or Mysteries) presents a description of the seven heavens, the names of their guardian angels and support angels, and describes certain services angels will perform if approached correctly. It contains incantations and recipes remarkably similar to materials preserved in the *GMPT*, and Ithamar GRUENWALD suggests that the *Sefer Ha-Razim* is more reliable than rabbinic sources of that time for detailing the nature and scope of magic practices among the general population. He notes, “We may well assume that the common people were less conscientious in restricting their use of magic” (GRUENWALD 1980: 228, 230). The following quotation conveys something of the flavour of the *Sefer*:

Now if you wish to consult a ghost, stand over against a grave and name the angels of the fifth camp while in your hand is a new glass phial in which is a mixture of oil and honey, and recite the following: “I adjure you, spirit of the ram bearer [קריפוריא = Hermes] who dwells in the cemeteries by the bones of the dead, that you receive this offering from my hand and do my will, and bring back to me so-and-so son of so-and-so who is dead. Set him up so that he may speak

number of magical practices, including a Solomonic magical tradition (cf. WÜNSCH 1905: 33. Solomon’s name appears on a magical apparatus found at Pergamum; GOODENOUGH 1953: II 236–37 describes an amulet which depicts Hekate on one side, while showing Solomon practising hydromancy on the other; charms, spells, rites and magical books are attributed to Solomon [*GMPT* IV 850]; JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* VIII 2 refers to a Jewish magician named Eleazar who performed an exorcism in the presence of Vespasian with the help of Solomonic magic; GOODENOUGH 1953: II 235 reports the discovery of a number of Solomon amulets in Jewish graves in Palestine).

²⁹ MARGALIOTH 1966; a more recent translation MORGAN 1983.

³⁰ Cf. MORGAN 1983: 9, “... what fascinates us most about this text, the magic, is part of a folk tradition which dates from a much earlier time.”

with me without fear; and let him tell me the truth, without deception;³¹ and let me not be afraid of him; and let him answer me as I require of him.” (The dead person) will then rise at once. But if he doesn’t, adjure still another time, up to three times. And when (the dead person) has come forth, place the phial before him and then say what you have to say. A myrtle-rod should be in your hand. And if you wish to release him, strike him three times with the myrtle (rod) and pour out the oil and the honey, and break the glass, and throw away the myrtle-rod and go home another way. (*Sefer Ha-Razim*, 176–187)

Excursus: Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina Ben Dosa

Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina Ben Dosa are well-known miracle-magic workers from the Jewish Tradition. This brief excursus does not concern itself with the historicity of Honi or Hanina, even if it were possible to find them underneath the tradition. Instead, it provides literary evidence of how ancient minds, in particular Jewish minds, viewed miracles, magic, and magicians. In this way it contributes to the efforts of this chapter, to gain an understanding of popular perceptions and presuppositions about magic in the Graeco-Roman world as a necessary step to providing a clearer focus and more realistic historical agenda for the figure of Simon Magus – and his reputation of being a magician.

How did ancient minds, in particular Jewish minds, view miracles, magic, and magicians? The *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* at the beginning of the twentieth century suggested the widespread image of the *theios aner* in the Graeco-Roman world provided a paradigm for understanding miracle-magic workers in the writings of the New Testament. While the appropriateness of the term has been disputed, there are at least some features of the *theios aner* which are held in common with charismatic types accepted in Judaism.³² However, precisely here we encounter a basic limitation in the form-critical method: classification, comparison, and history of literary forms cannot answer questions about the purpose and reliability of any given text. For our purposes, the fact that certain stories about miracle-magic workers circulated during the first and second century CE, and were being adopted and developed, only demonstrates that such stories were a widely-used and popular genre.

In Book 14 of the *Jewish Antiquities* (written c.93–94CE), Josephus writes about a certain *Onias*, “a just man and beloved by God, who once

³¹ Spirits do not always tell the truth. Cf. *GMPT* IV 1034.

³² Cf. KOESTER 1985: 243–252.

during drought prayed that God would bring the drought to an end. Listening to [Onias' prayer], God caused rain to fall" (JOSEPHUS *Ant.* XIV 2,1). Due to the reputation occasioned by his prayers, Onias was coerced to pray a curse on one group of Jews led by Aristobulus II, that was in civil conflict with another group led by Hyrcanus II. Onias refused and was stoned to death. Josephus then describes how God punished the followers of Hyrcanus II for the murder of Onias.³³

Onias' appearance in the *Antiquities* is sudden and brief. After a single incident in which an amazing response is experienced to his prayer, there is no further literary reference to Onias until the publication of the Mishnah tractate *Ta'anit* 3:8. In this version he is called Honi (Heb.) and people approach him to provide intercessory prayer for rain during a time of drought. When Honi's prayer at first is not answered, he draws a circle on the ground, and stands within the circle (so the reputation "circle drawer"). Then, Honi swears an oath by God's "great name" that he will not step outside the circle until God sends rain. A brief shower comes, but Honi complains this is too little. When God responds with a torrential downpour, Honi complains again, and the deluge eases to become moderate soaking rain. After more than enough rain has fallen, the Jews approach Honi to prayerfully request that the rain cease.

In the Mishnah tradition, the Honi story has developed from the "once" of Josephus' account to a demonstration of the continuing effectiveness of Honi's prayers, which teaches a general truth about persistent, trusting prayer. Against the background of Graeco-Roman magic, however, the drawing of and standing in a circle, and swearing oaths by God's "great name," could be understood as magical. Honi is no longer a person who prays effective prayers, but is more a miracle-magic worker, who coerces God to regulate rainfall from petition to petition.

Finally, the metamorphosis of Honi is complete with what William Scott GREEN calls the "rabbinization" of miracle workers.³⁴ In the Babylonian Talmud tractate *Ta'anit* 23a, Honi is given the title Rabbi and his powers to bring rain or cause drought are seen as a natural progression from knowing and mastering the Torah. Scriptural support is

³³ The mention of civil war helps approximate the date of Onias' death to c.65BCE. Cf. SCHÜRER 1971: 97, "While [Pompey] pressed on farther into Asia, he sent Scaurus to Syria. When the general arrived at Damascus he heard of the war between the brothers in Judea, and pushed forward without delay to see how he might turn to account this strife between the rival princes. He had scarcely reached Judea when ambassadors presented themselves before him, both from Aristobulus and from Hyrcanus."

³⁴ W.S. GREEN 1979: 628–639.

given from Hab 2:1 for Honi's circle drawing, and the focus and emphasis is more firmly placed on God's action as the giver of all rain.

We turn now to another well-known miracle-magic worker in the Jewish tradition. Hanina ben Dosa, like Honi, is known for the effectiveness of his prayers. Yet, unlike Honi, Hanina does not receive even a passing mention in the writings of Josephus, or any other first century CE source. Within his critical response to Geza VERMES' two detailed studies on Hanina ben Dosa,³⁵ Sean FREYNE comments about the debate over the probable dating of Hanina:

We have made no attempt to date the historical Hanina, though the pre-70CE period suggested by both Vermes and Neusner does seem to be a more plausible context for his activity as a man of deed. (FREYNE 1980: 242)

Three traditions about Hanina have been preserved in the Mishnah (*'Abot* 3:10–11; *Sota* 9:15; *Berakot* 5:5), of which the reference in *Berakot* is the more significant.

It is told concerning Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa that when he prayed for the sick he used to say: This one will live and this one will die. They said to him: How do you know? He replied: If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that he [the sick person] is favoured; if not, I know that [his illness] is fatal. (trans. VERMES 1972: 29)

In contrast with the prayers of Honi, the prayers of Hanina claim no special power, but rather claim a gift of precognition: the ability to tell from the flow of his prayers whether God would grant his request or not. However, when Hanina ben Dosa reappears in the Babylonian Talmud the miraculous features have dramatically increased. Hanina is said to heal the son of Rabbi Gamaliel by prayer from a distance (*b. Ber.* 34b; *y. Ber.* 9d); heal the son of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai through prayers (*b. Ber.* 34b); discern, from a distance, the moment a missing girl was rescued from her fall into a deep pit (*b. B. Qam.* 50a).

Expanding a story from the Mishnah about the truly pious who are never interrupted from their prayers even if attacked by a snake (*m. Ber.* 5:1), the Tosefta and Palestinian Talmud transfer the story to Hanina (*t. Ber.* 3:20; *y. Ber.* 9a; *b. Ber.* 33a), who not only does not stop praying and not suffer any harm from snakebite, but Hanina's disciples later discover

³⁵ VERMES 1972; 1973.

the snake dead at the opening of its hole! In this way the transformation of a pious man of prayer is complete.

The surviving details about Hanina are largely as Freyne comments a body of “items ... that can loosely be described as miracle stories” (FREYNE 1980: 228). For example,³⁶ Hanina has God stop and start rain, and turn vinegar into oil for the Sabbath lamp; miraculously bread appears in the empty oven of his wife, but the family table collapses when Hanina’s wife borrows spices which were not tithed; when stolen, Hanina’s donkey refuses to eat or drink until it is returned home.

In conclusion, a few observations can be made from the above brief description of the transformation experienced by two miracle-magic workers in Jewish tradition, who provide some parallel to the development and adaptation of the Simon Magus story.

First, it is interesting to note that the time-lapse between the “original” events surrounding Simon Magus and developed reports about him appearing in the second century CE writings of Justin Martyr and others, approximates the period of time between the original Onias event and its report in Josephus (c.130 years). Further, the dating of Hanina ben Dosa in the 70s CE, and accounts of his life in the Mishnah, indicates a similar time separation. This represents a serious gap of information and uncovering the earliest layer of tradition is generally considered impossible; however, that these stories have undergone transformation through various traditions and means of transmission is clearly demonstrable.

Second, that these stories are narrated in the literary forms of their time period indicates that such stories of miracle-magic workers were widely-used and popular. So even if, as will be argued, Luke has clearly crafted his narrative in Acts 8 about a certain Simon, there is valuable “historical” information here about the express religious world of his narrative, and the unexpressed religious perceptions of his audience.

Third, a variety of revered figures in the Graeco-Roman world practiced – individually or together – magic, exorcism, healing, and other esoteric arts. Some of these were also involved in precognitive, prophetic, and divination activities. No investigation and description of first century CE social and religious life can ignore these facts, any more than the description of religion in the twentieth century can avoid detailing such practices as Satanism, exorcism, occultic arts, or so-called New Age teachings and experiences.

³⁶ Cf. *b. Ta’anit* 24b–25a.

Fourth, that popular beliefs of the Graeco-Roman world continued among Christian and Jewish communities, whether accepted or not by their respective authorities and doctrines. Even in our generation, at the turn of the third millennium, magical practices and oracles are a way of life in parts of Africa and South America, also among well-educated and devout Christians. The historical evidence available suggests that such was no less the case in first century CE Rome, Alexandria, Samaria, Ephesus, or Jerusalem.

4. *Magoi in the Matthean Infancy Narrative*

Our efforts to provide a clearer focus on the image of Simon and his reputation of being a “magician” must of necessity include comment on Matt 2:1–12, which contains one of only two references in the entire New Testament to the noun μάγος. It would be convenient to simply observe that both references arise from the same philological subsoil, and conclude that their meanings overlap. However, the relevance of Matthew’s “visit of the magi” for our understanding of Simon cannot be predetermined so effortlessly. Meaning does not exist apart from context and authorial intention. So, prior to commenting on whatever interpretative correlation may be drawn between the Matthean Magoi and Simon, it may be useful to the reader if I first briefly sketch the purpose of gospel infancy narratives in general, and then comment on Matthew’s infancy narrative in particular.³⁷

Critical scholarship has long noted how the gospels developed backwards; that the earliest Christian *kerygma* concerned itself with the death of Jesus and the resurrection.³⁸ Over time a growing collection of sayings, parables, and reports of miracles performed by Jesus, emerged and circulated among early Christian communities. These materials were then selected, arranged and merged by the evangelists into their collection of traditions about the cross and the empty grave; and in this process of

³⁷ In addition to New Testament commentaries on Matthew, the following selected titles, including books and articles, provide specific and general analyses of the Matthean infancy narrative. AHRIKA 1990; R. BROWN 1999; BULTMANN 1963: 291–301; CAVE 1962; CROSSAN 1968; CROUCH 1991; DANIELLOU 1968; DAVIS 1971; DERRETT 1975; FRANCE 1981; HENDRICKX 1984; KINGSBURY 1975; STENDAHL 1964.

³⁸ Cf. Acts 2:23, 32; 3:14–15; 4:10; 10:39–40; 1 Cor 15:3–4.

Gospel formation, selection and emphasis were governed by the fact that a message of salvation was being preached and taught. Biographical interest was not primary.³⁹ Mark, the earliest Gospel account, includes no details about the birth and youth of Jesus. Likewise the Gospel of John includes no infancy details, but begins instead with the witness of John the Baptist concerning Jesus. So, why did Matthew and Luke write and include in their gospel outlines stories of the birth and childhood of Jesus?

Various explanations have been advanced in answer to this question, ranging from sheer curiosity and speculation among early Christians, through to an apologetic or theological agenda being followed by the evangelists. While doubtless there were many factors at work in the development of the gospel infancy stories, most no longer are detectable with any historical certainty. However, something that can be stated with certainty is that the appearance of gospel infancy narratives, and their inclusion by the evangelists, is contemporaneous with the development of New Testament Christology; which explains why they appear in Matthew and Luke rather than in Mark. (John took another christological pathway, tracing the divine identity of Jesus back to pre-existence before creation.) So, from a pre-Gospel period when the supreme announcement of Jesus' identity was associated with the resurrection—as evident in Paul's letters and some speeches in Acts—the Gospel of Mark claims that already at his baptism Jesus was declared Son of God, while Matthew and Luke point to the conception of Jesus as the christological moment. Matthew's infancy narrative reveals more about Matthew's theology, in particular his Christology, than provides historical and biographical details of the "one born king of the Jews." Matthew portrays Jesus as Son of David, Son of Abraham, Emmanuel, Son of God. Through Joseph Jesus is the descendant of the royal David line, and born of the virgin by the Holy Spirit there is a connection made between David's Son and Son of God.

A superficial reading of Matthew will observe many themes shared between Matt 1–2 and the rest of the gospel; for example, the theme of the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Yet, on closer examination there is clear evidence of the blending of originally independent traditions,⁴⁰ and the

³⁹ R. BROWN 1999: 27.

⁴⁰ New Testament scholarship applies three essential analytical "tests" to the infancy narrative of Matthew, in an effort to discern Matthean and non-Matthean material. First, there are the intra-textual concerns of vocabulary, style, structure; and, second, evidence of internal cohesion or discordance from the integration of originally disparate materials. Third there are the inter-textual concerns of

presence of non-reconciled details between the infancy stories and the remainder of the gospel narrative. For example, if Herod and all of Jerusalem knew about the slaughter of young children by soldiers looking for Jesus (2:16), why does no one, later in the gospel, know of Jesus' origins (13:54–55)? Also, why does the son of Herod know nothing about Jesus (14:1–2)? If John the Baptist was a blood relative of Jesus, why does he seem puzzled by him later, and why does he give no indication of any previous knowledge (7:19)? These narrative features—along with others—are supportive of the hypothesis that Matthew collected stories of Jesus and his ministry that had developed in Christian tradition, without any awareness of the infancy narratives; and Matthew was either unsuccessful, or unconcerned with fully reconciling these two previously independent source materials.

Matt 2 opens with a distinctive genitive absolute construction (Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντες...), followed by the particle ἰδοῦ, which the evangelist commonly uses (cf. καὶ ἰδοῦ)⁴¹ to introduce developments in the narrative or to emphasize the importance of a subject. This first verse provides the only evidence we have in Matthew's gospel for dating the birth of Jesus: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judaea during the time of King Herod." However, Matthew's intention is not biographical.

The Herod mentioned here (cf. 2:22) is Herod the Great, which poses some immediate historical difficulties. Josephus records the death of Herod having occurred shortly after an eclipse and before a Passover.⁴² Best astronomical evidence favours 4BCE as the time of Herod's death. A birth of Jesus dated about 7BCE not only fits this information about Herod (cf. 2:16), but also agrees with Luke's report that Jesus was about 30 years of age in the fifteenth year of the reign of

traditional material that both Matthew and Luke appear to have been dependent upon, including probable Old Testament stories and Jewish legends and allusions to cultural, social, political, and literary matters in contemporary Graeco-Roman society. Briefly, significant sources for Matt 2 are the Old Testament accounts of the Exodus and Balaam the seer from Beor, the non-biblical tradition in Josephus and Jewish midrash about a forewarning given to Pharaoh from sacred scribes/magi about a promised saviour of the Jews, and the contemporary historical event in 66CE of the Armenian Tiridates who travelled to pay homage to Nero in Naples, and then returned home by another route.

⁴¹ The number of occurrences in New Testament writings according to frequency, are: Matthew 62; Luke 57; Revelation 26; Acts 23; Mark 7; James 6; John 4; Hebrews 4; Paul (only in 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans) 9; Jude 1; and 1 Peter, 1.

⁴² JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* XVII 167.

Tiberius Caesar,⁴³ and modern explanations proposed for the celestial phenomenon at the time of Jesus' birth.

Bethlehem (ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας) is the ancestral town of David, where he was anointed by Samuel as king over Israel (1 Sam 16:1–13). The mention of Judaea is more theologically than geographically instructive. “Bethlehem of Judaea” anticipates the quotation from Micah 5:2 in verse 6, which was interpreted messianically by the Jews;⁴⁴ although neither the Hebrew or Greek text of Micah has the phrase: γῆ Ἰούδα. The Gospel of John describes Bethlehem as a κώμη. Likewise the Hebrew text refers to Bethlehem as בֵּית לֶחֶם קָטָן literally, “small with regard to being among the *thousands*”—an epithet used (cf. Num 1:16; 10:4) to identify the “families” into which the twelve tribes of Israel were divided. Despite their smallness and their inability to furnish a defensive unit for service in the land, the promise is that the Ruler of Israel is to come from Bethlehem. Significantly, Matthew gives an entirely opposite meaning to “the least” in verse 6 by his insertion of the phrase οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη. Further, the substitution of ἡγεμόσιν for “thousands,” is an interpolation of a promise given to David (cf. 2 Sam 7:11b–13).

The phrase “king of the Jews” immediately places the infant Jesus in opposition to Herod. Josephus records (*Ant.* XVI 311) that Herod the Great was known by the title “king of the Jews,” and according to the Matthean narrative Herod, and all of Jerusalem with him, was troubled/disturbed (ἐταράχθη) by the question of the Magoi.⁴⁵ The verb *ταράσσω* is used only twice in Matthew: here and in 14:26 when the disciples witness Jesus walking on water; an epiphany which leads to their confession of him as the Son of God (14:33, ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ). Hope of a universal king (messiah) who would usher in a golden age was current at the time of Matthew's writing. This is evident not only in ancient prophecy, which refers to him as a “star appearing” (Num 24:17), but also in contemporary literature⁴⁶ and in that fact that, whereas the Magoi inquire about “the king of the Jews,” Herod asks about the messiah (ὁ χριστός). Further, the wish of the Magoi to “worship him” (προσκυνησαὶ αὐτῷ = prostration in the presence of the king or God)

⁴³ Luke 3:1, 23.

⁴⁴ Cf. CD XII 18–20; 4*QTestimonia*; *T. Levi* 18:3; *T. Jud.* 24:5.

⁴⁵ Is there a possible hint of judgment here? In the book of Daniel 5:9 the king and his advisors are ἐταράχθη when his magoi fail to read the handwriting on the wall, telling him that his kingdom will be taken away.

⁴⁶ Cf. CD VII 19; *T. Levi* 18:3.

announces the universal importance of the infant Jesus even before he is born and publicly revealed.

As we observe the unfolding struggle between Herod, the descendant of David, and the newborn “king” in Bethlehem it appears that the storyline follows, or in many parts is influenced by, the Moses legend. Josephus⁴⁷ reports the legend of how an Egyptian scholar of the priestly class, or certain astrologers/magoi, had prophesied to Pharaoh concerning the birth of the coming saviour of Israel. Then Pharaoh summoned (cf. Midrash Exod. rabba 1) all the “astrologers” of Egypt, and ultimately ordered the slaying of the children of the Israelites (cf. 2:16). But the father of Moses learns through a dream that his child would be saved.⁴⁸

In addition to the Moses imagery, one also recalls the Balaam episode in the Old Testament book of Numbers. Balaam was a widely respected and known diviner, who came from the east, and saw a star rise out of Jacob.⁴⁹

When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him and he uttered his oracle: “The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened.” (Num 24:3–4)

The Septuagint text says Balaam’s oracle was through a dream vision (ἐν ὕπνῳ), which corresponds with the Joseph–Moses parallels in Matt 1, and the Magoi in Matt 2. Biblical assessment of Balaam is divided. To the extent that Balaam is blamed by one tradition—along with the kings of Midian (Num 25; 31:8)—for Israel’s seduction into idolatry, Balaam is seen as evil (cf. 2 Pet 2:15–16; Jude 11; Rev 2:14). However, by virtue of Balaam having prophesied good for Israel, he is viewed positively and it

⁴⁷ JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* II 205–206, “One of those sacred scribes (τῶν ἱερογραμματέων τῆς) who are very sagacious in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would be a child born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages. Which thing was so feared by the king, that according to this man’s opinion, he commanded that they should cast every male child, which was born to the Israelites, into the river, and destroy it.”

⁴⁸ JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* II 212.

⁴⁹ Num 24:15–17.

is said that he was filled by an authentic prophetic spirit.⁵⁰ In this sense Balaam and Matthew's Magoi are related in title, origin and role.⁵¹

"Magi from the east came to Jerusalem...". Some have argued that in these verses Matthew conducts an implicit apologetic against false Magoi and particularly against astrology.⁵² Further, as Powell suggests:

[M]agi were not viewed as wise men for a long time in the history of tradition. In fact, they did not really come to be thought of as such until the time of the Renaissance and, especially, the Enlightenment ... Matthew's readers are not expected to regard the magi as wise ... [yet] readers are clearly expected to know what μάγοι are, since the term is not defined. (POWELL 2000: 3)

POWELL attempts to overcome what he perceives as a narrative gap in Matthew's account⁵³ by the application of rhetorical analysis, raising the import of the question asked by the Magoi: "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" POWELL argues that the use of this title in Matthew's gospel is restricted to the lips of those who do not understand who Jesus is or what he is about (cf. 27:11, 29, 37). Further, that in Matthew the Magoi are "the most ignorant characters in the story" and contrasts their widely revered "wisdom" with the νήπιοι (cf. Ps 8:2; Matt 11:25): the naïve, immature, yet perceptive faith of the uninstructed.

However, POWELL does not give due weight to at least two important aspects that are evident in the text. First, the Magoi—the clear nuance is that they receive an answer to their close inquiry, although Matthew says Herod is the inquirer (ἐπυνθάνετο παρ' αὐτῶν ποῦ ὁ χριστὸς γεννᾶται)—can only learn about the Christ through what is written in the prophets. As Balaam the "pagan" seer received an authentic prophetic spirit from the God of Israel, the same can be said about the Matthean Magoi, who then receive further revelation from the Jewish Scriptures. This interpretation is underscored and contrasted by the secret meeting Herod holds with the Magoi, when he "inquired carefully" (ἠκρίβωσεν

⁵⁰ Cf. Num 22–24; PHILO, *De vita Moysis* I 277.

⁵¹ Cf. R. BROWN 1999: 195.

⁵² Cf. MANN 1958: 496; Did. II 2. Mann claims the Matthean magoi were Babylonian Jews who were practitioners of black magic and star worship, but who surrender their art in homage to Jesus. Cf. JUSTIN (*Dial.* 78,9), who notes the magoi renounce superstition and adore the true God.

⁵³ POWELL 2000: 3, "Matthew does not narrate the magi's perception or interpretation of the star. The narrative leaves a gap where this part of the story is concerned and modern readers have bridged the gap with the suggestion that the magi's specialized knowledge allowed them to interpret the divine revelation."

παρ' αὐτῶν τὸν χρόνον τοῦ φαινομένου ἀστέρος) concerning the time the star appeared. Is it possible that Matthew alludes to the technology of “accurately fixing” stars and planets, in the observations of astronomy⁵⁴ and astrology, by his own use of the verb ἀκριβόω here, followed in verse 8 by the adverbial phrase ἐξετάσατε ἀκριβῶς in reference to determining the appearance of the star and the nature of the child? Certainly, semantic prominence is created by the employment of the present participle τοῦ φαινομένου embedded in a section of narrative replete with verbs in the aorist tense.

Second, rather than being pilloried the Magoi are portrayed by Matthew as praiseworthy patterns for others. An audience familiar with the Jewish Scriptures and midrashic traditions would recognize echoes of the Balaam story. Like Balaam the Magoi are infused with a genuine prophetic spirit, and rather than being used by a king to destroy “his enemy” the Magoi honour him. Can we infer that through this episode Matthew addresses the Jewish element in his audience and reminds them that even in the prophets God had revealed his plan of salvation included the Gentiles. So the situation in early Christian communities was not a failure but a fulfillment of God’s plan; that those from afar would be drawn near by the messiah and Israel. Certainly, as BROWN comments, the inclusion in Matthew 2 of formula citations from the prophets (Hos 11:1; Jer 31:15; Mic 5:2) serve Matthew’s pastoral interests:

For Matthew, these citations did more than highlight incidental agreement between the Old Testament and Jesus. He introduced them because they fit his general theology of the oneness of God’s plan (a oneness already implicitly recognized by the appeal to the Old Testament in early Christian preaching) and, especially, because they served some of his own particular theological and pastoral interests in dealing with a mixed Christian community of Jews and Gentiles. (R. BROWN 1999: 104)

The phrase ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν appears in the Balaam episode and may be considered an example of direct borrowing and not necessarily the indication of a specific direction;⁵⁵ although much scholarly effort has been invested in the question of locality. Likewise, extensive research has been conducted into the nature of the “star.” Suggestions for the origin of the

⁵⁴ Cf. BOLL 1918: 40–48.

⁵⁵ ἀνατολῶν (=rise) and ἀνατολή (=rising) are used of the appearance of the sun, stars, clouds, and stars in the sky (Mark 16:2; Luke 12:54; James 1:11). East is the “rising of the sun” (Rev 7:2; cf. Matt 2:1; 8:11; 24:27).

Magoi include Persia, Parthia, Babylon, Arabia, Syria. Proposals for the star include a supernova, comet, or planetary conjunction. Yet, rather than rehearse what is available elsewhere the reader is directed to those specific studies.⁵⁶

However, it should be noted that if we do not follow the habit of many modern translations of the New Testament in rendering ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ as “in the East,” but rather “at its rising,” then we avoid the notion that the Magoi followed the “star” to Jerusalem. Instead, the Magoi associate the rising of the star with the King of the Jews and travel to the capital and centre of Judaism to determine its meaning. There is only one specific reference, in verse 9, to the star “guiding” the Magoi; and, that is to Bethlehem.

The imperfective aspect of the verb προάγω needs to be read in apposition to εἶδον (=they saw). The subject of the verb ὁράω in the New Testament is almost always people. One sees another person in their individuality, conduct, or need. It is significant, however, that the exceptions to this rule either are usually supernatural actions of Jesus that previous generations have been unable to “see,” or natural phenomena (stars, earthquakes) that have symbolic importance and effect a faith-related perception. The unanswered question is how the audience of Matthew understood and appropriated this reference to “leading” and the report of the Magoi’s worship and homage.

The story of Magoi coming “from the East(?)” to kneel before a king may not have been a strange report to Matthew’s audience. JOSEPHUS (*Ant.* XVI 136–141) mentions the various dignitaries from surrounding nations who attended the ceremonies that marked the completion of Caesarea Maritima by Herod in c.10BCE. But, more importantly, Suetonius⁵⁷ describes an event in 66CE that captured the imagination of all Rome, when Tiridates king of Armenia travelled to Italy with the sons of three neighbouring Parthian rulers to pay homage to Nero. Tiridates is reported to have said, “I have come to you, my god, to pay homage, as I do to Mithras.” PLINY comments (*Nat. Hist.* XXX 16–17) that Tiridates and his fellow travellers were Magoi. Jean GAGÉ has argued that this historical event served as inspiration for Matthew’s reference to the Magoi bearing gifts to the newborn “king of the Jews.”

⁵⁶ Cf. R. BROWN 1999: 168–170. Brown includes a comprehensive bibliography.

⁵⁷ Suetonius, *Nero* 13.

Aussi bien les mages de l'Évangile ne sont-ils devenus des "rois-mages" qu'assez tardivement pour l'imagination des chrétiens; à l'origine, ils ne sont pas des rois, mais ils portent des "présents royaux" vers Celui que leur science prophétique leur annonce comme vrai Roi. (GAGÉ 1968: 6)

So, in conclusion and by way of summary, what can be said about the relevance of Matthew's "visit of the magi" for our understanding of Simon? First, I have argued that Matthew's infancy narrative reveals more about Matthew's theology, in particular his Christology, rather than provides historical and biographical details of the one "born king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2). Now, whether or not one concludes the infancy narrative of Matthew is historical, whether or not it was based on eyewitness reports, whether or not it was compiled from pre-Matthean sources, it needs to be concluded that Matthew saw these stories as being an effective carrier of his testimony about the mission and meaning of Jesus of Nazareth. Second, that the Magoi were inspired by a sign, like "the *seeing* seer, Balaam of Beor," that led them to search for and "see" the Christ. Yet, Herod—despite all his military and government intelligence—is unable to do the same; and the chief priest and scribes, regardless of their scholarship, appear unconcerned to try. In this way, Matthew does not portray the Magoi ambiguously—as those who possessed a questionable occult knowledge—but as models of a new era in the dealings of God with people; namely, the light that leads to salvation has now been given to the nations (cf. Exod 13:21; 40:38; Ps 78:14; Isa 9:2–3; 60:1–3; Matt 4:12–17; Luke 2:29–32).⁵⁸ Finally, the descriptive and not derisive way the quoted contemporary sources in this section referred to the Magoi supports rather than detracts from the conclusions this chapter will make concerning historical estimations of Simon as "magician."

⁵⁸ Cf. HENGEL/MERKEL 1973: 153.

5. *Simon the “Magician” and other “Magicians” in the Book of Acts*

5.1 Introduction

In Acts 8 Luke begins to chronicle how the scattering of the Jerusalem disciples led to the spreading of the good news about Jesus and the kingdom of God. We are told that Philip went to Samaria and preached about the Christ (verse 5: ἐκήρυσσεν αὐτοῖς τὸν Χριστόν). There Philip encounters a certain Simon, who is identified to us as a long-term resident of the region. Simon is said to be a highly-esteemed, charismatic, and influential person who “practised as a magos” (verse 9: Ἄνῆρ δὲ τις ὀνόματι Σίμων ... μαγεύων) and claimed superior abilities (verse 9: λέγων εἶναί τινα ἑαυτὸν μέγαν). Further, Simon had aroused such a degree of respect and following among the general population that they “listened” to him (verse 10: ᾧ προσείχον πάντες)⁵⁹ and praised him as being “the Great Power of God” (verse 10: οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ καλουμένη μεγάλη).

From this brief account have arisen the centuries-old traditions about Simon Magus—the so-called “magician.” This image of Simon has been sustained in popular Christian imagination primarily by translations of the New Testament that decipher the present participle μαγεύων in Acts 8:9 as “practiced magic/sorcery.” This remains so regardless of the fact that practising as a μάγος has very little to do with “magic” in the modern and more popularly understood sense of achieving effects in the natural realm through supernatural agency, or sleight of hand.

In the analysis of Acts 8:4–25 that follows it will be argued that translations of the present participle μαγεύων as “practiced magic/sorcery” should be challenged as superficial, selective, and responsible for introducing anachronous ideas that are discordant with the text of Acts. Indeed, there are no express details⁶⁰ of Simon’s “magical” activities in Acts 8:4–25. Instead, a close examination of the original story in light of contemporary Graeco-Roman estimations of magic would reveal Philip, rather than Simon, to be the magician. Nonetheless, New Testament

⁵⁹ Cf. verse 6: προσείχον δὲ οἱ ὄχλοι τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Φιλίππου.

⁶⁰ As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, those who argue that ταῖς μαγείαις should be simply translated as “magic” underestimate the presence of parallelism and the interconnection of elements within Acts 8:9–11. For example, verse 11 repeats material from verses 9 and 10; namely, the verb προσείχον is repeated from verse 10, ἐξιστακέναι reflects ἐξιστάνων in verse 9, and ταῖς μαγείαις corresponds with μαγεύων in verse 9 (= doing the work of a μάγος).

commentators continue to link the story of Simon with other accounts of so-called “magicians” in Acts, and argue that Luke’s intention was to present a common theme through these stories that Christians wield authority over the devil in the post-resurrection era, and so to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over magic. Numerous literary and conceptual connections have been suggested in support of such a meta-narrative in Luke’s stories about Simon (chapter 8), Bar-Jesus (chapter 13), and the Sons of Scaeva (chapter 19). However, as outlined and discussed below, any such interpretative synthesis should be resisted since the context and conflict are different in each episode.

For specialists and general readers alike, although for different reasons, the following analysis and discussion of Luke’s stories about Simon, Bar-Jesus, and the Sons of Scaeva may appear to provide too much detail. However, as argued in the general introduction to this chapter, to gain a clearer focus on the person of Simon and his reputation of being a “magician” there is an unavoidable and necessary step. We must detail an understanding of the nature and function of magic in the Graeco-Roman world. This includes identifying the social conditions and cultural presuppositions that allowed the accusation and counter-accusations of magic to be made. So, within the overall aims of the present chapter, this is the intention of the primarily literary-historical investigations of Acts 8:4–25, 13:4–12, and 19:13–20 that appear below.

5.2 Philip, Peter, and Simon the “Magician” in Acts 8:4–25

5.2.1 Introduction

The Simon episode in Acts opens with a characteristic Lukan expression⁶¹ μὲν οὖν which, together with the participle διασπαρέντες, recollects 8:1–3 and explains the mission to Samaria as being the result of a scattering of the church at Jerusalem following persecution.

The appearance of Philip in Samaria is an example of the expanding scope of mission performed by the followers of Jesus.⁶² Verse 5 details how Philip preached “the Christ: τὸν Χριστόν” in a [the] city of Samaria:

⁶¹ As detailed above in § 2.3 of chapter three, μὲν οὖν is used to indicate a change or new stage in Luke’s narrative.

⁶² ... ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς (Acts 1:8).

κατελθὼν εἰς [τὴν] πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας.” However, the exact location of Philip’s activity is shrouded by a textual problem. Are we to understand Luke’s reference to mean the principal city of Samaria, or does the very uncertainty of the text lead us to conclude that Luke’s sources did not include a precise location? Again, is this uncertainty maintained by Luke principally to serve literary purposes, or is there some other plausible explanation?

Excursus. [The] City of Samaria⁶³ and a “Samaritan” Simon
in Acts 8:4–25

Acts 8 begins its account of Simon with the difficult and disputed statement, Φίλιππος δὲ κατελθὼν εἰς [τὴν] πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας (Acts 8:5a). It is necessary to establish what is meant by this geographical reference, in any step towards framing a response to questions surrounding [the] city of Samaria and a Samaritan Simon.

Bruce METZGER (1971) comments that it is difficult to decide the textual problem involving the presence or absence of the definite article in Acts 8:5. In the New Testament Σαμάρεια always refers to the territory, not the city of Samaria, so the phrase εἰς τὴν πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας is translated “to the [main/capital] city of Samaria.” However, while the external evidence⁶⁴ supporting the article is a strong argument for not omitting it from the text altogether, internal considerations favour its absence.⁶⁵ Luke never uses Σαμάρεια elsewhere as a name of a city, but always uses it to describe the region inhabited by the Σαμαριτεῖς (Luke 9:52; 10:33; 17:16; Acts 8:25).

In the New Testament there are 11 references to “Samaria,” and 10 occurrences of “Samaritan(s).” Mark never mentions the Samaritans. Matthew only mentions them once, and then negatively.⁶⁶ All other references are to be found in the writings of Luke⁶⁷ and John. What is of particular significance is that we have an apparent contradiction in the

⁶³ Cf. ZANGENBERG 2000: 520–525. ZANGENBERG provides a helpful review of the intensive discussions surrounding all 3 main candidates suggested by scholarship in answer to the geographical peculiarity in Acts 8:5.

⁶⁴ Φ^{74} \aleph A B 1175 pc.

⁶⁵ For example, Luke refers indefinitely to the same location in verse 8: ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐκεῖνῃ. Cf. METZGER 1971: 355–356; BARRETT 1994: 402.

⁶⁶ Matt 10:5.

⁶⁷ Luke–Acts consistently uses Σαμάρεια to refer to territory of the Samaritans, and in one place (Acts 8:9) uses the phrase: ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας.

command given by Jesus prohibiting any missionary activity among the Samaritans (Matt 10:5), and the express post-resurrection direction to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

By the time that Luke wrote his “orderly account” the fortress city of Samaria had long since lain in ruins, having been completely destroyed by the Jews under John Hyrcanus in 107BCE. The old city was rebuilt once under Gabinus and then again by Herod the Great in 25BCE; being renamed Sebaste. Like Caesarea, it was a predominantly non-Jewish city, forming part of the Herodian and later Roman military defences. Sebaste boasted a spectacular temple to Augustus and a sanctuary to Persephone. Those who are interested in identifying Sebaste⁶⁸ as the [main/capital] city of Samaria (Acts 8:5), considering it to have a significant “syncretistic milieu” to spawn Simon and his alleged identification with the supreme God, invoke the substantial textual support for the inclusion of the definite article. On the other hand, those preferring to identify “a city” with Shechem, or Gitta, the reported birthplace of Simon,⁶⁹ adopt the textual variant with anarthrous πόλις.

Nonetheless, available evidence supports the conclusion that all suggestions, including the village of Gitta or the city of Shechem, can neither be proven nor rejected with any historical certainty. Even so, some scholars have devoted considerable effort and literary space to locate Gitta south-west of Caesarea, on the coastal plain,⁷⁰ as the suggested area of Simon’s activity.⁷¹ Other Bible commentators have identified Shechem⁷² as another possibility for “[the] city of Samaria.” However, historically that seems impossible since the city of Shechem and its temple were destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 128BCE, and then Shechem disappeared from the pages of history. Another suggestion, Flavia Neapolis, which was founded by Vespasian in 72CE, is equally impossible.

⁶⁸ Some scholars have attempted to demonstrate a link between the Kore-Persephone worshipped in Sebaste with Simon and his πρώτη ἑννοια Helen. Cf. VINCENT 1936: 221–232; LÜDEMANN 1975: 20.

⁶⁹ Cf. JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,2.

⁷⁰ Sinaiticus has the variant reading: εἰς τὴν πόλιν τῆς Καισαρείας. But, HENGEL (1995: 75) comments, “The conjecture ... is completely wrong. This Samaritan locality, mentioned only in connection with the heresiarch in some old church sources after Justin, was at any rate completely insignificant.”

⁷¹ Cf. HENGEL 1995: 125; ZAHN 1922: I, 273 (n. 58), posits the *Qaryet Git* six miles west of Nablus.

⁷² Cf. COGGINS 1982: 423–433.

There is a certain attraction to locate “[the] city of Samaria” at Sychar (John 4:5), or present-day Askar. In Roman times Sychar was a large and significant city, “presumably greater than Shechem, which had been a fortified town.”⁷³ According to the Chronicles of Abu ‘l-Fath⁷⁴ (14th century CE) Dusis (Dositheos) came to visit a wise teacher in Sychar. Yet, as with other suggestions, “it must be remembered that in the first century the real religious centre for the Samaritans was not a city but the holy mount Gerazim itself.”⁷⁵

It appears that neither history nor geography alone are capable of providing a clear-cut solution in this debate over the identity of [the] ‘city’ in Acts 8:5. However, a novel insight by ZANGENBERG (2000: 523) provides an alternative to this research impasse. He draws attention to various reports from the ancient world that philosophers, prophets, and miracle workers were often drawn to larger urban centres because of socio-economic factors.⁷⁶ Cultural and business opportunities were limited if not non-existent in rural areas of Palestine in the first century CE, and Simon may have been drawn from obscurity in like manner as Jesus of Nazareth, who gravitated towards Capernaum and then beyond. Is it possible, then, that the uncertainty of the text in Acts 8:5 is not only due to the nature of traditions available to Luke, but also this very uncertainty reflects accurately the itinerant activities of Simon, whose long-term influence extended over numerous locations in the region of Samaria?⁷⁷

To say ancient sources report that Simon was a Samaritan from Samaria begs the question. Instead, what are we to understand by these claims? The story of Simon in the book of Acts neither confirms nor denies that Simon was a Samaritan. Instead, Acts 8:4–25 reports the activity of a certain Simon (μαγεύων) who was astounding the Samaritan people.

⁷³ SCHENKE 1968: 182.

⁷⁴ Abu ‘l-Fath 1865: 15.

⁷⁵ HENGEL 1995: 75. Cf. JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* XVIII 85–89. Some writers contend that this incident describes the appearance of a messianic claimant who persuaded a number of Samaritans to go with him to Gerazim.

⁷⁶ Cf. DZIELSKA 1986: 55. DZIELSKA describes how, for example, Apollonius of Tyana, “As a magician who often advised people, Apollonius visited several cities.”

⁷⁷ Cf. ZANGENBERG 2000: 525, “Immerhin konnte er sich nicht nur lange in der Stadt halten (8,9.11), sondern auch Menschen aus der gesamten Region Samarias in seinen Bann ziehen (8,9: ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας).”

Justin Martyr (*Apol.* I 26,2; *Dial.* 120,6) calls Simon a Samaritan and notes that many Samaritans were followers (and worshippers) of Simon.⁷⁸ Traditionally, commentators have claimed that Justin provides our most reliable witness concerning Simon Magus, since Justin himself was a “native of Samaria.” Certainly, Justin indicates in the first chapter of his *First Apology* that he was born in Flavia Neapolis in Samaria. However, nagging doubts about Justin’s reliability are raised when it is noted that although he claims for himself identity with the Samaritan people, at other places he describes himself as a Gentile,⁷⁹ a convert to Christianity.⁸⁰ Further, his statement (*Apol.* I 53) that the Samaritans received the word of God from the “prophets” calls into question Justin’s knowledge of Samaria and Samaritan beliefs both during and before his lifetime.

In the extant writings of Justin Martyr the term “Samaritan” appears three times, yet it is clear that the word is not used with the same meaning in all its occurrences. Once it is used to identify members of the Samaritan ethnic group (*Apol.* I 53), and twice it is used in the sense of “native” or “resident of Samaria” (*Apol.* I 26,2; *Dial.* 120,6). In the context of these latter instances Justin refers to Simon and his followers as “Samaritans.” Under closer examination, then, there are good reasons to agree with the conclusions of Bruce HALL that Justin had very limited contact with both Samaritans and Simonians:

[W]e have no grounds for believing that Justin was well acquainted with any members of the Samaritan ethnic group. A Gentile born in Flavia Neapolis, he may have left Samaria at a comparatively early age to further his studies in Greek philosophy to which he refers in the early chapters of the *Dialogue with Trypho*, and whether he did so or not, his contacts while he was living in Samaria were probably, at least largely, with members of the Gentile population of that region. It is quite possible that his claim that in his own time almost all Samaritans were Simonians was based merely upon an observation that Simonianism was strong among his Gentile acquaintances in Samaria. (HALL 1991: 118)

There are literary features in Acts 8:4–25 which provide further clues for deciphering the matter of a Samaritan Simon. For example, the common use of διασπείρω (only three occurrences of the verb in the New

⁷⁸ There is more evidence in the literature of considerable support for Dositheus, rather than Simon. Cf. ISSER 1976.

⁷⁹ JUSTIN, *Dial.* 28.

⁸⁰ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 53.

Testament) connects Acts 8:4–25 backward to 8:1b and forward to 11:19–20.

Now those who were scattered (οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες) went from place to place (διήλθον) proclaiming (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) the word (τὸν λόγον). Philip went down to [the] city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ [Messiah?] to them. (Acts 8:4–5)

Now those who were scattered (οἱ μὲν οὖν διασπαρέντες) because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled (διήλθον) as far as Phoenicia ... and they spoke the word (τὸν λόγον) to no one except the Jews. But among them were some ... who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) the Lord Jesus. (Acts 11:19–20)

Since Adolf VON HARNACK, the close parallels between Acts 8:4 and 11:19–20 have raised the question of an underlying “Antioch” source into which Luke has imported various blocks of material, including the mission of Philip into Samaria and his encounter with Simon (Acts 8:4–40).⁸¹ However, these patterns could alternatively be viewed as characteristic of Lukan style, a means of connecting various parts of his narrative.⁸² Within Acts 8:4–5, the verbs διασπείρω and διέρχομαι are used to describe the movements of Philip and other refugees from Jerusalem. Although rare in the New Testament, διασπείρω and its cognate, διασπορά, are widely used in the Septuagint to refer to the dispersion of Jews from Israel to the lands of the Gentile nations (ἔθνη).⁸³ This is true of Acts 11:19–20, where those associated with Stephen settle in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Also, even though Philip stays within Israel’s borders (8:4–40) his association with the Samaritan nation and the Ethiopian eunuch places him on the shadowy fringes of Judaism.

In conclusion, while the claim of HENGEL (1995: 69) that Luke’s only interest in Acts 8 is “the geographically visible progress of ... mission,” is far too expansive, available evidence places under serious doubt the historical possibility of Simon being a member of the Samaritan ethnic group. The sources point to Simon being a resident of Samaria, and

⁸¹ VON HARNACK 1911b: 131–188. Harnack grouped together Acts 6:1–8:4; 11:19–30; 12:25; and chapters 13–15 as Antiochene traditions, and associated the Philip material in 8:5–40 with 3:1–5:16; 9:29–11:18 and 12:1–24 which featured Peter and a Jerusalem-Caesarea setting.

⁸² On Luke’s distinctive style in holding his story together with repetitive phrases, sometimes at wide intervals, cf. CADBURY 1976: 88–97.

⁸³ Cf. SCHMIDT 1964: 99.

references to his being “Samaritan” serve a literary purpose. For example, the mention of Samaria would have immediately alerted some of Luke’s audience who—those with a particular Jewish mindset—regarded Samaritans as idolatrous⁸⁴ and associated with the practice of magic.⁸⁵ Josephus comments that Samaritans could appear at one moment as Jewish “kinsmen” and the next as “aliens of another race” (*Ant.* IX 291). Josephus also identifies the Samaritans with the “Cutheans” (2 Kings 17:24) who replaced the deported inhabitants of northern Israel after the Assyrian conquest,⁸⁶ and, in another place he labels them the “Sidonians in Shechem” who agitated to rename the Gerazim temple in honour of Zeus (*Ant.* XII 257–264).

The Mishnah likewise gives a mixed evaluation of the origin and heritage of Samaritans. Rabbi Eliezer refers to them as being of “doubtful stock” (*m. Qidd.* 4,3) and comments that anyone who eats their bread “eats the flesh of swine” (*m. Seb.* 8,10). Further, like the Gentiles, Samaritans are denied the religious duties of making sin-offerings and paying temple taxes (*m. Seq.* 1,5). Yet, other references clearly incorporate Samaritans within the people of Israel, as in the regulation that the Common grace must be recited when at least three Israelites dine together—including when one of them is a Samaritan (*m. Ber.* 7,1). Finally, while obvious tensions existed between Jews and Samaritans, their relationship is more complex and ambiguous than the summary assessment of John 4:9—“they have nothing to do with each other.” There is insufficient evidence to establish any clear or permanent division between these two socio-religious groups, and the Samaritans (according to their own literature) were no more syncretistic than contemporary Palestinian Judaism, and endeavoured to keep unshakeably to faith in the “one God” and his Law despite all persecutions.

Luke is certainly aware of strong Jewish opinions concerning Samaritans, viewing them as ἀλλογενής, “another race/kind” (Luke 17:18). Yet rather than this being equivalent to “pagan” or “gentile” the word clearly means “ethnically strange” or “religiously heterodox.” Certainly, the antipathy between both groups is reflected in gospel narratives such as Luke 9:51–56 and 10:25–27. Raymond BROWN comments that in some circles to be called a Samaritan was tantamount to being called

⁸⁴ Cf. Amos 3:9, 12; 8:14; Isa 8:4; Hos 8:5–6; Mic 1:5–6.

