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## THE SCRIPTURES ARE SUFFICIENT FOR INSTRUCTION: INTERPRETING ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ IN ATHANASIUS' VITA ANTONII

*Povzetek:* V življenjepis svetega Antona Puščavnika, ki ga je napisal sveti Atanazij iz Aleksandrije, se kot eden izmed vodilnih problemov pojavlja παιδεία; pozornost, ki jo avtor posveča temu vprašanju, doseže vrh v Antonovem pogovoru s poganskimi filozofi. Poganska παιδεία, ki jo avtor izrecno zavrača, pa je po drugi strani s številnimi manj izrecnimi aluzijami na pogansko biografsko izročilo deležna tudi svojeke potrditve. To dozdevno protislovje je razumljivo šele v širšem kontekstu, ki ga obravnava pričujoči prispevek; v kontekstu, ki upošteva tako dejansko vlogo, kakršno je imela παιδεία v pozni antiki, kot tudi vlogo vzgoje v zgodnji Cerkev. Kaže, da je Antonova polemika bolj kot sočasnim poganskim intelektualnim elitam namenjena "akademskemu krščanstvu" ter njegovim origenističnim težnjam.

*Abstract:* The Life of Saint Antony the Hermit by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria gives a significant amount of attention to the problem of παιδεία; it is a kind of leitmotif that culminates in Antony's discourse with pagan philosophers. Yet while the pagan παιδεία is explicitly renounced, it is also indirectly upheld by several less explicit references to pagan biographical tradition. This apparent contradiction makes sense within its broader context, as described by the present article; a context that takes into account both the actual function of παιδεία in late antiquity and the role of education within the early Church. It appears that the addressees of this polemic are not only contemporary pagan intellectual elites; Antony speaks to the representatives of "academic Christianity" and their Origenist inclinations.

Ἐλεγεν αὐτοῖς τῇ Αἰγυπτιακῇ φωνῇ ταῦτα· Τὰς ...  
Γραφὰς ἱκανὰς εἶναι πρὸς διδασκαλίαν.<sup>1</sup>

In a prominent passage in the *Life of Antony*, one of the founding texts of the monastic movement and an influential model for later

<sup>1</sup> *Vita Antonii* 16.1. "He spoke these words to them in the Egyptian language: 'The Scriptures are sufficient for us for instruction.'" Translations of the *Life of Antony* are based on the one by Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis. – During the writing of this article, Averil Cameron, Marko Marinčič and Kajetan Gantar provided invaluable advice, jovial exhortation and considerable structural improvements, for which I remain indebted. The obstinate deficiencies that still linger are, as always, mine.

Christian lives,<sup>2</sup> the saintly hermit comes into contact with several pagan philosophers. They have come to visit him, “thinking that they would mock him” because of his inadequate education, ὅτι μὴ μεμάθηκε γράμματα.<sup>3</sup> Instead of finding a fool for their unhealthy merrymaking, they themselves become the object of his gentle irony and have to depart “astonished because they had witnessed such great understanding in an unlettered person.” The author goes on to explain that, despite the lack of any formal erudition, Antony’s speech was seasoned with divine salt, τὸν δὲ λόγον εἶχεν ἡρτυμένον τῷ θείῳ ἄλατι, and the metaphor is clearly used to underline the futile uselessness of the secular education which failed to help the philosophers achieve their goal.

Dispute with the pagan savants goes on for several paragraphs. How is one to understand this elaborate monkish attack on the quintessential representatives of the classical system of learning, the sudden Athanasian charge on the proxies of παιδεία? It would not be particularly surprising in itself; after all, this comes more than two centuries after Tertullian’s battle cry: *Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? Quid Academiae et Ecclesiae? Quid haereticis et Christianis?*<sup>4</sup> Yet in a text that its author had interlaced with the results of that same παιδεία, weaving a web of subtle classical allusions and going as far as quoting from the biographies of the pagan philosophers, the likes of which are now being ridiculed, this certainly strikes the reader as an important contradiction. The discovery of this connection – connection of a Christian archetype to its pagan literary background – was made almost a century ago. Richard Reitzenstein was certain that the presence of parallels and quotations from the late antique lives of philosophers betrayed the very essence of the text, namely its Pythagorean character.<sup>5</sup> His confidence was, perhaps, premature; later scholars have drawn attention to a weak point in his argument. The

<sup>2</sup> While renewed doubts about the authorship of the *Vita Antonii* have generated a significant amount of discussion, they have failed to influence the *communis opinio*; for a quick overview see William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–13. Further and exhaustive bibliography regarding Athanasian research was collected by George Dion Dragas, *Saint Athanasius of Alexandria: Original Research and New Perspectives* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> *Vita Antonii* 73.