⁸⁵ Cf. *b. Sota* 22a.

⁸⁶ Cf. JOSEPHUS, *BJ* I 63; *Ant.* IX 288–290; X 184; XI 19–20, 88, 302; XIII 225.

“demented,”⁸⁷ that is, having a demon of madness. However, Luke clearly understands that Samaritans are ultimately worshippers of the same God as the Jews (cf. Luke 17:11–19).⁸⁸

So, Samaritans are to be viewed under the broad umbrella of first century CE Judaism and it is inappropriate to speak in this context of the commencement of a “Gentile Mission.” Instead this episode reflects an interim period prior to early Christian witness in Caesarea and Antioch. Klaus BERGER (1994: 313) has argued that the importance of Acts 8:4–25 is that it preserves evidence of an early Samaritan Christianity, as distinct from the Jerusalem community. BERGER raises the possibility that Luke defends the legitimacy of a Samaritan Christianity in Acts 8:4–40, over against those who follow a more narrow and restrictive mission policy (cf. Matt 10:5). Certainly, an apologetic agenda cannot be excluded from discussions about Acts 8, however the remainder of BERGER’s argument remains unproven; outlining the contours of an early Samaritan Christianity even more difficult to achieve than efforts to describe early forms of Jewish Christianity.

5.2.2 An Analysis of Acts 8:4–25

It is tempting to connect Philip’s preaching “the Christ” with the distinctive Samaritan expectation of a “restorer” (*Tabeb*), who would be a prophet like Moses (or even Moses *redivivus*) in fulfilment of the promise in Deut 18:15, and restore true worship on mount Gerazim.⁸⁹ However, the lack of any Samaritan sources dating from the same period as the New Testament is a significant obstacle to any confident verification of such a connection. Even so, the writings of Josephus give witness to considerable “messianic expectation” in Samaria during the period roughly contemporaneous with the story of Simon (*Ant.* XVIII 85–87). Further, if Philip’s “preaching the word: εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον” did involve proclaiming Jesus as τὸν Χριστὸν/*Tabeb*⁹⁰—the one who, like Moses, “stands” in the presence or counsel of God (cf. Exod 3:4–6; 33:18–23; Deut 5:31)—some intriguing questions arise concerning

⁸⁷ Cf. BROWN 1971: I, 358; TERTULLIAN, *Against Marcion* III 13. Samaria is almost a synonym for idolatry.

⁸⁸ For further details concerning Jewish-Samaritan relations, cf. JERVELL 1972; PURVIS 1986; CROWN 1989.

⁸⁹ Cf. COGGINS 1982; PUMMER 1992; CROWN 1989.

⁹⁰ Cf. ISSER 1975: 175–177; 1976: 138–140; FOSSUM 1985: 117–120.

connections with (1), Simon’s claim to be someone great: λέγων εἶναί τινα ἑαυτὸν μέγαν, verse 9; (2), the crowd’s acclamation of Simon as ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ; and (3), later reports in early Christian literature that Simon and Dositheus both styled themselves as the expected “prophet like Moses”/ “Standing One.”

Luke comments in verse 6 how the preaching of Philip impressed the local population: προσεῖχον δὲ οἱ ὄχλοι τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Φιλίππου. The verb προσέχω appears 24 times in the New Testament, of which ten occurrences are in Luke’s writings (6 in Acts). The active voice is rendered variously as “to turn one’s mind/attention to, to follow, to devote oneself to;” although, it is always translated in the Gospels as being “to watch out, to be on guard, to take care.” Yet, the combination and obvious interconnection of various elements in Acts 8:4–13 offers compelling reasons for other nuances to be associated with προσεῖχον than the simple idea of “paying close attention” to someone.

The appearance of προσεῖχον three times in five verses highlights more than Luke’s blending of oral traditions about Simon and Philip. These repeated προσέχω expressions effectively link⁹¹ the respective responses of (1), the crowds to Philip, verses 6–8; (2), the crowds to Simon, verses 9–11; and (3), ultimately both of these anticipate and elevate the response of Simon to Philip in verse 13. However, SPENCER argues that not every instance of προσέχω is the same:

With respect to Philip, the Samaritans “listened eagerly to what was said” (προσεῖχον ... τοῖς λεγομένοις, v. 6); in Simon’s case they “listened eagerly to him” (προσεῖχον δὲ αὐτῷ, v. 11; cf. v. 10). It was not Philip himself, but Philip’s message about Christ, which arrested the Samaritan’s attention; by contrast, the Samaritans’ attachment to Simon was more of a personality fixation, an enchantment with a cult figure. The closest Lukan parallel to the Samaritans’ ‘eager listening’ to Philip’s preaching is not their former devotion to Simon but rather the opening of Lydia’s heart “to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul”: προσέχειν τοῖς λαουμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου [Acts 16:14]. (SPENCER 1992: 51)

This assessment by SPENCER is curious to say the least; for there are linguistic, grammatical, and contextual reasons to interpret each προσέχω expression in Acts 8 in the same manner. Every instance of the compound

⁹¹ Cf. LÜDEMANN 1987: 94, “It cannot be demonstrated by vocabulary statistics that προσεῖχον in v. 6 is redactional, but that is probably the case because it is used again in vv 10, 11.”

verb προσέχω in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts is in conjunction with the dative and usually with a governing participial phrase. The verb προσέχω is never used in connection with persons—unless a case could be made for those instances⁹² involving προσέχω with the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῖς—but always with reference to the actions and attitudes of individuals. Lukan syntax, and a discernible literary pattern in Acts 8, dictates that both the dative form of the relative pronoun ὃς with προσέχω in verse 10 and the phrase προσεῖχον δὲ αὐτῷ in verse 11 should be translated in light of verse 6.

So, as Table 2 illustrates, the crowds respond to the message (τοῖς λεγομένοις) of Philip and the message (λέγων) of Simon. Again, in verse 13 Simon responds (cf. προσκαρτερῶν) to the message (εὐαγγελίζομαι) of Philip. The messages proclaimed respectively by Philip (verses 6–7, 12–13) and Simon (verses 9–11) were visual as well as aural events.⁹³ The σημεῖα of Philip in verse 13 serve to authenticate claims that God was with him and confirm the truth of his message concerning τὸν Χριστόν and τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. In similar vein Luke reports in verse 9 the message of Simon (λέγων) who was μαγεύων and astounding the people of Samaria.

The verb προσέχω is also significant as an example of Luke's use of the imperfective aspect to create semantic prominence in verses 4–13. As Stanley PORTER has argued the choice of tense form by speakers and writers in Hellenistic Greek signifies one of three planes of discourse: background, foreground, or foreground.⁹⁴

⁹² Cf. Luke 12:1; 17:3; 21:34; Acts 5:35.

⁹³ Cf. Acts 2:22.

⁹⁴ PORTER 1992: 22, "In Greek the aorist is what some have called the default tense ... the tense chosen when there is no reason to choose another. The imperfective (present/imperfect) aspect is more heavily weighted, and to use it in opposition to the perfective (aorist) implies greater semantic significance. The stative (perfect/pluperfect) aspect is most heavily weighted, and to use it in opposition to the perfective (aorist) and imperfective (present/imperfect) aspects implies the greatest significance."

TABLE 2		Literary Patterns in Acts 8:6–13	
Verses 6–7			
προσείχον δὲ οἱ ὄχλοι	→	τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ Φιλίππου	← ἐκήρυσσεν αὐτοῖς τὸν Χριστόν
	↗		
ἐν τῷ ἀκούειν αὐτοὺς καὶ βλέπειν τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει		↑ πολλοὶ γὰρ τῶν ἐχόντων πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα ... ἐξήρχοντο	
Verses 9–11			
ὃ προσεῖχον πάντες	→	Ἄνθρωπος δὲ τις ὀνόματι Σίμων λέγων	← [ἐγὼ εἰμι] ἡ δύναμις ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη
	↗		
ταῖς μαγείαις ἐξεστακέσαι αὐτοῦς		↑ μαγεύων καὶ ἐξιστάνων	
Verses 12–13			
[ὁ Σίμων] ἦν προσκαρτερῶν τῷ Φιλίππῳ	→	[Φίλιππος] εὐαγγελιζομένῳ	← περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
	↗		
ὁ δὲ Σίμων καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπίστευσεν καὶ βαπτισθεὶς		↑ θεωρῶν τε σημεῖα καὶ δυνάμεις μεγάλας γινομένας ἐξίστατο	

Of the 34 verbs in Acts 8:4–13 there are 8 verbs in the aorist tense, 24 verbs in either the present or imperfect tense, and 2 verbs in the perfect tense. According to discourse analysis theory the aorist creates a backdrop canvas against which other features of greater semantic significance are highlighted. So the set of aorist verbs in verses 4–13 requires no special comment. However, the 24 verbs in either the present or imperfect tense have the potential to cast a spotlight on, or to foreground, certain features and individuals in the narrative; and, as will be demonstrated later, there can be little doubt about the prominence of the remaining verbs in the perfect tense.

The striking nature of Luke's use of the verb προσέχω in this section is not that it is used in opposition to perfective (aorist) or stative (perfect/pluperfect) aspects but that twice it is nested in verses that use the imperfective exclusively, and then in verse 11 it is used in opposition to the perfect infinitive of the verb ἐξίστημι. It could be argued that a text that foregrounds everything would be a text that highlights nothing. But prominence is not merely a feature confined to a sentence, a verse, or a paragraph; the broader context and verbal aspects of the Simon story work together to create prominence. So the clustering of verbs with an exclusive imperfective aspect in verses 6, 9, and 10 is a prominent feature of the story of Simon in Acts 8:4–25; and, significantly, these verses appear in that section of the story which has already been identified as displaying the hallmarks of Lukan editing through the blending of various traditions.

What gives additional prominence to the verb προσέχω is that it is repeated three times in the space of five verses (vv 6, 10, 11). The mere fact that this particular verb is repeated does not signal it is foregrounded by Luke, but given consideration with the features mentioned above there is sufficient cause to give this verb special attention. Indeed, perhaps this is one of the emphases which reflect the author's situational context.

Arguably Luke's employment of the imperfective aspect conveys a durative sense to the actions described. Just as crowds stand along the roadside watching a parade pass by, so the audience or readers of this narrative encounter details immersed in its imperfective aspects; that is, as something in progress. We are left wondering to whom and to what Luke considers some to have "turned their mind/attention to," or "to follow," or "to devote themselves to." When later we take up this matter again, Luke's use of two verbs in the perfect tense will prove crucial and instructive for our conclusions. However, in the narrative before us, clearly the repeated use of the verb προσέχω effectively links the respective responses of the crowds to Philip and Simon; and, ultimately,

both of these anticipate and elevate the response of Simon to Philip in verse 13.

Verse 7 describes the noisy procession of unclean (evil/vicious) spirits from those they possessed. The verb ἔχειν is less common in Luke than in other synoptic writings;⁹⁵ in fact, there is some evidence that Luke avoids its use.⁹⁶ Even more rare in New Testament idiom is the phrase πνεῦμα ἔχειν (cf. Mark 3:22 βεελεζεβοὺλ ἔχει). Notable exceptions are Mark 3:30 (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει); Mark 7:25 (ἦς εἶχεν τὸ θυγάτριον αὐτῆς πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον); and, Acts 8:7 is also an exception, being the only instance of “having” an unclean spirit in Luke–Acts.⁹⁷ This further suggests the blending of various traditions in verses 4–12.

With the use of assonance Luke draws connections between the release of the πολλοὶ ... τῶν ἐχόντων πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα and the ὄχλοι who paid attention to the message of Philip, and in familiar Lukan style summarises that they became of one mind (ὁμοθυμαδόν).⁹⁸ Luke highlights a transfer of allegiance here with a juxtaposition of the response of the crowds who formerly followed Simon (προσείχον δὲ αὐτῷ διὰ τὸ ἰκανῶ χρόνῳ ταῖς μαγείαις ἐξεστακέναι αὐτούς) and the response of Simon, who likewise attaches himself to Philip (verse 13: ἦν προσκαρτερῶν τῷ Φιλίππῳ).

The perfect passive form of the verb παραλύω in verse 7 is distinctively Lukan in style. Apart from one exception, New Testament occurrences of the verb are found exclusively in Luke–Acts.⁹⁹ The Gospels prefer to use the substantive παραλυτικός.¹⁰⁰ Further, Luke’s choice to combine παραλελυμένοι with the plural form of the substantive χωλός is likewise unique. The plural form of χωλός is otherwise almost always used in the New Testament together with τυφλοί, and in addition appears often with a catalogue of persons

⁹⁵ Even so, the common synoptic construction uses the preposition ἐν or ὑπό with (τὸ) πνεῦμα (τὸ) ἀκάθαρτον.

⁹⁶ Cf. Mark 2:19 = Luke 5:34; Mark 3:1 = Luke 6:6; Mark 5:3 = Luke 8:27.

⁹⁷ HANSE (1964: 821) argues that ἔχειν doesn’t mean “to have in one’s power” or “to possess” but “[i]t expresses a spatial relationship and means to ‘bear in oneself’.”

⁹⁸ The adverb ὁμοθυμαδόν, apart from Rom 15:6, appears exclusively in Acts, where it primarily serves in summaries (1:14; 2:46; 4:42; 5:12).

⁹⁹ Cf. Luke 5:18, 24; Acts 8:7; 9:33 [Heb 12:12].

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Mt 4:24; 8:6; 9:2, 6; Mark 2:3–5, 9–10; John 5:3. An interesting textual variant at Luke 5:24 has considerable witnesses in support of τῷ παραλυτικῷ Ἰ C D L N W Θ Ξ Ψ f¹³ 33. 579. 700. 1241. 1424 *al* | *txt* A B f¹ R.

suffering from other infirmities. This is also Luke's common practice.¹⁰¹ So these details, together with a concentration of imperfective tense forms in verse 6, and the verbal opposition created in verse 7 between the perfect passive participle παραλελυμένοι and the aorist indicative passive ἐθεραπεύθησαν, provide another example of semantic prominence. Importantly, also, since Acts 8:4–13 effectively links and parallels the respective responses of the crowds to Philip and Simon—and ultimately Simon's response to Philip—this broader context invites us to correlate παραλελυμένοι and ἐθεραπεύθησαν in verse 7 with ἐξιστακέναι (verse 11) and ἐπίστευσαν (verse 12). The verb παραλύω can convey the idea of being weakened or disabled rather than being physically paralysed, and so παραλύω can be translated symbolically as in Heb 12:12.¹⁰²

Similarly, the intransitive form of the verb ἐξίστημι means “to become separated from something/ to lose something,” mostly to lose spiritual or mental balance. In the New Testament the weakened, or attenuated sense “to be amazed/astonished” is common. So Luke connects the report of how those having been weakened were “healed”¹⁰³ by Philip, with the claim that those “amazed” by the μαγείαις of Simon “believed” what Philip preached and “were baptized:”

ὅτε δὲ ἐπίστευσαν τῷ Φιλίππῳ εὐαγγελιζομένῳ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐβαπτίζοντο ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες (Acts 8:12).

But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Since the stative aspect in Greek always conveys the sense of an action complete in the past continuing to have an effect in the present, the perfect form of the verb ἐξίστημι in verse 11 should be understood to foreground—to strongly emphasise—an issue which the events of this story about Simon and Philip allegedly seek to address.

Commentators at this point may wonder if Luke is implying that some of his audience are still being “amazed” by something or someone,

¹⁰¹ Cf. Luke 7:22; 14:13, 21.

¹⁰² Heb 12:12, “... καὶ τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα ἀνορθώσατε.”

¹⁰³ In the New Testament, acts of healing are mentioned alongside the preaching of the gospel and include the restoration of creation, the saving of life, and the loosing of Satan's bonds (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Mark 3:2–5, 27; 7:35; 8:25; Luke 4:18–19; 13:13–16; 14:3–4; John 5:9; 9:14). Demonstrably there is always a strong eschatological aspect with the healings of Jesus; so the appropriate translation of θεραπεύω is *to heal* or *to make whole*; even “*to save*.”

and are yet to be convinced of/ or believe in “God’s kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ: βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (8:12b)”; perhaps yet to be baptised? In addition, the placement of the present participle εὐαγγελιζομένῳ and the imperfect passive form of the verb βαπτίζω in verse 12 reinforces the durative sense of the actions being reported.

After Philip’s preaching and healing activity there is πολλή χαρά in that city.¹⁰⁴ Joyous reception of the word in experiences of conversion and healing is a popular theme in Luke. Joy is the result of God’s presence and activity in the world (cf. Luke 2:10), rather than being primarily an involuntary and internal emotion. SCHNEIDER suggests¹⁰⁵ this reference to joy in verse 8 is provided in deliberate contrast to responses to Simon’s activity described in verses 9–11. However, rather than being a planned narrative device to contrast the respective crowd responses to Philip and Simon, this appears to be a common description found in Lukan summaries¹⁰⁶ that report the expansion and reception of the good news. It could also simply be argued that Luke’s sources were without further specific details. So, one story ends abruptly and is followed immediately in verse 9 by a flashback account of some previous activities in “the [same?] city: ἐν τῇ πόλει” involving “a certain man called Simon: Ἀνὴρ δέ τις ὀνόματι Σίμων.”

The adjectival use of the enclitic pronoun τις normally indicates something indefinite¹⁰⁷ or undetermined; although it can convey either the sense of “a certain [person],” or—as later appears in Acts 8:9b—it can be used emphatically to indicate somebody special if not extraordinary.¹⁰⁸ However there are no grammatical or contextual reasons that compel our translation of τις with an ironic or contemptuous sense. Indeed the high incidence of the pronoun τις in Luke–Acts¹⁰⁹ and the frequent appearance of this characteristic form of introduction¹¹⁰ favours the indefinite sense: “a certain man ...”.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Luke 8:13; 15:7; Acts 15:3.

¹⁰⁵ SCHNEIDER (1980: 489) makes the claim: “[Es] steht die Notiz über die Freude in Samaria vielleicht in bewußtem Kontrast zu den folgenden Angaben über den Magier Simon (vv 9–11).”

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Luke 8:13; 10:17; Acts 15:3.

¹⁰⁷ τις is often omitted in English translations.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. BAGD § 1aβ, 2aβ; BDF § 301.

¹⁰⁹ τις appears 80 times in Luke, and 115 times in the Acts.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Luke 10:38; 16:20; Acts 5:1; 9:10, 36; 10:1.

Simon is described as having been active in the city for some time [previous to Philip's arrival]: προῦπήρχεν. Together with other unique features,¹¹¹ the appearance of this rare verb¹¹² highlights Luke's handiwork and introduces a string of verbs over two verses, which are either present or imperfect tense-forms. As with verses 6–7 semantic prominence is created by an exclusive use of the imperfective aspect; a pattern, which concludes with a verb in the perfect tense (ἐξιστακέναι) followed by an aorist form of the verb πιστεύω.

Luke reports that Simon amazes the local population with words and actions. The claims¹¹³ of Simon were authenticated by his μαγεύων. The noun μαγεία and the verb μαγεύω are found in the New Testament only at Acts 8:9, 11. DELLING (1967: 359) provides a precise definition of μαγεία as the activity of a μάγος and μαγεύω as the actions of a μάγος.

As documented in chapter three, in classical Greek and Roman sources the chief activities of a μάγος were considered to be the worship of the gods, in sacrifice and prayers; and, in the performance of these activities they implied none but themselves had the ear of the gods. Other practices commonly associated with the μάγοι were dream-sending, divination and forecasting the future as well as distinctive teachings and lifestyle; yet, despite some notable slurs upon their reputation, their activities did not include “magic” in a shady sense.

However, English translations of Acts 8:9—without exception—encourage misunderstanding of the Simon episode by deciphering the present participle μαγεύων as “practising magic/ sorcery/ witchcraft.” Considerable social and cultural presuppositions accompany these nouns, which ultimately introduce anachronous ideas that are discordant with the text of Acts. This translation then ought to be challenged as being superficial and selective. It is superficial because it indicates a general lack of penetration into the issues surrounding the nature and activity of the μάγοι in antiquity. It is selective whenever scholars consign Simon to the shadows and fringes by linking him with figures like Bar-Jesus, the Jewish

¹¹¹ For example: the verb ἐξιστάνω appears only in Acts 8:11 and 8:13; the participle μαγεύων occurs only in 8:9; the use of the participle καλουμένη in naming things, places, and persons is distinctively Lukan (cf. Luke 10:39; 19:29; 21:37; Acts 1:12); the appearance of the qualifying comment τοῦ θεοῦ in verse 10 is recognised as a Lukan pleonasm; and the verb προσκαρτερέω occurs ten times in the New Testament, with six instances being in the Book of Acts. Cf. LÜDEMANN (1987: 94–95) for a comprehensive listing of unique and distinctive features in this section.

¹¹² Appears only twice in the New Testament: Luke 23:12; Acts 8:9.

¹¹³ Cf. Acts 8:10, λέγων εἶναι τινα ἑαυτὸν μέγαν.

false-prophet, μάγος and “son of the devil” in Acts 13, but disregard connections suggested by the mysterious reference to μάγοι in Matthew’s nativity story. The passage of time has not tarnished the reputation of those μάγοι for being wise and humble persons who knelt in adoration of the authority of the babe in Bethlehem, when they appeared as the quintessential “good fairies”¹¹⁴ at the birth of Jesus.

BARRETT is representative of this selective approach when first he cites Philo’s¹¹⁵ comments about true magic (ἀληθῆ μαγικῆν) but then also states that “there is a counterfeit to this ... pursued by charlatan mendicants and parasites and the basest of the women and slave population ...”.¹¹⁶ BARRETT (1979: 287) claims “it goes without saying that Luke did not think of Simon ... as [a] high-grade Persian priest.” Instead, he concludes, “Simon is one of a class that Luke strongly dislikes; he has illicit dealings with the supernatural, and makes money out of them” (BARRETT 1994: 406).¹¹⁷

It is remarkable that BARRETT can be so convinced about something that there is absolutely no evidence for in the text. Simon is not yet called a μάγος by Luke. The precise nature of his μαγεύειν (8:9) and μαγεία (8:11) is not provided in the Acts, and this is a disputed matter also in the sources. Why should it be so implausible that the very thing Barrett denies may indeed be the case? Is it possible that Simon was a μάγος whose family had ended up in Samaria following one of the western migrations of the Magoi during the Hellenic period? Our overview of references to the Magoi in the literature of Greek and Roman antiquity identified sufficient evidence to support modification of common translations of the present participle μαγεύων as “to practice sorcery.” The same evidence requires a similar re-evaluation of the person of Simon; namely, the possibility that the description of Simon as μαγεύων preserves a pre-Lukan oral tradition, and the very history of this word in the ancient world suggests Simon’s origin and activities as a μάγος: being an expert in divination, interpretation of dreams, and a hereditary specialist in religious rituals and songs.

¹¹⁴ GILBERT 1996: 14, “The role of the Magi in Matthew’s Nativity story is mysterious throughout. They appear like good fairies at the birth, each offering a gift that somehow symbolizes Jesus’ destiny: gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, and myrrh for a healer.”

¹¹⁵ PHILO, *De specialibus legibus* III 18; cf. chapter 3, section 2.5.1 above (p. 54).

¹¹⁶ Cf. BARRETT 1994: 405.

¹¹⁷ Cf. WITHERINGTON 1998: 283, “Luke [portrays] Simon ... as a magician hungry for power (and money).”

The noun *χρῆμα* appears six times in the New Testament, of which the majority of occurrences are in Luke's writings—twice in Acts 8. Luke portrays the true disciple of Jesus (Luke 10:4; 18:22; Acts 3:5; 4:32; cf. Matt 10:8) as someone who renounces wealth/possessions in order to receive and freely give riches from the kingdom of God. This is in contrast especially with itinerant peddlers of holy things, who were widely suspected of being charlatans and were renown for their avarice.¹¹⁸ However, while Luke alludes to the considerable income generated by the girl at Philippi who practised mantic arts (Acts 16:16) and those who produced magic paraphernalia and silverware at Ephesus (Acts 19:19, 24), there is nothing in the text of Acts 8 to justify BARRETT's claims that Simon had "illicit dealings with the supernatural, and makes money out of them." Here Simon is only guilty by selective extra-textual association.

Simon is said to practice as a *μάγος* and that he amazes the local community (Acts 8:9). The most frequent meaning of *ἐξίστημι* in the New Testament is the weakened intransitive sense "to become separated from something," "to lose something." LAMBRECHT (1991: 7) defines this as "a mental condition of being outside of oneself, or of astonishment because of amazement or fear."¹¹⁹

In the Gospels it is Jesus who "amazes." As a child in the temple precincts Jesus amazes everyone who hears him debate with the teachers: *ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες οἱ ἀκούοντες αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῇ συνέσει καὶ ταῖς ἀποκρίσεσιν αὐτοῦ* (Luke 2:47). During Jesus' public ministry the crowds were amazed at his healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:12, *ἐξίστασθαι πάντες*), and the raising of the synagogue ruler's daughter (Mark 5:42, *καὶ ἐξέστησαν ἐκστάσει μεγάλη*).¹²⁰ The disciples are amazed at Jesus' walking on the water and at his command over the violent elements: *καὶ ἀνέβη πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ λίαν ἐκ περισσοῦ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐξίσταντο* (Mark 6:51). The one exception to this almost exclusive application of the verb *ἐξίστημι* in the Gospels to the person and work of Jesus appears in Luke's resurrection narrative. Cleopas and his companion are in discussion with an unrecognised Jesus as they report how some of the women in their company "amazed" them

¹¹⁸ Cf. PLATO, *Republic* 364b; APULEIUS, *Golden Ass* VIII 26–30.

¹¹⁹ BDF § 93. *ἐξίστημι* = koine by-form *ἐξιστάνω*; Cf. BAGD 275–276, esp. 2 (b): "in our lit. more freq., and (as it seems) so far only in the Bible or works influenced by it, in the weakened or attenuated sense *be amazed*, *be astonished*, of the feeling of astonishment mingled w. fear caused by events which are miraculous, extraordinary, or difficult to understand."

¹²⁰ Cf. Luke 8:56, *καὶ ἐξέστησαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῆς*.

(Luke 24:22, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναικῆς τινες ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξέστησαν ἡμᾶς) with tales of angelic visions and an empty tomb.

In Acts the verb ἐξίστημι appears in connection with miraculous and unexplained events: the manifestation of tongues at Pentecost (2:7, 12); the response of the crowds in Damascus to Paul’s teaching after his conversion (9:21); the response of circumcised believers at Caesarea at the outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles (10:45); the response of the household of Mary at the release of Peter from jail (12:16). Like Jesus in the gospels, the ministry of the apostles in Acts is portrayed as being mighty in word and deed, and is received by the crowds with amazement.

But Acts 8:9, 11 are considered notable exceptions.¹²¹ In these instances the present participle ἐξιστάνων (8:9) and the perfect infinitive ἐξεστακέσαι (8:11) are assigned the transitive sense of “to confuse, amaze, astound.” However, it is a moot point whether much distinction can be drawn between the claim that Simon “amazes” people and other claims that crowds were amazed by the ministry of Jesus and the apostles; or, in this instance, by what Philip did and said. Clearly a like effect was produced in Simon by Philip: θεωρῶν τε σημεῖα καὶ δυνάμεις μεγάλας γινομένης ἐξίστατο (8:13). For Luke the true difference resides not in individual characters or motivation, but in their sources of power.¹²²

As already noted above, the messages proclaimed respectively by Philip (8:6–7, 12–13) and Simon (8:9–11) were visual as well as aural events. The σημεῖα καὶ δυνάμεις of Philip are said to include healings of various kinds as powerful demonstrations of the kingdom of God and the name¹²³ of Jesus Christ. Here, as BARRETT (1994: 408) comments, “the name of Jesus is a term for the active power of Jesus, visibly at work in the healing of disease and in spiritual healing also.” In similar vein Luke reports the reputation and claims of Simon who was ἐν τῇ πόλει μαγεύων καὶ ἐξιστάνων τὸ ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρείας. In light of the evident

¹²¹ In addition to the Acts 8 passage, BAGD identifies two occurrences of the verb ἐξίστανω which are given a stronger meaning still: Mark 3:21 (ἐξέστη: “he [Jesus] is beside himself”) and 2 Cor 5:13 (“for if we are in ecstasy [ἐξέστημεν]).

¹²² Jesus had promised his disciples would receive power to be his witnesses: λήψετε δύναμιν (Acts 1:8).

¹²³ Cf. VAN DER HORST (1989: 38–39) for examples of belief in the power of certain sacred, secret, and divine names; however, ZIESLER (1979: 28–41) argues there is no evidence in Acts that Christian use of “the name” conforms to the ancient use of names in magical formulae. BARRETT (1994: 182–183) comments, “[in] 19:13ff ... mere invocation of the name has an effect very different from that which its user hopes for, [which] shows a belief that Jesus is exalted above all magical compulsion.”

literary patterns employed by Luke in 8:4–11 Simon’s μαγεύων is linked with Philip’s σημεῖα καὶ δυνάμεις. While the specific activities of Simon are hidden within Luke’s use of the ambiguous participle μαγεύων, it has already been documented above that practices commonly associated with the μάγοι were dream-sending, divination and forecasting the future, as well as distinctive teachings and lifestyle. Interestingly there is also a body of evidence¹²⁴ to suggest that healings were sometimes experienced together with dream visions and were understood as religious experiences in their own right; personal and ineffable encounters with the divine (cf. Acts 14:11; 28:6). So we cannot limit our view of Simon’s activity and public appeal to the spiritual dimension.

In reporting the crowd’s accolade of Simon—οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη (8:10)—Luke sets a point of comparison and contrast with the preaching of Philip concerning “the Christ” (8:5, 12) and “the kingdom of God” (8:12), which was accompanied with σημεῖα and δυνάμεις μεγάλα. The use of the present passive participle καλουμένη indicates that Luke recognised the word μεγάλη as a title;¹²⁵ and the accepted view is that τοῦ θεοῦ is a Lukan explanatory gloss.¹²⁶ HORSLEY (1976: 107) argues however that, “... [this] misses the point. For in fact ἡ δύναμις here ought to be a synonym for God; and Acts may be avoiding the full force of the claim Simon was making for himself.”

Certainly, a degree of ambiguity exists in Luke’s text, which allows the title of Simon either to be read as a claim to be the foremost of subordinate powers,¹²⁷ or as an explicit claim to divinity.¹²⁸ Epigraphic evidence¹²⁹ supports the claim that the epithet μεγάλη was applied

¹²⁴ Cf. MUIR 1995: 362–376; VAN STRATEN 1981: 65–151; EDELSTEIN 1945: 156–157.

¹²⁵ Cf. BEYSCHLAG 1974: 93–94; LÜDEMANN 1975: 45–46. In characteristic style, Luke records double-names nested within a καλέω construction: Luke 6:15; 8:21; Acts 1:23; 13:1; 15:37.

¹²⁶ Cf. HAENCHEN 1971: 303; BRUCE 1990: 219; BARRETT 1994: 407.

¹²⁷ ROLOFF (1981: 134, 137–138) and BEYSCHLAG (1974: 102–106) both argue that in its Lukan context the title “the Great Power (of God)” alludes to Simon’s reputation as a “divine man,” a supernatural being in human form.

¹²⁸ BAUR (1967: 304), WAITZ (1904: 121–122), and BOUSSET (1907: 261–262) had already identified “the Great Power (of God)” as a name in which the genitive was secondary, and suggested that Simon’s title reflected the later deification of Simon by the Simonians. FOERSTER (1967: 193–195) argued that Simon was the first individual in the history of Gnosticism to claim “divine honours.”

¹²⁹ Cf. BEYSCHLAG 1974: 106–120; LÜDEMANN 1975: 42–49; RUDOLPH 1977: 320–328; HORSLEY (*NDIEC* 3, § 68, 106) provides an extensive list of primary sources which attest to the epithet μέγας and its variants being applied to numerous gods

frequently to numerous gods in antiquity; and, that ἡ δύναμις as a widely used synonym for God was not restricted to Jewish thought. However, in light of the clear rejection of both blasphemous accolades and divine pretensions in Acts (Acts 12:21–23; 14:14–15), it seems strange that Luke would knowingly leave unchallenged a reported divine claim by Simon. Again, the comparatively frequent and vague application of titles such as μέγας and δύναμις in ancient literature—which involve a wide range of contexts and applications—prevents any single or conclusive answer concerning Simon’s title. There is no unilinear historical tradition; rather, it is best to imagine the contribution of numerous complex and subtle factors. This explains why, despite the attention of more than one hundred years of scholarship, questions concerning the background and meaning of the title ἡ δύναμις ἡ μεγάλη in Acts 8:10 remain in dispute.

When considering the internal evidence of the text, though, there can be little doubt about the author’s intention in bringing together the rival figures of Simon and Philip. As SPENCER (1992: 93) neatly summarises, “[Luke’s] juxtaposition of Philip’s and Simon’s Samaritan exploits demonstrates not merely that both figures worked miracles and attracted multitudes, but also that both vied for the devotion of the same Samaritan throng and that Philip emerged as the undisputed champion.” Luke reports that Simon himself¹³⁰—the δύναμις μεγάλη—is amazed by the δυνάμεις μεγάλαι of Philip; that he believes, is baptized, and closely follows the evangelist: προσκαρτερῶν τῷ Φιλίππῳ.

The verb προσκαρτερέω appears six times in the first ten chapters of Acts, and describes aspects of Christian devotion to worship and

in antiquity; FOSSUM (1985: 171–172) provides an exhaustive footnote on the scholarly debate concerning the Simon title in Acts 8:10; FLUSSER (1975: 13–20) cites one particular late second to third century CE inscription to the goddess Kore, discovered in a cistern in the stadium at Samaria—εἰς θεὸς ὁ πάντων δεσπότης μεγάλη κόρη ἡ ἀνείκητος—as unusual because the epithet ἀνείκητος is normally associated with Helios/Sol Invictus. FLUSSER further observes that this inscription describes Kore and Helios as the female and male aspects of the one god, ὁ πάντων δεσπότης, and that this inscription provides possible links with the person of Simon—whom tradition claims proclaimed himself as the δύναμις μεγάλη—and his companion Helen, who was his ἔννοια. Much, however, remains unknown.

¹³⁰ Luke’s use of καὶ αὐτός adds emphasis to the mention of Simon’s name, as if it was assumed by Luke that those hearing the report about Simon’s baptism would be surprised. WITHERINGTON (1998: 285) suggests that Luke phrases his report this way “for its apologetic value—Christianity must be a powerful religion if notable and powerful figures of other religious orientations seek to be baptized into the Christian community.”

fellowship. Comparable to the close attention Simon gives to Philip is the reference in Acts 10:7 concerning the soldiers assigned to Cornelius, who remained true to him.¹³¹ The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, however, states that Simon's "conversion was not the result of inner conviction of faith in Christ as Redeemer, but rather from selfish motives, for he hoped to gain greater magical power and thus to increase his influence" (KIRSCH 1999 [Online]). This scepticism voiced by various commentators over the genuineness of Simon's conversion cannot claim to be occasioned by anything in the text.¹³² In fact there is clear linguistic and contextual evidence in Luke's narrative that Simon's faith was not defective. Luke gives no indication at this point that Simon's faith was any less sincere than the other Samaritan converts.¹³³ Indeed, we must conclude that Luke portrays Simon's belief, baptism, and initial discipleship, to be as genuine. If there had been something wrong with Simon's or the Samaritans' faith Luke could readily have written at verse 12 that, "when they heard Philip they were baptised, but they did not yet truly believe." Instead Luke insists that they did believe and were baptized; and Simon also.

The present participle προσκαρτερῶν is one of three present-tense participles nested by Luke in verse 13, which in itself draws attention to these verbs in contrast to other verbal forms in the same verse.¹³⁴ Beyond producing semantic prominence, however, this verse provides what appears to be an editorial note, or bridge, which prepares Luke's audience for the complication, climax, and denouement of the story which follows.

¹³¹ Cf. SPICQ, *Notes* II 758: "attached to his service."

¹³² SCHNEIDER (1980: 491), ROLOFF (1981: 135), and STÄHLIN (1968: 121) echo the traditional claims of Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,1 and Eusebius, *H.E.* II 1,11 that Simon faked his conversion to gain further self-advantage. STÄHLIN comments that "sein Glaube war kein wahrer Glaube, seine Bekehrung keine echte Bekehrung; er bleibt der Magier, der er gewesen war." PERKINS (1994: 92) argues that "Simon's initial entry into the Christian community (8:13) is as fraudulent as the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira. Ananias and Sapphira and Simon have hearts that are filled with Satan." FOSSUM (1985: 164) considers Simon's conversion implausible, but supports the idea of Simon's baptism. Unfortunately FOSSUM's claim that "in the Hellenistic world it was not uncustomary to be initiated into several mysteries in order to secure the utmost of spiritual power," is made without supporting evidence.

¹³³ Cf. PESCH 1986: 275; BRUCE 1990: 220; BARRETT 1994: 409.

¹³⁴ The verb θεωρέω (14 times in Luke) is a narrative word which is not readily interchangeable with βλέπω. Beyond simple observation θεωρέω in Acts stands for "perception/recognition" (Acts 4:13; 17:22; 21:20; 27:10; 28:6). Further, the verb γίνομαι is a common narrative word in the New Testament (669 occurrences), and it appears frequently in Acts with the sense "happen/occur."

The introduction of two members from Jesus’ inner circle of disciples¹³⁵ emphasises the significance of verses 14–17 for the telling of Luke’s story. Further prominence is attracted to these verses by Luke’s choice of the perfect tense to report Samaria’s conversion (verse 14: δέδεκται ἡ Σαμάρεια),¹³⁶ and the unusual occurrence of two periphrastic pluperfects in verse 16 (ἦν ... ἐπιπεπτωκός; and, βεβαπτισμένοι ὑπήρχον).

The apostles in Jerusalem respond to news about Samaria having received¹³⁷ the word of God by dispatching Peter and John as emissaries. Mention of the οἱ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἀπόστολοι creates an apparent connection with the narrative at 8:1, but the free movement of apostolic representatives implies a different time period unfettered by various forms of confinement due to persecution. Luke gives no explanation for Peter and John’s journey, although Luke’s audience might reasonably conclude a complication had arisen, following Philip’s mission, in light of Luke’s observation that the Holy Spirit had not yet “fallen” upon any of the Samaritan converts. This delay between baptism and reception of the Spirit clearly is surprising from Luke’s description that the Samaritans had “not yet” (verse 16: οὐδέπω γάρ) received the Spirit. Nonetheless, despite this apparent anomaly such delays were not unheralded by Luke. Even the apostles waited in Jerusalem for the “promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4; 2:17, 33, 38).

The verb ἐπιπίπτειν occurs 11 times in the New Testament, of which 8 instances (7 in Acts) are found in the writings of Luke. In addition to the literal meaning of “to fall upon, throw oneself upon,” and the figurative sense of events or experiences “coming over” someone (eg. “fear,” Luke 1:12; Acts 19:17), Luke uses this word exclusively in the first eleven chapters of Acts to describe the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:16; 10:44; 11:15).¹³⁸ Understandably the very physical and aggressive nuances of the verb have occasioned various commentators to remark that the gift of the Spirit described in Acts 8:16 was not purely an inward spiritual experience.¹³⁹ This interpretation receives support from Luke’s own

¹³⁵ Cf. Luke 8:51; 9:28; 22:8; Acts 1:13; 3:1, 3; 4:1, 13, 19; 8:14, 17, 25.

¹³⁶ Philip’s success as to [τὴν] πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας (8:5) is assigned regional effect in verse 8:14, δέδεκται ἡ Σαμάρεια τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.

¹³⁷ Use of the verb δέχομαι in Luke’s writings is often synonymous with the verb πιστεῦω (Luke 8:13; Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11).

¹³⁸ Cf. variants in Acts 8:39; 19:5.

¹³⁹ Cf. BAUERNFEIND 1939: 124; BARRETT 1994: 413; BRUCE 1990: 222; HAENCHEN 1971: 304; STÄHLIN 1968: 124. In the homilies of Chrysostom on the Acts of the

narrative that Simon offered the apostles money following what he “saw” (8:18: ἰδὼν δέ), and other references in Acts (10:45–46; 19:6) that record how “prophecy” and “speaking in tongues” followed the laying on of hands.

In ancient Israel the prophets were believed to speak inspired messages under the control of God’s Spirit, sometimes described as “Yahweh’s hand” being upon them.¹⁴⁰ These revelatory experiences involved both visions¹⁴¹ and possession or control.¹⁴² Some prophets were said to speak under the influence of music,¹⁴³ group excitement,¹⁴⁴ and even self-flagellation.¹⁴⁵ Plausibly these ecstatic episodes involved persons “moving, shaking, quaking, speaking, and behaving as if their bodies were occupied with a power greater than all their normal faculties.”¹⁴⁶ Perhaps, also, the perceptible hallmarks of the Holy Spirit—prophecy and speaking in tongues (Acts 2:14; 10:46; 19:6)—are to be understood in Luke’s account of the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit, and that Simon observed these phenomena. However, there is no way historically to verify the conclusions of DERRETT (1982: 54–55) that Simon possessed extensive paranormal abilities, and could “enter trance at will, to give voice to his ‘Great’: but he had not (so we are told) the gift of inducing the required trance in others.” While it has been documented previously that the μάγοι of ancient times were commonly associated with dream-sending, divination, and forecasting the future, DERRETT’s comments about Simon are at best an educated guess.

In earlier critical research Acts 8:14–17 attracted considerable attention for alleged indications of *Frühkatholizismus*, or, what WEISER (1981: 203) referred to as Luke’s “Amt- und Kirchenverständnis”; namely, Luke’s understanding of church and ministry and his apparent need to

Apostles [NPNFa, *Homily XVIII*], CHRYSOSTOM remarks that Luke “would not have said, ‘And having seen,’ unless there had been some sensible manifestation; just as Paul [laid his hands on them] when they spoke in tongues: οὐκ ἂν εἶδεν εἰ μή τι αἰσθητὸν ἐγένετο, ὡς περ καὶ Παῦλος ἐποίησεν ὅτε ταῖς γλώσσαις ἐλάλου.”

¹⁴⁰ Eg. Isa 8:11; Jer 15:7; Ezek 3:14; 8:1; 33:21–22.

¹⁴¹ Eg. 1 Kings 22:19–23; Isa 1:1; Hos 12:10; Amos 1:1; 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1.

¹⁴² Cf. AUNE (1983: 86), “... it is useful to distinguish between possession trance (which can be mediumistic) and vision trance. In possession trance it is believed that an external supernatural being or power has taken control of a person, while in the vision trance it is thought that the soul leaves the body or that it is subject to vision hallucinations of various kinds.”

¹⁴³ 1 Sam 10:5–6; 2 Kings 3:15–19.

¹⁴⁴ Num 11:24–30; 1 Sam 10:5–13; 19:20–24.

¹⁴⁵ Zech 13:6 [cf. 1 Kings 18:28–29].

¹⁴⁶ Cf. DERRETT 1982: 54.

legitimise the freelance missionary activity of Philip by describing the incorporation of the Samaritans into the *una sancta apostolica* through an apostolic seal of approval.¹⁴⁷ New Testament commentators have also attempted to discern from these verses a Lukan theology of baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸ The apparent separation of faith and baptism (8:12–13) and the gift of the Holy Spirit for the Samaritans (8:16–17) is problematic for some theologians and Christian doctrinal traditions. However, none of these research issues are immediately relevant for our investigation of Simon and so the contours of each respective debate will not be outlined here.

Historically, questions about ecclesial authority are matters more directly raised together with the mention of Peter than Simon. Also, the articulation of a Lukan theology of baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit is only indirectly related to the Simon question insofar as some commentators have debated whether Simon ever was a recipient of the Holy Spirit. Yet there is nothing in the text to support the assumption that Simon was not included in the apostolic laying on of hands with prayer for the Holy Spirit. BARRETT (1979: 291) correctly notes that following the laying on of hands Simon does not ask for the Spirit, but offers to purchase the power to confer the Spirit. Further, Peter’s response to Simon in verse 21a, “you have neither part nor lot in this matter” (οὐκ ἔστιν σοι μερὶς οὐδὲ κλῆρος ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ) does not argue against Simon being a Christian, but offers an explanation for Simon not having a role in conferring God’s Spirit, and why repentance and forgiveness should be necessary for any claim that such a role was open for purchase.

Consistent with Luke’s theme of being equipped for proclamation with the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18, 36; 9:1; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:33), Luke’s concern in Acts 8:4–25 is for the exercise of authorised prophetic power. A unique feature in Luke’s writings is the frequent appearance of the nouns ἐξουσία and δύναμις next to each other (eg. Luke 4:36; 9:1; 10:19); indeed, both terms are used practically as synonyms.¹⁴⁹ So, as already noted, the signs and wonders (verse 13: σημεῖα καὶ δυνάμεις) performed by Philip authenticate his true prophetic status in contrast with the celebrated activities of Simon. Simon’s subsequent attempt to

¹⁴⁷ Cf. SCHILLE (1985: 205) who notes: “Lukas soll der selbständigen samaritanischen Arbeit die kirchliche Legitimation verschaffen.”

¹⁴⁸ Cf. ADLER 1951; BARRETT 1979; BEASLEY-MURRAY 1962: 118–120; DUNN 1970: 55–72; LAMPE 1955: 198–200; MENZIES 1991: 248–260; PESCH 1986: 282–285.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. CONZELMANN 1960: 182.

purchase this power and authority (verse 19: ἐξουσία) signals to Luke's audience that Simon does not share in the prophetic ministry exercised by the chosen witnesses of Jesus (οὐκ ἔστιν σοι μερὶς οὐδὲ κλῆρος ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ). BROWN (1969: 111) suggests that the prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ¹⁵⁰ probably refers to "apostleship" or "Christian mission." Certainly the context requires λόγος to be translated here as "matter," and so the phrase refers to the authority to proclaim the Word and confer the Holy Spirit.

Luke reports how Simon's desire for the authority to confer the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, like the apostles, resulted in his offering them money (verse 18: προσήνεγκεν αὐτοῖς χρήματα). The use in Christian history of the term "simony"—the purchase or sale of spiritual office—is generally traced back to this action of Simon. However, the earliest records and legislation about this denounced evil date from a much later period¹⁵¹ and are based on an unwarranted interpretation of the Simon episode. Just as unnecessary are those claims which suggest Simon's readiness to pay for the right to confer the Spirit is an indication "he would certainly intend to charge for the commodity when he passed it on."¹⁵² Such comments uncritically perpetuate ancient stereotypes about the avarice and venality of magic practitioners.¹⁵³

It also has been suggested that Simon's offer to Peter was neither a bribe nor an inducement but "simply a price for a 'priesthood' subordinate to Peter" (DERRETT 1982: 62). Certainly there is evidence that both the sale and auction of priesthods were not uncommon in the ancient world, even in Israel (cf. 2 Macc 4:7–10).¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, such an interpretation of Simon's action is neither consistent with the internal development of the story, nor in concert with a broader attitude

¹⁵⁰ HAENCHEN (1971: 305) and PESCH (1986: 276–77) interpret ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ as a formula of excommunication. "Simon is refused a share in Christianity." SCHNEIDER (1980: 494) agrees: "Dann wird Simon von 'dieser Sache' ausgeschlossen; gemeint ist: Er hat keinen Anteil an der Vollmacht der Apostel bzw. am Christentum."

¹⁵¹ Cf. ODCC 1990: 1278.

¹⁵² Cf. BARRETT 1979: 288.

¹⁵³ Cf. LUCIAN, *Philopseudeis* 15–16; *Tragic Gout* 171–173; JUVENAL, *Satires* VI 546; ORIGEN, *Against Celsus* I 68; PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius* VI 39; VIII 7; TACITUS, *Annals* XVI 30–33.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. OTTO 1905: 233–234; 1908: 328; SMALLWOOD 1967: 380; MAGIE 1988: 541–542; DERRETT 1982: 61; SEG IV 516B^{35–36}, τὰς ἱερωσύνας ὡσπερ ἐν ἀπαρτεία πιπράσκουσιν καὶ ἐκ παντὸς γένους ἐπὶ τὴν ὄνην αὐτῶν συγκαλοῦσιν ἀνθρώπους εἶτα οὐκ ἐγλέγονται τοὺς ἐπιτηδειοτάτους ...

discernible within both the Acts and the New Testament towards the priesthood.

The New Testament uses the noun ἱερεὺς of pagan priests (eg. Acts 14:13), but especially of Jewish priests.¹⁵⁵ The Gospels never refer to Jesus or to his disciples as priests,¹⁵⁶ and Luke in particular is critical of the priesthood (eg. Luke 10:31); although he displays a favourable attitude towards the temple.¹⁵⁷ It is surprising then that Luke also is the only evangelist to describe some priests in a positive light,¹⁵⁸ which shows, as SCHRENK (1972: 264) comments—when noting Acts 6:7 reports how many priests became obedient to the faith—that “... Luke has in view a transformation of the priesthood by the Gospel.” The absence of the noun ἱερεὺς in Paul and the post-Pauline tradition, as well as the rest of the New Testament epistles, is also significant and instructive.

So, rather than alluding to an application for some form of subordinate priesthood, Luke clarifies his understanding of Simon’s actions through Peter’s response. Peter offers an explanation not simply for Simon’s benefit, but also for Luke’s audience. The scriptural allusions in the closing scene of this episode (verses 20–24) presuppose hearers who are well-taught Jews, which is a further indication of the age of Luke’s sources. Peter literally says, “To hell with you and your money!” (verse 20: τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοι εἶη εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὅτι τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνόμισας διὰ χρημάτων κτᾶσθαι). This is neither a sentence of condemnation¹⁵⁹ nor excommunication, but a rebuke by Peter given in pious duty to a “neighbour” who either sins or is about to commit an offence (cf. Matt 18:15; Lev 19:17).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. SAND 1991: 174.

¹⁵⁶ The “priesthood” (cf. 1 Pt 2:5, 9 ἱεράτευμα instead of ἱερεῖς) of the Christian community is not a literal priesthood. Not only has the temple been destroyed, but the sacrifices offered by the community are spiritual rather than animal or ceremonial; in particular worship, witness and daily devotion. Cf. Isa 61:6, 9; Ps 50:14; 51:17; 105:22; 141:2; Rom 12:1–2; Heb 13:15–16; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Acts 2:46; 3:1–10; 5:12, 20–21, 25, 42; 21:26; 22:17; 24:6, 12, 18; 25:8; 26:21.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Luke 1:5, 8; Acts 6:7.

¹⁵⁹ HAENCHEN (1971: 304) considers it ironic that Peter gives Simon an answer similar to curses found in the magical papyri. For example, “I deliver you into the black chaos in perdition: παραδιδῶμί σε τὸ μέλαν χάος ἐν ταῖς ἀπωλείαις *GMPT* IV 1249.” Nonetheless, Luke’s language at this point can also be viewed as completely biblical. Cf. Dan 2:5; 3:29 LXX (Theodotian); Matt 7:13; Rom 9:22; 1 Tim 6:9; Heb 10:39; Rev 17:8, 11.

The Jewish Holiness Code demanded even the scent of idolatry to be avoided.¹⁶⁰ The actions of Simon are meant to characterise him as someone who entertains pagan misunderstanding(s) in imagining that the apostles would dispense some benefits—whether through initiation or incantation—following an appropriate donation.¹⁶¹ In the assessment of the Old Testament pagan priests, temples and worship were invariably associated with both the exchange and accumulation of wealth. True servants of God, by contrast, refused remuneration for their service(s).¹⁶² Teachers of the Torah refused money for their imparting of knowledge. God’s “mercy” was free (cf. Isa 55:1) and was to be freely given (cf. Matt 10:8). Peter likewise refuses Simon’s offer. To pay money for God’s gift and power profaned its essential nature as the grace of a sovereign God.

The ἐξουσία coveted by Simon was a charismatic potential at work only through the words and actions of God’s chosen instruments. If Simon had a share (κλήρος) he would not have needed to purchase one. Judas had a “share/lot” (Acts 1:17, κλήρον) but was replaced by a certain Matthias (Acts 1:26) who fulfilled the criteria as a witness to the ministry of Jesus and the resurrection. DERRETT’s (1982: 65) observation that κλήρος was a “contemporary word for the ‘company [of Light]’ (or ‘of darkness’ as the case may be),”¹⁶³ is interesting, but that is not the nuance here. Instead, as already noted above, Simon’s offer indicates to Luke’s hearers that Simon does not have a share in the prophetic ministry exercised by the chosen witnesses of Jesus.

Simon’s notion (verse 22: ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας) that spiritual authority and power were either a commodity to dispense or an attribute inherent to the apostolic office is portrayed by Luke as an idolatrous thought. This is supported by Luke’s reference to Simon’s heart not being right before God (v 21), and his allusion to those curses in the Deuteronomic Code that applied specifically to Israelites who lapsed into idolatry (cf. Deut 32:5–43). Peter pronounces that Simon’s heart is not right in the sight of God: ἡ γὰρ καρδία σου οὐκ ἔστιν εὐθεία ἐναντι τοῦ θεοῦ. Such penetrative insight seems to be characteristic of Peter’s work according to Luke. On the Day of Pentecost Peter warns and pleads with people who do not respond to his message. His urgent words are that they save themselves from a “corrupt generation” (Acts 2:40), which is an

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Lev 20:1–5; Deut 7:25–26; 29:17–18; Josh 6:18; 7:13–15; 22:20.

¹⁶¹ Cf. 1 Sam 9:17; 2 Kings 5:5, 15; Dan 5:16, 17.

¹⁶² Cf. Acts 20:33; 1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 2:17; 11:9; 12:14–17; 1 Thess 2:5; 1 Tim 3:3; 1 Pt 5:2.

¹⁶³ Cf. 1QS II 2.5; 1QM I 5; XIII 12.

explicit reference to the “crooked generation” of Deut 32. Peter also discerns the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3–10).

In contrast with the Greek understanding of καρδιά as an organ in the physiological sense, the New Testament understanding of καρδιά is that the heart is the locus of understanding, knowledge, the will, and human conscience. Luke also uses καρδιά figuratively as the place of origin for the power of faith (Acts 8:37).¹⁶⁴ The notion of human hearts that are right (εὐθύς) or not right in the sight of God arises from a widely used biblical metaphor. The way of the righteous, who observe the conduct desired by God, is described as the “straight” way.¹⁶⁵

Simon is not “straight” with God. Indeed, Peter “sees” him in the “gall of bitterness” and the “bonds of unrighteousness.” Luke’s use of the accusative present participle ὄντα and the present tense of the verb ὁράω is not only an uncommon construction,¹⁶⁶ but the appearance of these two present-tense verbs has the effect of giving verse 23 additional semantic prominence. While the situational context of Luke’s audience is unknown, could we assume that behind Peter’s insight is mirrored Luke’s own concern for his audience? Perhaps this concern is similar to questions raised in later periods of early Christianity about the possibility of forgiveness for Christians who committed grave sins; notably those who fell into apostasy?¹⁶⁷ Convictions about various unpardonable sins that exclude people from God’s grace and the kingdom are part of the New Testament witness.¹⁶⁸ There is ample evidence also that various religious practices observed by some Christians prior to their conversion were never completely forgotten or abandoned.¹⁶⁹

The basic meaning of ὁράω is to see (with the eyes), although it can be used figuratively and then be translated as to “perceive,” “recognise,” “experience,” “visit,” or “consider.”¹⁷⁰ While often used as a synonym for the verbs βλέπω, θεωρέω, and θεάομαι, the subject of ὁράω in the

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Luke 8:12, 15; 24:25; Rom 6:17; Eph 3:17; 2 Tim 2:22; 1 Pt 1:22.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. 1 Kings 12:23; Ps 78:37; Prov 2:13, 16; Luke 3:4–5; Acts 13:10; 2 Pt 2:15.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. BARRETT 1994: 416; Note D E 614pc replace ὁράω with θεωρῶ.

¹⁶⁷ The so-called *lapsi*; cf. ODCC 1990: 799.

¹⁶⁸ Matt 12:12–13; Luke 12:10; Rom 1:24–32; 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:21; Heb 3:10–11; 4:3, 5.

¹⁶⁹ As outlined earlier in this chapter, there is overwhelming evidence of the practice of magic in the Graeco-Roman world, and to its survival despite official prohibitions. Details in the New Testament and other early Christian literature suggest that within the ranks of earliest Christianity there were partially socialized Christians who did not immediately give up all their old religious practices when they were converted. Cf. Acts 19:18–19.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. KREMER 1991: 526–529.

New Testament is almost exclusively persons. The one who “sees” is able to perceive particular persons in their innermost individuality; that is, to discern their heart and to understand their motives.¹⁷¹ MICHAELIS (1973: 328–340) comments that many instances of the verb ὁράω in the New Testament must be interpreted in the light of the prophetic and apocalyptic texts of the Old Testament and Judaism. Certainly, Luke’s use of ὁράω is related to his use of ὄραμα. This “seeing” is visionary (Acts 10:3, 17), sometimes in a dream (Acts 16:9), or in a trance (Acts 11:5; 22:18). However, it is extremely doubtful to infuse the preposition εἰς in verse 23 with a directional or destination emphasis,¹⁷² and then to translate Peter’s words in a prognostic or prophetic condemning sense as appears in the New English Bible: “I can see that you are doomed to taste the bitter fruit and wear the fetters of sin” (NEB Acts 8:23). Rather, in the present context Simon is no more condemned than Peter himself was when reproached by Jesus, “Get behind me Satan!”¹⁷³ BARRETT (1994: 417) is right to suggest that we best represent Peter’s words in this way: “In your present state of mind you are in bondage to unrighteousness.”

The challenge and call to repentance is part of the authority and commission given to those who are chosen witnesses to Jesus,¹⁷⁴ but it is especially characteristic of Peter in Acts (2:38; 3:19; 8:22). More than a general call to repentance, however, Peter here refers to specific sin: ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας σου ταύτης. Peter tells Simon to “Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a *thought in your heart*: ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου” (Acts 8:22).

The noun ἐπίνοια is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament. Luke normally uses the verb νομίζω (or the transitive form of δοκέω) when referring to an individual’s “thought” process, inner conviction, or “false assumption.”¹⁷⁵ So the appearance of ἐπίνοια in verse 22 is significant; although, not merely for its unique, uncharacteristic use. It is significant also because of its appearance in Christian heresiography as a title for

¹⁷¹ Cf. Matt 11:8; Mark 1:16; Acts 20:25; Col 2:1. In addition to seeing people, ὁράω is also used in the New Testament for the seeing of the Son of Man (Mark 13:26; 14:62), the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:5–8; Luke 24:34), or even God (Matt 5:8; John 6:46; 14:9; cf. ὁρατος Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27).

¹⁷² BRUCE (1990: 223) notes that in papyri when εἰς is used after the verb εἶναι the idea of destination is expressed, but “here there is more probably an instance of the encroachment of εἰς on ἐν. D reads ἐν, as in [Acts] 7:12.”

¹⁷³ Mark 8:33.

¹⁷⁴ Luke 24:47; cf. Acts 11:18; 20:21; 26:20.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Luke 2:44; 3:23; Acts 8:20; 17:29.

Helen, the alleged companion of Simon.¹⁷⁶ The failure of Luke to expressly mention Helen is not an argument against her existence, neither is it a counter to LÜDEMANN’s (1989: 96–98) provocative claim that Luke makes some ironic allusion to Helen as Simon’s ἐπίνοια through Peter’s acute assessment of the “thought” of Simon’s heart. While, as previously noted above, unconvinced critics have given LÜDEMANN’s claim a largely mediocre response, it remains a critical issue for us to consider later in a chapter about Simon as Gnostic; for the implication of LÜDEMANN’s claim is that the two essential elements of Gnostic Simonian religion can already be found in Acts: “the god Simon and his syzygos, ἐπίνοια.”

The phrase “gall of bitterness” and the “bonds of unrighteousness” is not an actual citation¹⁷⁷ but an allusion to two Old Testament texts (Acts 8:23; cf. LXX Deut 29:17, and Isa 58:6). Χολή is a common Hebrew expression for “bitterness,” “gall,” or “poison”¹⁷⁸—intensified here by the addition of πικρία. The allusion is to the warnings given about the poison of idolatry and the consuming anger of the Lord (LXX Deut 29:17–19). Further, the expression σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας recalls the chains of injustice¹⁷⁹ that the Lord desires to be loosed (Isa 58:6), and which Jesus came to break.¹⁸⁰

All terms connected with the word group δεσμ— have negative, violent, and disdainful connotations. The root δεσμ— has the simple meaning “bind” and appears to have been in common usage since the time of Homer (cf. *Iliad* VI 507; *Odyssey* XII 100). The word δέσμος means in the first place “chains.”¹⁸¹ However, sometimes in the language of curse formulae the verb δεσμεύω features in the curses of persons and property. Also, in the Greek magical papyri there are instances of magicians attempting to “bind” their godling.¹⁸² Can we assume then that Luke intends Simon to understand more than the immediately obvious in Peter’s use of the word σύνδεσμον? Does early manuscript tradition lend support to suggestions of Simon’s deeper understanding by reporting how Simon wept copiously because of Peter’s “insight”?¹⁸³ Further, does Luke

¹⁷⁶ Cf. JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,3 and parallels.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. HAENCHEN 1971: 305.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Job 16:13; 20:14; Ps 68:22; Prov 5:4; Lam 3:15.

¹⁷⁹ The reference is to unjust monetary transactions.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Luke 4:16–19; Acts 10:38.

¹⁸¹ STAUDINGER 1991: 288–290; cf. Judg 15:13–14; Luke 8:29; Acts 16:26.

¹⁸² *GMPT* IV 1248; cf. LEIPOLDT 1935: 1–2.

¹⁸³ D syr^{h,mg} Tert. δς πολλά κλαίων οὐ διελίμπανεν; cf. PS.-CLEM. *Hom.* XX 21; *Rec.* X 63. The Pseudo-Clementine Simon weeps “tears of rage and disappointment.”

expect his audience to appreciate the double meaning also? More than being well-versed Jews familiar with the curses of Deuteronomy, can we assume some of Luke's audience also were familiar with the language and practice of Graeco-Roman magic, or Jewish magic? What about Luke's audience being conversant with the teachings of Simon? One certainty among several uncertainties is that Luke's discernment—evidenced through the “seeing” of Peter—is that Simon has an idolatrous heart. Luke underlines this assessment both with an allusion to Deut 29 and its “man” who went after the gods of the nations, and through Simon's proposal to Peter; which Luke uses to expose an understanding of God and the ways of God that is different from what Peter proclaims.

Luke concludes the final scene of his story by having Simon request Peter's intercession before God. The irony is obvious. The one who claims to be “the great power” acknowledges Peter as someone with access to a superior power, and so he asks Peter to “pray to the Lord for me.” In the collective memory of Israel the role of intercession was exercised by angels,¹⁸⁴ prophets,¹⁸⁵ the righteous,¹⁸⁶ and heroes of faith like Abraham¹⁸⁷ and Moses.¹⁸⁸ Simon requests Peter to pray that “nothing you have said may happen to me: μηδὲν ... ὃ εἰρήκατε” (8:24), because, as one of the chosen messengers of God anointed with the Spirit,¹⁸⁹ Peter is portrayed by Luke in Acts as someone who speaks words which have power to change hearts (2:37), to heal (3:6), to command death (5:5, 10), and to restore life (9:40).

It is not only unfair, as BARRETT (1994: 417) suggests, but it also is unnecessary to conclude that Simon remains within the boundaries of his magical worldview by asking Peter to pray a blessing in order to remove his curse.¹⁹⁰ To sustain such a conclusion requires the *χολή πικρίας* and *σύνδεσμος ἀδικίας* of verse 23 to be read as prophetic judgements; or, Peter's outburst in verse 20 “τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἶς ἀπώλειαν” to be heard as a curse. I have already presented arguments above explaining why these are not necessary conclusions.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Dan 6:2; Tob 12:15; 1 En 9:10; 15:2.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Jer 27:18; 32:16; Dan 9:4.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. 2 Esd 7:102; 1 Tim 2:1; James 5:15; Rev 5:8.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Gen 18:23, 27, 31; 20:7, 17.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Exod 8:28–29; Num 11:2; 21:7; Deut 9:20, 26.

¹⁸⁹ Acts 2:16–21.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. BLANK 1950: 73–95; SPEYER 1969: 1228 concludes that curse itself is magical in Judaism.

Luke’s intention, instead, is to promote Simon as repentant. Luke achieves this even without the “weeping” Simon¹⁹¹ of early manuscript tradition; traditions which may have been attempts to heighten the effectiveness of Peter’s rebuke. Be that as it may the issue of Simon’s repentance remains a matter in dispute, fuelled in part—as canvassed above—by divergent interpretations of verses 20–23 and, in part by the abrupt if not incomplete ending to Luke’s account. However, while some conclude that Luke was evidently not interested in the personal fate of Simon, or that Luke’s sources were silent about the matter, Luke’s choice to complete the Simon–Peter episode with an archaic verbal form in the perfect tense may speak volumes.¹⁹² Indeed, the perfect tense of εἰρήκατε has present signification. Peter’s call upon Simon to repent and Simon’s request for intercession provide an authoritative model for Luke’s audience, whom we have suggested were already familiar not only with various popular magic practices, or with Simon and his teachings, but also with prophetic warnings against unpardonable sins and lapsing into idolatry.

Luke intends Simon’s request for prayer to evoke in his audience an awareness of their own need for repentance and prayer, so they may be spared the consequences of those things that continue to be warned and spoken about by God’s messengers (μηδὲν ... ὧ εἰρήκατε), who have been commissioned to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.¹⁹³ Granted that the situational context of Luke’s audience cannot be proven with any historical certainty, I have raised the possibility that Luke has chosen to address certain concerns he has for his audience through the device of a story: the Philip–Simon–Peter story. Whether Luke’s concern is over the remnants of pre-Christian religious practices among those who receive his story, or about some competition or controversy between his audience and those who follow Simon, is uncertain; but the conclusion of Luke’s narrative about Simon leaves an open door that extends into the present time of audience and reader alike.

¹⁹¹ In the Old and New Testament weeping is frequently connected with mourning and repentance, and evidently was acceptable before God. Cf. 2 Kings 20:19; 2 Chr 34:27; but, Deut 1:45.

¹⁹² I refer to earlier comments (above, p. 168), arising from Stanley PORTER’s thesis (1992: 22) that the choice of tense form by speakers and writers in Hellenistic Greek creates ‘semantic prominence.’ In this instance I argue in concert with PORTER that when writers choose the stative (perfect/pluperfect) aspect and use it in opposition to perfective (aorist) and imperfective (present/imperfect) aspects, this underlines what is of greatest significance for the writer.

¹⁹³ Cf. Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18.

Luke's concluding summary in verse 25, which includes his characteristic expression and indicator of change in the narrative *μὲν οὖν*, reports the continuing journey of the apostles in response to the commission of Jesus, to "be my witnesses ... throughout Samaria."¹⁹⁴ The double formula "they testified and spoke the word of the Lord," serves to remind Luke's audience that Peter and John were appointed messengers of God. Further, the phrase *λόγος τοῦ κυρίου*,¹⁹⁵ used here as it is repeatedly in the Old Testament, underlines the fact that their message is a prophetic word of revelation.¹⁹⁶

5.2.3 Observations

In conclusion, our analysis of Acts 8:4–25 has demonstrated that this episode in Luke's narrative is significant for a number of reasons. Evidence was provided to detail the blending by Luke of various literary and oral sources to create this episode in Samaria. The use of rare and characteristic Lukan language was highlighted. Distinct literary patterns were identified that compare and contrast first the activity of Philip and Simon, and then Peter and Simon, to establish for Luke's audience the authenticity of their respective claims that God was with them. It was also noted and discussed how Luke's choice of language, in particular his use of verbal forms, creates semantic prominence in the narrative. Significantly, however, our analysis of Acts 8:4–25 did not find supporting evidence for arguments that the Simon episode is primarily about magic.

Although almost all modern English translations and textual commentaries continue to translate the present participle *μαγεύων* as "practiced magic/sorcery" our investigation presented reasons why this should be challenged as superficial, selective, and responsible for introducing anachronous ideas that are discordant with the text of Acts. There are no express details of Simon's sorcery in Acts 8:4–25. Luke does not label Simon as a sorcerer or magician but instead refers to him as *μαγεύων*—"doing the work of a *μάγος*"—without any attempt to explain the unusual use of this verb, which occurs nowhere else in the Acts, or the entire New Testament.

¹⁹⁴ Acts 1:8; cf. Acts 2:40; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21–24; 23:11; 28:32.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Acts 13:44, 48; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10.

¹⁹⁶ 1 Sam 3:21; 2 Sam 7:4; 1 Kings 12:24; 17:2; 18:1; 19:9; 2 Chr 18:18; Isa 1:10; 38:4; Jer 1:2; Ezek 3:16; Amos 7:16; Jonah 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 2:1; Zech 1:1; Mal 1:1.

Luke conceals the specific activities of Simon behind this ambiguous participle μαγεύων, yet, as was documented at length earlier in this chapter, the practices commonly associated with the μάγοι in antiquity were dream-sending, divination and forecasting the future, as well as distinctive teachings and lifestyle. The brief definition of Cicero should not be forgotten either; namely, that the Magoi were “that clan of wise men and teachers dwelling in Persia.”¹⁹⁷ So, the true “magicia” of the “magos” was an ancient tradition of wisdom, and a service of the gods, rather than some doubtful dealings of a charlatan.

Further, as will be detailed in following sections, Luke does not describe Simon with compounding accusations as in the case of Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6–12) who is called a “Jewish magos and false prophet: μάγον ψευδοπροφήτην Ἰουδαίου,” “a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right: υἱὲ διαβόλου, ἐχθρὲ πάσης δικαιοσύνης,”¹⁹⁸ and a person who is “full of deceit and trickery: πλήρης παντὸς δόλου καὶ πάσης ῥαδιουργίας.”¹⁹⁹ Neither do we find in Acts 8 the renunciation or destruction of magical paraphernalia as Luke describes the case of Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus (Acts 19:17–19).²⁰⁰ So the meta-narrative proposed by some New Testament commentators, who link the story of Simon with other accounts of so-called “magicians” in Acts and argue that Luke’s intention was to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over magic through these stories, is to be challenged. Even though numerous literary and conceptual connections are suggested in support of such a meta-narrative, our investigation identifies reasons why such an interpretative synthesis involving Simon should be resisted.

Finally, while recent scholarship is divided over the assessment of Luke’s portrayal of Simon in Acts 8—namely, does Luke downgrade a prominent gnostic figure to a mere magician, or elevate a common magician to the status of a quasi-divine gnostic figure—this is a modern polarisation of aspects of Simon’s identity which evidence suggests originally existed in concert rather than conflict. The depth and scope of our investigation of Simon’s reputation as magician—the nature of his μαγεύων reported in Acts 8—is defended as a necessary step towards

¹⁹⁷ Cf. CICERO, *De divinatione* I, xxiii, 46.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. DAHL 1964: 70–84. DAHL reviews early Christian and Rabbinic uses of the expression “first-born of Satan.”

¹⁹⁹ The term ῥαδιουργία occurs only here in the New Testament. BARRETT (1979: 289) claims the term refers to fraudulent dealing in money matters.

²⁰⁰ Cf. PEASE 1946: 145–160. PEASE discusses the burning of books in the ancient world.

addressing the focal question of this book; the identity of Simon as first Gnostic.

5.3 Paul and the Jewish “Magician” Bar-Jesus in Acts 13:4–12

5.3.1 Introduction

The story of Paul and Bar-Jesus presents the modern reader with challenges, if not insoluble difficulties for historical comment: confusion over names (Bar-Jesus or Elymas), the historically unlikely conversion of Sergius Paulus, and Paul’s “magic-like” curse of Bar-Jesus to mention but a few. In the analysis of 13:4–12 that follows this brief introduction, we will discuss some of the more significant historical and literary details of the episode before providing supportive argument for a narrative intention other than that suggested by HAENCHEN and others;²⁰¹ namely, to demonstrate “the superiority of Christianity over magic” (HAENCHEN 1971: 398).

In the story of Paul and Bar-Jesus there are structural clues “that Luke has either totally broken up a story in the tradition or inserted notes into a story which had rather scanty details.”²⁰² BARRETT and others suggest that in all probability Luke has combined two or more stories here.²⁰³ In addition to the appearance of the previously identified favourite Lukan form of introduction (μὲν οὖν)—which always signals a section filled with Lukan inference and additional information—the following features support claims of a blended tradition: (1), the strange inclusion of John

²⁰¹ Cf. STÄHLIN 1968; SCHNEIDER 1982; CONZELMANN 1987; ROLOFF 1981; GARRETT 1989.

²⁰² LÜDEMANN 1989: 149. Chapters 13–14 of Acts have long been the focus of debate, to which BARRETT (1994: 600) summarily refers by commenting “that the most probable view is that Luke found in Antioch some account of churches having some connection with Antioch as centre, and collected stories that referred to them.” With the exception of those verses which report Paul’s encounters with Bar-Jesus and the people of Lystra, these chapters appear more formal and stylized, with less concern for detail, than other accounts of Paul’s exploits. While there is no way of determining whether this Antiochene source was oral or written, it is clearly an early tradition since nowhere else in the Acts does Luke mention διδάσκαλοι. Indeed, Luke’s description of Christian communities (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; 21:18) more often includes the leadership roles of elder and bishop.

²⁰³ Cf. BARRETT 1994: 609; BAUERNFEIND 1939: 170; CONZELMANN 1987: 73; DIBELIUS 1956: 16.

“Mark” in verse 5; (2), the competing claims that Saul and Barnabas *found* τινὰ μάγον (13:6), and the relative clause in verse 7 which asserts that Sergius *summoned* the pair²⁰⁴ to his court where Bar-Jesus was with the proconsul; (3), the confusion arising over the names “Bar-Jesus” and “Elymas,” which Luke attempts to clarify in verse 8: οὗτος γὰρ μεθερμηνεύεται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ; (4), the use of the name Saul prior to and including 13:8, and then the exclusive use of the name Paul from 13:9 onwards; and (5), the clear linking of the expressions τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ in verse 7 with τῆ διδαχῆ τοῦ κυρίου in verse 12.

This “first missionary journey”²⁰⁵ of Paul (Saul) begins from the port city of Seleucia near the mouth of the Orontes River where regular passage to many destinations could be obtained, since this port was a station of the Roman fleet.²⁰⁶ Then the account of this journey focuses on what Saul and Barnabas do in the two major cities of Cyprus²⁰⁷—Salamis and Paphos. Salamis had previously been the capital of the island, but under the Romans, in 22BCE, Cyprus was made a senatorial province administered by a proconsul.²⁰⁸ At that time the capital was moved to Paphos, or, more properly speaking, new Paphos.²⁰⁹ STRABO records in *Geography* XIV 6,3 that new Paphos was located some 60 stadia (about 11 kilometres) from Παλαίπαφος the site of the famous temple to Aphrodite. New Paphos was a harbour city and an administrative capital. Yet, as MITFORD (1980: 1321–1323) notes, Salamis remained the spiritual and economic centre of the island and boasted a significant temple to Zeus.

²⁰⁴ Acts 13:7, προσκαλεσάμενος ... ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.

²⁰⁵ MARSHALL (1980: 214) remarks how “Paul’s missionary work (during) this period has the best claim to being called a ‘missionary journey’ as is customary on Bible maps. The later periods were much more devoted to extended activity in significant key cities of the ancient world ...”.

²⁰⁶ CAH X 236.

²⁰⁷ Acts 11:19 claims, some “who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen (cf. 8:1) traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.” Therefore, BARRETT (1994: 610–611) comments, “the journey of Saul and Barnabas could be regarded as in the first instance a revisiting of converts already made and churches already established; no mention however is made of such converts and churches, and for this reason the notice in 11:19 is often discounted.” Paul gives no details of the journey in Gal 1–2.

²⁰⁸ WITHERINGTON (1998: 395) comments that, as elsewhere in Acts, “Luke is thoroughly familiar with the governmental arrangements of the Roman Empire, and in particular the differences between an imperial and a senatorial province.”

²⁰⁹ Cf. IDB 3, 648; PLINY, *Nat. Hist.* V 130; STRABO, *Geography* XIV 6,3.

5.3.2 An Analysis of Acts 13:4–12

Luke details how Saul and Barnabas were chosen for a special form of service by the direct nomination of the speaking Spirit: εἶπεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (13:2).²¹⁰ Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul uses the verb ἀφορίζω when referring to his having been “set apart” for proclaiming the gospel of God (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15). This divine appointment recalls the style and language of prophetic calls in the Old Testament (Isa 43:1; 49:1; Jer 1:5; cf. Matt 1:20; Luke 1:15–17, 35, 41), as well as the christological statements in Acts referring to “the one whom God appointed” (ὀρίζω: Acts 10:42; 17:31). The prepositional phrase, being called “for the work: εἰς τὸ ἔργον” is an expression used in Acts²¹¹ for the missionary task—words and action—which Luke understands ultimately to be the saving activity of Jesus Christ.²¹²

After fasting, prayer, and the imposition of hands, Saul and Barnabas are “sent on their way”: καὶ ἐπιθέντες τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῖς ἀπέλυσαν. While this ceremony does not amount to their being ordained as apostles,²¹³ it does indicate the recognition and support of the Antiochene community for Saul and Barnabas as leading prophets and teachers. Apostles and prophets are clearly distinguished in the language and thought of the New Testament. Even so, as David AUNE has correctly observed, “in many respects the New Testament apostle was the functional equivalent of the Old Testament prophet” (AUNE 1986: 202). The repeated claim in Acts that Old Testament prophecies have been, or are being fulfilled²¹⁴ implies an understood continuity between the prophets of Israel and the apostles.

As itinerant prophets Saul and Barnabas are “sent out” by the Holy Spirit and set sail for Cyprus. Luke provides postcard details of their activities as they traverse the island. These patchy details are summary in

²¹⁰ Perhaps by prophetic utterance. But note Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 1 Tim 1:18; 4:14.

²¹¹ Cf. Acts 14:26; 15:38.

²¹² Cf. Acts 1:1.

²¹³ Cf. WITHERINGTON 1998: 393; BRUCE 1990: 294; WEISER 1981: 307–308; BEST 1960: 348, “... if the distinction already existed Paul and Barnabas were, even prior to this ceremony, members of the ‘clergy’; if the distinction did not exist this did not create it.”

²¹⁴ Acts 3:18–26; 4:24–30; 7:48–53; 8:28–34; 10:43; 13:27–41; 15:15–19; 26:22–27; 28:23–29. Twelve individuals are indentified in Acts as regularly exercising the prophetic gift: Agabus (11:27–28); Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, and Saul (13:1); Judas and Silas (15:32); and the four virgin daughters of Philip (21:8–9).

character, as evidenced by the plural “synagogues” and the undeveloped reference to a certain John in verse 5, who is described as an ὑπηρέτης.

Mention of John is odd at this point. Why Luke does not refer to him earlier, in verses 1–4, remains uncertain. However, as various commentaries note,²¹⁵ in this way Luke both avoids claiming John was “sent” by the Spirit, and any need to defend John’s desertion in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13; 15:36–38). Particularly curious is Luke’s identification of John as ὑπηρέτης. RENGSTORF (1972: 539) notes that, in the New Testament, “[t]he noun ὑπηρέτης is always used in a general sense similar to that of classical and Hellenistic Greek including Philo and Josephus: ‘assistant to another as the instrument of his will.’”²¹⁶ However, granted the word is used in a variety of social, political, and military contexts in the ancient world, it is comparatively rare in the New Testament and its meaning is disputed in several difficult passages,²¹⁷ including this particular verse from Acts.

It can be clearly demonstrated that the functions of an ὑπηρέτης are not the same as the δοῦλος, the διάκονος, or the θεράπων; yet, because the specific nature of John’s “work” is not stated here by Luke, there is some doubt surrounding what function or relationships are intended by Luke’s use of the word ὑπηρέτης at this point. Both BARRETT (1994: 612) and SCHNEIDER (1980: 199) conclude that the use of ὑπηρέτης clearly shows Luke neither considered John to be independent to, nor a colleague of, Saul and Barnabas. On the other hand SCHILLE (1985: 287) dismisses these reflections on the nature of John’s work as “unnötig,” and RENGSTORF (1972: 541) deems it obvious that “for the author of [Acts] it was functional, being determined by the apostolic task (Acts 14:4, 14), with no need of details.” Still, there is an interpretive option worth considering other than those commonly agreed opinions that either confine the function of John to the provision of material needs, or allow minor contributions to the work of preaching and teaching.

In classical Greek literature the concept of ὑπηρέτης appears first in *Prometheus*, where Hermes—messenger of the gods—is described as θεῶν ὑπηρέτης. RENGSTORF (1972: 530) observes that “about the same time

²¹⁵ HAENCHEN 1971: 387; SCHNEIDER 1982: 120; WEISER 1980: 315; JERVELL 1998: 345.

²¹⁶ Cf. CLEMENT, *Protrepticus* 4, where ὑπηρέτης is used by Clement in his claim that “the Magi boast that the demons are the ministers of their impiety” (μάγοι ... ἀσεβείας τῆς σφῶν αὐτῶν ὑπηρέτας δαίμονας ἀρχοῦσιν); PS.-CLEMENT, *Hom.* VII 11 refers to Simon as a “servant of evil” (κακίας ὑπηρέτης).

²¹⁷ Luke 1:2; John 18:36; Acts 13:5; 26:16; 1 Cor. 4:1; cf. RENGSTORF 1972: 541–543.

we also find the derived verb ὑπηρετέω as an established element in the literary speech of the tragedians,” and that “irrespective of its origin²¹⁸ ... the employment of the word through the centuries preserves the basic sense which is apparent at the very first in its literary use.” RENGSTORF also observes that in context this description of Hermes as ὑπρέτης “can only mean that he is executing the will of Zeus and thus has behind him the power and authority of Zeus as chief of the gods.”²¹⁹ In similar vein the expression ὑπηρεταί Χριστοῦ in 1 Cor 4:1 suggests the exercise of authority and not mere assistance.

Is it possible that Luke was aware of the literary and cultic use of the word ὑπρέτης? Does Luke intend some instructive ambiguity in his description of John as ὑπρέτης, underscored by his location of John with Saul and Barnabas in the city of Salamis, which was a significant centre for the Zeus cult on the island of Cyprus? Just as Luke reported that the crowd at Lystra (Acts 14:11–13) was mistaken in its identification of Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes (ἐκάλουν... Παύλου Ἐρμῆν, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ ἡγούμενος τοῦ λόγου),²²⁰ is it not possible that a traditional source used by Luke in Acts 13:4–12 contained a similar popular misconception of John’s role? Rather than seeing John and Paul as cultic assistants subservient to the will of Zeus, Luke redefines them as ὑπηρεταί and μάρτυρες of “what they have seen and will see” (cf. Luke 1:2; Acts 26:16) in Jesus—son of the “Most High.”²²¹

²¹⁸ Cf. RENGSTORF (1972: 533) who details how ὑπρέτης and its denominative ὑπηρετέω are considered compounds of ἐρέτης the nomen agentis of a two-syllabled verb ἐρέσσω, or ἐρέττω, meaning “to row.”

²¹⁹ The men of Delphi (SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 712); Odysseus (SOPHOCLES, *Philoctetes* 990); and the true Cynic (EPICLETUS, *Diss.* III 22) are described as ὑπηρεταί.

²²⁰ Cf. IAMBlichus, who refers to Hermes in words which virtually parallel Luke’s description, “[a] god who is the leader in speaking.” θεὸς ὁ τῶν λόγων ἡγεμῶν (IAMBlichus, *On the Egyptian Mysteries* I 1).

²²¹ Apart from Mark 5:7 and Heb 7:1, the occurrence of ὕψιστος—the hellenistic predicate of Zeus—is confined to the writings of Luke. Certainly, ὕψιστος is the normal LXX translation of יְיָ הַשָּׁמַיִם an ancient Semitic title of majesty for Yahweh, and so Luke’s usage may simply be Septuagintal. Yet, as BERTRAM (1972: 620) notes “quantitatively and qualitatively ὕψιστος as a divine name is on the margin of the New Testament tradition ... [it] does not correspond to the New Testament revelation of God ...”. Overall, Luke’s use of ὕψιστος appears to be both allusive and apologetic with respect to other claims to this divine designation. The Lukan infancy narrative calls Mary’s promised child “son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32), whose mother is overshadowed by the “power of the Most High” (Luke 1:35). John the Baptist is described as a “prophet of the Most High” (Luke 1:76), and the prophetic slave girl at Philippi describes Paul and his companions as

Luke reports that Saul and Barnabas go first to proclaim τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ²²² among the synagogues²²³ (cf. Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8); but, we are not given any details of their preaching success. Instead, in one verse Luke condenses a journey taken by Saul and Barnabas from Salamis to the capital city Paphos, at the opposite end of the island.²²⁴ In Paphos Saul and Barnabas encounter a certain individual named Bar-Jesus (or Bar-Joshua)²²⁵ who is curiously described in three ways: μάγος, ψευδοπροφήτης, Ἰουδαῖος. FITZMYER (1998: 501) comments:

The description of Bar-Jesus borders on the fantastic: a Jew, who was a magician, a false prophet, and in the service of a Proconsul.

This is the only occasion in the Acts when any person is actually called a μάγος, and the term’s meaning is coloured by its combination with the term ψευδοπροφήτης. On available evidence BARRETT (1994: 614) makes a reasonable suggestion that “at this point the [μάγος] ... may perhaps be thought of as a court astrologer.” However, in view of the conclusions already detailed in my earlier inquiry above—an inquiry into the image of the Magoi in the literature of late antiquity—Bernd KOLLMANN (1998: 42) provides a more accurate description of the μάγος Bar-Jesus as “a specialist in prophecy or dream interpretation:”

Dieser Barjesus Elymas gilt als Pseudoprophet (Apg 13,6), wird also auf Weissagung oder Traumdeutung spezialisiert gewesen sein und als eine Art Hofastrologe gewirkt haben.

“servants of the Most High God: δούλοι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου” (Acts 16:17). In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas preach the good news of the “living God: θεὸν ζῶντα” (Acts 14:15).

²²² Instead of τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ Codex Bezae⁵⁸ it⁵⁸ syr^p read τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου. As METZGER (1971: 401) comments, this “reflects the Christianisation of the traditional expression.”

²²³ The mention of synagogues (plural) implies a large Jewish population. For details of Jews on Cyprus, cf. PHILO, *Embassy to Gaius* 282, and JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* XIII 284–287. BARRETT (1994: 611) comments, “according to Dio Cassius, in the rebellion of AD 116, the Jews of Cyprus killed 240,000 Gentiles. They also destroyed Salamis.”

²²⁴ Cf. Codex Bezae, which replaces διελθόντες with the variant reading καὶ περιελθόντων δὲ αὐτῶν: “And when they had gone around the whole island as far as Paphos.”

²²⁵ There also may be a veiled reference here to a claim—whether of Bar-Jesus or others—that he was a sympathizer or follower of Jesus.

It is not without precedent that a Roman official might include such a consultant in his entourage; and a person with Jewish roots as well. As reported earlier in this chapter, Jews in particular enjoyed a considerable reputation for magic and divinatory expertise in the Graeco-Roman world.²²⁶ Likewise, Cypriot magic commanded respect, but was considered a more recent phenomenon by PLINY (*Nat. Hist.* XXX 11).

JOSEPHUS (*Ant.* XX 142) mentions a certain Jewish μάγος from Cyprus, named Atomos,²²⁷ who was on friendly terms with the Judaean Procurator, Felix. Atomos later assisted Felix to seduce Drusilla away from her husband Azizus (*Ant.* XX 236–237). Suetonius, the Roman historian and younger contemporary of Tacitus, reports that when Vespasian was in Judaea—as commander of Roman forces chosen to crush [the] rebellion—“a distinguished Jewish prisoner ... Josephus by name, insisted that he would soon be released by the very man [Vespasian] who had now put him in fetters, and who would then be Emperor” (Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* X 5). Further, mention can be made of the reported trust a matron of Rome placed on the advice of a certain Jewess (Juvenal, *Satires* VI 543–544), the reliance of Emperor Tiberias on Thrasyllus the astrologer (Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* III 14), and, Emperor Nero’s reliance on the Armenian Tiridates (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 17). All these examples give credence to Luke’s report of a Jewish μάγος in association with a Roman official.

Among the functions associated with the μάγοι from antiquity was divination; and, in coupling μάγος with the word “prophet” Luke strongly suggests that Bar-Jesus claimed abilities to reveal the future through various mantic arts. Further, the use of the pejorative “false-prophet” is equally revealing of Luke’s narrative intention for this episode. As Bruce (1973: 264) correctly observes Luke wants to illustrate that Bar-Jesus “claimed falsely to be a medium of divine revelations.” He had been proclaiming the will and word of God in Paphos, but he has no authority to do so.

After the introduction of Bar-Jesus²²⁸ it would be reasonable to expect the mention of some controversy with this figure, but Luke

²²⁶ Cf. also: Strabo, *Geography* XVI 2; Apuleius, *Apology* XC; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* XXX 11.

²²⁷ Preferring the variant reading Ἄτομον, instead of Σίμωνα.

²²⁸ Cf. Yaure 1960: 300; Barrett 1994: 613. Variations for the name Bar-Jesus in the critical apparatus could be scribal attempts to improve grammar, or, indications of the reverence shown for the name of Jesus: Βαριησοῦς E; Βαριησοῦσαν D; Βαριησοῦμ Ψ; Βαριησοῦμα syr Ephr.

presents the Bar-Jesus episode without explanation and virtually no conclusion. KOLLMANN explores this curious oversight and observes that while the core historical issue between Paul and Bar-Jesus remains in the dark it is conceivable Bar-Jesus was hostile in his opposition to Paul and Barnabas, fearing the loss of his lucrative position.

Der geschichtliche Kern des Strafunders Apg 13,9–12 bleibt im Dunkel. Gut vorstellbar ist, daß Barjesus Elymas aus Furcht, seinen lukrativen Posten zu verlieren, Barnabas und Paulus gegenüber feindselig auftrat, damit scheiterte und dies die Entstehung einer Strafundererzählung evozierte. (KOLLMANN 1998: 43)

Luke deflects attention from Bar-Jesus by the use of a relative clause in verse 7a: ὃς ἦν σὺν τῷ ἀνθυπάτῳ Σεργίῳ Παύλῳ. Now the primary focus of Acts 13:4–12 emerges with the introduction of Sergius Paulus,²²⁹ whom Luke identifies as an intelligent person: ἀνδρὶ συνετῷ. BRUCE (1973: 264) suggests this was because he summoned (ἐπέζητησε) Saul and Barnabas to “hear the word of the Lord” (v 7), and, being deeply impressed by the “teaching of the Lord,” later “believed” (v 12).²³⁰ However, JERVELL (1998: 346) proposes an entirely different explanation:

Das heisst nicht, das er intelligent ist, sondern aus der Verwendung in der Septuaginta: einsichtsvoll, fromm, gottesfürchtig. Er gehört offenbar zu den Gottesfürchtigen.

JERVELL seems clearly convinced about something so uncertain in the text. It is true that Luke sees “understanding” as a spiritual function of

²²⁹ The identity of this proconsul is competently discussed elsewhere, in commentaries. General consensus is that no epigraphic evidence contains decisive confirmation of a proconsul *Sergius Paulus* or assists in dating the journey of Saul and Barnabas to Cyprus. However, for a first century inscription that refers to a different proconsul in Cyprus, cf. *NDIEC* I 45; and, for evidence that connects *Sergius Paulus* with Pisidian Antioch, see: *NDIEC* IV 138.

²³⁰ Some commentators maintain (cf. WITHERINGTON 1998: 402) there is no clear explication of what the proconsul believed; and, that the passage also lacks any reference to baptism or the gift of the Spirit. The same line of argument questions the conversion of Simon Magus (8:13) who is said to have “believed.” Whereas BARRETT (1994: 619) makes the following dismissive comment: “It has been maintained that Sergius Paulus was not truly converted (courtesy being perhaps mistaken for conviction) because he was not baptized. This argument would mean that there were no conversions on this missionary journey: there is no reference to baptism.”

the heart in response to the word.²³¹ Yet linguistically there seems an impossible distance between ἀνδρὶ συνετῶ and ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς,²³² or εὐσεβῆς καὶ φοβούμενος,²³³ or σεβόμενος²³⁴ which are more clearly established Lukan expressions for “God-fearers.”

Luke’s remark that Sergius “summoned” Saul and Barnabas is an interesting use of the verb ἐπιζητέω.²³⁵ The verbal prefix ἐπι- strengthens the simple meaning of the word “to seek.”²³⁶ Generally, the verb ζητέω is used positively (eg. Mary and Joseph *seek* the boy Jesus: Luke 2:45); yet, the word can also take hostile forms (eg. Herod *seeks* the child Jesus: Matt 2:13).²³⁷ However, what makes the use of this verb interesting in the present context is that, as VERSNEL (1991: 78) has outlined, ἐπιζητέω often occurs as one of the standard components in curse formulae, prayers for divine justice, and the so-called “confession steles.”²³⁸

Although there exists great variation, [confession steles] can generally be classified as praises for or aretalogies of the god, in which the δύναμις of the usually local divinity (e.g., the Great Mother, especially as Meter Leto; Men, with several epithets; Apollo, with epithets such as Lairbenos) is described and glorified . . . The reason for the erection of the stele is often a confession of guilt to which the author has been forced by the punishing intervention of the deity, often manifested by illness or accident. (VERSNEL 1991: 75)

VERSNEL (1991: 78) details how the verb ἐπιζητέω nearly always describes the action of the god(s), and is used in three distinct yet interrelated ways: (1), it means “to demand” satisfaction or restitution when the direct object is inanimate; (2), when the direct object is a person

²³¹ Cf. Acts 28:26–28.

²³² Cf. Acts 2:5.

²³³ Cf. Acts 10:2, 22; 13:26.

²³⁴ Cf. Acts 13:43, 50; 17:4, 17.

²³⁵ The verb ἐπιζητέω occurs thirteen times in the New Testament.

²³⁶ Cf. *EDNT* 2, 27: “eagerly seek after someone;” “be on the lookout for;” “strive for;” “wish/ demand.”

²³⁷ Cf. Mark 11:18; 12:12; 14:1; John 7:19; 8:40; 10:39.

²³⁸ Discovered in the north-eastern area of Lydia and in the adjacent area of Phrygia, these steles bear inscriptions that detail misdemeanors similar in type to other votive inscriptions for justice excavated in Asia Minor: theft, failure to return a deposit, and accusations of poisoning or black magic. Yet they differ from other inscriptions in that they include an admission of guilt, and often a warning against committing similar offences. VERSNEL (1991: 100) provides an extensive bibliography, listing various collections and commentaries dating from the nineteenth century.

the verb usually can be translated “to pursue;” and (3), when ἐπιζητέω is used without any object it normally conveys the absolute sense of “to investigate the matter” or “to conduct a judicial inquiry.”

Further dimensions are added to Luke’s narrative if we entertain the thought of Luke alluding to the fact that Sergius sought divine assistance through some magic ritual in locating/pursuing Saul and Barnabas and summoning them to court.²³⁹ Perhaps there were local religious, political, or economic concerns (cf. Acts 16:19–21) being raised in the aftermath of the preaching of the word, as there were with Peter in Jerusalem²⁴⁰ and later with Paul in Ephesus.²⁴¹ Then, the verb ζητέω in verse 8 might also suggest similar rituals or arts were performed to “confuse”²⁴² or to discourage the proconsul from accepting the prophetic message of Saul and Barnabas.²⁴³ Certainly there is an aural interrelation between the verbal forms ἐπεζήτησεν... ζητῶν... ἐζήτει. Also, Luke’s use of the present and imperfect tense of the verb in verses 8 and 11 foregrounds the activity of Elymas by contrasting his efforts to “confuse” with his own confusion experienced in the state of blindness. So the verb ζητέω in verse 11 (see further comment below) might also be read as some veiled reference by Luke to Elymas being blinded while speaking magical formulae, or invoking “the Sun” as an all-seeing avenger and arbiter.²⁴⁴ DUNN (1996: 176) and GARRETT (1989a: 153) both make the unnecessary suggestion that Sergius Paulus was open to the λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ in contrast to the false-prophet and magician Elymas. It is more plausible that Sergius Paulus and Elymas/Bar-Jesus were co-conspirators here.