<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius: Ein philologischer Beitrag zur Geschichte des Mönchtums*, Sitzungsberichte des Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1914), 34.

existence of pagan analogies and connections is incontestable and significant, but how is one to account for the fact that they are constantly accompanied by biblical ones – indeed, that scriptural quotes appear in numbers which literally dwarf the frequency of the classical passages?<sup>6</sup>

It appears that the author of the *Life of Antony* decided to simultaneously use and denounce the fruits of παιδεία. Though this be madness, yet there is method init; while the pagan and the Christian concept of education seem to be gridlocked in inexorable opposition, the author had good reasons for employing both within the same narrative. To understand his intentions and motives, one has to take into account the knotty role of παιδεία in late antiquity. The problem of education, a constantly reappearing leitmotif in the *Life of Antony*, provides a crucial insight into the inner logic of the text.

## 1. Παιδεία in Late Antiquity

The concept of παιδεία came into the focus of scholarly interest with the publication of Werner Jaeger's monumental trilogy.<sup>7</sup> Jaeger,<sup>8</sup> one of the most prominent classicists of the century and a disciple of Wilamovitz, understood education as an interpretative key to the entire Greek culture. Ultimately, his aim was defined by a conviction that it is impossible to have any educational purpose or knowledge without a fundamental comprehension of Greek culture, combined with a

<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to give a precise figure, but they seem to come in hundreds. See, for instance, G. J. M. Bartelink, "Die literarische Gattung der Vita Antonii: Struktur und Motive," *Vigiliae Christianae* 36 (1982): 52, where the number of Bible-related passages is estimated at about two hundred. An even more generous assessment is given by Tim Vivian, "Introduction," in *The Life of Antony by Athanasius of Alexandria: The Coptic Life and The Greek Life*, ed. Tim Vivian, Cistercian Studies 202 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2003), xxvi, who performed a "rough count" resulting in "some four hundred references or allusions."

<sup>7</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: Die Formung des griechischen Menschen*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1933-1947). Due to the war, an English translation of the trilogy was actually published before the original as *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, 3 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939-1945).

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis and further bibliography, see William M. Calder III, ed. *Werner Jaeger Reconsidered: Proceedings of the Second Oldfather Conference, held on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 26-28, 1990*, Illinois Studies in the History of Classical Scholarship 2 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), although some of the papers are not written exactly *sine ira et studio*. Charles Rowan Beye, in a review in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 03.05.02 (1992), has noticed "a good deal of gratuitously negative reconstruction of Jaeger's motives and behavior."

highly aristocratic perception of culture and civilisation as such. From the very beginning, in 1935, this approach was criticised by Bruno Snell, who found it both philologically and conceptually wanting.<sup>9</sup> Yet the main problem was elsewhere. Following the agenda of his Third Humanism, Jaeger presented παιδεία as a fundamentally ethical concept, one that uses the classics to equip the individual with the right kind of moral, cultural and civic virtues, which in turn enable this individual to join the aristocratic endeavour of further development. Snell saw this as using texts detached from historical reality and therefore without any significance, open to political manipulation of any creed.<sup>10</sup> The course of events quickly proved Snell's observations to be well grounded.<sup>11</sup> In the aftermath of the war, the belief in any close correlation between intellectual and moral dimensions of civilisation was effectively shattered and Jaeger's work has lost a lot of its scholarly influence since.<sup>12</sup>

But the term, which seemed to be on the brink of academic extinction, suddenly bounced back with renewed vitality: this time mainly with regard to the period for which such use of the word is actually amply attested, namely late antiquity.<sup>13</sup> The point of view, however, has changed significantly. As mentioned, Jaeger's concept of παιδεία was essentially aristocratic, and it is precisely this trait of the phenomenon that caught the attention of the late twentieth century, although not in the way Jaeger himself understood it. The cultural ideal, allegedly instrumental in fashioning the ethical character of an individual, has entirely disappeared from contemporary discourse; in accordance with the modern sensibilities, the influence of παιδεία is now perceived predominantly with regard to the social power and influence it can bring. With the Socratic idea of the unavoidable moral

<sup>9</sup> Bruno Snell, review of Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: Die Formung des griechischen Menschen* 1, Berlin 1934, *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 197 (1935). Reprinted as "Besprechung von W. Jaeger, Paideia," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> Snell, "Besprechung von W. Jaeger, Paideia," 51; 53–54.