²³⁹ STRELAN (1999a: 59 n. 21) makes a similar observation when querying the use of the verb ἐπιζητέω at this point.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Acts 4:18; 5:27–28; 13:49–50; 14:3–5, 19; 17:2–9.

²⁴¹ Cf. Acts 19:23–41.

²⁴² The verb διαστρέφω means “to twist,” “to dislocate,” “to confuse.” BERTRAM (1972: 717) comments that, according to Hellenistic and especially Stoic ethics, “the nature of man, which was originally good and orientated to the good, is twisted (διαστρέφεται) by bad teaching and example and by environmental influences of all kind.” New Testament usage mirrors the Old Testament. Cf. Exod 5:4; Deut 32:5; Prov 16:30; Isa 59:8; Ezek 14:15; 16:34.

²⁴³ Codex Bezae, with the support of other Western witnesses, explains this was “because he [the proconsul] was listening with the greatest pleasure to them: ἐπειδὴ ἡδίστα ἤκουεν αὐτῶν.”

²⁴⁴ Cf. HOMER, *Iliad* III 277: The Sun “who observes all things and hears all things.”

Having been summoned, Saul and Barnabas are confronted by the court μάγος, who is now called “Elymas”²⁴⁵ (v 8: Ἐλύμας ὁ μάγος); for, adds Luke, “this (*magos*) is what his name (*Elymas*) means.” Yet, clearly, neither name (“Bar Jesus,” or “Elymas”) is of Greek origin, nor are they synonymous. Further, that “Elymas” means μάγος appears just as uncertain as it is impossible to translate Bar-Jesus with μάγος. Ultimately, modern attempts by commentators to unlock this textual *non sequitur*, by invoking various Arabic (*alim* = “gain insight into something,” wise) or Aramaic backgrounds (*haloma* = interpreter of dreams), prove problematic and unsatisfactory.²⁴⁶ As BARRETT (1994: 616) comments, “Why should a Jew in Cyprus at the court of a Roman consular governor be called by an obscure Arabic nickname? A simple error seems to be the best explanation.” Ancient versions have preferred simply to transliterate the name (*Vulgate*, Elimas; *Peshitta*, Ἐλλυμας; *Bohairic*, Elumas).

To continue this conundrum with names, Luke notes in verse 9 that Saul is also called “Paul.”²⁴⁷ Yet, a far more crucial aural contrast occurs in verses 9b–10, where Paul, who is said to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit,²⁴⁸ is contrasted with Elymas/Bar-Jesus (now called Bar-Satan, in Greek: ὑπὸ διαβόλου), who is described as: “*full* (πλήρης = ‘under the influence,’ ‘afflicted by’) of deceit and fraud and an enemy of righteousness.”

Luke reports that Paul “gazed” at Elymas: ὁ καὶ Παῦλος πλησθεὶς πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀπεισας εἰς αὐτὸν. This gaze involves a form of superior insight, as both the preposition εἰς and the paranormal/pneumatic state of Paul indicate (cf. Acts 7:55). The verb ἀπειρίζω is more than simply a favourite²⁴⁹ word of Luke–Acts for “a prolonged, hard look” or “withering stare.” Evidence gathered by FISHER (1980: 221–222) from a wide range of sources which use this verb suggests that ἀπειρίζω “is a technical term for gazing at God or for gazing at the divine,” and that “[t]he context in which ἀπειρίζω occurs ... has to do

²⁴⁵ The appearance of the variant Ἐτοιμᾶς (or Ἐτοιμος) in Codex Bezae at this point is a clear attempt to remove an apparent difficulty by harmonizing the report in Acts with a story in Josephus about a certain Jewish magician at work in Cyprus (*Ant.* XX 142).

²⁴⁶ Cf. YAURE 1960: 297–314; CONZELMANN 1965: 100; ROLOFF 1981: 198; LÜDEMANN 1989: 151; BARRETT 1994: 615; FITZMYER 1998: 502.

²⁴⁷ WITHERINGTON 1998: 401–402, “Presumably Paulus was the apostle’s cognomen, though it may have been his praenomen or even a nickname or supernomen, for ‘paulus’ in Latin means little.”

²⁴⁸ πλησθεὶς = “under the influence of;” cf. Acts 2:4 and 4:8.

²⁴⁹ Cf. WILLIAMS 1964: 56; SCHNEIDER 1982: 204; SCHILLE 1985: 73; BARRETT 1994: 82; STRELAN 1999: 235–255.

with the manifestation of divine power.” Again, WINDISCH (1924: 114) correctly observes that the verb has nuances that often go unnoticed and is used in many passages of Acts in the same sense that it appears in 2 Cor 3:7, 14; namely, it is “von pneumatischen Erscheinungen gebraucht.”

In the book of Acts the verb ἀτενίζω is used to describe “looking upon holy people, places, and objects” (Acts 1:10; 3:12; 6:15; 7:55; 10:4; 11:6), and, for “the looking of holy people at others” (Acts 3:4; 13:9; 14:9; 23:1). Commenting on Acts 13:9, BARRETT (1994: 616) suggests some link between Paul’s “gaze” and the ancient concept of *evil eye* by making reference to a baraita (quoted in Str.–B. II 714) from *Moed Qatan* 17b: “Wherever the wise direct their eyes there is either death or misery.” However, HAENCHEN (1971: 400) correctly dismisses any such connection, saying that “ἀτενίσας does not mean that Paul possessed the withering glance that Jewish legend attributed to rabbis.” Luke intends, rather, to portray Paul as having acute discernment because he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

This action of looking with deep insight—the ability to see beneath the surface of events and into the individuality of people to discern their true nature and/or character—is accompanied in Acts 13:10–11 by an act of prophetic speaking. The aorist participle ἀτενίσας and aorist verb εἶπεν suggest these two actions are co-terminous. It is not impossible that Luke was aware that the verb ἀτενίζω often had a divine figure as its object and his use of the verb here is both intentional and ironic, as it serves to highlight the arrogance of Bar-Jesus/Elymas. Elymas held popular claim to being a medium of divine revelation. Yet, with prophetic words of judgment (cf. Acts 5:9–10), Paul draws the battle lines in this counter-claim over who genuinely has access to divine power and prophetic insight. Like Peter before him, Paul demonstrates that he has the power to expose and expunge all deceit.

Elymas is told that “the hand of the Lord” is upon him and he will be blind (13:11). The magicians in Pharaoh’s court had been forced to acknowledge “the finger of God” (Exod 8:15; cf. Deut 3:24; 4:34; 7:8; Isa 8:11; Jer 15:7; Ezek 1:3), but Elymas is held within the grasp of the Lord’s hand. This pronouncement of judgment mirrors Old Testament forms of prophetic speech (eg. 2 Kings 1:6; Isa 3:12; 29:13–14; Jer 16:11–13; Amos 3:2; 4:1–2; Mic 3:9–12). Significantly, however, rather than being preceded by the characteristic formula “Thus says the Lord,” Paul’s accusation and prophetic judgement of Elymas is introduced by a description of Paul’s inspired status: πλησθεὶς πνεύματος ἁγίου (13:9).

<i>Paul accuses Elymas:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are a child of the devil • You are an enemy of everything that is right • You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery • Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?
<i>Paul pronounces judgment on Elymas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now the hand of the Lord is against you • You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun

Every word of Paul's pronouncement in verse 10, with the exception of ῥαδιούργημα, mirrors the vocabulary and phrases of the Septuagint.²⁵⁰ This lends credence to the assertion of JERVELL (1998: 347) that these are words directed "gegen einen Juden." Luke's description of Elymas as Ἰουδαῖος (verse 6) indicates more than ethnic background; it clearly suggests a relationship between Elymas and the synagogue community. Regardless of community standing Paul denounces him as a "false prophet," "child of the devil" (cf. John 8:44), and an "enemy of righteousness." Unlike the Baptist whom Luke describes as "[going] before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation . . .,"²⁵¹ Elymas is portrayed as "διαστρέφων τὰς ὁδοὺς τοῦ κυρίου τὰς εὐθείας: perverting the right ways of the Lord" (13:10).

Paul's pronouncement of blindness effects the ultimate exposure of Elymas' fraudulent claims of being a medium of divine revelations and a spiritual leader. Blindness was one of the threatened punishments on Israel for living in breach of the covenant (Deut 28:28–29).²⁵² Moses cautioned the Israelites that the Lord would curse those who did not follow his commands and as a result "[a]t midday [they] will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Deut 28:29). This punishment is one in a long list of curses to be inflicted on those who disobey the voice of the Lord by "following other gods and serving them" (Deut 28:14–15).²⁵³ The clear

²⁵⁰ Cf. Gen 32:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Prov 10:9; Jer 5:27; Hos 14:10; Sir 1:30; 19:26.

²⁵¹ Luke 1:76b–77a.

²⁵² GARRETT (1989a: 157) argues that Deut 28 provides a possible model for Luke's composition of the story of Bar-Jesus's blindness.

²⁵³ Cf. 1QS II 5, 11–19. The writings from Qumran, roughly contemporaneous with the events recorded in Acts 8:4–25, also use curse language to condemn idolatry and employ light and darkness imagery as found in the Bar-Jesus story.

inference here is that Elymas’ activities were to be considered illicit and idolatrous. Significantly the book of Deuteronomy also provides the curse language understood in Peter’s words to Simon: “For I see you are full of bitterness [a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit]²⁵⁴ and captive to sin” (Acts 8:23).

Although Paul’s pronouncement of judgment has immediate effects (παραχρήμα) the punishment of Bar-Jesus is to be for a limited time. The ultimate fate of Bar-Jesus is left unspoken, as with Simon in Acts 8:24. Only this time, instead of prayerful intercession, able-bodied assistance is required (verse 11: “seeking people to lead him by the hand”).

Perhaps there is some merit in LÜDEMANN’s query (1989: 151) as to whether Luke’s intention with the superfluous “not seeing the sun: μὴ βλέπων τὸν ἥλιον” is to hint at the source of Bar-Jesus/Elymas’ divination.²⁵⁵ Certainly, as FITZMYER (1998: 503) comments, “Paul sees the machinations of Bar-Jesus as perverting the divine guidance of human beings, especially the conversion of the proconsul, but in a wider sense even the Christian mission.” It would be with more than a little touch of irony then that Luke consequentially links together the participles βλέπων²⁵⁶ and περιάγων in verse 11. Elymas, the former provider of

²⁵⁴ Deut 29:18. The verses (19–21) which follow record extremely harsh curses for those who are idolatrous and pronounce a blessing on themselves.

²⁵⁵ Cf. *GMPT* III 187–262; V 1–3; VI, 1–47 “Say therefore to the rising sun [the following] prayer: [15] Send me [divine responses] and a holy prophetic sign. In lucid [words], O priestess, [reveal all things]: both [when this will occur] and how it will be done. [Give me a presage,] so that with it [I may perform a test] on [anything. / Subduer, hither come! Lo you,] mankind’s Subduer, mankind’s force! Come, blessed Paian, most supreme, [help] me; [Come hither to me, golden-tressed], IEO, e’en thou, Paian, [the very lord of song. Come thou to me,] O Phoibos, many-named. O Phoibos, / sing out clear with presages, Phoibos Apollo, Leto’s son, far-worker, Hither, come hither, hither come; respond with prophecies, give presage in night’s hour.” “...[46]...give persuasive oracles at night as you recount the truth through dream oracles.” For further comment on sacrifice and prayers to the sun in the first century CE, cf. FAUTH 1995.

²⁵⁶ The verb βλέπω occurs 132 times in the New Testament (29 times in Luke–Acts), and has the basic meaning “see, look, view, notice, and comprehend visually;” although, already in the New Testament era the original meaning of the literal eye’s seeing had been expanded with the intuitive and critical sense of “look deeply into,” “see through,” “become aware of the essence.” In Greek antiquity the verb already had the nuanced meaning of having a philosophical, religious view—above all, the view of God—or an insight into the cosmic order (cf. MÜLLER 1990: 221–222). In the New Testament, in addition to the secular background to the verb and its meaning, the verb βλέπω manifests a distinct

spiritual guidance through visions now no longer sees but needs the help of many to guide him in performing even the simplest of physical tasks. As a μάγος Elymas had the knowledge to perform what EITREM (1991: 175–187) identified as “the ἀγωγή ritual,” which effectively bound the will of its subject to the suggestions of the practitioner. Now Elymas himself seeks to be led. Through the use of the present tense Luke foregrounds these details about Elymas and, in conjunction with the verb χειραγωγέω, emphasises the ongoing suppression of his powers.

Sergius is impressed and believes. There is some debate over how to arrange the concurrence of three verbs in verse 12—the indicative ἐπίστευσεν and the participles ἰδών and ἐκπλησσομένης—yet the context proves decisive. Without any invocation of God, Paul speaks his curse directly upon Elymas. The court of Sergius, and Luke’s audience, would have found this highly impressive since curses always involved the invocation of gods and demons (VERSNEL 1991: 60–106). Paul demonstrates that he is greater than a μάγος. Paul is a superior spokesperson: his words are performative because he is “πλησθεὶς ... *filled* with the Holy Spirit”—the Spirit of God.

5.3.3 Observations

In summary, the structural, historical and literary details of this episode more immediately support a narrative intention other than a demonstration of “the superiority of Christianity over magic.” Clearly, Luke insists in verse 12 that the conviction of Sergius Paulus does not result from any demonstration of Christian superiority over magic, but from the “teaching of the Lord” given by Paul and Barnabas. Further, among the significant details of the story outlined above, the narrative parallels between Paul and Bar-Jesus are prominent and noteworthy; supporting the argument that Luke’s intention is to provide an answer to an unwritten question: “who has legitimate claim and access to divine authority, power and prophetic insight?”

Luke reports how Saul, while attempting to arrest the progress of the nascent church, was blinded on the road to Damascus and needed to be “led by the hand” (Acts 9:8, χειραγωγούντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν). Bar-Jesus also was blinded and found it necessary to be “led

theological meaning when it describes the reception of a vision, or prophetic insight. Cf. Isa 6:9; 29:10; Rev 1:12; 5:3–4; 6:1–7.

about by the hand” (Acts 13:11, καὶ περιάγων ἐζήτει χειραγωγούς). However, precisely this similarity provides an opportunity for Luke the storyteller to reveal dissimilarities, as GARRETT (1989: 84) details: “(1) Bar-Jesus is said to ‘make straight paths crooked’ but Paul is led to ‘a street called straight’ (9:11); (2) Bar-Jesus is blinded by mist and darkness (13:11), but Paul has been blinded by an intensely bright light (22:11; 26:13); (3) whereas Paul eventually made the transition from darkness to light, Bar-Jesus’ blindness is not relieved within the context of the narrative.”

Luke’s palpable intention, therefore, at the commencement of his account of Paul’s missionary journeys, is to highlight and demonstrate how the “eyes” of Jews and Gentiles alike are “opened” to the prophetic message Paul and Barnabas speak (13:26); as well as the tragic situation of the unrepentant who “hear but never understand” and “see but never perceive” (28:26–27). So, in the Bar-Jesus story any motif of magic is secondary, while the pattern of conflict between light and dark, faith and unbelief, and the question of who speaks the words of God with authority and power is primary.

5.4 Paul and the Ephesian Exorcists²⁵⁷ in Acts 19:13–20

5.4.1 Introduction

Directing our attention now to Luke’s story of the “seven sons of Scaeva” (19:13–20) we can identify perhaps even greater exegetical and historical problems which have provided the foundation for diverse scholarly interpretation. These problems include: (1), the unlikelihood of there being seven sons of a Jewish High Priest working as an itinerant team of exorcists in Ephesus; (2), the absence of any record of a High Priest named “Scaeva”;²⁵⁸ (3), an apparent lack of agreement in number between the claim in verse 14 that there were “seven” who exorcised, and the comment in verse 16 that “the man who had the evil spirit jumped on both of them (ἀμφοτέρων)”; (4), curious textual variants which are obvious attempts to remove some of the episode’s evident difficulties;²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ On the reputation of Jews for exorcisms and magic arts see: MORGAN 1983; DULING 1985: 1–25; M. SMITH 1986: 455–462.

²⁵⁸ Cf. MASTIN 1976: 405–412.

²⁵⁹ Cf. HAENCHEN 1957: 28–29; METZGER 1971: 470–472.

and (5), the sudden mention of a house in verse 16 when no particular location for the episode is otherwise mentioned.

In the analysis of 19:13–20 that follows this brief introduction we will discuss these identified historical and literary problems. Then a different suggestion will be provided about Luke's intention as a writer in using this story. Some commentators²⁶⁰ claim that Luke's intention is to use the seven sons of Scaeva story to advance his theme in Acts about the ongoing triumph of Christianity over magic.

The sons of Scaeva episode is a distinct narrative unit bounded by summary comments in familiar Lukan style. The assertion that πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου (19:10; cf. v 17) is a Lukan pleonasm,²⁶¹ and the observation that οὕτως κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ἤξανε καὶ ἴσχυεν (19:20) serves as a summation of preceding verses (cf. Acts 2:47; 4:32–33; 5:12; 6:7; 12:24). Acts 19:11–19 is located within the broader context of chapters 18:23–21:26, which is traditionally referred to as Paul's third missionary journey.²⁶² However, this is somewhat of a misnomer considering that Acts 19:10 locates Paul in Ephesus for a period of at least two years, and material found in this section of Acts focuses almost entirely on Ephesus and its immediate surroundings. As TANNEHILL (1990: 230) comments: "Ephesus is not just another step in a series. It is Paul's last major place of new mission noted in the last stage of Paul's work as a free man."

The amount of literary and archaeological information available to scholarship about Ephesus is considerable.²⁶³ Among the more immediately relevant data for our study is the first century CE reputation of Ephesus being the chief city of Asia Minor,²⁶⁴ as well as a strategic and commercial centre for the Empire. ARNOLD (1992: 14) argues this reputation²⁶⁵ extended to "being something of a centre for magical

²⁶⁰ GARRETT 1989: 90; HAENCHEN 1971: 565–567; CONZELMANN 1987: 163; SCHNEIDER 1982: 267; STÄHLIN 1968: 256–257; ROLOFF 1981: 284–287.

²⁶¹ Cf. Acts 1:1–2a.

²⁶² Paul had previously wanted to reach Ephesus on his second missionary journey, but had been initially prevented (16:6) before being able to visit only briefly (18:19–21).

²⁶³ TREBILCO 1991; 1994: 302–357; OSTER 1987; 1990: 1661–1728; 1992: 542–549; HORSLEY 1992: 105–168; WANKEL 1979–1984; ELLIGER 1985.

²⁶⁴ Cf. KNIBBE 1970: 263–267; NILSSON 1950: II 235, "In the time of the Caesars, Ephesus, the seat of the proconsul, was the most distinguished and prosperous city of the province of Asia."

²⁶⁵ Cf. WILLIAMS 1985/90: 332, "preoccupied with magic;" MASSYNGBERD-FORD 1975: 389, "notorious for its association with magic"; SWETE 1922: 23, "head-quarters for the magic arts."

practices.” MEINARDUS (1979: 91) agrees that “Ephesus was well known among the cities of the eastern Roman world as a centre for the study and practice of magic.” However, as STRELAN (1996: 86) rightly counters, “This [claim] is not so easily substantiated.” Apart from the *Ephesia grammata*,²⁶⁶ there is almost no evidence to support claims that Ephesus was a city gripped by a profound interest in magic, even though Luke implies that a substantial number of practitioners were active at Ephesus, as evidenced by the sheer value of burned books (Acts 19:19). Then, inasmuch as books were very expensive, the value of these books might just as readily be explained by their rarity.

Considering the scholarly re-evaluation of Ephesus’ reputation for being “a well known centre for the study and practice of magic,” those opinions²⁶⁷ that claim Luke uses the seven sons of Scaeva story to reinforce a theme of ongoing Christian triumph over magic need critical reappraisal also. First, to speak about “the triumph of Christianity over magic” presupposes outmoded distinctions. As David AUNE (1980: 1513) comments:

[m]any historians of Graeco-Roman religions [focus] on magical incantations, or the magic ritual as constitutive of the essence of magic. However ... it is difficult if not impossible to establish a phenomenological distinction between magical incantation and religious prayer ... In terms of beliefs and practices, there appears to be no thoroughly convincing way of distinguishing magic from religion.

Second, to speak about “the triumph of Christianity over magic” ignores both historical evidence of the continuance of magic practice by Christian and non-Christian alike, regardless of official prohibitions,²⁶⁸ and the insights of modern research which confirm how magic is as much a *relational* category as a substantive one: serving to differentiate between the person making accusation of magic and the person(s) labelled.

²⁶⁶ Cf. PREISENDANZ 1965: 515–520; KUHNERT 1905: 2771–2773. While Ephesus was well known for its γράμματα, such writings were not unique. There were also the Φοινικῆ γράμματα (FGH 476, F3. Part 3 B:436), and the Ἰουδαϊκὰ γράμματα.

²⁶⁷ HAENCHEN 1971: 565–567; CONZELMANN 1987: 163; SCHNEIDER 1982: 267; STÄHLIN 1968: 256–257; ROLOFF 1981: 284–287.

²⁶⁸ Cf. BARB 1963; GOLDIN 1976; WITHERINGTON (1998: 582) comments, “What we are dealing with here [in Ephesus] is very much like what Paul was dealing with in Corinth ... partially socialized Christians who did not immediately give up all their old religious practices when they were converted.”

Jonathan SMITH and others²⁶⁹ have detailed how the charge of magic is universally levelled against activities regarded as deviant forms of behaviour.²⁷⁰ In this regard, Morton SMITH (1978: 68–80), who claimed the Graeco-Roman world recognised a magician “social-type” whose titles varied according to whomever was applying the title,²⁷¹ was correct in identifying how “labelling” is carried out by both supporters and enemies alike.

Finally, every interpretation of Acts 19:13–20 that claims that Luke uses the seven sons of Scaeva story to reinforce a theme of “ongoing Christian triumph over magic” relies on corroborative evidence beyond the immediate text and context. Paradoxically, rather than discounting notions of magic, Luke’s report about the activities of Paul in this episode appears more remarkable and “magical” than anything that is said about the Scaevan exorcists:

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11–12)

The powerfully persuasive words spoken by Paul concerning the kingdom of God (19:8) are followed by δυνάμεις—not ordinary powerful deeds²⁷²—performed by God “through the hands of Paul: διὰ τῶν χειρῶν Παύλου” (19:11). Although BARRETT (1998: 906) dismisses the thought, SCHILLE (1985: 379) discerns a magical reference here: “Die Wendung ‘durch die Hände’ geht auf die magische Berührung zum Zweck der Herstellung eines Kraftflusses.” While Luke declares that God is the author of these δυνάμεις, and uses the preposition διὰ with an instrumental genitive τῶν χειρῶν Παύλου—an imitation of Septuagintal

²⁶⁹ J.Z. SMITH 1978; SCHUR 1980; BECKER 1963.

²⁷⁰ This is an observation to which we must later return, since Deviance theory offers fruitful possibilities in any effort to place Simon Magus and other so-called magicians in Acts into clearer focus.

²⁷¹ SMITH (1973: 227) comments that “[T]he same man will customarily be called a *theios anēr*, or a son of a god, by his admirers, a magician by his enemies. Within this area all three terms refer to a single social type...”. However, it is now generally accepted that the term “divine man” was not a known category in the first century CE, and should be resisted when describing the apostles and other New Testament figures. Cf. HOLLADAY 1977, who challenges the earlier work of BIELER 1967.

²⁷² SCHILLE (1985: 379) notes that “Die Litotes meint nicht ‘einmalig’, sondern ‘ungewöhnlich.’”

language (i.e. a Semitism)—these verses undoubtedly reflect the widespread respect for sympathetic influence in the Graeco-Roman world.

The variety of regular features in ancient magic are well documented elsewhere and need no rehearsal here.²⁷³ While none of these features appear in verses 11–12, apart from mention of physical contact between Paul and the sick through the hand, Luke does report the claims of miracle/magic properties associated with various items of Paul’s clothing. The precise meanings of σουδάριον and σιμικίνθιον (Latin = *sudarium* and *semicinctium*) are uncertain, yet most probably refer to the handkerchief worn on the head (cf. Luke 19:20; John 11:44; 20:17) and the apron worn for work. A majority of New Testament commentaries highlight the parallel effect of Peter’s shadow,²⁷⁴ mentioned in Acts 5:15–16, and note how the textual addition found in Codex Bezae explicitly details the healing effect of Peter’s shadow: ἀπηλλάσσοντο γὰρ ἀπὸ πάσης ἀσθενείας ὡς εἶχεν ἕκαστος αὐτῶν.

HAENCHEN (1971: 563) suggests that Luke’s summary report in verses 11–12 is an example of early Christian fiction, or hearsay: “[Luke] could view Paul only with the eyes of his own time: the Paul, already transfigured by legend, who so overflowed with divine power that even the cloths on his body are drenched with it.” SCHILLE (1985: 379) likewise comments: “Das zeigt den Hiatus zwischen dem historischen Paulus und dem, was man ihm nachsagt: apostolische Krafttaten waren offenbar nur indirekt von ihm zu haben.” In making their determinations on the historical worth of Luke’s report about extraordinary miracles performed by Paul, HAENCHEN and SCHILLE were possibly influenced by Ernst KÄSEMANN’s article on apostolic legitimacy. *Die Legitimität des Apostels*²⁷⁵ considered, independently of information in Acts, how Paul and his contemporaries thought about his miracles. KÄSEMANN concluded that only the Christian mind sees the power of Christ at work in the apostle,²⁷⁶ and that whoever wants to see the apostle distinguished by extraordinary miracles fails to recognise that in him is reflected the form of Jesus the crucified.²⁷⁷ So, HAENCHEN and SCHILLE argue that these verses in Acts stand in stark contrast to the Pauline concept of the apostle. SCHILLE (1985: 379) succinctly comments:

²⁷³ HENRICHS 1973–1974; HULL 1967; KEE 1986.

²⁷⁴ Cf. VAN DER HORST (1976–1977: 204–212) The human shadow was understood as an extension of the person, even as a manifestation of the soul or life-force.

²⁷⁵ KÄSEMANN 1942: 33–71.

²⁷⁶ KÄSEMANN 1942: 58.

²⁷⁷ KÄSEMANN 1942: 55.

Wie anders hatte Paulus seinen Apostolat verstanden! Wie geringfügig sind die Spuren wunderhaften Handelns im Corpus Paulinum! Er hatte ja gerade den Ausweis durch Wunder als hellenistisches Fehlverständnis erkannt (der Apostel soll nicht triumphieren, sondern die Zeichen des Gekreuzigten tragen)!

However, regardless of their disputed historical value and origin, it is clear that Luke effectively uses verses 11–12 as preparation for the events reported in verses 13–20. Despite obvious theurgic associations, Luke presents Paul as being mighty in word and deed—in contrast to those who have no real power.²⁷⁸ The concluding phrase τὰ τε πνεύματα τὰ πονηρὰ ἐκπορεύεσθαι (verse 12) forms a connective link with what follows.

5.4.2 An Analysis of Acts 19:13–20

So effective was Paul that Luke reports the humorous aside²⁷⁹ concerning certain exorcists who abandoned their usual commands and tried to name, not merely the name of Jesus over the possessed, but “the name of the Lord Jesus *whom Paul preaches*: ὃν Παῦλος κηρύσσει.”²⁸⁰ Unlike Simon in Acts 8, who desired the ἐξουσίαν to confer the πνεῦμα ἅγιον (8:19), this itinerant team of exorcists covet the δυνάμεις performed by Paul—the ability to expel τὰ πνεύματα τὰ πονηρὰ (19:12). Luke identifies these exorcists as being Jews. As outlined earlier in this chapter, Jewish magic in antiquity was more than respected: it was revered. However, in

²⁷⁸ Cf. CONZELMANN 1987: 163.

²⁷⁹ DIBELIUS 1956: 19. DIBELIUS is convinced that the underlying tradition of Acts 19:13–16 was for entertainment only. “The evil spirit will not be driven out by unauthorized exorcists, who have simply borrowed a formula which they have heard used by genuine exorcists—this is the sense of the story, told in a strain which is not without its comic element. It is not clear whether the misused formula was ever a Christian one, for the anecdote is embedded in a summary passage (19.11–13, 17–19), so that we no longer have the beginning of it ... the story was certainly not fashioned by Christian interests.”

²⁸⁰ According to HOPFNER 1928: 330, a strong sympathetic bond existed between spiritual beings and their true names. Also, it was commonly supposed that the violently killed (βιαιοθάνατοι) and those who had died young (αἰῶροι) could make up what they had lost or avenge their untimely deaths. Hence, they could possess persons and extend their lives (eg. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* III 38); or, be summoned by those who knew the methods to command them. See further: *GMPT* I 248; II 48, 145; IV 1390–1495; 1950.

describing these Jewish exorcists as “itinerant” Luke underlines the fact that they were probably unknown outsiders.

The verb ὀρκίζω (“to cause someone to swear”) and its compound form ἐξορκίζω (“to cause to swear/to invoke someone”) are rare in the New Testament, but more common in the magical papyri. In both the Greek world and Judaism oath swearing was primarily a form of “self-cursing” in the event that a person be exposed or convicted for not speaking the truth. For the Greeks oaths varied in form from the simple invocation of Zeus (ὣν Δία) to more complicated formulae involving various deities. SCHNEIDER (1973: 458) provides an explanation for this diversity:

The basis of [this] variety is the richness of the Greek world of gods. Linked with this is the fact that a man would not call on the same gods as his wife, or a young man on the same gods as an old. [Also] individual cities and states had their official gods in oaths.

However, in Judaism oaths were viewed as active confessions of the sovereignty and unity of God.²⁸¹ Swearing by any gods other than Yahweh was considered an abuse of God’s name,²⁸² and a form of idolatry.²⁸³ The Old Testament uses two words for “to swear:” שָׁבַע and אָלַהּ. While אָלַהּ literally means “to curse,” the radical consonants of the verb שָׁבַע suggest some connection with the numeral שֶׁבַע “seven,” and the old south Arabian verb *sabaga* “to be ample, to be complete.”²⁸⁴

The number “seven” played an exceptional role in the cultures of most civilisations in antiquity: the Semites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Babylonians, Indians, and Greeks.²⁸⁵ This importance is often attributed to the widespread belief that custody of the world was in the seven planets (the sun, moon, and five planets).²⁸⁶ Also, according to mythology, “seven” was sacred to Minerva the Roman goddess of wisdom, consecrated to Mars the god of war who had seven attendants, and a symbol of Osiris—the Egyptian upholder of order and ruler of the underworld—believed to have been dismembered into seven parts by his brother Seth. Seven was considered sacred to Apollo the god of healing,

²⁸¹ Deut 6:13; 10:20; Isa 19:18; 45:23; 48:1; Jer 12:16.

²⁸² Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12.

²⁸³ Jer 5:7; Hos 4:15; Amos 8:14; Zeph 1:5.

²⁸⁴ KOEHLER-BAUMGARTNER 1999: IV 1396.

²⁸⁵ For extensive documentation cf. SORENSEN 1967: 567–569; ABRAHAMS 1982: 1254–1264; and FARBRIDGE 1970.

²⁸⁶ FARBRIDGE 1970: 129.

poetry, and music, who was represented in ancient literature as playing on a harp with seven strings.²⁸⁷

“Seven” was prominent in the religious life of Israel. Important festivals²⁸⁸ and rituals²⁸⁹ were held over a period of seven days; animals for sacrifice often numbered seven;²⁹⁰ altars prepared for sacrifice seven;²⁹¹ the blood of sacrifice sprinkled seven times;²⁹² the oil used for anointing sprinkled seven times;²⁹³ and Temple furnishings often numbered seven.²⁹⁴ Seven was considered effective in ritual actions;²⁹⁵ evil spirits and diseases were believed to come in groups of seven;²⁹⁶ famine in seven year cycles;²⁹⁷ serious ritual defilement lasted seven days;²⁹⁸ and the ideal number of sons was considered to be seven.²⁹⁹

While there is no clear fusion in the Old Testament of the concept “oath” with “seven” or “fullness” there is sufficient evidence to embrace comments by SCHNEIDER (1973: 459) that שבע originally meant “to come under the influence of seven things.” The two verbs שבע and אלה frequently occur together as the inclusion of a curse was thought to strengthen an oath.³⁰⁰ Oaths in the Old Testament were accompanied by blood sacrifice, and often seven animals were involved.³⁰¹ Herodotus provides an interesting point of comparison when reporting the custom of certain “Arabs:”

There are no men who respect pledges more than the Arabians. This is how they give them: a man stands between the two pledging parties, and with a sharp stone cuts the palms of their hands, near the thumb, then he takes a piece of wool from the cloak of each and smears with their blood seven stones that lie between them, meanwhile calling on Dionysus and the heavenly Aphrodite. (Hdt. III 8 [Loeb])

²⁸⁷ WILLIS 1993: 42–45, 138, 168–172.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Passover, the New Year festival, Day of Atonement, and feast of Tabernacles all occur during the seventh month.

²⁸⁹ Exod 29:35–37 records the ordination of priests and consecration of altars.

²⁹⁰ Gen 7:2; 8:20; Num 28:11; 1 Chr 15:26; Job 42:8.

²⁹¹ Num 23:1–2, 4, 14, 29; 2 Chr 29:21.

²⁹² Lev 4:6, 17; 14:7; 16:14; Num 19:4.

²⁹³ Lev 8:11.

²⁹⁴ Exod 40:22, 26; 25:31–37; Zech 4:2, 11.

²⁹⁵ Josh 6:4, 8, 13; 2 Kings 4:35; 5:10.

²⁹⁶ Luke 8:2; 11:26.

²⁹⁷ Gen 41; 2 Kings 8.

²⁹⁸ Lev 15:19, 28; Num 19:11, 14, 16.

²⁹⁹ Ruth 4:15; Job 1:2; Acts 19:14.

³⁰⁰ Num 5:21; 1 Kings 8:31; 2 Chr 6:22; Neh 10:30.

³⁰¹ Gen 15:10; 21:31; Jer 34:18–19.

It seems not too insignificant that in Acts 19:13–16, where there are questions about the exact number of exorcists at work, that Luke uses the verb ὀρκίζω to describe their activities: those who are known to use seven-fold rituals when swearing their oaths are said to number seven. Codex Bezae omits the problem words “seven” and “Jew” in its revision of verse 14. In so doing it also removes some of Luke’s story-telling art.

ἐν οἷς καὶ υἱὸι [+ ἑπτὰ ^{syr^{hm}}] Σκευᾶ τινος ἱερέως ἠθέλησαν τὸ αὐτὸ ποιῆσαι (ἔθος εἶχαν τοὺς τοιούτους ἐξορκίζειν), καὶ εἰσελθόντες πρὸς τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον ἤρξαντο ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα λέγοντες, Παραγγέλλομέν σοι ἐν Ἰησοῦ ὃν Παῦλος ἐξελεθεῖν κηρύσσει (Acts 19:14 [Codex Bezae]).

In this connection also [seven] sons of a certain priest named Scaeva wished to do the same thing (they were accustomed to exorcize such persons). And they came in to one who was demon-possessed and began to invoke the Name, saying, “We command you, by Jesus whom Paul preaches, to come out.” (Acts 19:14 [NIV])

Perhaps the appearance of the numeral ἑπτὰ “seven” in verse 14, which has long puzzled exegetes in light of the change in verse 16 to ἀμφοτέρων “two,” ought to be reconsidered in terms of a subtle word/thought association? Rather than simply being considered a gloss in which “the name Σκευᾶ was taken to be the Hebrew עֲבֵשׁ which [could] be read as the numeral seven (ἑπτὰ),”³⁰² or, “a marginal note of interrogation ζ (=ζήτει) ... being taken as the numeral seven,”³⁰³ is it possible that Luke intended an allusion to the methods employed by exorcists instead of simply accounting for the membership of this itinerant band. Again, even the verb περιέρχομαι may allude to some magical action rather than circuitous wanderings. Certainly, as the story unfolds (vv 15–16) it is clear that Luke intends a contrast between the powerful “actions” of Paul and the activity of the Scaevan exorcists, just as tradition recorded a contrast between the prophet Elijah and the ineffective prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:21–39).

Imitation is sometimes called “the highest form of praise;” in this account an implicit compliment is paid to Paul’s superior power. There are numerous examples in the magical papyri³⁰⁴ as well as both early Christian³⁰⁵ and Jewish³⁰⁶ literature of various gods and even the name of

³⁰² METZGER 1971: 471.

³⁰³ CLARK 1933: 371–373.

³⁰⁴ Cf. PGM IV 3019–3020.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Mark 9:38–39; Luke 9:49–50.

³⁰⁶ Cf. JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* VIII 42–49.

Jesus being invoked to heal or exorcise or curse others. The famous *Paris papyrus* 574 records the spell “I abjure you by Jesus, the God of the Hebrews: ὀρκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν Ἑβραίων Ἰησοῦ, and the invocation “Hail God of Abraham, Hail God of Isaac, Hail God of Jacob, Jesus Chrestos, the Holy Spirit, the Son of the Father, who is above the Seven, who is within the Seven.”³⁰⁷ The practice of some Jews invoking the name of Jesus (cf. Str.–B. I 468) was sufficiently prevalent to be strongly criticised in rabbinic writings.³⁰⁸

However, LÜDEMANN (1987: 213–214) claims that verses 13–16 are to be regarded as “unhistorical ... a legend (from the tradition) with a burlesque basis, or as a joke.” DUNN (1996: 259) also asserts that “the ‘seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva’ sound something like a circus act, and that is probably how they should be regarded.” Likewise, SCHILLE (1985: 379) observes that “[d]ie folgende Geschichte war vermutlich eine profane Burleske, die nur notdürftig dem lukianischen Anliegen dienstbar gemacht worden ist.” Yet clearly as BARRETT (1996: 908) observes, more than mere Lukan entertainment “a narrative such as [this] suggests that Luke was aware of a resemblance between Christian miracle-working and contemporary magic but at the same time wished to make a fundamental distinction.”

There are form-critical features which support—if not claims of pure invention—the view that verses 13–16 present special Lukan material: (1), the verb ἐπιχειρέω appears only in Luke (cf. Luke 1:1; Acts 9:29; 19:13), as does the verb τραυματίζω (cf. Luke 10:34; 20:12; Acts 19:16), and the compound noun ἔξορκιστής occurs only here in the New Testament (Acts 19:13);³⁰⁹ (2), the description πνεῦμα ποιηρόν with one exception³¹⁰ is found only in Luke (Luke 7:21; 8:2; 11:26; Acts 19:13, 16); (3), the pronominal adjective ἀμφότεροι occurs more frequently in Luke than in other New Testament writings; and (4), the compelling fact that the entire episode is embedded in a summary section (Acts 19:11–13 and 19:17–19).

The noun ἔξορκιστής in verse 13 provides the historical kernel of this story, that Jewish exorcists used the name of Jesus (cf. Luke 9:49).

³⁰⁷ Cf. DEISSMANN 1978: 252; GMPT 1986: 62 [PGM IV 1227–1264].

³⁰⁸ Cf. Tosefta *Hullin* II 22–23; *y. Shabbath* XIV 4,14d; *y. Abodah Zarah* II 2,40d–41a; *b. Abodah Zarah* 27b.

³⁰⁹ The compound noun ἔξορκιστής is found elsewhere in Greek literature in LUCIAN and PTOLEMY as well as in the Greek church fathers. On the later activity of ritual exorcists in the church see HORSLEY 1976: I 79.

³¹⁰ Matt 12:45.

BETZ (1986: xli) supports the general reliability of this episode, and indicates how typical such an account is among a wide variety of reports concerning first century CE exorcisms. However, there are details in the sons of Scaeva story which nudge historical and literary critics closer to the remark of HAENCHEN (1971: 566), that “Luke has ... made use of material alien to his purpose, which he could not quite mould together in spite of all his vigorous efforts to do so.”

Luke claims the seven wandering exorcists were sons of a certain Scaeva, a Jewish ἀρχιερεύς. Yet the name Scaeva does not appear among the twenty-eight names of high priests known from Herod the Great to the fall of Jerusalem in 70CE.³¹¹ Consequently scholars have questioned the translation of “high priest,” and argue—following the use of the word elsewhere in the gospels and Acts—that ἀρχιερεύς may be translated “chief priest” (ie. a member of priestly families from whom the high priest was chosen).³¹² A further suggestion by MASTIN (1976: 405–412) is that Scaeva was a renegade Jew who served in the imperial cult as a “chief priest.” Many cities of the eastern Empire—including Ephesus³¹³—had such ἀρχιερείς³¹⁴ and sometimes these provincial leaders were called Ἀσιαρχαί, a term even used by Luke in Acts 19:31. FITZMYER (1998: 650)³¹⁵ appears convinced of this latter possibility and comments that if the word ἀρχιερεύς refers to a chief priest in the imperial cult “the activity of his seven sons, then, takes on a different character.”

Under scrutiny, however, there are reasons to dispute the idea that the Asiarchs were also high priests.³¹⁶ Further, in all likelihood Luke is not using the term ἀρχιερεύς in some technical sense for the high priest of Jerusalem, which makes most of the debate rather academic.³¹⁷ Indeed, there is a high probability that the word ἀρχιερεύς belonged to a tradition used by Luke, which did not originally involve Paul.³¹⁸ So, as

³¹¹ Cf. SCHÜRER 1973–1986: II 227–236; JEREMIAS 1989: 178; HAENCHEN 1971: 565; SCHILLE 1985: 380; JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* XVIII 34–XX 179. Codex Bezae recognises the difficulty and simply has the word ἱερέως (Acts 19:14).

³¹² KELLERMANN 1990: 164–165; SCHNEIDER 1982: 266, 270; WEISER 1985: 529. The term ἀρχιερεύς both in the New Testament and in Josephus does not always relate to an incumbent high priest, and in the plural can have a wider meaning.

³¹³ Cf. ENGELMANN 1993: 279–289.

³¹⁴ Cf. MAGIE 1988: 446–449, 544, 1298–1301.

³¹⁵ FITZMYER 1991: 299–305.

³¹⁶ Cf. KEARSLEY 1994: 366–367.

³¹⁷ Cf. WITHERINGTON 1998: 581.

³¹⁸ Cf. WEISER 1985: 524; BARRETT 1998: 909.

PESCH observes, whether these seven exorcists actually belonged to priestly stock, “bleibt ungewiß.”³¹⁹

Luke continues his tale in verse 15 by claiming ἀποκριθὲν δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ πονηρὸν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς. We are left to assume that this is one of the “evil spirits” (plural) mentioned in verse 13, who now responds to the exorcists: “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognise (respect),³²⁰ but who are you!”

Der Dämon ‘kennt’ Jesus, d.h. er erkennt ihn in seiner Herrschermacht an und weiß sich ihr ausgeliefert, und er ‘weiß von’ Paulus, d.h. er weiß, daß Paulus der allein legitimierte Vertreter der Macht Jesu ist.” (ROLOFF 1981: 286)

Curiously this evil spirit has supernatural insight³²¹ and knows the competency of his opponents. Even more striking, as HAENCHEN (1971: 566) observed, is the unspoken question: “Why does this demon remain undisturbed? Why has not Paul driven him out?” HAENCHEN concluded that Luke made use of material “alien to his purpose” and failed to incorporate this material smoothly into his traditions about Paul in Ephesus. For HAENCHEN the inner logic and difficulty of the sons of Scaeva story is that “the demon remains the victor.” However, while there is supporting evidence of Luke’s incorporation of “alien material” HAENCHEN’s final assessment is at variance with Luke’s summary comments that bracket the episode (19:10b–11, 20) and proclaim the prevailing power of the word: κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ἠῤῥανεν καὶ ἴσχυεν.

The use of ὑμεῖς in the evil spirit’s question is quite pointed and deliberate, for it underlines Luke’s frequent claims about the authorised³²² use of “the name” (19:13 ὀνομάζειν τὸ ὄνομα)³²³ being different from the incantations of a formula. “Die Nennung des Namens Jesu wirkt nicht automatisch” (WEISER 1985: 532; cf. CONZELMANN 1987: 111).

³¹⁹ In concert with ROLOFF (1981: 286), PESCH comments: “Vielleicht waren [die Exorzisten] nur Gaukler fragwürdiger Herkunft, die sich zur Steigerung ihres Ansehens vor dem Volk ihrer Verbindung mit geheimnisvollen jüdischen Autoritäten rühmen” (PESCH 1986: 173).

³²⁰ WEISER (1985: 522) comments that for Luke ἐπιστᾶσθαι always has as object “historische Faktoren ...”.

³²¹ Cf. Luke 8:28 and parallels.

³²² SCHILLE (1985: 380) comments, “Der Jesus-Name ist nach Lukas effektiv nur im Mund von Christen. Lukas greift den hellenistischen Gedanken von der automatischen Wirkung jeder magischen Anrufung frontal an.”

³²³ Cf. Luke 10:17; Acts 3:6.

The sons of Scaeva are confronted not by their lack of technique but their lack of authority. So, these unnamed, unknown, and unrelated exorcists—with no power or authority—are driven out by the evil spirit. In fact, verse 16 says the possessed man leaped on the exorcists and overpowered/mastered (κατακυριεύω, cf. Matt 20:25) “both of them:” ἀμφοτέρων. METZGER (1971: 471–472) provides various explanations and variant readings to overcome the apparent difficulty of reading ἀμφοτέροι with ἑπτὰ in verse 14. Yet there is no compelling reason to insist that ἀμφοτέρων must mean “both” since it can also mean “all.”³²⁴

The exorcists flee ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου ἐκείνου naked and wounded. This is an abrupt comment, and both ROLOFF (1981: 285) and BARRETT (1998: 911) have good reason to argue that the lack of any previous mention of a “house” is further indication that Luke has abbreviated a tradition and incorporated this material into his account of Paul’s work in Ephesus. There is evidence of a figurative use of the noun οἶκος in describing the human body as a “dwelling” for demons,³²⁵ and frequent reference to οἰκία as the gathering places of Christian communities.³²⁶ Even though there is scant detail in the story to argue conclusively, the mention of “household” here suggests that the Jewish exorcists had been active within the Christian community. This is a fundamental observation. For, as STRELAN (1996: 261) correctly comments, “it affects the understanding of the episode 19:11–20 if all the events described are meant to be understood as occurring within the context of a Jewish community and/or the community gathered around Paul, and not in the wider Ephesian context.”

The description of the vanquished exorcists as γυμνοὺς καὶ τετραυματισμένους emphasises more than their humiliation. This is another example of Luke creating special highlights in his narrative through the selection of verbal tense forms which indicate semantic prominence. KLUTZ (1999: 264) makes the insightful comment that:

[b]y choosing the perfect tense-form where another tense of the same verb or even an adjective could have been selected, the narrator heavily emphasises that the itinerants not only failed to expel the spirit and help the poor man, but actually lacked power to prevent themselves from falling victim to the malevolent being.

³²⁴ Cf. Acts 23:8 and the examples provided in MM 1980: 28.

³²⁵ Cf. Matt 12:44 and parallels.

³²⁶ Cf. Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 12:12; 20:20.