<sup>11</sup> Beat Näf, "Werner Jaegers Paideia: Entstehung, Kulturpolitische Absichten und Rezeption," in Calder, *Werner Jaeger Reconsidered*.

<sup>12</sup> See Manfred Landfester, "Die Naumburger Tagung 'Das Problem des Klassischen und die Antike' (1930): Der Klassikbegriff Werner Jaegers; seine Voraussetzung und seine Wirkung," in *Alturtumswissenschaft in den 20er Jahren: Neue Fragen und Impulse*, ed. Hellmut Flashar (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Recently, for instance, in Barbara E. Borg, ed. *Paideia: The World of the Second Sophistic*, Millenium Studies in the Culture and History of the First Millenium C.E. 2 (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

impact of education being quite discredited, the debate is now being framed in terms of social elites and political roles of cultural figures.<sup>14</sup>

The idea was developed by Peter Brown in his book on *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*.<sup>15</sup> The nature of political power in that period was clearly autocratic, Brown argues; from this point of view, Tacitus was right in his *Dialogus*, rhetoric as a political art belonged to a time long gone. Yet in the end, the grip that those in charge could actually exercise was extraordinarily weak. “The wielders of power were only too easily isolated from the world they claimed to control”<sup>16</sup> for various reasons, ranging from the difficulties caused by the distance between the cities alone, to the uncertainty of one’s position, due to the unpredictable influences lobbying with the superiors, or even the silent threat of persistent boycott from the side of one’s subjects. Here, the classical παιδεία would help both the ruler and the ruled. It was a system, shared by the elites of the entire empire, by both the governor and the governed; as such, it could serve as a vital face-saving medium which could mask the unpleasant realities of the power struggle. “Emperors and governors gave way, not because they were frequently unsure of themselves, ill-informed, or easily corrupted; rather, they had been moved by the sheer grace and wisdom of carefully composed speeches.”<sup>17</sup>

That was the true potential of rhetorical education in late antiquity. Despite the many laments intoned by the Roman authors who considered it dead and gone together with the old republican system, παιδεία actually reinvented itself as the decisive factor and flourished among those who knew how important it was to tip the scales at exactly the right moment. Seemingly obsolete and futile, the central position which the classics held in the curriculum, as well as the endless repetition of the *controversiae* and *suasoriae*, had an important role to play; no wonder it went on for so long.

<sup>14</sup> As in Jaap-Jan Flinterman, *Power, “Paideia” and Pythagoreanism: Greek Identity, Conceptions of the Relationship between Philosophers and Monarchs, and Political Ideas in Philostratus’ “Life of Apollonius”* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1995). Another example is the work of Carsten Drecoll, “Sophisten und Archonten: Paideia als gesellschaftliches Argument bei Libanios,” in *Paideia: The World of the Second Sophistic*, ed. Barbara E. Borg (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Examples of this attitude abound in Brown's book; at least one of the more poetically charming may serve as an illustration here.<sup>18</sup> Libanius, for instance, reports of an indicative event of a new governor coming to a province with his staff. They were met by Libanius, who started the conversation with the most important question of them all: ἡρόμην, εἰ μέμνηται τῶν περὶ Ὀδυσσεῶς εἰρημένων Ὀμήρῳ καὶ ὅστις ἦν πρὸς τοὺς Ἰθακησίους.<sup>19</sup> How did Odysseus rule when king of Ithaca? There was only one correct answer: "Gently as a father." What Libanius wanted to hear was a particular quote from the Odyssey – ὡς οὐ τις μέμνηται Ὀδυσσεύος θείοιο / λαῶν, οἷσιν ἄνασσε, πατήρ δ' ὡς ἥπιος ἦεν<sup>20</sup> – which he did, and promptly; the newcomers had obviously had the right kind of schooling. It was this proof of identity, or perhaps legitimacy, as Brown demonstrates, which established the atmosphere of mutual trust and enabled the provincial government to function smoothly.