This provides the last nail in the coffin, so to speak, to conclude a list of verbs in verse 16 which emphasise the impotence of the sons of Scaeva: *ἐφαλόμενος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐπ’ αὐτούς ... κατακυριεύσας ἀμφοτέρων ἴσχυσεν κατ’ αὐτῶν*. Every well-attuned Jewish ear in Luke’s audience would recognise the significance and irony in Luke’s use of the word *ἰσχύς*, the most common word for power in the LXX.³²⁷ Even more significant is that some of the earliest christological statements in Christianity proclaimed Jesus as the *ἰσχυτέρος* who overcomes and binds Satan the *ἰσχυρός*.³²⁸ This is how exorcisms in the gospels came to be understood: Jesus “the stronger one” is able to rob Satan of his prey, and to set the oppressed free.³²⁹

When this episode involving the exorcists became widely known the result was not mass conversions but a holy fear.³³⁰ The term *φόβος* is used to indicate religious awe because of the incomparable *δυνάμεις* of Paul.³³¹ WITHERINGTON comments, “Luke clearly believes in the evidential value and effect of miracles in attesting the authenticity of God’s work in the lives of Jesus’ followers.”³³² Perhaps Luke means to highlight the degree of fear experienced by his use of the verb *ἐπιπίπτειν*. In addition to the literal meaning of “to fall upon, throw oneself upon,” and the figurative sense in which the verb is used here referring to events or experiences “coming over” someone (eg. “fear,” Luke 1:12; Acts 19:17), Luke uses this word to describe the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:16; 10:44; 11:15). The very physical and aggressive nuances of the verb not only recall the encounter experienced by the exorcists with the overpowering evil spirit, but capture the feeling of overwhelming dread that seized those being told these events.

Luke claims that an additional result to this story becoming widely known (*πάσιν Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλήσιν*) was that the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified: *ἐμεγαλύνετο*. Derived from the noun *μέγας*, the verb *μεγαλύνω* means “to make great,” “to enlarge,” “to praise.” Outside the New Testament, in addition to literal and non-literal meanings, the word *μέγας* and its derivatives “are also used in connection with

³²⁷ Cf. GRUNDMANN 1964: 290–294; 1972: 397. While the MT uses *קִיּוֹם* and *יָדוּעַ* for concepts of power, the LXX almost always uses *ἰσχύς*.

³²⁸ Cf. Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27.

³²⁹ Cf. Isa 40:26; Eph 1:19.

³³⁰ Cf. Luke 1:12, 65; 7:16; Acts 2:43; 5:5, 11.

³³¹ Cf. signs and wonders in Acts 4:30; 5:12.

³³² Cf. WITHERINGTON 1998: 161.

epiphanies of deities and heroes” (GRUNDMANN 1973: 529–530).³³³ In the LXX μέγας generally corresponds with the Hebrew adjective *גָּדוֹל* and the confession of God’s greatness arises out of Israel’s contact with the nations and other gods (cf. Ex 18:11, μέγας κύριος παρὰ πάντας τοὺς θεούς).³³⁴ The attributes of God were hailed as great: “strength” (Ex 32:11; Deut 4:37); “power” (Deut 8:17); “mercy” (Ps 86:13; Isa 54:7); “glory” (Ps 138:5). The “name” of God—as the expression of God’s nature and being—was also said to be great.³³⁵

In the New Testament μέγας is used to describe those things that are surpassing or unusual³³⁶ or even loud;³³⁷ things that cause astonishment both saving and destructive;³³⁸ and the depth of human emotion.³³⁹ In the book of Revelation μέγας often refers to the political–economic or demonic concentration of power.³⁴⁰ Of more immediate interest for our consideration is that only certain people in Luke’s writings are called great. Jesus is called great (Luke 7:16), John the Baptist is called great (Luke 1:15, 32), and Luke reports how Simon λέγων εἶναι τινα ἑαυτὸν μέγαν (Acts 8:9). It can be argued that the direct speech of Simon included an ἐγὼ εἶμι statement (cf. Mark 14:62 etc). Then, more than a public acclamation by followers, this would make Simon’s claim to be God’s representative, or perhaps even to be divine (see above).

By contrast, while Luke reports that the crowds ἐμεγάλυνεν the apostles (Acts 5:13)—perhaps meaning that after the punitive judgment of Ananias and Sapphira the crowds were afraid to get near Peter and the apostles due to the possible adverse effect of doing so—there was never any self-engrandisement by the apostles. Rather the apostles spurned adoration (cf. Acts 14:14–15 etc), and rejoiced instead to be counted worthy of suffering disgrace (ἀτιμάζω) for the Name (Acts 5:41). Luke is

³³³ The phrase μέγας θεός is found everywhere throughout the ancient world. GRUNDMANN (1973: 539) refers to an inscription of Darius I (522–486BCE) in Persepolis: “A great god is Ahura Mazda, who is the greatest of all gods ...”. Reference can also be made to numerous examples of epigraphic and papyrological evidence: CIG II 2170; 2653; 2963c; III 4501–4502; *GMPT* IV 640; 987; 1345; 1710.

³³⁴ Cf. Deut 10:17; 2 Chr 2:4; Ps 47:2; 77:13; 86:10; 95:3.

³³⁵ Cf. Ps 76:1; 99:3.

³³⁶ Mark 4:32; 13:2; Luke 1:42; 5:29; 14:16; 16:26; 17:15; 19:37; 23:46; Acts 7:60; 23:9; 26:24.

³³⁷ Rev 1:10; 19:17.

³³⁸ Matt 4:16; 24:24; Luke 4:25; 21:11, 23; John 7:37; Acts 2:20; 6:8; 8:13.

³³⁹ Matt 2:10; Luke 2:9–10; 8:37; Acts 2:43; 4:33.

³⁴⁰ Rev 12:3, 9; 14:8; 17:1.

consistent then in reporting the success of Paul in Ephesus with the familiar refrain that the “name of the Lord” was given honour/ made great (Acts 19:17).

In verse 18 Luke provides information which is mostly overlooked in the conclusion of this story. The use of the perfect participle πεπιστευκότων places special emphasis on these believers, and sets the stage for ensuring their actions have particular prominence. The force of the perfect tense implies that some members of the Ephesian Christian community had continued to practise magic after their conversion. CONZELMANN (1987: 164) recognised the semantic potential of the perfect tense here, but considered Luke’s choice of language at this point either unconscious or inept. However, since this reference appears in a summary section of the story, it can be argued that Luke knew exactly what he was doing in his selection of tense form to establish the story’s relevance for its audience. Namely, those still spellbound by the practices of magic should confess their error as many former Ephesian devotees did; detailing their activities and divulging their spells.³⁴¹ As BRUCE (1990: 412) comments, since the power of spells lies in their secrecy, to divulge their details was to render them powerless and inoperative. The use of the participial phrase τῶν τὰ περίεργα πραξάντων in verse 19 further strengthens the case for πράξεις to mean “magical spells,” since the term τὰ περίεργα appears commonly in the writings of antiquity to describe magical practices.³⁴²

In a public display, to give credence to their renunciation of former magic practices, some of the Ephesians burned their books. There are numerous reports about the seizure and public burning of books officially labelled as subversive and dangerous.³⁴³ Suetonius describes the burning of Greek and Latin prophetic writings under the reign of Augustus.³⁴⁴ LIVY documents the burning of books written by those considered subversive of true religion.³⁴⁵ DIOGENES LAERTIUS lists the burning of books written by Protagoras.³⁴⁶ However, a significant difference in Luke’s record of events is the voluntary burning of books in Ephesus that represented considerable practical and pecuniary value.

³⁴¹ Cf. HAENCHEN 1971: 567; BRUCE 1990: 412; BARRETT 1998: 912. MM 533 also lists the specialized meaning of “magical spells” for πράξεις.

³⁴² Cf. MM 505.

³⁴³ Cf. TREBILCO 1994: 314–315; PEASE 1946; Jer 36:20–27; 1 Macc 1:56.

³⁴⁴ SUETONIUS, *Augustus* 31.

³⁴⁵ LIVY, *History of Rome* XL 29,3–14.

³⁴⁶ DIOG. L., *Lives* IX 52.

To complete our analysis of 19:13–20 it needs to be noted how Luke uses the storyteller’s art of alliteration to underscore the point that, while the evil spirit had “over-lorded” the exorcists, it was the reputation and power of the Lord’s name and word that truly increased through the preaching and mighty works of Paul (verse 16: κατακυριεύσας ... ἴσχυσεν; verse 17: τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ; verse 20: τοῦ κυρίου ... ἴσχυεν). GRUNDMANN (1972) details that “[b]ehind the whole Greek concept of power there stands the idea of a natural force which, imparted in different ways, moves and determines the cosmos, and which has its origin in widespread primitive notions of Mana and Orenda.” In late antiquity practitioners of arcane arts claimed to know these cosmic, divine, and demonic forces—and their interconnections—and so claimed to mediate these forces for the good or ill of others. However, the message that Paul and the chosen witnesses of Jesus preached with powerful deeds (cf. 19:11) acquired its force (power/strength) only through the effective power of the Lord, which overcame demons and created faith.³⁴⁷

The use of the verb ἀυξάνω in the book of Acts reflects the figurative language of gospel parables rather than the general background of the word in Greek literature, which features more the idea of growth in reputation and power.³⁴⁸ The basic thought is that of scattered seed (ὁ λόγος) that grows.³⁴⁹ So Luke reports how the Gospel is preached and the number of disciples increases.³⁵⁰ The odd expression, καὶ ἐμεγαλύνετο τὸ ὄνομα, helps the internal momentum of the story crescendo with summary words that parallel the constructed summaries of Acts 6:7 and 12:24. “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (19:20).

5.4.3 Observations

While commentators have claimed that Luke’s intention is to use the seven sons of Scaeva story to advance Luke’s theme in Acts about the ongoing triumph of Christianity over magic, our analysis of Acts 19:13–20 has argued that Luke’s primary and overarching intention is to answer a

³⁴⁷ Cf. Eph 6:10; Phil 4:13; James 5:16.

³⁴⁸ Cf. DELLING 1964a: 517. Various references.

³⁴⁹ Cf. Mark 4:3–9, 14–20 and parallels.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20.

different unspoken question: “who has legitimate claim and access to divine wisdom, authority and power?”

First, methodological concerns were raised about the validity of modern research continuing to make claims about “the triumph of Christianity over magic” since this language presupposes outmoded distinctions which are no longer considered appropriate or adequate for historical analysis. Second, it was noted that to speak about “the triumph of Christianity over magic” ignores historical evidence of a continuance of magic practice by Christian and non-Christian alike, regardless of official prohibitions. Also, the insights of modern research confirm how magic is as much a *relational* category as a substantive one: serving to differentiate between the person making accusation of magic and the person(s) labelled. Third, it was argued that claims about Luke having used the seven sons of Scaeva story to reinforce a theme of “ongoing Christian triumph over magic” require corroborative evidence beyond the story’s immediate text and context. Paradoxically, rather than soaring above and beyond notions of magic, Luke’s report about the activities of Paul in Acts 19 appears more remarkable and “magical” than anything that is said about the Scaevan exorcists.

Our inquiry supports the view that Acts 19 offers the modern reader information about, and insight into, an encounter between earliest Christianity and established forms of religion in the province of Asia Minor (19:10, 22), including the practice of magic. The reputation of Ephesus for being a centre for the study and practice of magic was noted; although, a counter-claim was supported that such charges are not so easily proven. What can be demonstrated, however, is that adequate historical and literary evidence does not exist to support a Lukan meta-narrative about the “triumph of Christianity over magic” linking the stories of Simon, Bar-Jesus, and the Scaevan exorcists. To claim otherwise is to swap clarity for closeness. As an art critic needs to balance standing close to the canvass—in order to discern and interpret the deft stroke and technique of the painter—with the need to stand at an appropriate distance to view the complete work, so historical literary criticism of Acts 19:13–20 needs to maintain its perspective. There is no meaning apart from context. So viewed within the broader canvas of Acts the presenting theme of magic/exorcism in the Lukan seven sons of Scaeva story is secondary, while the themes of struggle between light and dark, faith and unbelief, and the question of who speaks the words of God with authority and power are primary. Luke reports how the preaching of Paul was accompanied with and confirmed by mighty actions (verse 11: *δυνάμεις τε οὐ τὰς τυχοῦσας ὁ θεὸς ἐποίει διὰ τῶν*

χειρῶν Παύλου). The clear inference is that the Lord speaks through the words and actions of Paul.

CHAPTER FIVE

Simon the Gnostic

1. Introduction

Early Christian tradition identifies Simon Magus as the father of all heresies; and, by inference, the author of Gnosticism.¹ These claims raise many questions. Was Simon himself a Gnostic, and in what sense? Does Christian tradition imply a genetic link between Simon and later heresies, or simply refer to Simon as being the first person known by ancient Christian writers to have taken a certain line?² What is the relationship between the Simon of Acts 8 and the “Gnostic” Simon listed in the catalogues of Christian heresy? These are not new questions. Problems of definition and classification have always challenged Simon Research, together with questions about the nature and origin of Gnosticism.

In the history of scholarship there have been numerous definitions proposed for what qualifies as “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism,” but a consensus is yet to be achieved as to the validity and use of these common categories. In view of this lack of agreement an overview of terminology will be presented first in this chapter. This overview will broadly outline the development and the use of the terms “Gnosis” and “Gnosticism” from their earliest appearance in literature until the modern era. Even if this does not prove decisive it will identify some of the epistemological and methodological challenges confronting any attempt to answer questions surrounding a Gnostic Simon. In so doing this approach will help identify clear and valid criteria to decide the focal question of this book: “Simon Magus: First Gnostic?”

In addition to a lack of agreement among researchers on key terminology, an equally significant barrier and complicating factor to our

¹ Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2; 27,4; II *praef.* 1–2; EPIPHANIUS, *Pan.* XXI 4,4.

² Cf. WILSON 1979: 486.

investigation of a Gnostic Simon is the paucity and fragmentary nature of materials available for analysis. Not only a considerable span of time lies between our oldest and more recent source—the first century CE book of Acts and the writings of Epiphanius, which date from the fourth century CE—but, as already described in the chapter on Sources, these surviving materials arise from diverse geographical and cultural contexts, as well as differing to varying degrees in character and style. However, they do share one common characteristic: they all are hostile witnesses. The methodological issue facing Simon Research is how to evaluate and use the data these witnesses provide? In the absence of original materials from the hand of Simon, how can the sources confirm or deny the assessment that Simon was a Gnostic? Previous research has concluded that the available sources do not simply present reminiscences from the life of Simon that have been handed down unmodified, but assumes that an oral tradition lies behind these accounts, which has shaped and reshaped the transmitted stories over time.

Due to the state of affairs described above, the possibility of reconstructing a historically reliable outline of Simon's teaching appears questionable or limited. Yet a cautious attempt will be made to distil out of the murky evidence provided by ancient Christian writers remnants of Simon's teaching evident in several textual fragments. Finally, our assembled data will be compared with an identified set of criteria, outlined in a concluding chapter, before providing a positive or negative response to the question of a Gnostic Simon.

2. Towards a Consensus in Terminology

2.1 The Word “Gnostic” and Its Development³

The word *γνωστικός* appears for the first time in a Greek text from the end of the fourth century BCE. Its background is neither in conversational Greek, nor the language of popular literature. Instead, *γνωστικός* was an invented word that belonged to the jargon of intellectuals and philosophers. Adolf AMMANN (1953) claims—in his research into the

³ Cf. HOLZHAUSEN 2001: 58–74. This important article came to my attention too late for me to consider in depth. There is a wealth of information in the footnotes alone.

derivation and meaning of Greek adjectives ending in $-\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ —that during the classical and late classical periods of antiquity as many as 5000 new technical terms entered the Greek vocabulary through the combination of the adjectival desinence $-\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ with various stems;⁴ and, in our area of interest the stem $\gamma\upsilon\omega-$. The result was the invention of words that embraced some of the flavour of the Greek genitive; that is, $-\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ was used to express the sense of “(being) related to...”.

In his dialogue, the *Statesman*, Plato debates with friends the qualities considered necessary in an ideal leader or ruler. Two possible kinds of wisdom or knowledge ($\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\eta\mu\eta$) are identified. One is called “practical” ($\pi\rho\alpha\kappa\tau\iota\kappa\eta$) wisdom/knowledge and the other is termed “Gnostic” ($\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\eta$), which Plato says “leads to knowledge, not manual ability: $\pi\alpha\rho\epsilon\chi\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}$ $\pi\omicron\upsilon$ $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\nu$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\prime$ $\omicron\upsilon$ $\chi\epsilon\iota\rho\upsilon\rho\gamma\iota\alpha\nu$ ” (PLATO, *Statesman* 259e). The discussion concludes that the required knowledge of an ideal ruler is more the $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ type of wisdom—the ability to discern issues and the reflection that leads to knowing possible courses of action—rather than having a “practical” kind of knowledge or skill.

The history of the word $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ reveals that it was never widely used, nor was it ever transferred from technical philosophical usage into the Greek vernacular. Significant also is the fact that, in all its use in the literature of late antiquity $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ is never applied to individuals but only to aspects of individuality, such as mental facility, or features of personality. So the earliest evidence of the word $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ being applied to individuals and to distinct social groups in the second century CE represents a major change in direction.

Prior to the discovery of a Gnostic library at Nag Hammadi (modern day Chenoboskion, Egypt) in 1945, the main sources of information on Gnostic groups and ideas were the writings of ancient Christian authors. In deciphering the use of the terms “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” in modern scholarship it is necessary to consider evidence from these early Christian sources; in particular the principal work of Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons (c. 180CE), entitled “Exposure and refutation of knowledge falsely so called: $\Upsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\chi\omicron\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\tau\rho\omicron\pi\eta$ $\tau\eta\varsigma$ $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omega\nu\acute{\omicron}\mu\omicron\upsilon$ $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ (*Adversus Haereses*).”

Irenaeus is identified as the first writer to apply the word $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ with reference to specific individuals and groups known to him and his community. Irenaeus labels as “Gnostic” various individuals and groups whose teachings he considered a serious threat to the existence of the

⁴ Cf. CHANTRAINE 1933: 384–396.

Christian church and its message. It is noteworthy that there is only one instance where Irenaeus clearly says that certain individuals “call themselves Gnostics;”⁵ a claim supported in part by comments attributed to Celsus⁶ and Clement⁷ that they were aware of some who professed to be Γνωστικοί.

On the other hand there are several instances where Irenaeus clearly uses the label οἱ Γνωστικοί “the Gnostics” to isolate an identifiable group with distinctive teachings.⁸ For example, Irenaeus states that Valentinus established a school based on the principles of “the sect called Gnostic: ἡ λεγομένη Γνωστικὴ αἵρεσις.”⁹ Table 3 lists all the “heresies”¹⁰ Irenaeus identifies in Book 1 of his *Elenchos*, some of which he labels “Gnostic.” At the same time there are many other examples where Irenaeus’ use of the term γνωστικός is unclear.¹¹ Scholarly opinion over those references is divided. Does Irenaeus identify specific sects or does he use the term Γνωστικοί in a more general sense to include all the groups he opposes?¹²

⁵ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 25,6. Irenaeus refers to the followers of a woman named Marcellina. LAYTON (1995: 338) suggests this was presumably a self-applauding title, alluding to the ideal qualities understood by the use of the common noun γνωστικός in the history of philosophical thought since the time of Plato.

⁶ Cf. ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum* V 61.

⁷ Cf. CLEMENT, *Strom.* II 117.

⁸ Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 29,1; II 13,10; III 11,2; IV 33,3.

⁹ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 11,1.

¹⁰ The term αἵρεσις (from the verb αἰρέω; αἰρέομαι [mid]) is a more colourful and malleable word in ancient Greek literature than standard lexicographical entries might at first suggest. Standard translations include “taking,” “seizing,” and “choice,” but evidence found in civil and political documents dating from 300BCE suggest the possibility of “attitude,” “disposition,” “conviction,” or “doctrine” (cf. LE BOULLUEC 1985: 41–44). Only by the time of Plutarch (c.50–120CE) and Epictetus (c.50–130CE) does any firm evidence appear to justify the designation “school.” DIOGENES LAERTIUS (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* I 20) defines groups known as “heresies” in the following manner: αἵρεσιν μὲν γὰρ λέγομεν τὴν λόγῳ τιμὴ κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀκολουθοῦσαν ἢ δοκοῦσαν ἀκολουθεῖν (“... for we use the term of those who in their attitude to appearance follow or seem to follow some principle”). So it can be demonstrated that the use of the word in Greek literature has no fundamental derogatory or negative overtones. Indeed, the word is predominantly used to designate a voluntary association—whether political, philosophical, medical, or religious—and was even used by some as a term of honour.

¹¹ Cf. *Adv. Haer.* II praef. 2; 13,8–10; 31,1; 35,2; III 4,3; 10,4; IV 6,4; 35,1; V 26,2.

¹² Cf. JAESCHKE 1978: 259–260; BROX 1966: 105–114; RUDOLPH 1977b: 220–221.

TABLE 3 Heresy Lists

The "heresies," or sects, listed below, under the name of ancient Christian authors, are printed in the same order in which they appear in the catalogues of each writer. Those figures and groups shown in SMALL CAPS correspond to those generally included under the classification of "Gnostics" in modern scholarship.

IRENÆUS, <i>Adversus haereses</i> Book 1	HIPPOLYTUS, <i>Refutatio Omnium</i> <i>haeresium</i> Books 5-9	PS.-TERTUL- LIAN, <i>Adversus</i> <i>omnes haereses</i>	EPIPHANIUS, <i>Panarion</i>	EPIPHANIUS, <i>Panarion</i>
VALENTINIANS	NAASSENES	Judaism	Barbarism	MARCIONITES [?]
VALENTINUS	PERATAI	Dositheus	Scythianism	Lucianists
PTOLEMY	SETHIANS	Sadducees	Hellenism	Apelleans
SECUNDUS	JUSTIN	Pharisees	Judaism	SEVERIANS
MARCUS	The Pseudo- Gnostic	Herodians	Samaritanism	Tatianites
SIMON OF SAMARIA	SIMON MAGUS	SIMON MAGUS	Pythagoreans	Encratites
MENANDER	VALENTINIANS	MENANDER	Platonists	Phrygians
SATORNIL	VALENTINUS	SATURNINUS	Stoics	Montanists
BASILIDES	SECUNDUS	BASILIDES	Epicurians	Tascodrugians
CARPOCRATES	PTOLEMY	NICOLAS	Samaritans	Pepuzians
MARCELLINA	HERACLEON	OPHITES	Gorothenes	Priscillianists
CERINTHUS	MARCUS	CAINITES	Sebuaeans	Quintillianists
Ebionites	COLARBASSUS	SETHIANS	Essenes	Artotyrites
NICOLAITANS	BASILIDES	CARPOCRATES	Dositheans	Quartodecimans
CERDO	SATORNIL	CERINTHUS	Scribes	Alogi
MARCION [?]	MENANDER	Ebion	Pharisees	Adamians
Encratites	MARCION [?]	VALENTINUS	Sadducees	Sampsaeans
Tatian	PREPON	PTOLEMY	Hemerobaptists	Elkasaites
BARBELO- GNOSTICS	CARPOCRATES	SECUNDUS	Ossaeans	Theodotianists
OTHER	CERINTHUS	HERACLEON	Nasaraeans	Melchizedekians
GNOSTICS	Ebionites	MARCUS	Herodians	Bardesianists
(OPHITES)	Theodotus of Byzantium	COLARBASUS	SIMONIANIS	Noetianists
(CAINITES)	Theodotus	CERDO	MENANDRIANS	Valesians
	MELCHIZIDE- KIANS	MARCION [?]	SATORNILIANS	Catharists
	GNOSTICS	Lucanus	BASILIDEANS	Navatians
	NICOLAOS	Apelles	NICOLAITANS	Angelics
	CERDO	Tatian	GNOSTICS	Apostolics
	Lucian	Phrygians	STRATIOTICS	Apotactics
	Apelles	Proclus	PHIBIONITES	Sabellians
	DOCETISTS	Aeschines	SECUNDIANS	Origenists (1)
	MONCHIMOS	Montanus	SOCRATTITES	Origenists (2)
	Tatian	Blastos	ZACCHAEANS	Paulianists
	Hermogenes	Theodotus of Byzantium	AN	MANICHAEANS [?]
	Quartodecimians	Theodotus	BORBORITES	Acuanites
	Montanus	Praxeas	CARPOCRATIANS	Hierakites
	Priscilla		CERINTHIANIS	Melitianis
	Maximilla		Merinthians	Arians
			Nasaraeans	Ariomanites
			Ebionites	Audians
			VALENTINIANS	Photinians

Encratites	SECONDARIANS	Marcellians
CAINITES	EPIPHANES	Semi-Arians
OPHITES	ISIDORE	Pneumato-
Noachites?	PTOLEMAENS	machians
Noetus	MARCOSIANS	Macedonians
Callistus	COLORBASIANS	Eleusians
Alcibiades	HERACLEO-	Aerians
Elchasaites	NITES	Actians
Jews	OPHITES	Anhomoeans
Essenes	CAINITES	Dimoirites
Pharisees	SETHIANS	Apollinarians
Sadducees	ARCHONTICS	Antidicomarians
	CERDONIANS	Collyridians
		Massalians

This is an issue of considerable importance for scholarship. Modern use of the terms “Gnosis”, “Gnostic”, and “Gnosticism” can ultimately be linked to reports found in the writings of ancient Christian authors that γνωστικός was the self-designation of certain individuals and groups. In the tradition of scholarship, therefore, we find general agreement that this reported self-given name provides a natural starting point for the study of phenomena identified as “Gnostic.”

Broadly speaking there are two opinions advanced about Irenaeus’ use of the label “Gnostic.” Norbert BROX (1966) is representative of those who claim that Irenaeus uses the label “Gnostic” as a shorthand reference to heretics and heresy of all sorts. BROX argues¹³ that while Irenaeus believed there was a specific sect called “Gnostics” he never established direct evidence for it, and instead Irenaeus generally applies the label “Gnostic” as a synonym for “heretic.” A different opinion is represented by Adelin ROUSSEAU and Louis DOUTRELEAU,¹⁴ who claim that Irenaeus uses the label “Gnostic” in two ways. First, with the original and common sense of “learned (*savant*),” and second, when Irenaeus refers to the followers of a particular sect called “the Gnostic heresy” in *Adv. Haer.* I 25,6. ROUSSEAU and DOUTRELEAU argue that, except on three occasions where Irenaeus uses “Gnostic” in the sense of “learned,”¹⁵ in

¹³ BROX 1966: 111. “Eindeutig ist in I 11,1 hinter der λεγομένη Γνωστική αίρεσις und hinter den ψευδονύμως Γνωστικοί ein und dieselbe Einzelsekte bzw. Gruppe der »Gnostiker« zu sehen. Aus ihr stammt Valentin ab. Außer dieser Merkwürdigkeit fällt auf, daß sich die Sekte bei Irenäus sonst nirgends findet.”

¹⁴ ROUSSEAU/DOUTRELEAU, SC 294: 350–354. A list of all occurrences of the term in *Adversus Haereses*.

¹⁵ *Adv. Haer.* I 11,3; 11,5; 25,6.

all other places the term γνωστικός is used by Irenaeus in the second sense of referring to a specific sect.

Our investigation into the definition and use of the word γνωστικός also needs to consider evidence from the third and fourth century CE. The principal Christian writers from this period, who engaged in polemic against teachers labelled as “Gnostic” and compiled catalogues of heresy, were Hippolytus of Rome¹⁶ and Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis (c.315–403 CE).

In his major anti-heretical work *Refutatio omnium haeresium* Hippolytus identifies only two groups he claims “called themselves Γνωστικοί:” the Naassenes¹⁷ and the followers of Justin.¹⁸ Interestingly, however, Hippolytus writes how the Naassenes taught that among the world they were “the only true Christians.”¹⁹ This fragmentary information suggests that their choice of name as “Gnostic” was an attempt to highlight a religious quality the Naassenes espoused, rather than an effort to distinguish themselves with an identity separate from Christianity. Further, the same appears to be the case when Hippolytus discusses the followers of Justin (the Gnostic). Hippolytus mocks this group when he comments how they “call themselves Gnostics, <as if> they alone had stumbled upon the marvellous knowledge (Gnosis) of the perfect and the good” (*Ref.* V 23,3).

Otherwise Hippolytus’ application of the label “Gnostic” is not only sparse²⁰ but also ambiguous in meaning to the modern reader. For example, in one passage Hippolytus makes only general reference to “the diverse doctrines of Gnostics, whose foolish opinions we have not deemed worthy enumerating, since they are full of many irrational and blasphemous teachings” (*Ref.* VII 36,2). It appears that Hippolytus inherited not only data for his treatise from the work of Irenaeus, but also adopted Irenaeus’ non-specific use of the term “Gnostic.” It is impossible to conclude from the context which group Hippolytus has in mind. Another example that creates a sense of ambiguity for modern readers is when Hippolytus uses the term “Gnostic” in reference to individuals and groups—such as Theodotus of Byzantium, and the Ebionites—who are not identified by any modern definition as being “Gnostic.”

¹⁶ Hippolytus never calls himself the “bishop of Rome,” but instead claims to be among the successors of the apostles and guardians of the doctrines of the church (*Ref.* I, Prooem. 6).

¹⁷ *Ref.* V 2; 6,4; 8,29; 11,1.

¹⁸ *Ref.* V 23,3.

¹⁹ *Ref.* V 9,22.

²⁰ Cf. *Ref.* VII 35,1–2; 36,2; X 23,1.

The writings of Epiphanius are valued for their preservation of historical material from sources now lost in the original. On the other hand, the works of Epiphanius are widely criticised for being superficial, verbose, and often inaccurate.²¹ In his major treatise, *Panarion* (or, Medicine Chest), he outlines his intention:

I shall be telling you the names of the sects and exposing their unlawful deeds like poisons and toxic substances, matching the antidotes with them at the same time—cures for those already bitten, and preventatives for those who will have this experience. (*Pan.*, Proem. I; WILLIAMS 1987: 3)

Despite his intention to identify and differentiate between the sects, there remains a degree of ambiguity in Epiphanius' work which reflects not only his sources,²² but also the characteristic inaccuracy of some aspects of his information. For example, Epiphanius uses the word *αἵρεσις* to indicate not only local ecclesial communities and schools of thought, but also to distinguish theological tendencies among scholars. The meaning of "heresy" in Epiphanius is further complicated by the fact that he uses this word for each of the eighty divisions or chapters of his work. Similar confusion surrounds his discussion of the Gnostics.

There are numerous passages where it is unclear whether Epiphanius means to refer to a specific sect, or indeed uses the label "Gnostic" more generally.²³ Epiphanius reserves direct use of the label "Gnostic" for only one sect; or perhaps more accurately, a handful of groups that he claims are one even though they appear under different names in various locations.

And then the <founders> of the falsely termed "knowledge" began their evil growth in the world—I mean the ones called Gnostics and Phibionites, the so-called disciples of Epiphanes, the Stratotics, Levitics, Borborites and the rest. For to attract his own sect with his own passions, each of these people invented countless ways of doing evil. (*Pan.* XXV 2,1; WILLIAMS 1987: 78)

Contrary to his avowed efforts to pinpoint differences between these "Gnostics" and other groups like the Valentinians,²⁴ Epiphanius muddies the waters of his antidote by claiming in some passages that Valentinus and many others use the self-given name "Gnostic:"

²¹ Cf. TREU 1958: 531, "Sein Stil ist wie sein Wissen konfus und weitschweifig ...;" cf. also ODCC 1990: 464.

²² Cf. EPIPHANIUS, *Pan.* XXXI 33,1–2. Epiphanius' major source of information was Irenaeus, whom he admired greatly.

²³ Cf. *Pan.* XXXVIII 2,5; XL 1,5; XLII 11,15.

²⁴ Cf. *Pan.* XXXI 32,7; XXXVII 1,2; XL 7,5.

They all call themselves Gnostics, I mean Valentinus and the Gnostics before him, as well as Basilides, Satornilus and Colorbasus, Ptolemy and Secundus, Carpocrates, and many more. (*Pan.* XXXI 1,5; WILLIAMS 1987: 152)²⁵

Consequently, as was identified also in other ancient Christian literature, there is general ambiguity in the way Epiphanius uses the label “Gnostic” in his writings, and scant evidence for a self-given use of γνωστικός. Indeed, there is a tension, if not disparity, between the “heresy” catalogues of Epiphanius, Hippolytus, and Irenaeus—which identify a specific group who called themselves Gnostics—and further claims by the same authors that “many” others also use the name.

More than passing reference should be paid to the findings of a survey by Morton SMITH (1981: 803) that outlines how there is little reference to self-proclaimed “Gnostics” in the works of other Christian writers from the first three centuries CE.²⁶ To this observation LAYTON (1995: 339) supplies the additional information that “[i]n Greek literature down to the seventh century, there seems to be no other record of γνωστικός applied to specific people.” Even more revealing is the fact that there is no direct evidence of any recognised Gnostic author using “Gnostic” as a self-chosen name. There is a complete lack of the word γνωστικός or its Coptic equivalent in the Nag Hammadi writings; yet, numerous other self-appellations appear.²⁷ While this lack in itself does not discount the possibility that certain individuals and groups ever used the term, its complete absence in all original “Gnostic” writings discovered so far is difficult to understand and to reconcile with claims about its widespread use.

In summary, the original sense of the word γνωστικός clearly referred to a quality and was never applied to individuals or distinct social groupings. Evidence in ancient Christian writings is scant and ambiguous for the use of the word as a self-given name by individuals and groups, and does not include all groups that usually appear in modern definitions and lists of Gnostics. However, in those few instances where “Gnostic” is claimed to be a self-given name, the context proves that this name was chosen because of the qualities associated with the original and classical use of the word γνωστικός. Finally, the complete absence of the word as

²⁵ Cf. *Pan.* XXXI 36,4. Epiphanius claims that Valentinus calls himself a Gnostic; *Pan.* XXXIII 1,1. Epiphanius states that Ptolemy belonged to the Gnostics, and was a follower of Valentinus, Secundus, and Epiphanes.

²⁶ Cf. TERTULLIAN, *Adv. Val.* 39,2; *De anima* 18; *Scorpiace* 1,5; CLEMENT, *Strom.* III 30,1; IV 114,2; *Paed.* I 52,2.

²⁷ Cf. SIEGERT 1980: 129–132.

a self-appellation in surviving Gnostic literature suggests that the word needs to be used with caution, and always with qualification, because of its often pejorative and limiting nature. The implications for any consideration of Simon as the first Gnostic are obvious.

2.2 The Word “Gnosticism” and Its Development

The word “Gnosticism” is a modern construct,²⁸ which has no equivalent in ancient Greek, Latin, or Coptic. When first coined in the eighteenth century it was used as a descriptive similar in meaning to the hyphenated expression Gnostic-heresy (Gnostick-heresie).²⁹ Gnosticism was initially adopted by modern scholarship as a convenient category to accommodate those groups and individuals identified by early Christian authors as having called themselves Gnostics. Researchers later applied this Gnosticism category more broadly, regardless of self-designation, to include groups sharing distinctive religious, social, cultural, and economic characteristics. The rationale generally advanced for this development contends that those groups identified as having used the self-given name “Gnostics” shared common features with other groups who did not expressly use the appellation; and, that this typological correspondence equates with the essence and spirit of Gnosticism.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, as our history of research chapter has already noted, scholarship followed the traditional view of Gnosticism presented in the writings of Irenaeus and the Church Fathers; namely, that Gnostic sects were the product of early Christian heresies. However, all this was challenged and changed by a new approach introduced by scholars from the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. The focus of research shifted and efforts were concentrated to discover a pre-Christian form of Gnosticism. An evolutionary model was applied to a variety of early Christian and near-Eastern sources, with the underlying presupposition that Gnostic phenomena could be understood and explained by situating them in an historical sequence and broader context that included the religious motifs and ideas of late antiquity.

²⁸ Cf. RUDOLPH 1996: 43. Kurt RUDOLPH describes Gnosticism as a “deprecatory expression, a theologizing neologism.”

²⁹ Cf. LAYTON 1995: 349. Bentley LAYTON traces the creation of the term Gnosticism to the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614–1687). Layton states that More “coins the term ‘Gnosticism’ with roughly the same generic meaning as Hammond’s ‘Gnostick-heresie’ ...”.

This initial change was further extended when a new generation of scholars adopted a research model influenced and informed by phenomenology, an emerging comparative approach to the study of religions, and new philosophical categories. Proponents of this methodology analysed non-Christian texts for patterns analogous with Christian materials, in order to determine questions of shared origin and influence. The underlying presupposition was that Gnosticism could not be understood developmentally, but needed to be understood as a whole within a larger matrix of religious speculation and symbolism.

Then the discovery and publication of the Nag Hammadi Library precipitated more changes in research direction and focus. Scholarship abandoned earlier attempts to locate the roots of Gnosticism in Persia, and began to re-examine possible links between Judaism and the origin of Gnosticism. This new research identified clear linguistic connections between Gnostic mythology and Jewish tradition; especially in the reinterpretation provided by certain Nag Hammadi texts of the events of Genesis, and speculations of Adam in Paradise.

So, briefly, from initially being employed as a convenient category to accommodate and study those groups and individuals nominated by ancient Christian writers as having called themselves Gnostics, the constructed term Gnosticism itself was later expanded to accommodate constructed groupings of religious thought, practice and experience—regardless of self-designation—on the basis of phenomenological similarity. Consequences of this metamorphosis in the use of the term Gnosticism in the history of scholarship have included a lack of clarity in classification, a plurality of definitions of what constitutes Gnosticism, and continuing debate over which figures and groups qualify being counted as “Gnostic.”

The now famous international conference at Messina, Italy, in 1966, was convened to establish terminological and conceptual agreement with regard to the origin of Gnosticism.³⁰ It was decided to use the term *Gnosis* to mean “knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an elite.” In contradistinction to this broad use of *Gnosis* is the restricted term *Gnosticism*, chosen to indicate a specific historical phenomenon and, in particular, the Gnostic systems of the second century. The following working definition of Gnosticism was suggested:

³⁰ The Colloquium elected a committee comprised of H. JONAS, C. COLPE, J. DANIELÉLOU, G. WIDENGREN, and U. BIANCHI (assisted also by M. SIMON and H. MARROU) to prepare a draft proposal, which was debated, emended, and finally adopted during a final three-hour session of the conference. The Proposal was an attempt to avoid the undifferentiated use of the terms *Gnosis* and *Gnosticism*.

a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarised in the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world of fate, birth and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally re-integrated. Compared with other conceptions of a “devolution” of the divine, this idea is based ontologically on the conception of a downward movement of the divine whose periphery (often called Sophia [Wisdom] or Ennoia [Thought]) had to submit to the fate of entering into a crisis and producing—even if only indirectly—this world, upon which it cannot turn its back, since it is necessary for it to recover the *pneuma*—a dualistic conception on a monistic background, expressed in a double movement of devolution and reintegration.

The type of *gnosis* involved in Gnosticism is conditioned by the ontological, theological, and anthropological foundations indicated above. Not every *gnosis* is Gnosticism, but only that which involves in this perspective the idea of the divine consubstantiality of the spark that is in need of being awakened and reintegrated. This *gnosis* of Gnosticism involves the divine identity of the *knower* (the Gnostic), the *known* (the divine substance of one’s transcendent self), and the *means by which one knows* (*gnosis* as an implicit divine faculty is to be awakened and actualised. This *gnosis* is a revelation tradition of a different type from the Biblical and Islamic revelation tradition).³¹

The congress also attempted to secure agreement among scholars to use the terms “*pre-Gnostic*” and “*proto-Gnostic*.” Pre-Gnostic elements do not constitute Gnosticism in the strict sense, but are those elements in existence in pre-Christian times, which were later incorporated into Gnosticism proper. On the other hand, proto-Gnostic designates the early or incipient forms of Gnosticism which preceded the fully developed Gnosticism of the second century.

Unfortunately, the Messina agreement had a problem at its core, and from its inception. Ironically, in an effort to achieve terminological clarity the Congress overlooked certain modern linguistic peculiarities. For example, European languages convey an ironic or general deprecatory sense with all “-isms.”³² In addition, prior to Messina, the German noun “Gnosis” and the English term “Gnosticism” were used synonymously, one translating the other. So, the introduction of the Messina definition invited possible confusion if the distinction were to be applied to previous literature and continuing common usage.

³¹ BIANCHI 1967a: xxvi–xxvii.

³² Cf. RUDOLPH 1996: 43; SCHENKE 1982: 375: “... in research one not infrequently uses instead of or alongside of ‘gnosis’ also the concept ‘Gnosticism’. Here one occasionally means by ‘Gnosticism’ Christian *gnosis* in distinction to pre-Christian pagan *gnosis*. The concept ‘Gnosticism’ is in any case pejorative and basically is on a level with the terminology of heresiology.”

In the years since Messina,³³ numerous international conferences have focused on Gnosticism,³⁴ yet modern research has shown itself increasingly less concerned with constructing comprehensive theories than to investigate the remarkably diverse body of Gnostic literature. Indeed, the whole quest for origins has largely been abandoned, since potentially it leads through a process of infinite regress to ever more remote origins. Instead, it has been argued, the impetus for the development of Gnosticism must be sought in specific events and, or, experiences;³⁵ that Gnosticism has an essence, a spirit of its own, something new that is not derivable from Judaism or from anywhere else.

The problem for researchers has been in defining exactly what that “something else” ought to be. GRANT (1959) suggested the shattering of eschatological hope after the fall of Jerusalem; QUISPEL (1972) argued for the “the experience of self” that is then mythically projected; while the legacy of JONAS (1967a: 26) continues to insist that the uniqueness of Gnosticism lies in a certain “attitude toward existence.” In a paper presented to the International Colloquium on Nag Hammadi Texts—held in Quebec (1978)—which considered the attitude of Gnostic Religion towards Judaism, Karl-Wolfgang TRÖGER echoed the words of JONAS when he asserted “the issue of Gnostic origins does not depend on common traditions and similar tendencies found in the two religious phenomena, but their intrinsic essence and spirit.”³⁶ TRÖGER identified

³³ Five years after Messina, Kurt RUDOLPH commented in his report on Gnosis research that German scholarly discussion had largely rejected the Messina distinction. The ripping apart of *Gnosis* and *Gnosticism* was judged as unfortunate and dangerous since both terms are already so closely connected with the well-known phenomenon of late antiquity. “Gnosis” itself was employed by ancient Christian writers to designate it. With the term Γνωστικοί the connection has been made to the central idea and in part to the self-designation: “Unglücklich und gefährlich dagegen ist das Auseinanderreißen von Gnosis und Gnostizismus, da beide Begriffe bereits so eng mit den bekannten spätantiken Phänomenen verbunden sind und ‘Gnosis’ selbst von den christlichen Häresiologen zu seiner Kennzeichnung verwendet wurde, wobei an die Zentralidee und die teilweise Selbstbezeichnung mit ‘Gnostiker’ (Γνωστικοί) angeknüpft worden ist ...” (RUDOLPH 1971: 18–19). RUDOLPH reports H.-M. SCHENKE saying in his review of BIANCHI, *Le origini dello Gnosticismo*, that one “cannot do much” (wenig anzufangen) with this expanded sense of Gnosis. He also cites A. BÖHLIG as embracing the distinction as something that can in fact help but also conceding that “what *gnosis* as a religious worldview might mean is not yet grasped concretely.”

³⁴ See those listed in YAMAUCHI 1984: 22.

³⁵ PAGELS 1976: 364–368.

³⁶ TRÖGER comments that to adequately account for the development of Gnosticism our search must “make allowance for the new quality inherent in the Gnostic

'anti-Cosmism' as the identifying factor of Gnosticism, yet other modern scholars variously locate the new focus of Gnosticism as: anti-Somatism,³⁷ Asceticism,³⁸ Libertinism,³⁹ and Deterministic Elitism.⁴⁰ However, there are fundamental problems in distilling Gnosticism into an inclusive attitude. Under the light of closer scrutiny they prove to be narrow, if not selective, subjective abstractions and labels. To apply such notions to the broad spectrum of sources originating from different time periods, divergent social locations, and specific psychological or cultural contexts, is questionable if not completely invalid. The ultimate dangers of such an approach are either the construction of an unverifiable meta-narrative, or, confusing the task of definition with explanations of how new religious movements occur.

Much of the scholarly effort, then, which has concentrated on defining Gnosticism as an "attitude," "spirit," or "new mental focus" (different from anything prior to its emergence) has created even more debate. So much so that Michael WILLIAMS argues in his book—*Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*—that it is time for modern research to re-examine the category of Gnosticism, because in modern discourse it has become such "a protean label that it has all but lost any reliably identifiable meaning for the larger reading public." Indeed:

since there is no true consensus even among specialists in the religions of the Greco-Roman world on a definition of the category 'Gnosticism', that category should be the very first thing shoved out the door to make way for better ones before we can get on with the business of sorting. (WILLIAMS 1996: 3-4)

More than simply being renamed, or redefined, WILLIAMS argues⁴¹ that the category "Gnosticism" needs to be dismantled and replaced.

religion. For we consider it necessary to emphasize that the Gnostic religion is neither a degenerated sort of Judaism nor degenerated Christianity. Rather, it is a religion of its own—that is to say, a religious movement with an anti-cosmic attitude. I think this religious conception of the universe is something beyond and essentially different from certain pessimistic attitudes within Judaism or disappointed apocalyptic aspirations" (K.-W. TRÖGER in BARC 1981: 96).

³⁷ DODDS 1965.

³⁸ HILGENFELD 1966: 333; FOERSTER 1972: 473; SCHOEPS 1956.

³⁹ PERKINS 1990: 374-375; JONAS 1967: 276.

⁴⁰ FILORAMO 1990: 129; GREEN 1985: 213.

⁴¹ WILLIAMS 1996: 51. The suggestion of "biblical demiurgical traditions" seems only to replace an inadequate category with one even more difficult. However, upon closer examination we discover that WILLIAMS does not wish to promote confusion by inventing a new single description for an already-selected body of data. Rather, in addition to conventional efforts to sort out traditio- and socio-historical

However, in an undisguised passion to abandon the classification of religious data in terms of historical traditions, the lines between epistemology and sociology in modern scholarship are in danger of becoming blurred, if not entirely overlooked.

Some research can be accused of presuming that even though the word “Gnosticism” was never used by ancient Christian writers that they described and labelled essentially the same groupings of religious thought, practice, and experiences. This is impossible. Despite the claim of JONAS (1967a: 32), for example, that “already Irenaeus, in the title of his work, used the name ‘gnosis’ (with the addition ‘falsely so called’) to cover all those characteristics ...” it needs to be remembered that the criterion which Irenaeus used to place various groups into the same category of “Gnosis” was not phenomenological similarity but “false teaching;” namely, those who failed to comply with his “rule” of truth (κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας).⁴² For Irenaeus this “rule” of truth was the original truth which the church was charged to preserve as true and firm knowledge of God, and so there was no need to seek other opinions or to ask other questions. This is one point for which he attacks the “Gnostics.”⁴³

In summary, Gnosticism is a modern construct which has experienced changes in definition and application within the history of modern scholarship. There is no equivalent term in ancient Greek, Latin, or Coptic; and, neither are there lines of continuity between modern usage of the word Gnosticism and the categorisation by ancient Christian writers of certain self-proclaimed “Gnostic” figures and groups. Since a lack of clarity and agreement exists with the label “Gnosticism,” as with the label “Gnostic,” these words need to be used with caution, and always with explanation. Finally, due to the intimate links between the figure of Simon and questions concerning the nature and origin of Gnosticism, the methodological challenges confronting Simon research are obvious. The terms “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” remain “slippery words,”⁴⁴ despite the efforts of scholars. Therefore, continued diligence needs to be exercised in their definition and use, since terminology ultimately directs interpretation.

relationships, WILLIAMS argued that on another level less problematic categories be used to classify the materials in question.

⁴² *Adv. Haer.* I 9,4; 10,1; 22,1; II 27,2–28,1.

⁴³ *Cf. Adv. Haer.* II 11,1.

⁴⁴ *Cf. RUDOLPH* 1996: 41.

3. Evidence from Ancient Christian Writers

3.1 Introduction

Surviving objects have a special power to help people grasp the past; to extend human appreciation for the dimensions of history. How tantalising, then, is the invitation we read Justin Martyr extend to Antoninus Pius:

Ἔστι δὲ ἡμῖν καὶ σύνταγμα κατὰ πασῶν τῶν γεγενημένων αἱρέσεων συντεταγμένον ᾧ εἰ βούλεσθε ἐντυχεῖν, δώσομεν. (JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,8 [PG 6, 369])

I have compiled and have on hand a treatise against all the heresies which have arisen, which I will give you if you would like to consult it. (trans. RICHARDSON 1970: 259)

Unfortunately, we cannot consult Justin's *Syntagma against all heresies*; it no longer exists. This earliest of all heresiological works known to us has not survived, and despite efforts to reconstruct this compilation from later writings—especially from Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses* and Hippolytus' *Refutatio*—these reconstructions have met with little success or agreement among scholars.

Nonetheless, it is generally conceded by scholarship that a high degree of probability supports every claim that the *Syntagma* of Justin provided considerable details about Simon's life and teachings; otherwise it makes little sense why Justin would invite the Emperor to consult this work for further information about the heresy of Simon. Again, there are numerous points of agreement between Justin's brief report about Simon in his *First Apology*⁴⁵ and the expanded, impressive information provided by Irenaeus.⁴⁶ This congruency is best explained by an hypothesis that Irenaeus was acquainted with both the *Syntagma* and *Apology* of Justin, and that while there were evidently several instances of correspondence between these writings Justin provided only select details from what he knew of Simon—perhaps for the sake of brevity—in his letter of defence to Antoninus Pius.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Apol.* I 26,1–3.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Adv. Haer.* I 23,1–4. Points of agreement include (1), Simon's activities in Rome during the reign of Claudius; (2), the divine claims of Simon; (3), details about Simon's companion, Helen (his *Ennoia*), who once "stood on a roof."

To date, however, no object like a Rosetta stone nor any original writing of Simon has been unearthed to empower researchers in their efforts to provide answers to the question of a Gnostic Simon. While the discovery and translation of the Nag Hammadi Library has significantly increased the amount of original source material for the study of “Gnostics” and “Gnosticism,” it has not provided even a single reference to Simon; which is both disappointing and revealing. The lack of any reference to Simon⁴⁷ raises the issue of what relative importance should be given to claims that the origins of Gnostic heresy can be traced back to Simon. What is confirmed by the Nag Hammadi texts, instead, is the considerable variety in Gnostic teachings already identified by ancient Christian authors, who themselves drew comparisons with the many-headed hydra of Greek legend.⁴⁸

In the following critical examination of several textual fragments dating from the second and third centuries CE, a cautious attempt will be made to identify beneath the reports of Simon’s teaching possible original traditions and sayings. This analysis will contribute to our eventual conclusions about the question of a Gnostic Simon.

3.2 Literary Fragments

3.2.1 Fragment 1: Justin Martyr, *Apology* I 26,3(a)

καὶ σχεδὸν πάντες μὲν Σαμαρεῖς, ὀλίγοι δὲ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔθνεσιν,
ὡς τὸν πρῶτον θεὸν ἐκέλευον ὁμολογοῦντες προσκυνοῦσι.

And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations,
worship him, and publicly acknowledge him as the first God.

There are no linguistic difficulties with this fragment from Justin. On the other hand, disputes over its meaning in context and within the broader debate surrounding a possible Gnostic Simon are entirely another matter.

Justin’s claim that many acknowledge Simon as πρῶτος θεός, and worshipped him, does not in itself identify Simon as a Gnostic. However, it cannot be too strongly emphasised that this public acclaim of Simon must always be read in connection with Helen’s identification as πρώτη

⁴⁷ Cf. ARAI 1977: 185–203. ARAI argues that there are echoes of Simonian Gnosis in the tractate “Exegesis on the Soul”—a treatise on the fall of the soul and its return to the higher world.

⁴⁸ Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 30,15; HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* V 11.

ἔννοια and understood within the broader context of Justin's appeal to the Emperor regarding the distinctiveness of true Christian worship.⁴⁹

It is impossible to avoid the pantheon of ancient Greece and Rome as the fertile mythological sub-soil for this designation of Simon as "first God." Since it is the only occurrence of this divine title in Justin's *First Apology* such rarity may support its originality. If πρῶτος θεός were merely a secondary characterisation of Simon, a label applied by outsiders, or an example of Christian slander, it would be reasonable to expect other occurrences, and for these to be linked with derogatory comments or disclaimers. However, the fact that Justin draws the attention of the Emperor to an apparent well-known phenomenon, without additional words of explanation, is a clear indication of πρῶτος θεός being a genuine and immediately understood title of Simon. The ὀλίγοι who venerate Simon include not only followers from among the Samaritans but also those who honoured Simon with the erection of a statue on the river Tiber bearing the reported inscription: *Simoni deo sancto*.

In Graeco-Roman literature from the time of Homer the word πρῶτος was commonly used in three senses. First, and more frequently, πρῶτος was used in a temporal sense; second, in the sense of rank or degree; and, third, the word could be used in a rare spatial sense.⁵⁰ It seems least likely in the context of Greek vernacular that Simon's label as πρῶτος should be understood temporally or sequentially. Instead, the label πρῶτος here, as in Philo⁵¹ and the New Testament,⁵² is not used as a comparative but stresses preeminence with allusions to pre-existence as well as the primal creation of all things.

Any inquiry into Justin's reference to Simon's epithet as πρῶτος θεός needs to keep in mind Philo's views on the relation between God and humans, considering the not insignificant influence of Philo's writings on

⁴⁹ Cf. *Apol.* I 24,1–2, "... though we say things similar to what the Greeks say, we only are hated on account of the name of Christ, and though we do no wrong, are put to death as sinners; other men in other places worshipping trees and rivers, and mice and cats and crocodiles, and many irrational animals. Nor are the same animals esteemed by all; but in one place one is worshipped, and another in another, so that all are profane in the judgment of one another, on account of their not worshipping the same objects. And this is the sole accusation you bring against us, that we do not revere the same gods as you do, nor offer to the dead libations and the savour of fat, and crowns for their statues, and sacrifices."

⁵⁰ Cf. BAGD, "πρῶτος."

⁵¹ Cf. PHILO, *On the migration of Abraham* 181; *On Abraham* 115. In the writings of Philo a nuance of exclusivity surfaces when Philo refers to God as πρῶτον θεόν.

⁵² Cf. Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13.

diaspora Judaism and early Greek speaking Christianity. Philo argues that the rational part of the human soul or the mind is a divine part through which humanity is related to God,⁵³ yet he would consider it blasphemous to call any human a “god,” unless careful disclaimers were made, as is the case in his discussion of the central role played by Moses in Judaism. In *De vita Moysis* I 158–159, Philo outlines the unique partnership Moses enjoyed with the Creator, which included his being considered worthy of the same name; for Moses is called god and king (θεός καὶ βασιλεύς). The biblical text Philo deems supportive of this description is Exod 7:1, where God says to Moses: Ἴδου δέδωκά σε θεὸν Φαραω “See, I send you as [a] god to Pharaoh.”

Wayne MEEKS (1967: 104–105) argues that Philo wavers here between presenting Moses as sharing God’s nature and even “approaching substantiality” with God, and viewing Moses as a divine man who is granted an apotheosis. But, on the basis of a thorough analysis of the treatise *De mutatione nominum*, David RUNIA presents a practically opposite interpretation of Philo’s exegesis of Exod 7:1.

[O]ur discussion of the two passages in the *De mutatione nominum* has taught us how to interpret the words “being deemed worthy of the same title (sc. as God)” (προσθήσεως τῆς αὐτῆς ἀξιωθείς) in *Mos.* I 158. The privileged status of Moses is shown by the fact that he has no less than three names (one of which is ‘god’). God too has many titles—God, Lord, Father, Creator and so on. The crucial difference is that for Moses these are personal and proper names which tell us something about his nature, whereas God, as transcendent Being, has no proper (i.e. legitimate) name (κύριον ὄνομα) which can indicate his essence. A little earlier in *Mos.* I 75–6 Philo, with reference to Exod. 3:14–15, had made the same point, but so that weaker natures may have a title with which to address Him, He says that He is God (θεός) of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The fact therefore, that Moses is given the same title as God is certainly a great honour, but it does not imply a kind of deification in which Moses comes to share in the same nature as God. On the contrary, such a conclusion would reveal a failure to understand the nature of God’s transcendence and the implications of that transcendence for the way in which he can be named. (RUNIA 1988: 60)

Philo argues in the *De mutatione nominum* that God’s nature is to be, and is not to be predicated. As such, God cannot be legitimately named except by means of κατάχρησις, the conscious misuse of language.⁵⁴ Philo’s line

⁵³ Cf. PHILO, *De mutatione nominum* 181–185.

⁵⁴ Cf. RUNIA 1988a: 82–89.

of thought in this treatise is difficult at times, although philosophically consistent. Since the name or title θεός cannot be predicated of God as God really is, then it follows that Moses—indeed any range of beings—can share the same name. However, Moses is only ever portrayed as a god in relation to other humans, not in relation to other divine beings, or God the Supreme Being. In this regard Philo's comments in *Quod omnis probus sit* are most instructive. Although the context is different, the description of the “wise” and “friends of God” as true rulers and gods of men compares with the portrayal of Moses as θεός καὶ βασιλεύς.

The legislator of the Jews in a bolder spirit went to a further extreme and in the practice of his “naked” philosophy, as they call it, ventured to speak of him who was possessed by love of the divine and worshipped the Self-existent only, as having passed from a man into a god, though, indeed, a god to men (ἀνθρώπων μέντοι θεόν), not to the different parts of nature, thus leaving the Father of all the place of King and God of gods. ([Loeb] *Quod omnis probus sit* 43)

So, Moses—the wise friend of God—is sent as “god and king” to Pharaoh the archetypal φαῦλος. In relation to Pharaoh, Moses is a mediator. He mediates by representing God to Pharaoh, and through his intercessions. Of course, the mediator *par excellence* in Philo's theology is the Logos, who can appear at several hypostatized levels: transcendent, immanent, and as an angel.⁵⁵ SEGAL (1977) and FOSSUM (1982) have argued that Philo displays theological sympathies towards the idea that God's highest servant, the “angel of the Lord,” is a second power in heaven next to, and perhaps rivalling God. This subject is far too complex to be more than mentioned here. Further, this question does not immediately concern us: what degree of correspondence is there in Philo's theology between Moses as mediator and the Logos? Rather, our concern is with Justin's report of Simon as πρῶτος θεός. Although, as already mentioned, the Philonic heritage in Justin is not insignificant. So, when reporting that Simon was considered a god (θεός ἐνομίσθη) by some, would Justin have recalled the mediator role of Moses and understood these as rival claims?

Justin's own commentary,⁵⁶ given to Trypho, demonstrates that our conclusions about πρῶτος and our reference to speculations about the relation between the divine and human in the thought of diaspora

⁵⁵ Cf. RUNIA 1986: 446–451.

⁵⁶ Cf. JUSTIN, *Dial.* 120.

Judaism and early Greek speaking Christianity, are relevant and well founded. Justin insists there is a “second God,” a “power” from God and that this is Christ.⁵⁷ In this regard, Justin argues, the Samaritans, were mistaken in trusting Simon as God above all powers:

ὃν Θεὸν ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως εἶναι λέγουσι.

Who they (the Samaritans) claim is God above all power, and authority, and might. (JUSTIN, *Dial.* 120,6 [PG 6,756])

In this context Justin’s reference (*Apol.* I 26,2) to a statue having been erected on the banks of the Tiber, in recognition of Simon’s divine status, has been a problematic issue in the history of scholarship. As already mentioned in chapter 3 (§ 4), it is now commonly accepted that Justin—or his informant—saw and misinterpreted a dedication to an ancient Sabine god Semo Sancus, who was often identified with the divine protector of the sanctity of oaths Ζεὺς ὄρκιος or πίστιος.

Gerd LÜDEMANN (1975: 51) is convinced that Simon was venerated in Rome by the Simonians, with links to the cult of Zeus, long before Justin’s letter of appeal to Antoninus Pius. He quotes Robert CASEY approvingly in defence of the monument being used by the Simonian cult:

That the statue had originally no connexion with Simon is evident, but it is not impossible that Simonians in Rome used it for their own worship ... The fact that the monument was used by others for a different worship need also have been no hindrance in so cosmopolitan an age. Examples of temples and images used by different sects for their own religion are attested in the *De dea Syria* (Ps.-Lucian 11ff) and were probably not uncommon. (CASEY 1933: 154)

LÜDEMANN points to later references in Irenaeus as supportive evidence for the existence and endurance of Zeus imagery in the veneration of Simon. First, Irenaeus mentions an image cult among the Simonians:

Imaginem quoque Simonis habent factam ad figuram Iovis, et Helenae in figuram Minervae, et has adorant. (IRENÆUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,4 [Brox 1993: 294])

(The Simonians) also have an image of Simon modelled after the likeness of Jupiter (=Zeus), and another of Helena after the likeness of Minerva (=Athena), and these they worship.

⁵⁷ Cf. JUSTIN *Dial.* 105, 120, 128; *Apology* I 33; ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum* V 39; VI 61.

Second, Irenaeus claimed⁵⁸ that Simon represented himself as the “loftiest of powers” (*sublimissimam virtutem*) and the Being who is “Father over all” (*super omnia pater*). The logic in LÜDEMANN’s argument is clear and credible that these references in Irenaeus are an expansion on the reconstructed divine predication of Simon found in Justin.⁵⁹ However less certain is his attempt to reconstruct the pre-history of the Simonian cult in Rome with assistance from various literary points of reference.

By means of literary triangulation, LÜDEMANN attempted to navigate the contours of development in the cultic veneration of Simon/Zeus through a period of history, which he himself admitted was full of “dark and unclear centuries”⁶⁰ for Simon Research. He utilised three disparate sources to map out the Simon matrix. First was a reference in the *Antiquities* of Josephus⁶¹ to a letter from a group of Sidonians in Shechem addressed to Antiochus IV Epiphanes (c.167BCE) requesting that an unnamed temple erected on Mount Gerazim be given the name “temple of Zeus” (*Zeus Hellenios*). Second was a fragment, reputedly from the hand of Pseudo-Eupolemus, quoted in Eusebius’ *Preparatio Evangelica* (IX 15,5) claiming that Gerazim when translated means “the mountain of the Supreme One” (ὄρος ὑψίστος). Third, in addition to evidence gathered through coin, manuscript, and archaeological discoveries—of a Gerazim cult that flourished early in the second century CE following the erection of a temple by emperor Hadrian (r. c.117CE—138CE) on the site where once a Samaritan temple had stood—LÜDEMANN (1975: 53) pointed to a notice in the writings of PHOTIUS (c.810CE—c.895CE), excerpted from Damascios’ *Life of Isidore*, concerning a blended Samaritan cult on Mount Argarios (Ἀργαριζίvu) where a major sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos was built.⁶²

LÜDEMANN presented this three-fold evidence in support of an hypothesis that Simon/Zeus worship can be dated from the first century CE, being a possible offshoot or parallel development to the Samaritan

⁵⁸ Cf. *Adv. Haer.* I 23,1.

⁵⁹ Cf. LÜDEMANN (1975: 51), “In die Zeusverehrung Simons fügen sich die bisher erschlossenen Gottesprädikate der Simonianer (erster Gott, Gott über alle Gewalt, Macht und Kraft) sowie das bei Irenäus erhaltene ‘esse autem se sublissimam [sic] virtutem, hoc est eum qui sit super omnia pater’ (I 23,1. Vö 2,8 f) gut ein.”

⁶⁰ Cf. LÜDEMANN (1975: 53–54), “Andererseits wird man aber weiter vorsichtig folgern dürfen, daß die Tradition vom Zeus Hypsistos auf dem Gerazim auch in der Zwischenzeit, den für uns dunklen Jahrhunderten, weiterlebte ...”.

⁶¹ JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* XII 257–261.

⁶² Cf. DAMASCIOS, *Life of Isidore*, as in PHOTIUS, *Bibliotheca* 242.

cult centred on Mount Gerazim.⁶³ While it is possible that some Samaritans connected with the Gerazim cult of Zeus Hypsistos were attracted by the claims of the Simonians and authored the identification of Simon as Zeus, or πρῶτος θεός, a previous assessment of LÜDEMANN's original thesis by Wayne MEEKS (1977: 139) is still applicable: "[w]e may justly admire the originality of Lüdemann's hypothesis without being necessarily convinced by it."

As acknowledged earlier it is impossible to decipher what was meant or understood by Simon's designation as πρῶτος θεός apart from the pantheon of Greece and Rome—as a significant expression of the diverse nature of religious perspective and practice in antiquity—however, the contribution represented by Luke's report of a "Samaritan" accolade of Simon as δύναμις μεγάλη must not be underrated or ignored either. There is sufficient evidence to argue plausible links in the transformation of Simon from his public identity as the "great power" (δύναμις μεγάλη) to his veneration in Rome as the highest godhead (πρῶτος θεός). Indeed, as ULLMANN (1973: 396) claimed, the appearance of similar terms as divine epithets in Gnostic literature makes it "impossible not to see the δύναμις μεγάλη in Acts 8:10 in connection with the broadly articulated Gnostic concept of God in later sources."

To date Simon Research broadly agrees that apart from some minor Lukan editing⁶⁴ the phrase οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη in Acts 8:10 preserves an original confession by Simon's followers; or, as Otto BAUERNFEIND and others have claimed, an assumed self-designation (ἐγὼ εἰμι) from Simon himself. However, there is no consensus in scholarship about the origin and meaning of this title. H.G. KIPPENBERG (1971) argued that while Gnostic associations of the title clearly appear in Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and the Pseudo-Clementines, there are equally strong connections between the Simon tradition and basic elements in Samaritanism. He claimed that Luke's use of the participle καλουμένη suggested a previously existing well-known epithet in the worship life of the Samaritans, which was transferred to Simon (KIPPENBERG 1971: 345). Jarl FOSSUM (1985) also defended the Samaritan provenance of the title δύναμις μεγάλη, claiming:

⁶³ Cf. LÜDEMANN (1975: 54). "Das letztere (namely the tradition of a Zeus Hypsistos cult on Gerazim) wäre hochbedeutsam für die frühen Simonianer, denn ihre Simon/Zeusverehrung könnte mit diesem Kult irgendwie in Verbindung gestanden haben und wäre dann wohl in das 1. Jahrhundert zu datieren."

⁶⁴ Cf. Chapter Four on "Simon as Magician."

[T]he divine name of the Great Power, which appears in the oldest account of Simon, is no name of Zeus, but a Samaritan name of YHWH ... “the Great Power” is an authentically Samaritan divine name, and the encomium of “the Power” or even “the Great Power” as “great” is a Samaritan characteristic. (FOSSUM 1985: 171–172)

FOSSUM presents copious amounts of evidence in support of his hypothesis that the *δύναμις μεγάλη* is Samaritan in origin, and more than simply a divine title, it refers to divine characteristics and a divine calling. FOSSUM concludes that when Simon claimed to be “the Great Power” (or others claimed the title for him) this was a claim to the office of being “the Glory of God” or “the Angel of the Lord.”

[W]hen Simon claimed to be “the Great Power” this amounted to a claim to be the divine Glory, the manifestation of God in human form. This interpretation makes it possible to understand Luke’s reason for having added the genitive to the phrase “the Great Power of God”. The genitive is commonly taken as *genitivus appositivus*, in which case, however, it must be considered as misleading. It is more sensible to take the genitive to be possessive ... [indicating] that “the Great Power” is not God himself but a divine hypostasis. (FOSSUM 1989: 371)

The problem with traditions that link Simon with the Samaritans is that they are extraordinarily difficult to assess. First, there are no Samaritan texts that date from the New Testament era. The earliest surviving Samaritan materials—apart from the Pentateuch—date from the 4th century CE; and even these are preserved in manuscripts several centuries more recent. So, while we can consider seriously the connections and allusions that KIPPENBERG, FOSSUM and others highlight between the traditions of Simon and Samaritanism, caution needs to be exercised over their appeals to the Samaritan targums and the *Memar Marqah* because of the later date of these materials.

Second, BOWMAN (1967) and others urge caution over making firm distinctions between Samaritans and Jews in the first century. Instead, it is best to view Samaritans as a conservative grouping, not unlike the Sadducees, within the Jewish nation. COGGINS (1982: 432) makes the valid point that the existence of various groups like the Simonians and Dositheans “warns us against supposing that Samaritanism was a homogeneous entity.” Third, scholars are divided over whether references to “Samaritans” in Acts 8, and the writings of Josephus and Justin, exclusively identify members of an ethnic group; or, whether sometimes the word is used inclusively for all people who lived in a particular geographical region. In her doctoral dissertation Rita EGGER (1986)

argued that the Greek terms Σαμαρείς and Σαμαρίται as well as the names “Shechemites,” “Sidonians at Shechem,” and “those on Gerazim” are terms in Josephus that refer to the region without specific religious connotations.⁶⁵

So then, with appropriate precautions in mind regarding the claimed “Samaritan” status of the title, we can argue interpretive links between the epithets δύναμις μεγάλη and πρῶτος θεός. The designation of Simon as πρῶτος θεός suggests the highest godhead was identified with Simon himself. However, as COX (1983: 21) cautions “in this period the idea that men could be divine did not include absolute identification with the supreme god, whether he be Zeus, the Neoplatonic One, or the Christian God. Pagans and Christians agreed that the supreme God was incorporeal, unchanging, and incapable of mixing with the material realm.”

Reference to Simon as πρῶτος θεός represents a developed stage in the Simonian cult, which inherited features from the cultural milieu of its communities present in diverse geographical regions. The transformation from “Great Power” to “First God” required a process of reinterpretation as Simonians engaged with other religious communities in an attempt to define their beliefs and practices in the language of their observers. The metamorphosis in public opinion of Simon the μάγος, resident in Samaria, to Simon the πρῶτος θεός venerated in Rome, is therefore analogous to the transformation of Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and Joseph, to Son of Man, Son of God, Lord of all (πάντων κύριος).⁶⁶

ὄν Θεὸν ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως εἶναι λέγουσι.

Who they (the Samaritans) claim is God above all power, and authority, and might. (JUSTIN, *Dial.* 120,6 [PG 6,756])

⁶⁵ In summary the conclusions of EGGER’s research were: (1), the Samaritan community was established essentially in the 4th century BCE, and was composed of “many priests and Israelites;” (2), not all terms in the writings of Josephus which refer to people living in the region of Samaria are to be interpreted as members of the Samaritan community. Indeed, some of these “residents of Samaria” should be called Samaritans in distinction from members of the Gerazim community; (3), the Samaritans were not syncretistic nor polytheistic during the first centuries of their proper existence; (4), in times of persecution and conflict Samaritans suffered like Jews, because in Seleucid and Roman eyes they were Jews; (5), Josephus was not anti-Samaritan, but anti-Samaritan. EGGER’s research conclusions are an additional corrective to claims that Justin provides our most reliable witness concerning Simon Magus, because “Justin himself was a native of Samaria.”

⁶⁶ Cf. Acts 10:36; Rom 10:12.

καὶ καθίσας ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.

... and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (Eph 1:20b–21 NIV)

Excursus: Simon and the Gods and Goddesses of Graeco-Roman Antiquity

The precise stages of development in the deification of Simon, a certain μάγος resident in Samaria, who attributed his exceptional abilities to an unparalleled relationship with the divine, are impossible to retrace with anything approaching historical certainty. However, the spread of Simon worship to Rome undoubtedly parallels the migration of various other “Oriental religions”⁶⁷ that gained a foothold on the banks of the Tiber through traders, sailors, slaves, and colonists; some even introduced through the patronage of an emperor.⁶⁸

The tangible evidence of architecture, art, and literature—as well as the language and images used to represent the divine—prompts the conclusion that the effects of Roman expansion through conquest and assimilation of cultures did not take place in one direction only. While JUVENAL quipped⁶⁹ about the Syrian Orontes disgorging into the Tiber,

⁶⁷ The term “Oriental religions” entered the vocabulary of scholarship through the work of Franz CUMONT (1909). This collective term is generally understood as referring to the Egyptian, Syrian and Anatolian cults that spread throughout the Roman world. Modern research, however, prefers expressions like “religions of eastern origin,” “Graeco-Oriental religions,” or simply “foreign religions” because they avoid the misconception that these were pure Eastern imports simply transplanted into a Western context.

⁶⁸ Cf. JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,1–2, “There was a Samaritan, Simon ... who in the reign of Claudius Caesar ... did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a god, and as a god was honoured by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber ...”. TURCAN (2000: 14) notes that while Augustus and Tiberius repressed all religious expansion that threatened the ancestral cults, “Caligula had an affection for Egyptian gods,” “Claudius favoured Phrygianism,” “Nero was interested in the Syrian Goddess and the doctrines of the Magi,” and Titus made a pilgrimage to the temple of Venus-Astarte at Paphos in Cyprus.”

⁶⁹ JUVENAL, *Satires* III 62.

the poet HORACE mused⁷⁰ how all-conquering Rome increasingly fell under an Eastern spell.

The centuries-old interaction of cultures located within the Mediterranean basin—sometimes meeting, and at other times confronting each other—resulted in various fusions and blendings of religion in which dominant characteristics are only a manner of speaking. The type of sectarian belief evident behind the notice about Simon in the *Apology* of Justin Martyr,⁷¹ and reflected in Luke's account in Acts 8, indicates that Simon worship did not arrive in Rome in its earliest Samaritan form. Like the worship of other foreign gods, Simonian imagery and liturgy had to a greater or lesser extent undergone the effects of Hellenic filtration prior to its arrival. Robert TURCAN makes the astute observation that:

The 'Pax Romana' which the Fathers of the Church were to hail in retrospect as providential for the expansion of Christianity, was favourable to the dialogue and mutual intercourse of polytheisms. The intermingling of men and attitudes, representations and ideas, produced—with differing degrees of intensity depending on circumstances—an extraordinary ferment throughout two or three centuries. (TURCAN 2000: 5)

As a consequence it is difficult to decipher the meaning of Simon as πρῶτος θεός apart from a religious worldview intimately connected with a cosmology fostered and legitimized by Greek philosophy and astrology. Further, and contrary to those who claim that Justin's *First Apology* does not assume Gnostic teachings of Simon,⁷² the designation of Simon and Helen as "First God" and "First Thought" are impossible to comprehend apart from the theogony and cosmogony of Gnostic mythology.⁷³

The following brief description⁷⁴ of Gods and Goddesses in Graeco-Roman antiquity serves to remind the reader of those essential details and

⁷⁰ HORACE, *Epistles* II 1,156–157: "Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio."

⁷¹ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26.

⁷² Cf. VAN UNNIK 1967: 242; WILSON 1979: 490.

⁷³ Cf. LÜDEMANN 1999: 10, "Im Gegensatz ... kann angenommen werden, daß schon hier der klassische gnostische Mythos zugrunde liegt: Der »Erste Gedanke« des »Ersten Gottes« hat nämlich aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach das All hervorgebracht. Nachdem er gefallen war, ist er wiederum durch den höchsten Gott gerettet worden."

⁷⁴ Further reading: BURKERT 1985: 235–253; DOWDEN 1992; EASTERLING/MUIR 1985; GORDON 1981; HOHEISEL 1998: 311–319; KERENYI 1974; MORFORD/LENARDON 1991; MOMIGLIANO 1987: 445–471; NILSSON 1974; OGILVIE 1969;

dimensions of the religious milieu that received and transformed the worship of Simon. This context also contributes to any response to the focus question of this study: was Simon a Gnostic?

Many myths circulated in the ancient world about the beginning of all things, but no single version became universally accepted. The one account that gained widest currency in ancient Greece was outlined by the 8th century BCE poet Hesiod⁷⁵ in his *Theogony*. This was, in effect, a summary and skilful retelling of common myths about the origins of the world and the gods who ruled it.⁷⁶

The Greeks believed that their lives and destinies were controlled by a great number of divinities, the most important of which were the Olympians. Among these Olympians Zeus was heralded the supreme power on Mount Olympus. He claimed the heavens as his domain, while his brothers Poseidon and Hades became lords of the sea and the underworld respectively. Table 4 is a simplified representation of the genealogy of the universe and of the gods, according to Hesiod.

Popular belief understood the authority of Zeus to extend not only over the council of the gods and the course of all things, but also to guarantee the power of kings and the authority of city laws, as well as the preservation of social order in the human realm. On the other hand, the Lydian stoic philosopher CLEANTHES (c.330BCE–c.232BCE) described Zeus in more abstract terms as the essential breath of the living universe

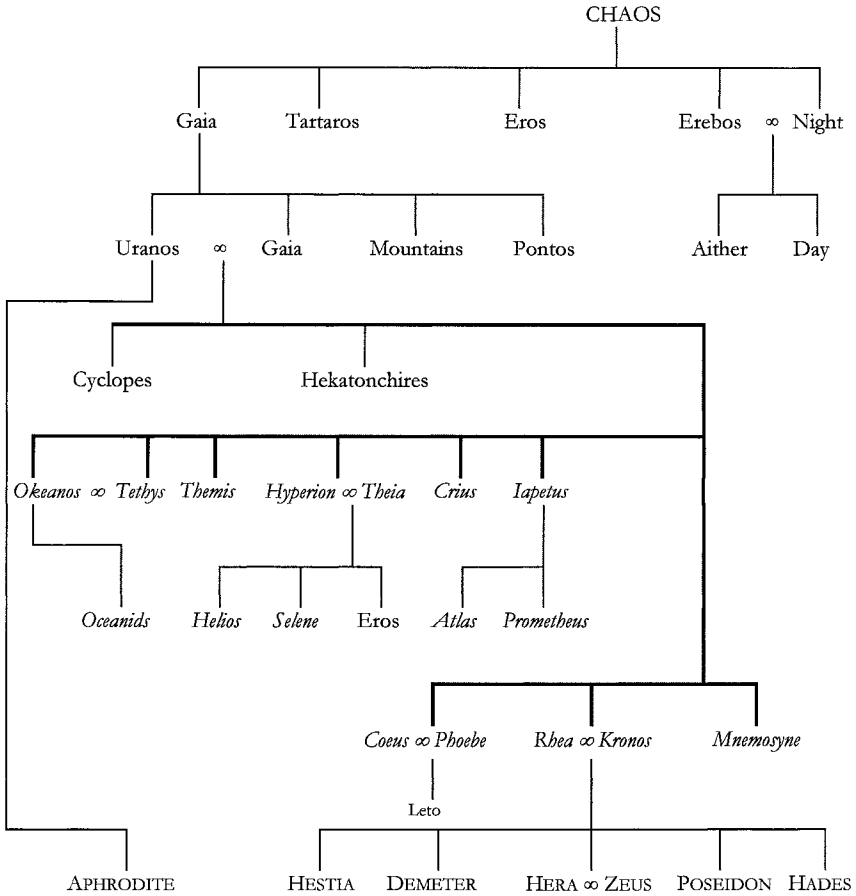
TEIXIDOR 1977; THOMAS 1984: 1500–1535; TURCAN 2000; VERNANT 1987: 98–118; 1990.

⁷⁵ HESIOD (c.700BCE) was a farmer, professional reciter of poetry, and an authoritative writer on ethics and theology who lived at Ascra in Boeotia. Two of his major poetic works, the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, have survived in full.

⁷⁶ An alternative account of the creation of the world was embraced by the followers of Orphism. It begins with Chronos (=Kronos) accompanied byAdrasteia (“necessity”). From Chronos come Aither, Erebus, and Chaos. In Aither Chronos fashions an egg, from which is born Phanes, the Creator, a bisexual deity with golden wings and four eyes. Phanes is called by many names, including Eros, and has a daughter, Night, who becomes his consort. Night gives birth to Gaia (earth) and Uranos (heaven). When Zeus seizes control he recreates everything, swallows Phanes and couples with Kore to produce Zagreus-Dionysos. Several historians of religion (RUDOLPH 1983; PEARSON 1990; STROUMSA 1984) who label Gnosticism as a “parasitic” movement—that is, with no genuine independent traditions but one that always borrows from religions with established doctrines and institutions—suggest that esoteric movements such as Pythagoreanism and Orphism provided Gnosticism *in nuce* with the doctrine of origin and kinship of the soul, imprisoned in matter, that strives for reunion with the higher light-world along the path of a liberating ascent through the planetary spheres. Cf. BIANCHI 1964: 38–39.

TABLE 4 THE GENEALOGY OF THE GODS

This table is a simplified representation of the genealogy of the universe and the gods, according to Hesiod. The twelve Titans and their most important offspring are in *italic type*, the first Olympians in SMALL CAPS.



KEY
Okeanos Titans and their offspring
 POSEIDON First generation of Olympians
 ∞ Coupled with
 | Gave rise to birth of

without whom nothing on earth, nor in the heavens, nor in the sea is produced.⁷⁷

Greek myth credited Zeus with a string of affairs with both divine and human consorts.⁷⁸ One famous liaison—at least in the context of our investigation of Simon—was with Leda, queen to Tyndareus the king of Sparta. Zeus came to her in the disguise of a swan, and Leda produced four children from two eggs. From one came Polydeuces and Helen, and from the other Castor and Clytemnestra. One of these children, Helen, became the wife of Menelaus king of Sparta. Helen plays an important role in the story of the Trojan War. Her elopement with Paris prince of Troy is said to have precipitated the war.

Perhaps the most powerful and prominent of Zeus' progeny was the goddess Athena. Athena was worshipped as the defender of cities, especially the city of Athens, of which she was patron and which was the centre of her cult. Athena was regularly addressed by her cult titles "Pallas"—a word which probably means "girl" in reference to her virginity—and "Tritogeneia," in reference to her supposed birthplace. Athena was further acclaimed as the protector of heroes. Odysseus was said to be her favourite since his skills and wisdom almost matched her own qualities. With her assistance Odysseus invented the wooden horse that led to the defeat of Troy. Athena also assisted the heroes Herakles and Perseus in their adventures.

It was the unusual nature of Athena's birth that is alluded to in the story of Simon's consort, Helen of Tyre. Athena was said to have been born fully armed from the head of Zeus, and her common representation is a figure dressed in armour with helmet, spear and shield. Her breastplate is adorned with the head of the Gorgon Medusa given to her by the hero Perseus. Even so, Athena was more particularly associated with activities of the mind. She was said to rival her father Zeus in wisdom and possessed the cunning "intelligence" of her mother Metis. One of her symbols was the owl, the wisest of birds.

In turning our attention to the Roman pantheon it is no coincidence that these gods and goddesses appear remarkably similar to those of Greece. Roman mythology arose in concert with the movements of legions and patricians rather than through the musings of philosophers

⁷⁷ Cf. CLEANTHES, "Hymn to Zeus," in STOBÆUS, *Eclogues* I 1,12; A modern translation by Niall McCLOSKEY [Online].

⁷⁸ Not all of Zeus's consorts were female. They included Ganymede, the beautiful son of King Tros of Troy, who became cup-bearer to the gods of Olympus.

and poets. As noted previously, the Romans absorbed and adopted the myths of their conquered subjects: the Egyptian myths of Isis and Osiris, the Greek myths of Oedipus and Agamemnon, the Celtic myths from Britain and Gaul, were all in some sense Roman myths. However, unlike the Greeks who sought the grace and favour of the gods, the native religion of Rome was based on mutual trust (*fides*) between god and man.

Romans desired the cooperation, benevolence, and “peace” of the gods (*pax deorum*). They believed divine help enabled humans to master the forces that inspired awe and anxiety (*religio*), and so to live successfully. This explains the development of what was called the “divine law” (*ius divinum*), a body of rules listing what needed to be done or avoided. This law focused on ritual rather than moral action; ceremonies that were respected and valued as patriotic tradition. As long as Roman citizens performed the right ceremonies they were free to think what they liked about the gods.

However, while the orderly, legalistic, and patriotic Romans never entirely gave away their old practices, the religious rituals and mythology of many nations offered the attraction of expressing strong feelings and emotions. TURCAN comments that their liturgies excited and aroused the senses of those who were henceforth left cold by the strictly formalist worship of the Roman gods:

In sound alone, the wild and frenzied rhythms of the Egyptian dances, the harsh and strident noise of the Isiac sistra, the horse cries of the priests of Atargatis or Bellona, the timbrils of the galli and the insistent tones of their oboes left no one indifferent. In contrast, this sonorous exoticism was not a characteristic of Mithraic ceremonies; but beneath the vault of the Persian caverns, the hymns sung in chorus, like those of which a few lines have been deciphered under the church of Santa Prisca on the Aventine, must have resounded with a moving beauty. (TURCAN 2000: 18)

Little evidence remains to permit conclusive arguments about what proved attractive to Romans in the Simon cult, apart from Christians reports that Simon’s reputation in magic, and the alleged “freedoms” enjoyed by the Simonians,⁷⁹ assisted the establishment of the cult in Rome. As already discussed in chapters 3 and 4, magicians and necromancers commanded a degree of curiosity and respect in antiquity due to

⁷⁹ Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,3–4; HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,5; EPIPHANIUS, *Pan.* XXI 3,4.

their eastern image and perceived connections with the famed wisdom of Zoroaster.

The Roman pantheon included some deities imported directly from the Greek world—for example, Aesculapius (=Asklepios), god of medicine—but many more native gods were gradually reinterpreted. In this way Jupiter was seen as the equivalent of Zeus, Venus of Aphrodite, and Pallas Athena became Minerva. Ovid's poetic stories of transformation, the *Metamorphoses*, are an example of Greek myths appearing in Roman guise. The remark by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I 23,4) that the Simonians worshipped Simon and Helen before images crafted in the forms of Jupiter and Minerva is likewise an indication that Simonianism was “Romanised”—integrated and legitimised by the *interpretatio Romana*—and annexed into the Roman pantheon.

Table 5 represents the most important gods and goddesses from the Greek and Roman pantheons, noting their commonly understood major functions. Nevertheless, there remained significant differences between Greek and Roman gods. The Greek historian DIONYSIUS of Halicarnassus (fl. c.30BCE—7BCE) in his *Roman Antiquities* points to the moral superiority of Roman over Greek deities, while Marcus Terentius VARRO (c.116BCE—27BCE) in his *Antiquitates rerum humanum et divinarum* claims that unlike their Greek counterparts the gods and goddesses of Rome had never been represented in human form.⁸⁰ Michael GRANT comments that the Romans “lacked the Greek taste for seeing their deities in personalised human form and endowing them with mythology.”⁸¹ Even so, some Roman gods did begin life as mortals, such as Romulus who was deified after his death, and a string of emperors who were worshipped as divine.

Generally, however, in comparison with the Greek pantheon the gods of Rome are lacking in personality. For example, Jupiter does not display the tyrannical nature or sexual instincts of Zeus. Venus exhibits none of the callous sensual dynamism of Aphrodite, but derived her name from the idea of “blooming nature.”⁸² Finally, Mars appears remarkably domesticated in comparison with his Greek parallel the war god Ares. Mars models central patriotic values in being associated with agriculture

⁸⁰ Cf. VARRO, *Antiquitates rerum humanum et divinarum* [Online].

⁸¹ Cf. GRANT, “Roman Religion” [Online].

⁸² Cf. GRANT, “Roman Religion” [Online]. The goddess Venus increased greatly in public significance among Roman citizens through the legend that she was the mother of Aeneas the ancestor of Rome, whom statuettes of the 5th century BCE from Veii show escaping from Troy with his father and son.

TABLE 5 GODS and GODDESSES <i>Parallels within the Greek and Roman Pantheon</i>		
Roman Deity	Greek Deity	Major Activity
Jupiter	Zeus	God of the heavens/sky; the supreme god
Juno	Hera	Consort of Jupiter/Zeus
Minerva	Athene	Goddess of wisdom/intelligence
Apollo	Apollo	God of healing, poetry, and music
Diana	Artemis	Goddess of hunting
Ceres	Demeter	Goddess of crops
Bacchus	Dionysios	God of wine
Mars	Ares	God of war
Venus	Aphrodite	Goddess of love
Neptune	Poseidon	God of the sea
Mercury	Hermes	God of commerce/messenger of Gods
Vesta	Hestia	Goddess of the hearth/home
Liber	Dionysios	God of ecstasy and wine
Saturn	Kronos	God of sowing and seed
Dis Pater	Hades	God of the underworld
Faunus	Pan	God of the woodlands
Cupid	Eros	God of love; son of Venus/Aphrodite
Vulcan	Hephaistos	God of fire and forge
Aesculapius	Asklepios	God of medicine
Castor and Pollux	Castor and Polydeuces	Sons of Jupiter/Zeus

and civic virtues, as well as being father of Romulus, the first king of Rome.

Among the more exotic deities introduced into Rome was the *Magna Mater* (Great Mother), also known as Cybele. Her full official Roman name was *Mater Deum Magna Idaea* (Great Idaean Mother of the Gods). This cult of the Mother Goddess of Phrygia, was brought to Rome in 205/204BCE following a Sibylline prophecy that the invading Hannibal could be expelled and conquered if the “Idaean Mother” were brought to Rome, together with her sacred symbol, a small stone said to have fallen from the heavens.

Legend locates the rise of the worship of the Great Mother in the general area of Phrygia (modern west-central Turkey), although the existence of numerous similar deities in the ancient world indicates that Cybele was merely one form of the nature deity common to all Asia Minor. In all her manifestations the Great Mother was characterised by essentially the same qualities. Most prominent among these was her universal motherhood. She was the parent not only of gods but also of human beings and beasts. It is noted with interest that Irenaeus claims the Simonians ascribed a demiurgic function to Simon’s companion, Helen, and referred to her as the *mater omnium*.⁸³

Like many other fertility goddesses of Asia Minor, Cybele was worshipped with orgiastic dancing during which her devotees would mutilate themselves with swords and knives. In his *On the Nature of Things*, the Epicurean poet LUCRETIVUS describes the cult.⁸⁴ The Goddess was served by self-emasculated priests known as *galli*. Initially the frenetic dancing, music, and ecstatic self-mutilation practiced by Cybele devotees not only met with mixed reactions among the Roman populace, but also led to severe regulation by State authorities. Until the Emperor Claudius, Roman citizens could not become priests of Cybele, but after that a relaxation in restrictions witnessed the cult of Cybele grow into one of the most important cults of the Roman world; although she never gained the same popularity enjoyed by another fertility goddess, Isis.

Descriptions of Simonian cult life and worship in the reports of early Christian writers do not immediately equate with what is known about Great Earth Mother rituals in the ancient world; indeed, I will later argue an entirely different origin for alleged Simonian practices. Certainly, accusations of sexual deviance among foreign peoples and religious

⁸³ Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2.

⁸⁴ Cf. LUCRETIVUS, *On the Nature of Things* [Online].

groups are commonplace in the literature of antiquity, and it would be easy to dismiss such reports of promiscuity in the worship and community life of the Simonians as having little historical value. Yet, these very details deserve further attention.⁸⁵ To understand the social conditions and cultural presuppositions which helped shape estimations of Simon and the Simonians, in popular imagination, are equally as important for historical research as the question of Simon's identity.

3.2.2 Fragment 2: Justin Martyr, *Apology* I 26,3(b)

Καὶ Ἑλένην τινά, τὴν συμπερινοστήσασαν αὐτῷ κατ' ἐκεῖνο τοῦ καιροῦ, πρότερον ἐπὶ τέγους σταθεῖσαν, τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἔννοιαν πρώτην γενομένην λέγουσι.

And a certain Helen, who travelled around with him in those days, and had formerly been a prostitute, they say was the first thought produced from him.

There are a number of critical features in this brief fragment for translators and commentators: the name Helen, the noun τέγος, the verb συμπερινοστέω, and the phrase τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἔννοιαν πρώτην γενομένην λέγουσι. The later two are especially relevant for any investigation of a Gnostic Simon.

First, the name “Helen” was iconic in Greek folklore. Inescapable thought associations accompanied any bearer of that name, inasmuch as persons living in the 21st century CE would experience if given the name “Elvis,” “Madonna,” or “Judas.” The most famous Helen of all history was Homer's *Helen of Troy*. Helen was the legendary Beauty-Queen of Graeco-Roman antiquity, whose suitors included the most eligible of Achaean males: Odysseus, Diomedes, Ajax, Philoctetes, Teucer, Patroclus, and Menelaus—whom Helen chose to marry because of his status and vast fortune.

During a visit to Sparta, Paris the Trojan prince not only enjoyed the hospitality of Menelaus, but with the assistance of the goddess Aphrodite he also seduced Helen to escape with him to Troy. When their flight is discovered, Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon, king of Argos, summon the Greek princes who muster an expeditionary force to sail for Ilium (=Troy), to avenge the abduction of Helen. So begins the ten-year-long siege of Troy. When Paris is slain in battle by the archer Philoctetes, Helen marries Deïphobus his brother, whom she later betrays to

⁸⁵ See Section 3.2.4 (pp. 287ff.) below.

Menelaus when Troy is subsequently captured. Menelaus and Helen return to Sparta, where they live happily until their deaths.

However, Helen was not only famous for her beauty—the face that launched a thousand ships⁸⁶—but also for her legion of lovers, for which she gained notoriety as one of the most famous sluts in antiquity.⁸⁷ MACDONALD (1990: 336) claims that “her reputation became so besmirched that rhetoricians tried to exculpate her in order to hone their skills of persuasion.” Justin reinforces Helen’s reputation by reporting that she “had formerly stood on a roof.”

The noun τέγος (=στέγος; Lat. *fornix*) is normally translated as “roof,” or sometimes it can refer to a “covered hall,” “covered arch-way,” or “chamber.”⁸⁸ In addition, there are a few instances where τέγος has developed a transferred sense of “brothel” (=situated in underground vaults?) and was used euphemistically to refer to prostitution.⁸⁹ This is the clear inference in parallel accounts of Helen in Irenaeus and Hippolytus.

Hic [Simon] Helenam quandam ipse a Tyro civitate Phoeniciae quaestuariam cum redimisset, secum circumducebat, dicens hanc esse primam mentis eius Conceptionem, matrem omnium, per quam in initio mente concepit angelos facere et archangelos.

He [Simon] led about with him a certain Helen, whom he had redeemed as a harlot in Tyre, a city of Phoenicia, and said that she was his First Thought, the Mother of all, through whom in the beginning he had conceived the idea of making angels and archangels. (IRENÆUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2)

μετενσωματουμένην <δὲ αὐτὴν καὶ> ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων καὶ τῶν κάτω ἐξουσιῶν – οἱ καὶ τὸν κόσμον, φησὶν, ἐποίησαν –, ὕστερον ἐπὶ τέγους ἐν Τύρῳ τῆς Φοινίκης πόλει στήναι. ἦν κατελθὼν εὗρεν.

But the angels and the powers below—who, he says, created the world—caused the transference from one body to another of (Helen’s soul); and subsequently she stood on the roof of a house in Tyre, a city of Phoenicia, and on going down thither (Simon professed to have) found her. (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,3)

⁸⁶ Cf. MARLOWE, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, Act V Scene 1 [Online]: “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers of Ilium? Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies. Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again. Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips, and all is dross that is not Helena.”

⁸⁷ Cf. LUCIAN, *Verae historiae* II 25–26; CLEMENT, *Protrepticus* II 35,2; *Stromateis* II 20, 106–107.

⁸⁸ Cf. LSJ “τέγος;” LS “*fornix*;” HOMER, *Odyssey* I 333; X 559; XI 64; HDT. III 40; XENOPHON, *Cyropaedia* VII 5,22.

⁸⁹ Cf. HORATIUS, *Satyrarum libri* (= Works of Horace) I 2,5 [Online]; Suetonius, *De Vitae Caesarum* I 49 [Julius]; JUVENAL, *Satires* III 156.

The diagram in Table 6 attempts to trace the inter-textual relationships in the use of the Helen tradition by ancient Christian writers. Justin does not explicitly associate Simon's Helen with Helen of Troy, but there are linguistic echoes (see below) and thematic allusions. Later Christian reports locate Helen in Tyre, which is highly interesting because of that city's cultic links with the Great Near-Eastern Mother Goddess.⁹⁰

There are some who suggest that, by describing Helen as "standing on a roof," Justin was alluding to Homer's *Helen* atop the towers of *Ilium* pointing out for her captors the heroes of Achaea.⁹¹ However, this seems a little too clever even granted that Homer's *Iliad* was widely recognised in antiquity, and reputedly served as a basic text in Hellenic education. The phrase ἐπὶ τέγους σταθεῖσαν is qualified in Justin's brief account by the adverb πρότερον and stands in apposition to the phrase τὴν συμπερινοστήσασαν αὐτῷ κατ' ἐκείνου τοῦ καιροῦ.