Brown's realistic perception of the role of παιδεία inspired a new range of studies that confirmed his theories. Raffaella Cribiore, whose thorough investigation focuses on education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, likewise emphasises the importance of its social dimension.<sup>21</sup> Her main metaphor for the phenomenon is taken from Lucian, who describes the experience of learning as the ascent of a very steep hill, which can only be achieved by the select few; but the ones who actually reach it are then able to look down upon the lesser mortals as if they were mere ants, οἷον μύρμηκας ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕψους ἐπισκοποῦντές τινας τοὺς ἄλλους.<sup>22</sup> Taken at its face value, one might interpret this image as not very different from the contemporary situation, where the number of students who stay in the system until the very end is likewise only a fraction of those who begin. Yet the evidence, as Cribiore and her papyri point out, suggests a different conclusion. All education was essentially private and the pool of beginners, itself composed of a significantly smaller percentage of the population than it is today, was already dominated by the elite. So was further selection. "Class and status – and, to a much lesser extent, merit – determined who continued."<sup>23</sup> While half a century ago Werner Jaeger was still able to believe that the men of παιδεία had represented the

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>19</sup> Libanius, *Orationes* 46.3.

<sup>20</sup> Homer, *Odyssea* 2.233.

<sup>21</sup> Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001; reprint, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Lucian, *Hermotimus* 5. Cf. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 3.

best and the brightest of their generation, contemporary scholarship seems to be less impressed with their character; as one looks closer, it appears that those “who reached the summit of rhetorical instruction were not necessarily the intellectuals, but those who craved certain positions in law and administration.”<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Education and the Early Church

From this social perspective, the complex relations between the early Church and the world of classical education suddenly appear much clearer. The core of the conflict was not entirely at the level of dogma; if even some of the pagans, from Xenophanes of Colophon onwards, were able to explain away the uncomfortably anthropomorphic gods of their own mythology and read the classics in an allegorical way, or even as mere literature, for the sake of rhetorical, literary and linguistic competence, the Church could have easily done the same – and it sometimes did, as it will be shown. The social dimension was more difficult to deal with; did not accepting the code of the – prevailingly hostile – elite actually mean compromising one's own identity? The *Didascalía apostolorum* from the third century took an emphatically strong stand: *Quid tibi deest in verbo Dei ut ad illas gentiles fabulas pergas?*<sup>25</sup> The answer it gives is unambiguous: Nothing. There is no better history than the Books of Kings, no better eloquence than the Prophets, or better poetry than the Psalms. The message is unequivocal: *Ab omnibus igitur alienis et diabolicis scripturis fortiter te abstine!* As demonstrated by Henry-Irénée Marrou in his *History of Education in Antiquity*, the number of passages with this attitude is “embarrassingly large,” and more than that. While some of the well known passages, such as the anti-Ciceronian dream of Saint Jerome,<sup>26</sup> may function as the private opinion of an individual, the *Didascalía apostolorum* and others of its kind carry with them the canonical authority of the entire Church.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Didascalía apostolorum* 1.6.1–6.

<sup>26</sup> Hieronymus, *Epistulae* 22.30.

<sup>27</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), 321. This initially hostile attitude lost most of its meaning with the advent of Constantine and the eventual conversion of the elites, but its echoes can still be found in the later periods. Marrou gives another interesting example, the *Statutes of the Early Church* 16, compiled at the beginning of the sixth century, which actually prohibit the bishop from reading any pagan books. The same archaic prohibition is given by Isidore of Seville, *Sententiarum libri tres* 3.3, and reportedly survived as a part of canon law up to the twentieth century. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 446.

Still, as Christianity slowly found its way to the educated imperial elite, a different mentality emerged in its writings, a movement towards a new synthesis. This development is highlighted in Werner Jaeger's last book and a kind of epilogue to his trilogy, entitled *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*.<sup>28</sup> Although Jaeger's research on this topic was halted by his death<sup>29</sup> and later corrected to an extent, the material he has presented speaks for itself. From the very beginning, a strong current within Christianity was trying to adopt some of the ideals of classical παιδεία, to a surprising extent. An early example of this is the *Letter to the Corinthians*, written by Clement of Rome at the end of the first century, a text which shows a strong connection with the Greek system of education, both in form and in content. Its apparatus relies heavily on the Stoic tradition and goes as far as repeating passages from Greek tragedy.<sup>30</sup> Its conceptual agenda goes even further. Not surprisingly, one of the keywords in this letter is παιδεία; it is mostly used in its meaning from the Septuagint, translating a Hebrew word for chastisement, yet sometimes already incorporates its Greek connotation, referring to the written tradition.<sup>31</sup> "It is obvious that under the influence of the existence of the much-admired 'Greek παιδεία,' which was common knowledge for all men, a new concept of Christian παιδεία was being evolved."<sup>32</sup>

Another example of this trend, more than a century later, is Origen with his project of bringing Christian theology in line with Platonism. An articulate description of his mediating position, *a fortiori*, since it does not come from a Christian, is given by Porphyry.