The compound verb συμπερινοστέω is extremely rare in surviving Greek literature. It has a basic meaning of "to go around together with," "follow along with,"⁹² although it also has some notional association with Homer's thematic word νόστος (νέομαι) meaning "return (home)."⁹³ PAUSANIUS⁹⁴ refers to the Νοστοί, "the homeward journeys of the Greek heroes after the taking of Troy." More than aimless wandering about, or simply providing a description of travel companions, it is possible that Justin alludes to the successful return of Simon—like a Homeric hero—

⁹⁰ Atarata is a combined form of the names of the three major Canaanite-Phoenician goddesses (*Atar-ata* [Phoen.]; *Atargatis*, *Derketo* [Greek]; *Dea Syria* [Latin, *Syrian Goddess*]). She is often depicted as fish-tailed, a mermaid, associated with moisture. As vegetation goddess of generation and fertility, she protects her cities; as a moist sky goddess in cloud-like veil with eagles around her head; as a sea-goddess she is dolphin-crowned. During Roman times she was worshipped by ecstatically dancing eunuch priests of the *Dea Syria*, and equated with the Anatolian Cybele (*Mater Deum Magna Idaea*); cf. LUCIAN, *De Dea Syria* 3–4, "And in Syria there are temples almost as old as those in Egypt, of which I have seen most, in particular the temple of Herakles in Tyre, not that Herakles whom Greeks praise in their songs, but the one whereof I speak is much older, and is Tyre's patron [the god *Melqart*]. In Phoenicia is another great temple which the people of Sidon keep. They say it belongs to Astarte, and Astarte, I swear, is Selene the Moon." Cf. LUCIAN, *De Dea Syria* 32, "But when you look upon Hera [Atargatis], she presents great diversity of details; for although the whole could truly be considered Hera [Atargatis], nonetheless it contains something of Athena, Aphrodite, Selena, Rhea [Kybele], Artemis, Fortune [Nemesis] and Parcae [Moirai] [The Fates]."

⁹¹ Cf. MACDONALD 1990: 339.

⁹² Cf. LSJ, "συμπερινοστέω;" PAUSANIUS, *Description of Greece* V 14,10.

⁹³ Cf. LSJ, "νόστος;" HOMER, *Odyssey* III 142; X 100; XX 333.

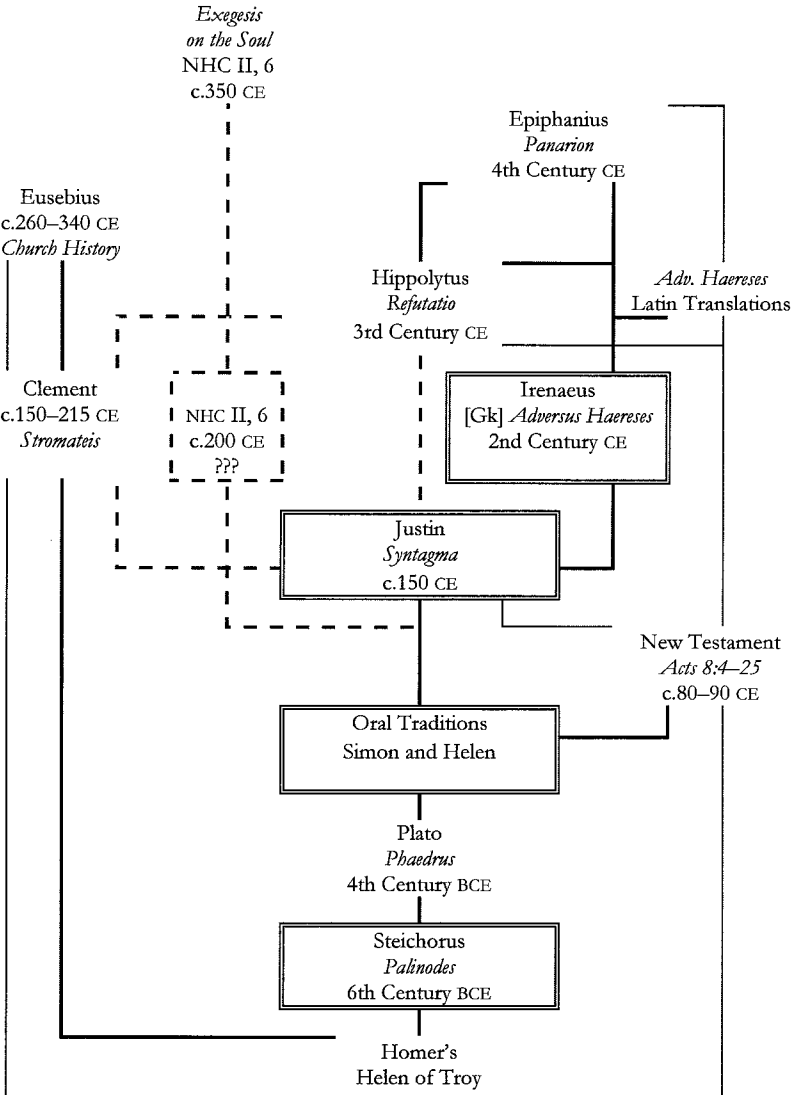
⁹⁴ Cf. PAUSANIUS, *Description of Greece* X 28,7.

TABLE 6

Helen the Whore

Textual traditions in the Ancient Christian Portrait of Helen of Tyre

Items in boxes no longer exist in the original. Unbroken lines indicate clear links. Broken lines represent uncertain links.



after rescuing Helen. The theme of rescue is certainly present in later accounts of the Helen-Simon Tradition.⁹⁵ Irenaeus reports that Simon ransomed Helen from her money-making ventures in the city of Tyre (*quaestuariam*⁹⁶ *cum redimisset*). Hippolytus is more literal in his transmission of the tradition by reporting that she stood “on a roof in the Phoenician city of Tyre,” and proceeds to mention later, in the same context, that Simon’s journey to Tyre in search of Helen was in order to release her from bondage: ὅπως ῥύσῃται αὐτῆν τῶν δεσμῶν.⁹⁷

Hippolytus’ choice of the verb περιάγω to detail how Helen accompanied Simon wherever he went is a possible allusion to an earlier tradition of Simon being a “magician.” As previously discussed in chapter 4, magicians were reputed to have knowledge to perform an “ἀγωγή ritual,” which was a power ritual to effectively bind the will of a subject to the suggestions of the practitioner. FOSSUM, however, connects the term περιάγω to Jewish sapiential tradition:

Simon’s companionship with Helen ... appears to be similar to the mystical conjugality which the wise man has with Sophia in Jewish sapiential tradition. In *Proverbs* man is admonished to track Wisdom down (2:4), find her (3:13), buy her (4:7), and never let her go (4:6). She is to be made his beloved (4:6, 8; 7:4). According to the *Book of Sirach*, the student of wisdom follows Sophia, peers through her window, listens at her door, and goes in to her and enjoys union with her (14:22ff.). This search and union are described at length in 51:13ff. In the *Book of Wisdom*, too, Wisdom is a heavenly personage with whom the wise man is united (6:12ff.; 7:10, 28; 8:2, 9, 16). (FOSSUM 1987a: 194–195)

Justin’s report of the public confession of Helen as ἔννοιαν πρώτην has proven to be a matter of contentious debate in scholarship, increasing in complexity due to the ongoing preoccupation of Gnostic Research with the subject. The reason for this focus, as RUDOLPH suggests (1977: 328), is clear: “Die Interpretation des »Simonianismus« als einer Spielart der Gnosis hängt wesentlich von der Ennoia/Helena-Figur und ihrer Verbindung zu Simon ab.” Commentators are divided over whether to leave Helen on the roof as an example of Christian slander—her prostitution interpreted as a counter-legend to the myth of her divine

⁹⁵ Cf. EPIPHANIUS, *Pan.* XXI 2,3; TERTULLIAN, *De Anima* 34; HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,3–4.

⁹⁶ Possibly a combination of two words: *aria* and *quaestus*. The word is probably used in a similar sense to the modern expression “making money on the streets.”

⁹⁷ HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,4.

origin—or, to promote the Helen/Ennoia story as a type of Gnostic Sophia mythology; or, to interpret Helen as symbolic of the human soul in need of rescue.

For the purposes of that discussion, and our investigation of a Gnostic Simon, the Justin fragment remains an important key. Unlike later Christian authors, Justin appears as an impartial witness without any particular interest in Gnostics. In fact, there is not a single mention of Gnostics or Gnosis in the *Apology*. In reporting the details of Simon and his companion, Justin adopts a matter of fact approach, without any hint of satire or slander. Is it possible then that, in this fragment presenting the combination of Simon and Helen as “first God” and “first Thought,” Justin preserves an already existing tradition—a nascent form of the dualistic cosmology and anthropology recorded in Irenaeus—of the teachings of Simon? Certainly Justin alludes to the demiurgic role attributed to Helen/Ennoia when he mentions those “influenced by demons” who spread certain teachings about Minerva (=Athena/Helen):

ἐπειδὴ ἐννοηθέντα τὸν θεὸν διὰ λόγου τὸν κόσμον ποιῆσαι ἔγνωσαν, ὡς τὴν πρώτην ἐννοιαν ἔφασαν τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν.

... knowing that God conceived and made the world by the Word, they say that Minerva is the first conception. (JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 64,5)

In Jewish Sophia mythology “Wisdom” performs a demiurgic function that is analogous to the allegory of Athena/Helen as “creative thought.”⁹⁸ While knowledge as a feminine principle in the creation has been identified as belonging to the literary fibre of earliest Gnostic cosmic speculation,⁹⁹ it should not be overlooked that there are similar conceptual connections already to be found in Jewish literature.¹⁰⁰ In the Wisdom of Solomon, for example, Wisdom is the “mother” of all things (7:12), and God’s “all powerful word” (18:15). In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is said to have been born prior to the creation of the world, and was a “craftsman” alongside God when God created the world:¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Cf. LÜDEMANN 1975: 55–56; QUISPÉL 1951: 65; KRAUS 1950: 881.

⁹⁹ Cf. ADAMIK 1998: 52–64; PEARSON 1972: 457–470.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Sir 24:3; Wisdom 7:22, 25; 8:1, 4, 6.

¹⁰¹ It is interesting that Justin relies on Prov 8:22–36 to support his teaching that God generated a certain logical power as the “beginning” before all created things. In scripture, Justin argues, the Holy Spirit calls this logical power, or beginning, “Sophia,” “Angel,” “Lord,” “God,” “Son,” and “Logos” (Dial. 61,1 and 3; 62,4; 100,4; 126,1). While inseparable from God the Father, when God wills it this “beginning” is made to “leap forth” or is withdrawn (Dial. 123,3).

The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began ... I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. (Prov 8:22–23, 27–30 NIV)

ὁ θεὸς τῆ σοφίᾳ ἐθεμελίωσεν τὴν γῆν,
ἤτοιμάσεν δὲ οὐρανοὺς ἐν φρονήσει·
ἐν αἰσθήσει ἄβυσσοι ἐρράγησαν,
νέφη δὲ ἐρρύησαν δρόσους.

By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations,
by understanding he set the heavens in place;
by his knowledge the deeps were divided,
and the clouds let drop the dew. (Prov 3:19–20 NIV)

Irenaeus reports that the Valentinians interpreted and translated Gen 1:1 in a unique way, by applying an instrumental sense to the prepositional phrase “In the beginning ...”. So they read “Through the ‘Mother of all’ God created ...”. Likewise, Irenaeus claims, Simon taught the following about Helen/Sophia:

hanc esse primam mentis eius Conceptionem, matrem omnium, per quam in initio mente concepit angelos facere et archangelos ... a quibus et mundum hunc factum dixit.

this woman ... the mother of all, by whom, in the beginning, he conceived in his mind [the thought] of forming angels and archangels ... by whom he also declared this world was formed. (IRENÆUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2)

If Irenaeus' report is reliable, then Simon's teaching is quite unlike the developed Gnostic cosmologies of the second century CE, like the Coptic *Pistis Sophia* and the Apocryphon of John. Simon's Helen/Sophia does not create the heavens and the earth, but generates intermediate angelic beings. Further, the appearance of Sophia on earth as an inconstant incarnation of the divine (*et per saecula veluti de vase in vas transmigraret in altera muliebria corpora*),¹⁰² and at last as a common prostitute, is a unique feature of Simon(ian) teaching.

¹⁰² IRENÆUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2.

Even so, in several Nag Hammadi tractates¹⁰³ there are some interesting parallels to the Helen/Sophia reports found in ancient Christian writings. Although correspondence does not always equal inheritance or dependence, the *Exegesis on the Soul* appears to share conceptual roots with Jewish writings.¹⁰⁴ Certainly, the story of the journey of the soul from prostitution to virginity through repentance has a degree of correspondence with stories of various Jewish women; namely, Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, and Gomer.

The *Exegesis on the Soul*¹⁰⁵ recounts the Gnostic myth of the fall into the world of a female figure—the soul—and her eventual return to heaven. When she falls to earth and into a body she pollutes herself with many lovers, who treat her as a whore; a slave to their sexual desires. She lives in a brothel and the children of her liaisons are either dumb, blind, sick, or feeble-minded. The soul remains in this pitiful state until she perceives her plight and repents. She asks help from the Father who in his mercy renews and purifies her.

In *Thunder: Perfect Mind* (NHC VI,2) mention is made of a female figure who is sent from the power to be pursued and found. This figure has two sides or manners of existence, like Sophia and the fallen soul:

I am the honoured one and the scorned one.
 I am the whore and the holy one.
 I am the wife and the virgin.
 I am [the mother] and the daughter.
 I am members of my mother.
 (*Thunder* [NHC VI,2] 13,16–22; trans. ROBINSON)

I am the silence that is incomprehensible
 and the idea (*epinoia*) whose remembrance is frequent.
 I am the voice whose sound is manifold
 and the word (*logos*) whose appearance is multiple.
 (*Thunder* [NHC VI,2] 14,9–13; trans. ROBINSON)

The description of the incarnate Helen/Sophia in early Christian literature as a common prostitute has possible connections with Jewish

¹⁰³ Cf. *Apocalypse of Peter* 74, 25–34 [NHC VII,3]; *Thunder: Perfect Mind* 13,16–22; 14,9–13; 16,3; 21,7–10 [NHC VI,2]; *Exegesis on the Soul* 127, 131–133 [NHC II,6].

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and Qumran literature.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. ROBINSON 1988: 190, “In its main lines, the story of the soul in *Exegesis on the Soul* follows the Valentinian myth of Sophia, the last aeon who leaves the Pleroma searching for new horizons. From prostitution to repentance in tears and from repentance to her return to the house of the Father, the itinerary of the soul closely recalls Sophia’s journey.”

sapiential tradition, which presents Wisdom as both consort and offspring of God.¹⁰⁶ GRANT (1959: 85) suggested that Simon was aware of this dual concept of Sophia—in Gnosticism Sophia also bears the name *prounikos* meaning “lewd” or “lustful”—and found a precedent for his teaching about Helen in the marriage of Hosea to Gomer.

This is an interesting proposal, and not merely for its word associations. Hosea is directed to take a “wife of whoredom: אִשָּׁה זְנוּנִים [Hos 1:2]” but this cannot simply mean a woman given to prostitution; which would rather have to be read as אִשָּׁה זֹנֶה (Josh 2:1; Judg 11:1). Instead, as the parallel concept “spirit of whoredom: רוּחַ זְנוּנִים [Hos 4:12; 5:4]” suggests, זְנוּנִים refers to a quality rather than an activity; the spirit of a people fallen away from God.

G. BOSTRÖM (1935: 150) argued for the existence of a sexual cult in Canaan, whose fertility rite required women—usually young virgins—to have sexual relations with strangers to ensure the continuance of vitality in the clan.¹⁰⁷ Reference also can be made to Herodotus,¹⁰⁸ Jewish literature,¹⁰⁹ and Augustine¹¹⁰ for witnesses to the widespread existence of similar rites.

So, the divine direction for Hosea to take a “wife of whoredom” is equivalent to take in marriage any woman from among the faithless people of Israel who had submitted to a bridal rite of initiation. The point at issue here is not one of morality but apostasy; although, the word זְנוּנִים itself is suggestive of sexual activity, and most probably alluded to a Canaanite sexual rite. Hosea married a “wife of whoredom” as a symbol of the unceasing “marriage” love between God and Israel. This theme, which appears often in the prophetic books, was most probably coined after the myth of the *hieros gamos* between the high god and the mother/love goddess—the archetype of Wisdom/Sophia.

¹⁰⁶ Wis 8:3, 9, 16; 9:4, 10; Prov 2:16; 5; 6:24; 7:5–6; 9:13.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. RUDOLPH 1963: 65–73.

¹⁰⁸ Hdt. I 199, “The foulest Babylonian custom is that which compels every woman of the land once in her life to sit in the temple of Aphrodite and have intercourse with some stranger” [Loeb].

¹⁰⁹ TESTAMENT OF THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS, Judah 12:2 records knowledge of sexual rites among the Amorites: “It is the custom of the Amorites that those who want to be married must sit in the gate for seven days and engage in prostitution.”

¹¹⁰ AUGUSTINE gives the following account about the cult of Venus in his *De Civitate Dei* IV 10, “...to whom the Phoenicians offered the gift of prostituting their daughters, before they married them to their husbands.”

In an analysis of early Christian reports about Simon and his companion Helen, Gerd THEISSEN (2000) presents not dissimilar conclusions about the possible symbolic meaning of Helen's name and the union between Simon and Helen; namely, that Helen is possibly a symbol of Greek or foreign culture,¹¹¹ and her marriage with Simon represents a synthesis of Western and Eastern influences—the union of various cultures and cults—into one religion.¹¹² THEISSEN argues that a movement in Samaria at the instigation of a prophetic figure named Simon, and prompted by his symbolic marriage to a pagan Helen, had an impact on Samaritans not dissimilar to the effect that Paul's theology had upon the nascent Christian movement—the embracing of “gentiles” into its community. THEISSEN (2000: 431) claims that, “Was das hellenistische Urchristentum für das Judentum war, war der Simonianismus für die Samaritaner.” Is it possible, then, that the account in Acts 8 reflects a confluence of two prophetic movements in Samaria, and that for a period of time there were numbers of Simon's disciples who viewed themselves as Christian,¹¹³ and some Christians who were counted among the Simonians? This is not impossible. Yet, in the absence of further evidence it appears that any answer offered would be like trying to verify one unknown with another.

There is much that remains unknown about Simon's Helen. Some commentators dismiss her as a mythological figure. Yet the available evidence does not discount the possibility of there being an actual Helen; although, like Gomer the wife of Hosea, her symbolic importance overshadows all other details. In our fragment from Justin she is not only symbolic of the human soul or culture in need of rescue and renewal, but of ultimate release and generation, as Hippolytus reports, through Simon's unique intelligence.¹¹⁴

As previously noted, the description of Helen as Simon's ἔννοια πρώτη has a considerable pre-history. In Greek mythology the goddess

¹¹¹ THEISSEN 2000: 423, “Auch der Name ‘Helena’ hat wahrscheinlich eine symbolische Bedeutung; Er steht für die griechische (oder die fremde) Kultur.”

¹¹² THEISSEN 2000: 428–429, “Wenn wir dieses gnostische System deuten wollen, so erkennen wir eine bewusste Synthese von okzidental und orientalischen Elementen ... Wir erkennen hier das alte Thema der samaritanischen Religionsgeschichte wieder: die Vereinigung der verschiedenen Kulturen und Kulte – der jüdischen Samaritaner und der heidnischen Samarier – in einer Religion.”

¹¹³ JUSTIN writes in *Apol.* I 26,6 that Simon, Menander, and Marcion call themselves ‘Christians’ (Χριστιανοὶ καλοῦνται).

¹¹⁴ Cf. HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,6: οὕτως τοῖς ἀνθρώποις σωτηρίαν παρέσχε διὰ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπιγνώσεως [Marcovich].

Athena was said to have been born from the head of Zeus, and was associated with activities of the mind. This occasioned various allegorical interpretations found in Greek philosophy,¹¹⁵ where, for example, Athena is identified as the “forethought” (φρόνησις or νοήσεις) of God.¹¹⁶

The word ἔννοια, as employed in Greek literature, conveys the “act of knowing;”¹¹⁷ or, describes the result of thought as in “notions,” “conceptions,”¹¹⁸ or “intentions,”¹¹⁹ and appears regularly in connection with the activities of Ζεός. The word ἐπίνοια is similar in definition to ἔννοια, and LÜDEMANN (1987: 421) may be correct that ἐπίνοια and ἔννοια are “synonyms in the Simonian tradition;” however, even though employed by Hippolytus¹²⁰ in reference to Helen, ἐπίνοια does not usually appear in association with Ζεός and did not share the mythological and philosophical background of ἔννοια.

The application of various other names to Helen in later Christian reports of Simon and his consort suggests the influence of a form of Sophia mythology lies behind aspects of the allegory of Helen as ἔννοια.¹²¹ In the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* Simon is said to have referred to Helen by other names, including “Sophia” (Wisdom) and “Kyria” (Mother of all).¹²² Pseudo-Tertullian does not mention Helen as such, but refers to the female “daemon” in Simonianism as *Sapientia*.¹²³ Irenaeus names her the *matrem omnium* (Mother of all), and, in context, this implies a creative function. Even if it is disputed that “Mother of all” was a genuine name given to a female divinity in Simonianism, the description of Helen as “Mother” can be traced back to the same sources that proclaim her as Ennoia/Wisdom:

Ennoia [proceeding] from God is a notion which can find a precedent in Jewish Sophia mythology as well as in the Greek Athena myth. (FOSSUM 1987a: 188)

¹¹⁵ Cf. LÜDEMANN 1975: 56. Lüdemann provides a representative list of quotations.

¹¹⁶ Cf. KRAUS 1950: 879–880; JUSTIN, *Apology* I 64,5; CLEMENT, *Stromateis* V 3,16; ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum* VIII 67.

¹¹⁷ Cf. PLATO, *Def.* 414a.

¹¹⁸ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* 1073b.

¹¹⁹ Cf. PS.-PLATO, *Laws* 769e.

¹²⁰ Cf. HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,1–2.

¹²¹ Cf. FOSSUM 1987a: 185–197; LÜDEMANN 1975: 65–78.

¹²² PS.-CLEMENT, *Hom.* II 25.

¹²³ PS.-TERTULLIAN, *Adversus omnes haereticos* I 3–4.

Features identified in Fragments 1 and 2—Simon as “First God,” Helen as “First Thought” in need of rescue from harlotry, and Simon’s successful return after providing ransom for Helen—are more than sufficient support for the claim that “in what Justin’s informants told him, they were alluding to their whole myth of creation, fall, and redemption” (GRANT 1959: 74). In Justin, Simon the *πρῶτος θεός* is also manifested as a redeemer figure.

3.2.3 Fragment 3: Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI 9,1–2a

In Hippolytus we find an important reference to a public perception of Simon.¹²⁴ Evidently Simon was strongly supported in some circles as “the Standing One,” but Hippolytus denied any truth to this assertion with an interesting but curious counter-claim that, “Simon was not Christ: Χριστὸς οὐκ ἦν Σίμων.”

Οὕτως ἡγητέον <τοῦς> Σίμωνα τὸν μάγον ἀπεικάζοντας τῷ Λίβυι τάχιον <τοῦτου τοῦ> ἀνθρώπου γενόμενον [οὕτως] θεόν. εἰ δὲ ἔχει τὰ τῆς εἰκόνης ἀκριβῶς καὶ πέπουθεν ὁ μάγος πάθος τι παραπλήσιον Ἀψέθῳ ἐπιχειρήσομεν μεταδιδάσκειν τοῦ Σίμωνος τοὺς ψιττακοὺς ὅτι Χριστὸς οὐκ ἦν Σίμων ὁ ἑστὼς στὰς στησόμενος. (*Ref.* VI 9,1–2a [Marcovich])

In this way we must think concerning Simon the Magos, so that we may compare him unto the Libyan, far sooner than unto Him who, though made man, was in reality God. If, however, the assertion of this likeness is in itself accurate, and the Magos was the subject of a passion similar to Apsethus, let us endeavour to teach anew the parrots of Simon, that Simon was not Christ, who stood, stands, and will stand.

What correspondence did Hippolytus perceive between ὁ ἑστὼς and Χριστὸς? What does claim and counter-claim reveal about Simon? Does this recorded tradition of the “Standing One” provide hints about the teaching and status of Simon? What, if anything, can be learned here about a Gnostic Simon? Before attempting to answer any of these questions it is necessary to provide some comments by way of introduction.

¹²⁴ ὁ ἑστὼς στὰς στησόμενος: HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* IV 51,9; VI 12,3; 13,1; 17,1; 18,4; X 12,3–4; ὁ ἑστὼς στησόμενος: PS.-CLEMENT, *Hom.* II 22,3–4; XVIII 12,1; ὁ ἑστὼς: HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 13,1; 17,2; PS.-CLEMENT, *Hom.* II 24,6; *Rec.* I 72,3; II 7,1–3; 11,3; III 47,3.

As previously discussed in our investigation of the sources, most scholars doubt Simon's authorship of this material preserved within a section of Hippolytus' *Refutatio*¹²⁵ popularly known as the "Great Revelation" (= *Apophasis Megale*). In addition to the absence of any hint concerning the existence of this writing or its contents in earlier Simon sources, the evidently philosophical characteristics of the material reveal a later and more developed stage of Simonian speculation. LÜDEMANN (1975: 100) concluded that there was no genetic relationship between the *Apophasis* and earlier accounts of Simon's teaching in Irenaeus and Justin. Further, he claimed the title "Standing One" cannot be confirmed as an original teaching of Simon. Instead, this would appear to be a tradition arising from an offshoot of mainstream Simonianism. LÜDEMANN's assessment and commentary prematurely dismisses possible lines of inheritance. After all, Hippolytus was no mere reporter preserving unmodified traditions concerning Simon. So an argument against any link between the reports of Irenaeus and Justin and the Megale Apophasis based primarily on the absence of any mention of Helena¹²⁶ is questionable. I have argued¹²⁷ that there are certain details in the *Apophasis* which suggest a degree of correspondence with earlier Simon sources; even the report in Acts.

The epithet "Standing One" appears in several religious traditions in the Near East from Late Antiquity until the Islamic era.¹²⁸ Scholarly opinions over its meaning and pre-history are equally diverse. In classical Greek the word στάσις had a literal meaning of "standing/standing firm," "existence," "continuance" and its use frequently described a god-like quality.¹²⁹ The concept of divine στάσις, and the participation of humankind in it, was a common theme of discussions in Late Antiquity, through the influence of Platonic and Aristotelian thought. In Philo's writings,¹³⁰

¹²⁵ HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 9–18.

¹²⁶ LÜDEMANN 1975: 100, "Daß die bei Irenäus und Justin erhaltene sim(onische) Lehre in keinem genetischen Zusammenhang mit der MA steht, scheint mir vor allem aus dem Fehlen der Helena-Gestalt hervorzugehen ...".

¹²⁷ See above, Chapter 3, section 4.3 (pp. 94ff.).

¹²⁸ WIDENGREN (1955: 40–41) documents the parallels between the Islamic Shi'ite title *al-qā'im al-mahdī*, the Samaritan Ⲅⲏⲛ and the Simonian Gnostic title ὁ ἑστῶς.

¹²⁹ Στάσις was also used with the developed sense of "taking a stand" (= strife/rebellion); cf. DELLING 1971: 568–571; Spicq, *Notes* II 826–828.

¹³⁰ RUNIA (1986: 434) identifies the following traces of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy in the works of Philo: (1), God as first or highest cause; (2), God as wholly stable and immovable, but source of movement for all other beings; (3), God is unceasingly active, achieving his purpose with complete ease.

for example, God is nominated as ὁ ἑστῶς¹³¹ because God is the durable and changeless one, and στάσις is used to describe the divine mode of existence. In this connection, Philo identifies those who are lovers of God (φιλόθεος)—those who manage to penetrate the divine world, to approach God—as “standing ones.” This is because God makes them sharers in God’s own nature.¹³² Moses¹³³ and Abraham¹³⁴ are the archetypal “standing ones” since they communicated with God face to face.

τὸ μὲν οὖν ἀκλινῶς ἑστῶς ὁ θεός ἐστι, τὸ δὲ κινητὸν ἡ γένεσις.
ὥστε ὁ μὲν προσίων θεῷ στάσεως ἐφίεται ... (PHILO, *De Posteritate Caini* 23)

Now that which is unwaveringly stable is God, and that which is subject to movement is creation. He therefore that draws nigh to God longs for stability ... (trans. F.H. COLSON [Loeb 227])

However, Jarl FOSSUM (1985: 120) in particular has rejected any suggestion that the philosophical concept of στάσις can assist our understanding of the title “Standing One.” Instead, he argues that ὁ ἑστῶς is a title with clear links to Samaritanism and this background alone provides the pattern for its use in early Christian literature. FOSSUM notes approvingly how RITSCHL (1857: 228) had already explained the title in light of the eschatological prophet (ὄν ἀναστήσει κύριος) in Deut 18:15, 18. GRANT (1959: 91–92) and KIPPENBERG (1971: 319) explain the epithet ὁ ἑστῶς as meaning that “the prophet like Moses” stands before God and receives divine revelation; whereas ISSER (1976: 139) interprets the title to mean that Moses was the supplicator *par excellence*.

FOSSUM (1985: 120) concluded that the title “Standing One,” as used by the Pseudo-Clementine and Gnostic writings, alludes not only to the Moses-like prophet but ultimately to God, since “it has been known for a long time that God is designated as ‘the Standing One’ in Samaritan texts.” Indeed, he claims, the ascension of Moses on Mount Sinai involved the idea of an apotheosis:

When Moses ascended to heaven in order to receive the Law, he was invested with the Divine Name, which signifies the nature of the

¹³¹ PHILO, *De Posteritate Caini* 27, συνεγγίξει τῷ ἑστῶτι θεῷ ([he] draws near to God the standing one).

¹³² PHILO, *De Posteritate Caini* 28, ἕτερον δ’ ὅτι τῆς ἑαυτοῦ φύσεως, ἡρεμίας, τῷ σπουδαίῳ μεταδίδωσιν: “and secondly that he makes the worthy man sharer of His own Nature, which is repose” [Loeb].

¹³³ PHILO, *De Posteritate Caini* 27; *Legum Allegoriae* III 9; *De Somniis* II 226.

¹³⁴ PHILO, *De Posteritate Caini* 28; *De Confusione Linguarum* 30.

divine, and made into a divine or angelic being ... In *Memar Marqa*, it is said that Moses “dwelt among the Standing Ones” (IV,6). This position of Moses no doubt images him as the chief among the angels, God’s messengers. The hymn goes on to describe Moses as “the Elohim who is from mankind” (55,5). The divine names “Standing One” and “Elohim” were shared by the angels; and, since Moses is given the self-same names he obviously is elevated to the position of an angelic being, even the principal angel of God. (FOSSUM 1985: 124)

It serves the greater purpose of FOSSUM to argue a Samaritan provenance for the Simonian concept of “the Standing One.” However, for reasons previously discussed caution needs to be exercised when working with traditions that link Simon and the Samaritans. The problem with these traditions is that they are extraordinarily difficult to assess due to their late date. This fact in itself presents a significant obstacle to claims about a Samaritan provenance for the Simonian title “Standing One.”

Almost a century ago James MONTGOMERY argued the “influence of Hellenism upon Samaritan theology” in the usage of 𐤌𐤎𐤑 as a title for God.¹³⁵ Certainly an accommodation of the Platonic idea of *στάσις* can be discerned in the *Memar Marqa*,¹³⁶ yet equally significant for our discussion is the fact that two further entities are said to share in the durability and immutability of the divine: Moses and the Law. Moses became an intermediary between God and humankind when he climbed mount Sinai to receive the Law of God. The description of Moses as “standing” on the top of Sinai not only located him spatially but also spiritually: he crossed the line between mortal and immortal when invited to participate in divine affairs. This is why Samaritan-Jewish tradition describes Moses in a unique way by attributing to him the name “Elohim.”¹³⁷ In a similar manner, the Torah—which was given to Israel through the intercession of Moses—was implied to share in the eternal,

¹³⁵ MONTGOMERY 1968: 215.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Memar Marqa* IV 91,29–31: “He is standing (𐤌𐤎𐤑) above the mass of primeval silence. He created when he wished and meant to. He is ‘I am.’ He is the one who will be after the world. Like he was at the beginning of the world.” *Memar Marqa* IV 111,24–25: “I, I am the one who is standing (𐤌𐤎𐤑) above the creation and mount Sinai. I, I am the one who is and there is none besides me. I, I am the one who is out of time or place.” The participle 𐤌𐤎𐤑 in Samaritan Aramaic conveys the same sense of “living” (cf. Hebrew 𐤌𐤎𐤑 n.s. Polak [P] participle) which is contained also in the title ὁ ἕστῶς.

¹³⁷ Cf. MEEKS 1968: 354–371.

unchanging nature of God; and by association the Torah was considered perfect and its truth universal.

It is by way of contrast then, for example, that Origen criticises Dositheus for introducing change. Dositheus, who like Simon is designated as ἑστῶς in the Pseudo-Clementines, is described by Origen as a false prophet who is responsible for various books and myths: "To this day there are Dositheans originating from him, possessing books of Dositheus and myths about him that he did not die but is still alive somewhere."¹³⁸ It is interesting that these accusations survive to be included in the fourteenth century CE Samaritan chronicle of Abu 'l-Fath, who also condemns Dositheus for having written books; indeed, a new version of the Torah, an altered and deteriorated version of God's Law, which the Dositheans are said to have in their possession.

Is it possible that Simon also was the author of various writings and myths? While there is no evidence to support this conjecture, it would add further dimensions to the reported acclaim of Simon as "Standing One" in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, and reference in Clement concerning the charismatic activity of Simon in Alexandria. While polemical in tone, and preserved in a literary source of dubious value for Simon Research—the Pseudo-Clementines being an example of early Jewish-Christian religious and philosophical romance—this evidence suggests that the Simonians themselves conceived Simon as having the authority to introduce teachings superior to the law of Moses.

In early Christian literature we may confine ourselves to two references that clearly demonstrate the inadequacy of claims for a Samaritan provenance for the title "Standing One." First, in the carpet-bag of materials provided by Clement of Alexandria—who among other things argued a Christian defence against the charge that faith was a lower form of knowledge than empirical perception—we find an interesting observation about the honour given to Simon by the Simonians. In this passage Clement testifies to the philosophical background of the Simonian title for Simon as "the Standing One." The reference about disciples of Simon wanting to adapt their way of living to the pattern of Simon suggests that soteriological significance was placed upon particular behaviour by individuals:

¹³⁸ ORIGEN, *Commentary on John XIII* 27, 162.

Thus Abraham stood in the face of the Lord and when he approached he spoke and to Moses it was said: "But you, stand here with me." And those who are around Simon want to adapt their way of living to the Standing One, whom they honour. Now faith and gnosis of the truth see to it that the psyche that chooses them always acts in the same way. But to falsehood change is attached, and digression and defection, just as peace and rest are attached to the gnostic. (CLEMENT, *Strom.* II 52,1–4).

Second, in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, which document a supposed debate between the apostle Peter and Simon Magus, the writer describes Simon as a pretender who presented himself as an eschatological prophet like Moses; and, claimed to be "the Standing One." *Homilies* II 24 records that Simon and Dositheus were both disciples of John, but during Simon's absence at the time of John's death Dositheus assumed the leadership of the Baptist community. Initially Simon did not oppose the leadership of Dositheus, but began to malign him when it was discovered that Dositheus failed to correctly teach community doctrines.

On one occasion, Dositheus, perceiving that this artful accusation of Simon was dissipating the opinion of him with respect to many, so that they did not think that he was the Standing One, came in a rage to the usual place of meeting, and finding Simon, struck him with a staff. But it seemed to pass through the body of Simon as if he had been smoke. Thereupon Dositheus, being confounded, said to him, "If you are the Standing One, I also will worship you: εἰ σὺ εἶ ὁ ἑστῶς, καὶ προσκύνω σε." Then Simon said that he was; and Dositheus, knowing that he himself was not the Standing One, fell down and worshipped; and associating himself with the twenty-nine chiefs, he raised Simon to his own place of repute; and thus, not many days after, Dositheus himself, while he (Simon) stood, fell down and died. (PS.-CLEMENT, *Hom.* II 24 [ANFa])

This passage is significant because the text provides clear evidence that several different meanings could accompany the use of the term ὁ ἑστῶς: authority, immortality, divinity. This title seems to attribute exclusive importance and charismatic authority to its bearer. Reference to the staff wielded by the "Standing One" alludes to the Moses-like status and leadership of Dositheus. The description of Simon as "standing" when Dositheus dies is an indication that at some earlier time the philosophical ideas of durability and immutability (immortality) were integrated with the idea of Mosaic prophecy and authority. Finally, when the Pseudo-Clementine Dositheus says "If you are the Standing One, I will also worship you," this is not only spoken for Simon's benefit but for all who receive the tradition.

So far I have attempted to briefly outline the context within which debate concerning the background and meaning of claims about Simon as “Standing One” needs to be analysed. Further to patterns of use already observed in philosophical, Jewish, Samaritan, and some early Christian materials, consideration also needs to be given to the way the title is otherwise used in Hippolytus. In this context a key text appears in *Ref.* VI 17,1–2.

Ἔστιν οὖν κατὰ τὸν Σίμωνα τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἀφθαρτον ἐκεῖνο ἐν παντὶ <ἀνθρώπῳ> κεκρυμμένον δυνάμει, οὐκ ἐνεργεία, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐστὼς στὰς στησόμενος· ἐστὼς ἄνω ἐν τῇ ἀγεινήτῳ δυνάμει, στὰς κάτω ἐν τῇ ῥοῇ τῶν ὑδάτων, ἐν εἰκόνι γεννηθείς, στησόμενος ἄνω παρὰ τὴν μακαρίαν ἀπέραντον δύναμιν, ἐὰν ἐξεικονισθῇ. (*Ref.* VI 17,1–2 [Marcovich])

According to Simon, therefore, there exists that which is blessed and incorruptible in a latent condition in every one—(that is) potentially, not actually; and that this is He who stood, stands, and is to stand. He has stood above in unbegotten power. He stands below, when in the stream of waters He was begotten in a likeness. He is to stand above, beside the blessed indefinite power, if He be fashioned into an image.

The three-fold description—“he stood, stands, is to stand”—encapsulates a typical Gnostic cycle of existence: a process of reintegration with a primordial source. The presence of a divine potentiality (seed/spark?) in every human being, that is destined to be reintegrated with its source, is not only a common theme in Gnostic literature¹³⁹ but also was evidently the subject of philosophical speculation by early Christian writers. Justin reflects this in his reference to “each thing return[ing] to that from which it was produced,”¹⁴⁰ as Hippolytus does also when he engages in debate about the originating principle of the universe through his accusation that Simon plagiarised Heraclitus in nominating the first principle as fire (*Ref.* VI 9,3).

A fundamental theme in the thought of Heraclitus was that the universe is subject to ceaseless change. Heraclitus chose fire, the most mobile substance known to him, to convey this first principle of the universe. The same ever-living fire—sometimes referred to as vapour or breath—he also considered the vital principle and essence of the soul.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Ap. John* (NHC II,1) 9,8–9; 20,22–24; *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6) 134,7–15; *Testim. Truth* (NHC IX,3) 35–36; *Zost.* (NHC VIII,1) 130–132; *Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII,1) 41; 43; 45; *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3) 41.

¹⁴⁰ JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 19,5.

Some commentators have interpreted the fire principle of Heraclitus as “merely a concrete physical symbol for ceaseless activity, or process, not itself a substance; but the very denial of substance” (THILLY 1957: 33). Certainly, unlike the Eleatic school, of which Parmenides was the chief exponent, Heraclitus denied the permanent substratum and unity of the universe, and argued instead that change was the fundamental principle of life.

To what extent Hippolytus was correct in identifying Heraclitus as the source of Simon’s teaching about the originating principle of the universe is open to debate. In the context of ongoing discussion, however, another detail ought not to be overlooked. Sources not only preserve details about Simon’s regard for fire, they also connect Simon with the traditions of the Persian μάγοι who held special reverence for fire. Do we then find preserved here in Hippolytus not simply an example of how the teachings of Simon were transformed through philosophical reinterpretation, but also a remnant from an earlier strata of stories that connected Simon with the traditions of the μάγοι?

One of the most repeated observations in the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity from the time of Xanthos onwards (c.465BCE–c.425BCE) was that Persians worshipped fire. For example, Herodotus comments how the μάγοι offered sacrifices to fire as one of the original deities.¹⁴¹ The importance of fire in Zoroastrianism is well-documented. According to tradition, when Ahura Mazda created the world, at first in its spiritual form, he created it in the form of fire. Fire was said to hold part of the essence of Ahura Mazda,¹⁴² who was eternal light. So, to pollute fire—by bringing it into contact with impure substances—was one of the worst sins; and, to allow a fire to be extinguished was punishable by death.

The reference by Hippolytus to Heraclitus and his teaching on fire, within an exposition of Simon’s teachings, is a clear example of how in most cases refutation in the writings of Hippolytus simply meant to expose; to reveal the dependence of heresies and heretics on non-Christian sources, and so to demonstrate their “godlessness.” At the core of Hippolytus’ criticism of Simon’s alleged teaching, that “fire was the originating principle of the universe,” is the claim that Simon

¹⁴¹ Cf. Hdt. I 131–132; STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,13; DIOG. L., *Lives*, Proem. 6–9.

¹⁴² Cf. CLEMENT, *Protrepticus* V 65,1; DIOG. L., *Lives* I 6; EPIPHANIUS, *De Fide* 13; LUCIAN, *Jupiter Tragoedus* XLII 690; Hdt. III 16. Herodotus mentions the fact that “Persians consider fire to be a god.”

misrepresented the law of Moses (“books” of Moses). For Hippolytus this amounted to more than ignorance or malicious intent; to presume the authority and ability to give an application of Scripture other than that intended by the holy writers was tantamount to self-deification: ὁ Σίμων ἑαυτὸν θεοποιεῖ (*Ref.* VI 14,1).

Λέγει δὲ ὁ Σίμων μεταφράζων τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως ἀνοήτως τε καὶ κακοτέχνως· Μωσέως γὰρ λέγοντος ὅτι «ὁ θεὸς πῦρ φλέγον ἐστὶ καὶ καταναλίσκον», δεξάμενος τὸ λεχθὲν ὑπὸ Μωσέως οὐκ ὀρθῶς, πῦρ εἶναι λέγει τῶν ὄλων τὴν ἀρχήν, οὐ νοήσας τὸ εἰρημένον ὅτι θεὸς οὐ πῦρ, ἀλλὰ πῦρ φλέγον καὶ καταναλίσκον, οὐκ αὐτὸν διασπῶν μόνον τὸν νόμον Μωσέως, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν σκοτεινὸν Ἡράκλειτον συλαγωγῶν. (*Ref.* VI 9,3 [Marcovich])

Now Simon, both foolishly and knavishly paraphrasing the law of Moses, makes his statements (in the manner following): For when Moses asserts that “God is a burning fire and consuming fire,” taking what is said by Moses not in its correct sense, he affirms that fire is the originating principle of the universe. (But Simon) does not consider what the statement is which is made, namely, that it is not that God is a fire, but a burning and consuming fire, (thereby) not only putting a violent sense upon the actual law of Moses, but even plagiarising from Heraclitus the Obscure. (*Ref.* VI 4 [ANFa])

However, after identifying Heraclitus as the source of Simon’s teaching about the originating principle of the universe, Hippolytus employs Aristotelian categories to explain this theory of Simon. Hippolytus claims that Simon taught a two-fold nature of fire (τὸν πυρὸς διπλὴν τὴν φύσιν)—one secret, the other manifest—and that this equates with Aristotle’s teaching of potentiality (*δυνάμει*) and actuality (*ἐνεργείᾳ*).

According to Aristotle, every individual substance was a mixture of *matter* and *form*. “Form” was the universal aspect of a thing—an essential unity shared by all things of the same type; if you like, a quality which never changed. “Matter,” on the other hand, was that which conferred particularity and uniqueness, which persisted yet changed in the process of growth. For Aristotle, unlike Plato, matter and form were inseparable aspects of the same individual thing. Form was eternal, like the Platonic idea, but instead of being outside of matter, it was in matter. Form and matter were the co-eternal and co-existent principles of things.

Aristotle’s teaching on *potentiality* and *actuality*, referred to by Hippolytus, was closely allied to Aristotle’s antithesis between form and matter. As form and matter were inseparable yet distinguishable aspects of a particular substance, so “potentiality” and “actuality” were considered stages in the development of a substance—the potential being an earlier and the actual being a later stage. One illustration used by Aristotle

was that of an acorn: as the acorn is to the oak, so is potentiality to actuality. “The potential is that which lies latent within a thing; the actual is the completed thing” (THILLY 1957: 106). Indeed, Aristotle called matter the principle of potentiality and form the principle of actuality. In as much as the acorn—a potential oak—realises its potentiality and becomes manifest, real, or actual, then matter succeeds in taking on form and achieves its ultimate purpose.

Hippolytus claimed that Simon taught the originating principle of the universe—which is fire—existed potentially in all; and, that this indefinite power [was] he who stood, stands, and will stand (*Ref.* VI 12,3; 17,1). Further, that unless this potentiality becomes actualised—Hippolytus says¹⁴³ “formed into an image:” ἐὰν ἐξεικονισθῆ—it vanishes, and is destroyed.¹⁴⁴

προσλαβοῦσα γὰρ ἡ δύναμις τεχνίτην, φῶς τῶν γινομένων γίνεται, μὴ προσλαβοῦσα δέ, ἀτεχνία καὶ σκότος, καὶ ὡς ὅτι οὐκ ἦν, ἀποθνήσκουσι τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ συνδιαφθείρεται. (*Ref.* VI 12,4b [Marcovich])

For when the *potentiality* takes unto itself an act, a light of existent things is produced; but when the *potentiality* does not take unto itself (an act), unskilfulness and ignorance are the results; and just as when (the power) was non-existent, it perishes along with the expiring man. (*Ref.* VI 12,3 [trans. ANFa])

Hippolytus is not entirely clear in detailing how the potentiality existing in every one becomes actualised. There are, however, two separate yet inter-related statements that offer some insight to the resolution of that question. First, in reference to the “Standing One” Hippolytus claims that whenever the “Standing One” is made into an image that he will exist (there) quantitatively and completely. Second, Hippolytus details Simon’s opinions on how every one needs to be made into an image of the Spirit, itself a manifestation (seventh power) of the first principle, fire.

ὅς ἐὰν μὲν ἐξεικονισθῆ ὡν ἐν ταῖς ἕξι δυνάμεσιν ἔσται οὐσία δυνάμει μεγέθει ἀποτελέσματι ... (*Ref.* VI 12,3 [Marcovich])

Wherefore, whensoever he may be made into an image, inasmuch as he exists in the six powers, he will exist (there) substantially, potentially, quantitatively, (and) completely ...

ἐβδόμη γὰρ ἐστί, φησί, αὕτη δύναμις ἣτις ἦν δύναμις ὑπάρχουσα ἐν τῇ ἀπεράντῳ δυνάμει, ἣτις γέγονε πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων. αὕτη

¹⁴³ *Ref.* VI 17,2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ref.* VI 12,4a.

ἐστί, φησί, ἡ ἑβδόμη δύναμις περὶ ἧς λέγει Μωσῆς «καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπέφερετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος», τουτέστι, φησί, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ πάντα ἔχον ἐν ἑαυτῷ εἰκὼν ὄν τῆς ἀπεράντου δυνάμεως ... ὃ ἐὰν μὴ ἐξεικονισθῆ μετὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἀπολείται δυνάμει μείναν μόνον μὴ καὶ ἐνεργεῖα γενόμενον ... ἐὰν δὲ ἐξεικονισθῆ καὶ γένηται ἀπὸ στιγμῆς ἀμερίστου ... τὸ μικρὸν μέγα γενήσεται τὸ δὲ μέγα ἔσται εἰς τὸν ἀπειρον αἰῶνα καὶ ἀπαράλλακτον τὸν μηκέτι γίνομενον. (Ref. VI 14,3–6 [Marcovich])

Now this seventh power, which was a power existing in the indefinite power, which was produced prior to all the Ages, this is, he says, the seventh power, respecting which Moses utters the following words: “And the Spirit of God was wafted over the water;” that is, the Spirit which contains all things in itself, and is an image of the indefinite power ... and whosoever is not made into an image of this, will perish with the world, inasmuch as he continues only potentially, and does not exist actually ... If one, however, be made into an image, and be generated from an indivisible point ... small will become great. But what is great will continue unto infinite and unalterable duration, as being that which no longer is subject to the conditions of a generated entity. (Ref. VI 14,4–6 [trans. ANFa])

Both references mention being made into an image (ἐξεικονισθῆ). The broader context involves questions concerning the origin of the universe that arise from various philosophical and faith perspectives. In particular, Hippolytus refers to the Genesis account which speaks of humankind being made in the “image” and “likeness” of God (Gen 1:26). Hippolytus¹⁴⁵ remarks that the Simonians interpreted the two-fold nature of human creation—κατ’ εἰκόνα καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν—in light of Simon’s teaching concerning the originating principle of fire. This divinely created potentiality, however, perishes in humans at death unless it is actualised by “being made into an image.”

In Philo the concepts of image and revelation are combined in association with the logos theme. According to Philo, the logos—as the εἰκὼν of God—is the “hypostatized knowability of God” (JONAS 1954: 75). In his treatise concerning *The Confusion of Tongues* Philo describes how true servants encounter the image of God through the agency of Moses (the Standing One):

¹⁴⁵ Many Greek and Latin Fathers of early Christianity maintained a distinction between εἰκὼν and ὁμοίωσις, the former they supposed to represent the physical (matter) aspect of the likeness to God, the latter the ethical (form). Generally it was considered that the concrete essence of the divine likeness was shattered by sin; and it was only through Christ that human nature could be transformed into the image of God again. Cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10.

ἀναβαίνειν δὲ τοῖς λογισμοῖς πρὸς αἰθέριον ὕψος, Μωσῆν, τὸ θεοφιλὲς γένος, προσησαμένους ἡγεμόνα τῆς ὁδοῦ. τότε γὰρ τὸν μὲν τόπον, ὃς δὴ λόγος ἐστί, θεάσονται, ᾧ ὁ ἀκλινῆς καὶ ἀτρεπτος θεὸς ἐφέστηκε ... εὐπρεπὲς γὰρ τοῖς ἑταίρειαν πρὸς ἐπιστήμην θεμένοις ἐφίεσθαι μὲν τοῦ τὸ ὄν ἰδεῖν, εἰ δὲ μὴ δύναιντο, τὴν γοῦν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ, τὸν ἱερώτατον λόγον, μεθ' ὃν καὶ τὸ ἐν αἰσθητοῖς τελειότατον ἔργον, τόνδε τὸν κόσμον· (PHILO, *De Confusione* 95–97 [Loeb])

... but in their thoughts ascend to the heavenly height, setting before them Moses, the nature beloved of God, to lead them on the way. For then they shall behold the place which is in fact the Word, where stands God the never changing, never swerving ... For it well befits those who have entered into comradeship with knowledge to desire to see the Existent if they may, but, if they cannot, to see at any rate his image, the most holy Word, and after the Word its most perfect work of all that our senses know, even this world. (trans. F.H. COLSON [Loeb])

In the New Testament Paul refers to Christ as the “image of God,” hidden from the sight of unbelievers by the “god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4). In combining the notions of *χριστός* and *εἰκών* Paul transfers to Christ a characterisation of divine Wisdom common in Hellenistic-Judaism. Wisdom was believed to have been formed before the creation, to proceed from God’s mouth, and was said to be the likeness of God. Wisdom was “a reflection of the eternal light, a flawless mirror of the divine work and an image of his goodness” (Wis 7:26). Further, Wisdom was said to have been sent to humankind but found no home there and returned to God in heaven, from where Wisdom continually descends to the wise.

In the surviving religious literature from the first centuries of the common era there is evidence of various forms of an “emissary” figure; a figure who comes from the dimension/world of light and brings a certain knowledge (Gnosis) that calls his followers out of the darkness into the light. According to Paul, Jesus Christ was sent from God (Gal 4:4).¹⁴⁶ As the “image of God” he made God’s actions visible and in his being represented the invisible God to humankind. As the “Christ” he was the bearer of salvation, since it is only “through Christ” that the believer gains access to God and enjoys the ultimate purpose of his/her creation (Rom 5:1–2; 1 Cor 8:6; 2 Cor 5:18; 1 Thess 5:9).

Unlike Philo, who considered the *λόγος* a poor substitute,¹⁴⁷ in the writings of Paul Christ as “image” is the full representation of God. Since

¹⁴⁶ Cf. John 3:16–17; 1 John 4:10.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. PHILO, *De Confusione* 148.

he is both Christ and image of God, believers can be assured that in Jesus they encounter God the Father. According to Paul, those who perceive in the gospel the glory of the Lord, who was in Christ, experience an ongoing transformation until the believer acquires a “glorious body” like that of the risen Christ (Phil 3:21). This transformation of the Christian’s character is described as the work of the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17a).

ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness (*image*) with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18 NIV)

Returning to the claim of Hippolytus—that Simon taught there is a divinely created potentiality in all humankind that perishes at death unless it is actualised “by being made into an image”—it is impossible to identify with any certainty what process of actualisation Hippolytus had in mind. In all probability it involved a form of revelation/authoritative teaching; perhaps accompanied by ritualised actions and individual life-style changes.

IRENÆUS remarks that Simon conferred salvation to others by “making himself known” to them: *hominibus autem salutem praestaret per suam agnitionem* (*Adv. Haer.* I 23,3). Later, in the same chapter, Irenaeus details how Menander—Simon’s successor—taught that his disciples “obtain the resurrection by being baptised into him, and can die no more but remain in the possession of immortal youth”: *Resurrectionem enim per id quod est in eum baptismum accipere eius discipulos et ultra non posse mori, sed perseverare non senescentes et immortales* (*Adv. Haer.* I 23,5). There is a certain correspondence here with what Hippolytus writes; namely, “if one be made into an image—small will become great (τὸ μικρὸν μέγα γενήσεται); but what is great will continue unto infinite and unalterable duration (εἰς τὸν ἄπειρον αἰῶνα καὶ ἀπαράλλακτον), as being that which no longer is subject to the conditions of a generated entity” (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 14,6 [trans. ANFa]).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the contrast of small becoming great alludes to a process of initiation and formation. Cf. *Thunder* (NHC VI,2) 17,25–32. “Come forward to me, you who know me and you who know my members and establish the *great ones* among the *small* first creatures. Come forward in childhood, and do not despise it because it is *small* and it is little. And do not turn away *greatness* in some parts from the *smallness* for the *smallnesses* are known from the *greatnesses*” (trans. ROBINSON).

In conclusion, our investigation has noted the widespread appearance of the notion “Standing One” in the literature of the Near East from Late Antiquity to the early Islamic Era,¹⁴⁹ which provides sufficient reason to argue for a non-Samaritan provenance for the title. On available evidence the philosophical concept of the divine *στάσις* appears the more fertile medium for the incipience of the title “Standing One.” It is improbable that anything more definite can be reconstructed from the sources. While scholars correctly identify the appearance and development of the title “Standing One” in Samaritan-Jewish traditions, this does not answer the question of the origin of the idea. Instead of an identified unilinear tradition, the surviving evidence paints a picture of emerging concomitant notions and the gradual institutionalisation of the role of “Standing One” in a variety of contexts.¹⁵⁰

In tracing the contours of some of these emerging notions it was noted that among the different meanings understood with the use of the title “Standing One,” were authority, immortality, and divinity. The title conferred exclusive importance and charismatic authority to its bearer, due to the recognised intermediary role exercised by the “Standing One” between God and humankind.

One of our initial queries concerned the correspondence perceived by Hippolytus between the titles *ὁ Χριστός* and *ὁ ἑστώς*. If the notions of “image” and “revelation” were associated with the “Standing One,” then this obviously presented a challenge to Hippolytus’ acceptance of the holy writers’ testimony that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God. Yet, clearly the ultimate proof for Hippolytus that Simon was not the “Christ” or the “Standing One” is that Simon was unable to rise from the dead.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Cf. GOEDENDORP 1991: 74–76. Goedendorp identifies phenomenological parallels between early Christian reports on Dositheus as “Standing One,” and the reports of Islamic heresiologists who detail the appearance among proto-Shi’ite factions of persons claiming to be *al-qā’im al-mahdī*.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. GOEDENDORP 1991: 77. “It appears in the case of Simonianism and Dositheanism an important step [was] made in the designation of religious leaders as *ἑστώς* ... a merging of the idea of stability and (Mosaic) prophethood can be noticed. Connotations such as immortality, concealment and limitation of religious authority to one (final) spiritual leader make the prophet like Moses a bridge to the proto-Shi’ite *al-qā’im al-mahdī*.”

¹⁵¹ Simon had himself buried alive, saying he would rise three days later. But, Simon remained in the grave: οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὁ Χριστός (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 20).

3.2.4 Fragment 4: Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI 19,5

οἱ δὲ αὐθις, μιμηταὶ τοῦ πλάνου καὶ μάγου Σίμωνος γινόμενοι, τὰ ὅμοια δρῶσιν, ἀλογίστως φάσκοντες δεῖν μίγνυσθαι. (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,5)

But, again, those who become followers of this imposter—I mean Simon the Magos—indulge in the same practices, and irrationally allege the necessity of promiscuous intercourse.

There is longstanding traditional material in this polemic directed by Hippolytus against the alleged sexual proclivities of Simon and his followers. It would be easy to dismiss this reference as being of little historical value or consequence. The literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity is virtually littered with reports about the prevalence of family marriages or next-of-kin marriages¹⁵² in the ancient world—unions between mother and son, father and daughter, brother and sister. Further, it can be demonstrated that early Greek and Latin writers routinely ascribed to all foreign peoples a variety of alluring sexual practices, including wife swapping and promiscuous intercourse; although, granted, the Persians were often singled out for particular mention.¹⁵³

I would argue that there are good reasons to analyse this fragment more closely. I suggest there is information here to assist the formulation of our answer to the central focus of this work; namely, the identity of Simon: first Gnostic? Included within a report about the redemption of Helen—which is material that has clear links with previous reports by Justin and Irenaeus—this fragment preserves information that did not originate from the Simon myth but from traditions about the Magoi. It is surely not without significance that the activities and social status of the Magoi in antiquity played a vital role in shaping the figure of Simon in popular Christian imagination.

¹⁵² For Greek and Latin references to next-of-kin marriages, cf. LATTKE 1994: 41–49.

¹⁵³ Cf. CATULLUS, *Carmen* 90; STRABO, *Geography* XV 3,20; PHILO, *De specialibus legibus* III 13; POMPEIUS TROGUS (CLEMEN, *Fontes* 65); CURTIUS RUFUS, *Historiae Alexandri Magni Macedonis* VIII 2,19 (CLEMEN, *Fontes* 39); PLUTARCH, *Moralia* XIII 2,507; TATIAN, *Oratio ad Graecos* I 28; CLEMENT, *Paedagogicus* I 7,55; EUSEBIUS, *Praeparatio Evangelica* VI 10,16; TERTULLIAN, *Apologeticum* 9; *Ad Nationes* I 16; SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Outline of Pyrrhonism* I 152; III 205; MINUCIUS FELIX, *Octavius* 31,3–4; AELIANUS, *Περὶ ζώων ιδιότητος* VI 39; DIOG. L., *Lives* I 7; ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum* VI 80; THEOPHILUS, *Ad Autolyicum* III 4; JEROME, *Adversus Jovinum* II 7; THEODORETUS, *Ἑλληνικῶν θεραπευτικῆ παθημάτων* IX 33; AGATHIAS, *Historiae* II 24.

Arguably the earliest reference to Persian men—in this case the Magoi—having intercourse with mothers, daughters, and sisters, appears in a fragment of tradition attributed to Xanthos the Lydian in the writings of Clement of Alexandria.

μίγνυνται ... οἱ μάγοι μητράσι καὶ θυγατράσι καὶ ἀδελφαῖς
μίγνυσθαι θεμιτὸν εἶναι κοινὰς τε εἶναι τὰς γυναῖκας οὐ βία καὶ
λάθρα ἀλλὰ συναινούντων ἀμφοτέρων, ὅταν θέλη γῆμαι ὁ ἕτερος
τῆν τοῦ ἑτέρου. (CLEMENT, *Strom.* III 2, 11,1; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 3)

The Magi have intercourse with their mothers and daughters, and having intercourse with their sisters is allowed, and their women are shared, not by force or secretly, but they come to an agreement when one of them wants to sleep with the other's wife.

As already outlined in our chapter on Sources, while there are other witnesses who claim that the Magoi practised incest as part of ritual duty and as a means of preserving the caste, there are good reasons to exercise caution in evaluating Clement's information. Under closer examination this account is at variance with three other significant reports in matters of fact, focus, and cultural familiarity.

First, when Herodotus describes the marriage customs of the Persians he comments on the practice of polygamy and the practice of keeping concubines (Hdt. I 135), but fails to mention either next-of-kin marriages or the rumoured widespread phenomenon of incest.¹⁵⁴ Second, in terms of focus, it can be demonstrated that some writers only repeated traditional material about marriage customs among the Persians to assist their broader authorial intentions. So, for example, the cynic philosopher Sextus Empiricus makes his observations about next-of-kin marriages in the context of a debate concerning the inherent value of human actions:¹⁵⁵

Πέρσαι δὲ καὶ μάλιστα αὐτῶν οἱ σοφίαν ἀσκεῖν δοκοῦντες οἱ Μάγοι
γαμοῦσι τὰς μητέρας καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι τὰς ἀδελφὰς ἄγονται πρὸς
γάμον. (SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, III 205 [Loeb 273; CLEMEN, *Fontes* 70])

(It is unlawful among us to marry one's own mother or sister.) But the Persians, and among them especially those who are thought to practice wisdom, the Magoi, marry their mothers and the Egyptians take their sisters in marriage...

¹⁵⁴ One possible exception is the story Herodotus recounts about Cambyses' desire to marry his sister (Hdt. III 31). However, as DE JONG (1997: 427) comments, "In the context of Herodotus' description of Cambyses, this is but one of the many instances of Cambyses' madness. There is reason, therefore, to doubt the historicity of the story ...".

¹⁵⁵ Cf. CICERO, *Tusculan Disputations* I, 108. Cicero raises questions about the relativity of cultural norms, and suggests that all laws are equally a matter of choice.

This passage is of particular importance because it invites research to investigate more closely the ideology behind Persian practices. The confluence in a single phrase of three historical key topics for Simon Research, Wisdom—Magoi—Incest, points readers beyond the self-evident fact that next-of-kin marriages were the subject of considerable interest among ancient Greek and Latin authors because such practices clashed with their own marriage customs and laws.

Philo of Alexandria provides a revealing commentary in his *Special Laws* (III 13) that among the Persians the practice of incest was not only thought to increase spiritual awareness and superior family qualities in its participants, but also, any progeny of these liaisons were said to be of superior birth:

μητέρας γὰρ οἱ ἐν τέλει Περσῶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν ἄγονται καὶ τοὺς φύντας ἐκ τούτων εὐγενεστάτους νομίζουσι καὶ βασιλείας ὡς λόγος τῆς μεγίστης ἀξιοῦσιν. (PHILO, *De specialibus legibus* III 13)

Those of the Persians who are in high office marry their own mothers; they consider those who are born from these (unions) to be of superior birth and, as it is said, think them worthy of the highest sovereignty.

Albert DE JONG (1997: 430) comments that Philo's observations are in agreement with Pahlavi literature on the subject; namely that "these unions were considered normal and [were] bound by exactly the same legal prescriptions as all marriages. They were considered to be meritorious in a religious context, and were thought to be among the best instruments against the evil powers, and among the highest virtues ... (they) are mirrored in the divine world."

What light, if any, does this expanded information provide for our analysis of the fragment in Hippolytus' *Refutatio* which links Simon with a tradition about the Magoi? Virtually nothing is known about the historical origins of Simon. Biographical data in ancient Christian writings attempts to locate him geographically, ethnically, and socially, but the elusive shape of a pre-Lukan Simon is widely disputed. Could it not be that this remnant of a tradition about the Magoi—which among ancient Christian writers Hippolytus alone preserves and links with the characterisation of Simon as a Magos (μάγου Σίμωνος)—provides further hints to Simon's identity and origin? Could it not be that Simon was by descent a Persian μάγος, whose family had ended up in Samaria through one of numerous recorded migrations?

In what Simon's μάγος identity consisted is unclear in the earliest witnesses. In the New Testament Simon is not yet called a μάγος but is

described as μαγεύων (Acts 8:9). Later witnesses, including Hippolytus, report that Simon was generally revered from Palestine to Rome and taught a different source of wisdom that, connected with his claims about the redemption of Helena, was an offer of salvation to those who followed him “through his own unique intelligence.” Our fragment appears in this context and provides the additional information that Simon’s disciples indulged in the practices of Simon and supported the necessity of promiscuous intercourse. Hippolytus further claims these believers do whatever they desire because they are free (ὡς ἐλευθέρους). This freedom ostensibly included sexual intercourse and promiscuity that did not exclude incest.

Among the more frequent modern characterisations of ancient Gnosticism is that it was a religious mindset that spawned either one of two distinct ethical responses: asceticism or libertinism. However, even though a considerable list of references could be cited from ancient literature as witnesses to the sexual promiscuousness and sexual deviancy of various groups and individuals—many of them referred to as “Gnostics”—the fact remains that these charges are not so easy to substantiate.

A core issue here is the credibility of witnesses. First, there is not a single instance where any group or individual unequivocally advocates these alleged sexual practices, but always these accusations are made by outsiders with no firsthand experience of the sexual excesses they report. Second, since the outsiders in question were no dispassionate observers and reporters, but were overt defenders of their faith, there is further doubt that much of their detailed information can be trusted. A common method used by ancient Christian writers was to expose alleged error or deviant behaviour—if it walked like a duck, and quacked like a duck, it was a duck, so to speak—and circumstantial evidence was equally admissible as direct witness. Further, these Christian writers subscribed to an understanding that “right believing” led to “right living;” therefore, the connection between illicit behaviour and heresy is a frequent theme in their writings.¹⁵⁶

Charges of sexual license are absent from the earliest accounts about Simon (Acts 8:9–11; JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,1–3), but accusations levelled at the Simonians first appear in Irenaeus and then in subsequent heresiological reports. IRENAEUS not only asserts that Simon conferred salvation upon people by revealing himself to them (*hominibus autem*

¹⁵⁶ Cf. LERNER 1972: 10–34.

salutem praestaret per suam agnitionem),¹⁵⁷ but makes claims that are subsequently reported by Hippolytus. IRENAEUS details that Simon's disciples "... being free, live as they please" (*ut liberos agere quae velint*),¹⁵⁸ and that they "live profligate lives and practice magical arts, each to the extent of his ability (... *libidinose quidem vivunt, magias autem perficiunt, quemadmodum potest unusquisque ipsorum*)."¹⁵⁹

It appears that the juxtaposition of "Wisdom—Magoi—Incest" in Sextus Empiricus is a more complete reflection of tradition about the Magoi, which otherwise exists in a highly fragmented state throughout the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity. This is what also distinguishes our fragment in Hippolytus from other examples of polemic against Simon. In addition to Hippolytus being the only Christian writer to link a piece of tradition about the Magoi with a certain Simon, who was reported by the earliest witnesses as μαγεύων (doing what a Magos does) in Samaria, Hippolytus retains the tripartite form of the tradition in reporting that disciples of Simon (the Magos), who were redeemed by his unique intelligence (Wisdom), indulged in the practices of Simon and supported promiscuous intercourse (Incest).

3.2.5 Observations

Our critical examination of several textual fragments from early Christian literature began as a cautious attempt to identify beneath the reports of Simon's teaching possible original traditions and sayings. This examination was intended to contribute to our eventual conclusions about the question of a Gnostic Simon. How, then, does our analysis help in the formulation of an answer to the focal question of this study; namely, the identity of Simon: first Gnostic? Simply, that in any attempt to reconstruct Simon from the sources it matters not only who Simon was historically—and opinions vary widely about the ability or validity of scholarship to answer that question with any degree of certainty—but it is equally important to recognise how Simon was perceived by others.

Modern debates about identity assume that it is not an inherent quality of individuals but that identity is generated in interaction with

¹⁵⁷ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,3.

¹⁵⁸ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,3.

¹⁵⁹ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,4.

others.¹⁶⁰ Traditional models have considered the dynamic interaction of various factors—such as class, gender, and race—in the construction of a coherent identity. More recent analyses deny the ability of any single model to fully explain the contradictions and ambiguities of individual personality, but that researchers always need to consider the simultaneous overlapping and interacting of both psychological and sociological factors in the production of human identity.

Scholarship is limited in its ability to determine the “private”/“psychological” identity of Simon. Materials that might be considered evidence of how Simon viewed himself are almost non-existent. Indeed, there is no commonly accepted first-hand testimony. Instead, our only reports about Simon have been formulated by the tongues of others. This “public” identity of Simon in the sources is how he was perceived by others.

Importantly, two things need to be said about our use of available data on Simon. First, this material is localised and conditioned by space and time. We apprehend Simon’s identity not in the abstract but always in relation to a given place and time. Second, our study and assessment of Simon’s identity must be based on “evidence” and we must be aware of our methods of perception. There is no such thing as “immaculate perception” (CARNEY 1975: 1). The classical subject–object dichotomy has been deconstructed. The interpreter can no longer claim to stand outside the act of interpretation.¹⁶¹ Modern critics accept the dictum that not only authors of ancient texts but also their interpreters have specific temporal, psychological, social, and cultural contexts that affect and inform both their general perceptions and descriptions of personalities and events.

Social approaches to the interpretation of New Testament texts suggest that critics reading first century CE scripts need to remember that first century communities around the Mediterranean perceived human identity differently from 21st century Western readers. Namely, that “first

¹⁶⁰ Cf. SARUP 1996: 14.

¹⁶¹ Ferdinand Christian BAUR—nineteenth century historian and New Testament scholar—once described his task as the “objective interpretation” of materials in their history. “Mein Standpunkt ist mit einem Worte der rein geschichtliche, auf welchem es einzig darum zu thun ist, das geschichtlich Gegebene, so weit es überhaupt möglich ist, in seiner reinen Objectivität aufzufassen” (SCHOLDER 1966: v). Likewise Adolf VON HARNACK (1900: xix) argued that “historical understanding is achieved only as one makes the effort of separating the distinctive essence of an important phenomenon from the temporary historical forms in which it is clothed.”

century Mediterranean people [were] not individualistic, but *dyadic* or group-orientated ...” (MALINA/NEYREY 1991: 72). In effect, at least by modern western standards, this amounts to thinking about people in terms of stereotypes; submerging any individuality beneath what is common, general, and presumably shared by a particular category (such as gender, ethnicity, age) to which a person is seen to belong.¹⁶² So Virgil’s Trojan can say, “Learn about all [Greeks] from this one [Greek]: *Ab uno disce omnes.*” (VIRGIL, *Aeneid* II 65)

In summary, although it seems strange and even perverse for [people of the twenty-first century] to know individuals through stereotypes, this type of understanding one’s self and others seems to typify the people in Luke’s narratives. When we know a person’s father and family (including gender and sibling rank), clan or tribe, ethnos, place of origin (region village) and trade, according to the canons of Luke’s world we truly know them. According to their ways of perceiving and describing, we genuinely know the essential and relevant information about them. (MALINA/NEYREY 1991: 89).

In my opinion, identity is perhaps best viewed as a multi-dimensional space within which a variety of texts—written, oral, and the socio-cultural context—blend and clash. These texts for Simon, of course, include the many quotations from a variety of sources—as detailed in this and previous chapters—representing diverse centres of culture and ideology, and divergent interpretations expressed over time. As such, identity cannot be seen as an object that exists in and of itself, offering the same face to each observer in every period of history. These observations will guide our conclusions about the identity of Simon, to which I will turn now.

¹⁶² The list of basic stereotypes nominated by *Social Criticism* as determinative for first century Mediterranean peoples’ self-understanding, include: Family and Clan; Place of Origin; Group of Origin; Inherited Craft-Trade; Parties-Groups.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

1. Preliminary Remarks

At the end of our study of Simon through a critical and analytical review of the sources—including literature extending from Graeco-Roman antiquity through to the fourth century of the Common Era, the New Testament account of Acts, and the writings of ancient Christian authors—the focal question of this study remains to be addressed: Was Simon Magus the first Gnostic?

Before proceeding to give a simple positive or negative answer to this question, there are several matters from our investigations that first need to be identified, in summary, as being foundational in shaping my response. First, due to only a modest number of texts at our disposal—some of them relatively difficult, and none of them firsthand—considerable limitations confront any Simon Research. This offers some explanation to why, despite the depth and extent of previous scholarship, a definite answer to the focal question of this study has been hindered, and the image of Simon has remained indistinct if not quite blurred at numerous points. Further, as the history of research demonstrated by tracing chronologically the significant responses of scholarship to questions raised by the portrait of Simon in the sources, the figure of Simon has appeared either sharper or more diffused through the lens and foci adopted by his respective investigators.

Second, the overview of sources revealed a degree of ambiguity surrounds *μαγ-* words in the literature of Graeco-Roman antiquity. While a development in the understanding and use of the noun *μάγος* was identified—from the 5th century BCE to the 3rd century CE—the claim could not be sustained that only a pejorative sense of the word remained by the first century CE. Evidence supports an enduring positive and respectful use of the noun *μάγος* among educated Greeks and

Romans. Further, as a result of our investigations it was suggested that modifications are necessary to the interpretation of Acts 8, which describes a certain Simon having been active for a considerable time in [the] city of Samaria: μαγεύων. Luke conceals the specific activities of Simon behind this ambiguous participle, however practices commonly associated with the μάγοι in antiquity were dream-sending, divination and forecasting the future, as well as distinctive teachings and lifestyle. The true “mageia” of the “magos” was an ancient tradition of wisdom, and a service of the gods, rather than the doubtful dealings of some charlatan.

Third, it was argued that the categories of “magos” and “Gnostic” need not be viewed as mutually exclusive perceptions and descriptions of Simon, but can be viewed as complementary assessments. In other words, the division in scholarship over Luke’s portrayal of Simon in Acts 8—namely, does Luke downgrade a prominent Gnostic figure to a mere magician, or elevate a common magician to the status of a quasi-divine Gnostic figure—is a modern polarisation of aspects of Simon’s identity which evidence suggests originally existed in concert rather than conflict.

Finally, it was claimed that any answer given to the focal question of this study depends on what understanding of the word “Gnostic” is chosen. Here scholarship is presented with a dilemma not unlike the confusion experienced by Alice in conversation with Humpty Dumpty during her incredible adventures in Wonderland:

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things?”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master? That’s all.”¹

An “objective” observer to the history of debate concerning the meaning of “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” could not help but identify “definition” as a fundamental obstacle to every attempt to answer the question of Simon’s identity as “first Gnostic.” Our brief overview of the development and use of the words “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” described how originally the word γνωστικὸς in classical Greek literature was used in reference to certain human qualities and was never applied as a personal descriptive of individuals or groups. Indeed, the application of the word

¹ L. CARROLL, *Through the Looking Glass (and what Alice found there)*, London [1872]: Victor Gollincz Ltd., 1986: 108–109.

γνωστικός to individuals and to distinct social groups, in the second century CE writings of ancient Christian authors, was a significant change. Even so their use of the term is scant and often ambiguous; sometimes used in a neutral positive light, but more often applied negatively. There are few instances where “Gnostic” was claimed by ancient Christian authors to be a self-given name, but in every occurrence the context indicates that this name was chosen because of the qualities associated with the original and classical use of the word γνωστικός. The complete absence of the word as a self-given name in surviving Gnostic literature remains a note of caution to any use of the word without qualification, because of its often pejorative and limiting nature.

On the other hand, the word “Gnosticism” is widely seen as a modern construct employed initially by scholars as a convenient category to accommodate and study those groups and individuals nominated by ancient Christian writers as having called themselves Gnostics. In the history of scholarship, however, the term Gnosticism has suffered from a lack of clarity in classification due to a plurality of definitions of what constitutes Gnosticism, and a resultant debate over which figures and groups qualify being counted as “Gnostic.”

Consequently, in answering the focal question of this study we are faced with a choice of how broad (and so, with less clarity) and inclusive to define our use of the terms “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism.” It is proposed that we approach the question of Simon’s identity from three distinct perspectives: (1), from the Messina definition of Gnosticism; (2), from the viewpoint of ancient Christian writers; and (3), from a select number of reconstructed original traditions, or sayings, of Simon. This approach is followed in light of previously outlined modern assumptions about identity; namely, that identity is not an inherent quality of individuals, but is generated in interaction with others. The identity of Simon never existed in and of itself, offering the same face to each observer in every period of history. So, for research, as equally important as whoever Simon was “historically” are the ways he was perceived by others; to identify the unique set of overlapping psychological and sociological factors that generated his identity.

2. *The Messina Definition and Simon*

If we proceed now to apply the consensus guidelines of the Messina definition to surviving reports about Simon, in doing so we approach our

question with a relatively broad definition—the Messina conference producing a list of characteristics of “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” that were descriptive of phenomena rather than presenting a precise definition. If one asks, in the sense of this definition, “Was Simon a Gnostic?” then a tentative yes answer may be given, as the comparisons in Table 7 indicate.

However, this agreement is not everything it first appears. My obvious caution in tentatively responding to the question of Simon’s identity on the basis of the Messina agreement is at least twofold. First, the Table of Comparison requires an assumption that cannot be sustained. It presumes that even though the word Gnosticism was never used by ancient Christian writers—nor was an equivalent notion ever entertained—that Messina and these ancient Christian writers described and labelled essentially the same groupings of phenomena: religious thought, practice, and experiences. However this is not so. The criterion used by later Christian authors, from Irenaeus onwards, to identify and critique the so-called Gnostics was not one of phenomenological similarity but of false teaching. In other words, the danger of tabulating two sets of characteristics, as in Table 7, is that we assume typological correspondence equates with essence. However the results produced may be of as little value as a classic syllogism:

(major premise)	All Gnostics claim special knowledge
(minor premise)	Simon claimed special knowledge
(conclusion)	Simon was a Gnostic

Second, the Messina Conference guidelines are by nature a composite list of agreed characteristics of Gnostic and Gnosticism. Consequently, not every characteristic will be fully present in some groups or individuals as in others. Further, the paradigm only seeks lines of correspondence and leaves undetected any number of characteristics which might place apparent agreements in doubt. In the case of Simon, while there are aspects of his reported teaching that are impossible to comprehend apart from the theogony and cosmology of Gnostic mythology, there are some remarkably un-Gnostic features as well that bear no resemblance to the developed Gnostic systems of the late 2nd–3rd centuries CE.

The guidelines of Messina attempted to compensate for these and other variations through its accommodating categories of pre- and proto-Gnostic. Pre-Gnostic are those elements present in pre-Christian times which were later incorporated into Gnosticism proper. Proto-Gnostic are the early and incipient forms of Gnosticism which preceded the second century CE.

<p>TABLE 7</p> <p>A comparison between ancient Christian reports of Simon's teaching and the list of characteristics describing "Gnostic" and "Gnosticism" according to the definition of Messina 1966.</p>	
<p>GNOSTICISM ACCORDING TO MESSINA</p>	<p>SIMON ACCORDING TO ANCIENT CHRISTIAN WRITERS</p>
<p><i>Ontological aspects</i></p> <p>A downward movement of the divine, whose periphery (often called Sophia [Wisdom] or Ennoia [Thought]) submits to the fate of entering into a crisis and producing—even if only indirectly—this world of fate birth and death ...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helen is Simon's πρώτη έννοια • Helen is the <i>mater omnium</i> • Helen descends to this world and generates the angels and powers • Angels and powers created the world • Helen detained by jealous angels, and suffers at their hands • Helen prevented from returning upwards to her father
<p>DUALISM ON A MONISTIC BACKGROUND</p> <p><i>Anthropological aspects</i></p> <p>The presence of a divine spark dormant in humankind, needing to be reawakened</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A latent incorruptible, blessed condition exists potentially in every human being • The creator angels enslave the minds of the people of this world
<p><i>Soteriological aspects</i></p> <p>The idea of divine consubstantiality—the divine substance of one's transcendent self is imprisoned and in need of being awakened, released and actualised</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmigration of Helen's soul • Simon redeems Helen from bondage • Simon saves people through his own unique intelligence • Simon saves people by making himself known • Those who are redeemed are free to live as they please

If we attempt to understand Simon strictly from those features in the reports of ancient Christian writers, and from reconstructed original sayings or traditions—not accounted for by the Messina guidelines—then one might present a case for Simon being a pre-Gnostic figure. As the “Standing One” he offers access and reintegration with the divine through his unique position and knowledge. Yet, again, not all remaining evidence can be located completely under this category. For example, the teachings attributed to Simon appear to be more accommodating of Greek mythology and contemporary philosophical rather than pre-Gnostic or proto-Gnostic speculations; and, his supposed understanding of the creation of the world through angels is perhaps better seen as an idea in the process of development rather than a clearly defined anthropological and cosmological dualism.

Unfortunately, the agreed definition provided by Messina fails to identify Simon conclusively from its list of characteristics. There are features still unaccounted for, and other aspects still not explained. This inadequacy has been reflected in almost two generations of research since the Messina conference. There has been an almost wholesale shift beyond comprehensive theories about Gnosticism to the recognition and investigation of a diverse body of Gnostic literature. Scholars continue to look for the impetus behind the development of Gnostic groups and teachings, suggesting that specific events and/or experiences hold significant clues and insights.

3. Ancient Christian Writers and Simon

Ancient Christian writers did not classify their information about Simon, or so-called Gnostic groups and individuals, with the same focus and precision demanded by modern scholarship. It is useless for modern research to attempt then to distil a comprehensive and reliable definition of Gnosticism from the heresy catalogues of early Christian literature, simply because these ancient defenders of faith never intended to record the hallmarks of Gnosticism, as such, for the benefit of posterity. Instead, their purpose was to identify what they labelled heresy. This charge of heresy was made on the basis of their declared “canon” or rule of truth; namely, that the truth was announced by prophets, taught by Jesus Christ, delivered by the apostles, and preserved by traditions. So, the resultant heresy lists were not compiled on the basis of phenomenological similarity, but on a common deficiency in, if not denial of, matters of truth. Table 8

TABLE 8 A comparison between charges levelled by ancient Christian writers against alleged “Gnostics” and their reports about Simon.	
ACCUSATIONS AGAINST “GNOSTICS” IN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN LITERATURE	SIMON ACCORDING TO ANCIENT CHRISTIAN WRITERS
<p><i>Ontological aspects</i></p> <p>[They teach ...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the existence of a power sent from on high as a power of God • the existence of an ageless aeon in a virgin spirit • an unknown Father who gives his prognosis to Ennoia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon acclaimed as the δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ • Helen is Simon’s πρώτη ἔννοια • Helen is the <i>mater omnium</i> • Simon claims Helen is the Holy Spirit, and he is πρῶτος θεός
<p><i>Cosmological aspects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angels and powers below created the world <p><i>Anthropological aspects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is death and destruction of the body, and reintegration only of the soul with the divine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helen was Simon’s first thought, by whom he formed angels and archangels who created the world • Simon claimed the world would be dissolved • Unless the soul achieves its divine potentiality it expires with the perishing of human life
<p><i>Theological aspects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deviate from the rule of truth, and denigrate God by divisions in the divine, teaching another God beyond the Creator • Blaspheme by introducing theological fictions that destroy the substance of faith; teach Greek heresy not connected with Christ <p><i>Soteriological aspects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretend a superior knowledge other than that mystically revealed through Christ • Freedom from the teachings of the prophets, who derived them from the world creating angels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon appears among the Jews as Son, in Samaria as Father, and to the nations as the Holy Spirit • Simon acknowledged as “first God” • Angels created the world • Simon celebrated magical rites • Simon claimed the originating principle of the universe was fire. He plagiarised this teaching from Heraclitus • Simon confers salvation by making himself known as the Standing One [Christ?], through his own unique intelligence. • People saved through the grace of Simon and not through individual righteous action(s)

attempts to compare the charges of ancient Christian writers directed against alleged Gnostics with their reports about Simon.

These public perceptions of Simon are important ingredients to his identity. They arose in communities that perceived human identity in non-individualistic terms; submerging some of the very features modern minds consider distinctive beneath what was common, general, and understood to be shared by the group to which a person was seen to belong. For example, although there is considerable doubt whether Irenaeus had direct personal contact with any Simonians, it is clear that in attacking the Valentinians, Irenaeus was convinced he could refute all other heretics at the same time (*Adv. Haer.* II 31,1). Irenaeus applied his principle of tradition to the teachings he opposed; and, as with his own dogma assumed that all Gnostic teaching and practice could be derived from persons in the apostolic period. In this way Irenaeus located the origin of all heretical teachings in the person of Simon reported in Acts 8. This being the case, in Irenaeus' estimation, every type of Gnostic teaching in his own day could be rejected because Peter the apostle had already rebuked and repudiated them in Simon.

Among the Gnostic teachings exposed by ancient Christian authors, and singled out for special attention, were dualistic teachings and outlooks which challenged Scripture and tradition. These views were believed to be the result of bad influences: magic, astrology, demonic inspiration, intellectual sickness, moral failure, false reading of Scripture, Greek philosophy, and secular education. According to ancient Christian writers these dualistic teachings had dangerous social and political implications since they questioned what was universally received (IRENÆUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 10,2; 30,13). One issue at point was the atomisation of the divine, which ancient Christian writers claimed had no small consequence: it amounted to atheism: "They are without God in their thinking, in their character, and in their behaviour: ἀθέους ... κατὰ γνώμην καὶ κατὰ τρόπον καὶ κατὰ ἔργον (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* I Prooem. 8).

An attempt to view the identity of Simon through the eyes of ancient Christian writers, therefore, is a necessary and important perspective not to be overlooked. However, such an endeavour is confronted by fundamental challenges, since these primary documents are not only individually distinctive—spanning various temporal, social, cultural, and geographical contexts—but also, as ancient documents, they are collectively distant from 21st century categories.

One such fundamental methodological challenge remains the question of definition. As already noted, ancient Christian authors did

not construct a single category called “Gnosticism” to analyse and assess Gnostic groups and individuals known to them. Although modern research now universally agrees that it is invalid to adopt criteria informed by theological prejudice to categorise religious groups and individuals, this has been the effect historically through research that has uncritically handled the diverse body of phenomena in heresy catalogues as the foundation of a category called “Gnosticism.”

So, Simon research needs to eliminate as far as possible the modern construct “Gnosticism” from its investigations. As RUDOLPH (1996: 45–46) comments, “Research has to use general terms [and] ... once such terms have been taken over by scholars long ago from ancient traditions, they could hardly be disposed with again. In our case ‘Gnostics’ has proved its worth and is very much to the point; this is less true of Gnosticism.”

The task remains to assess the Simon reported by ancient Christian writers, in their own terms. In their view Simon was principally the Father of all heresy—*ex quo universae haereses substiterunt*—and only “first Gnostic” by implication. The nature of his “Gnostic” identity remains a matter of debate. That he exercised and taught a different source of knowledge than the apostles, is clear from the sources. That Simon practiced the ancient traditions of the Magoi has been argued in this study. That he was a pre- or proto-Gnostic is difficult to answer on the basis of early Christian evidence, because these are categories associated with the modern construct “Gnosticism.”

4. “Simon” on Simon

In chapter 5 a cautious attempt was made to identify, beneath ancient Christian reports of Simon’s teaching, possible original traditions and sayings as a contribution to eventual conclusions about a “Gnostic Simon.” To reconstruct, from fragmentary evidence, information that approximates listening to Simon’s own voice may be a highly dubious if not impossible task. However, this approach is followed in an endeavour to provide a third level of investigation into Simon’s identity. Already “professional” and “public” perspectives have been considered. Now an attempt will be made to present something that approximates aspects of the “private” identity of Simon, similar to former research efforts to locate the “essence” or “spirit” of Gnosticism in specific events and or experiences.

Research has hinted for some time that something is missing in all the decades of detailed analysis and interpretation concerning Simon. It is suggested that beyond questions of philology, philosophy, and history, Simon research needs to more earnestly consider sociological and even psychological factors in its efforts to understand the identity of Simon. In addition to an ongoing evaluation of surviving written texts a greater appreciation needs to be given to the degree of orality in ancient Mediterranean cultures and how the Simon story developed within the media world of the first four centuries of the Common Era. This includes more credence being given to different forms of social analysis.

Obviously, great care needs to be exercised in any attempt to draw conclusions about social reality through a critical analysis of written texts containing mythological symbols. However, innovative approaches to these texts are needed, because it is difficult for the modern reader to imagine anyone having written anything like the demiurgical myths found in ancient literature without the impetus of some socio-political event or experience.

One of the features that modern research has often identified as being characteristic of Gnosticism, in an attempt to locate its essence, is an alleged “anti-cosmic” or “world-rejection” attitude.² However, beyond the simple recognition that numerous Gnostic myths refer to the creation of the universe by inferior beings or angels—separate from the supreme power, who hold humankind in ignorance and prevent the actualisation of their true self—little explanation has been provided by scholarship to describe what this language implies about the people who espoused these and other beliefs. How did their anti-cosmic attitude exhibit itself? In socio-political ways? Through anti-social behaviour, radical ethical behaviours, or anarchy?

If we proceed now to look at Simon through the fragmentary biographical evidence preserved by ancient Christian writers, what do we find? Does an anti-cosmic, world-hating Simon emerge?

...[A]fter Christ's ascension into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods; and they were not only not persecuted by you, but even deemed worthy of honours. There was a Samaritan, Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar, and in your royal city of Rome, did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a god, and as a god was honoured by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between

² Cf. JONAS 1967a: 241–265; YAMAUCHI 1984: 15; FILORAMO 1990: 55.

the two bridges, and bore this inscription, in the language of Rome, “Simoni Deo Sancto,” “To Simon the holy God.” And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first god ... (JUSTIN, *Apol.* I 26,1–3)

Tradition locates Simon socially and geographically by calling him a Samaritan, born in the village of Gitta. In a previous chapter the question was posed whether or not Simon could have been a Persian μάγος by descent, whose family had ended up in Samaria through one of numerous recorded migrations? It is most likely that at some stage in his development in the ancient practices and traditions of his ancestors that Simon would have travelled between a number of cities in search of clients and a receptive cultural scene.

If other traditions are correct Simon eventually travelled to Caesarea, Alexandria, and finally to Rome. Justin’s claim that Antoninus Pius erected a statue in honour of Simon equates not only with his success as a Magos, but reflects a relatively high level of involvement in Roman society; perhaps among the more economically and politically powerful. While Simon’s reported success and favour in Rome does not imply a public or political involvement, on the other hand it does not suggest rejection or hostility toward society or political powers.

But the angels and the powers below—who, he says, created the world—caused the transference from one body to another of (Helen’s soul); and subsequently she stood on the roof of a house in Tyre, a city of Phoenicia, and on going down thither (Simon professed to have) found her. (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,3)

... this woman ... the mother of all, by whom, in the beginning, he conceived in his mind [the thought] of forming angels and archangels ... by whom he also declared this world was formed. (IRENÆUS, *Adv. Haer.* I 23,2)

Early Christian accounts of Simon suggest that considerable efforts were invested to reduce the distance between Simon’s religious tradition and the broader cultural context of the first century. While reference to Simon as “first God” and Helen as “first thought” is difficult to translate into immediately accessible information for a 21st century mindset, Hippolytus, for example, claims that considerable shaping influences of Greek mythology and philosophy are evident in the teachings of Simon; in the case of this fragment, the literary traditions about Helen of Troy. Irenaeus, on the other hand, reports that Simon referred Helen as *mater omnium*, and with this language it is impossible to avoid strong allusions to the Great Earth Mother. Irenaeus also mentions later in the same chapter that followers of Simon had images of Simon and Helen in the

shapes of Jupiter and Minerva (*Adv. Haer.* I 23,4). It should be noted that images of philosophers and other leading figures were relatively common in Roman households during this period.

So the impression given by these reports, rather than witnessing a need for cultural tension, or active rejection, being a constant in the psyche of Simon or other alleged “world-haters,” there are clear indications of efforts being made to reconcile creation myths and biblical traditions with elements more evident in Graeco-Roman mythology and philosophy. Scholarship has often labelled this religious accommodation as Gnostic syncretism, which is another way of describing the processes leading to a removal or reduction of cultural barriers.

But, again, those who become followers of this imposter—I mean Simon the Magos—indulge in the same practices, and irrationally allege the necessity of promiscuous intercourse. (HIPPOLYTUS, *Ref.* VI 19,5)

Among the traditional accusations levelled at Gnostics are the rejection of conventional rules of social order, the removal of religious scruples, and the practice of deviant sexual activities. However, WILLIAMS is correct to conclude that:

[T]he actions described are really socially deviant only if we think of Judaism and Christianity as the norm. From the standpoint of the larger world in which these people lived from day to day, it is probably better to understand such behaviour in exactly the opposite spirit ... as behaviour that looks more like social conformity than like social deviance. (WILLIAMS 1996: 103)

As detailed already in chapter 5, the Magoi are thought to have practiced incest as part of ritual duty and as a means of preserving the caste. In the likelihood that Simon advocated a freedom that ostensibly included sexual intercourse and promiscuity that didn't exclude incest, then these practices—as among the Persians—would have been considered normal, if not meritorious in a religious sense. Namely, incest was thought to be the best instrument against the influence of evil powers, and among the highest of virtues because it mirrored activities within the divine world; that is, the union of male and female aspects of the divine. Children born of these liaisons were said to be of superior birth. Even today, in the modern context, peculiar marriage rites and practices are not unheard of; even the expectation that certain types of union can merit celestial rewards, as they mirror the completed relationship between God and the faithful.

It is a somewhat unexpected discovery, however, that the evidence in the sources does not equate with the defined characteristic of Gnostics displaying an anti-cosmic attitude. Indeed, rather than reclusive or rejective in their behaviour, many so-called Gnostic groups appear to have been socially active and accommodating. Ironically, like the proverbial pot calling the kettle black, ancient Christian writers are the ones who appear as the real world-haters; through their radical demands about distinctive lifestyles that resist prevailing cultural, social, and political norms.

5. *Final Remarks*

What are we to conclude about Simon? Was he the first Gnostic? My work has outlined why a simple, comprehensive, and definitive answer of “yes” or “no” regrettably cannot be given. In part this is due to the nature of the evidence available and differences over terminology, but it also reflects the complex nature of human identity. In the case of Simon, he has been viewed through many different eyes, and his identity has never been an object that has existed in and of itself, offering the same face to each observer in every period of history. Simon materials are localised and conditioned by time and space—likewise all observers have specific temporal, psychological, social, and cultural contexts that affect and inform their perceptions and descriptions of him—and so Simon’s identity is never apprehended in the abstract but always in relation to a given place and time.

From the viewpoint of Messina there are sufficient grounds to answer a tentative “yes” to him being a pre-Gnostic in the terms of the definition; yet, as noted, there are non-compliant factors in the reports of Simon’s teaching and activities which question this apparent correspondence.

From the viewpoint of ancient Christian writers there are clear grounds to conclude that Simon was considered a heretic and the author of all heresies. Further, that he practiced ancient magic, was influenced by Greek philosophy, and entertained nascent forms of Gnostic cosmology and anthropology; or, at least his teachings accommodated a wide range of opinions and practices, which the emerging form of normative Christianity—represented by Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius—considered both theologically and morally deviant.

From the viewpoint of “Simon,” or at least from the evidence of his reconstructed teachings, there are reasons to conclude he was a

charismatic figure adept in the traditions of the Magoi, who exercised considerable ability, authority, and influence. A self-proclaimed expert in divine things, Simon would not have rejected the notion of being a “Gnostic;” at least not in the original classical sense of the word. He taught a source of truth and salvation that differed from mainstream Jewish thought and practice; he claimed the preeminent role of “Standing One”—some called him the “first God,” Christians viewed him as a “Christ pretender”—and he enjoyed public favour and widespread respect from Samaria to Rome.

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