<sup>28</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>29</sup> The author himself calls this booklet "a kind of down payment on what I hope will be a larger whole." He died in 1961, the year his book was published, and that larger whole never materialised. The book is a sketch and should be taken as such; this was soon pointed out by reviewers such as C. W. MacKauer, review of *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, *The Journal of Religion* 43 (1963). A harsh criticism of the text appeared thirty years later, published by Paul T. Keyser as "Werner Jaeger's *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*," in Calder, *Werner Jaeger Reconsidered*. It is based on the idea that Jaeger purposely ignored both Jewish and Gnostic sources, thus establishing a deceptive continuity between Greek and Christian culture. Given the scope of the book and the intentions of its author, that was hardly the case; Beyé, in his review, remains sceptical.

<sup>30</sup> Clemens, *Epistula I ad Corinthios* 20; a list of the examples of a peaceful cooperation in the universe seems to go back to Euripides, *Phoenissae* 535 ff., while a sentence in chapter 37, οἱ μεγάλοι δίχα τῶν μικρῶν οὐ δύνανται εἶναι, οὐτε οἱ μικροὶ δίχα τῶν μεγάλων, echoes both Sophocles, *Ajax* 158, and Euripides, *Aioles* fr. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. his phrase τὰ λόγια τῆς παιδείας τοῦ θεοῦ in 62.3.

<sup>32</sup> Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 117.



He describes Origen as a kind of double agent. Initially, he disappointed his colleagues by turning towards the barbarous venture of Christianity, despite having been brought up as a Greek, amidst Greek culture; Ὁριγένης δὲ Ἑλλήν ἐν Ἑλλησιν παιδευθεὶς λόγοις, πρὸς τὸ βάρβαρον ἐξώκειλεν τόλμημα.<sup>33</sup> Yet, Porphyry continues, his change was external; despite his Christian life, Origen had kept his Greek mentality, imparting a Greek meaning to all that foreign mythology; κατὰ μὲν τὸν βίον Χριστιανῶς ζῶν καὶ παρανόμως, κατὰ δὲ τὰς περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξας ἐλληνίζων τε καὶ τὰ Ἑλλήνων τοῖς ὀθνείοις ὑποβαλλόμενος μύθοις.<sup>34</sup> Origen, it turns out, “lived with Plato” and read all of the Platonist and Pythagorean literature; no wonder he decided to allegorise the Scripture. Plato had rejected the crude theological images of Homer and Hesiod as unfit for παιδεία; in a similar manner, Origen saw the divine anthropomorphism of the Old Testament as an inadequate expression of truth, at least when interpreted literally. By his distinction of literal, historical and spiritual meaning he “saved what we might call the Christian παιδεία and its foundation in the Bible, as the Stoics had done with Homer’s theology.”<sup>35</sup>

Once again, there were social grounds for this development. Despite the immanent opposition to the old pagan world and despite the theological incompatibility with much of its classical literature, the early Christian Church never developed its own schools. The Jewish community had a system of education based on the sacred texts, which slowly abandoned even the Greek Bible and concentrated on the study of the Torah in Hebrew.<sup>36</sup> The Christians did not follow that example and a text by Saint John Chrysostom makes it very clear: children should receive Christian teaching from their parents.<sup>37</sup> An additional source of religious instruction was the Church, which developed a nuanced and very efficient system, as can be seen in Saint Augustine’s *De catechizandis rudibus*, and it was supplemented by the central role of readings and preaching within the liturgy, but there was nothing that could be, *stricto sensu*, called a Christian school. As the papyri indicate, even when a Christian teacher decided to teach

<sup>33</sup> His account is given by Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.19.7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 49.

<sup>36</sup> Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 316.

<sup>37</sup> Joannes Chrysostomus, *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis* 19 ff.

a Christian text, this would be accompanied by another one from the classical tradition.<sup>38</sup>

This was the principal reason for the complicated *odi et amo* that Christianity displayed towards the classical culture. There was no alternative to the traditional school; a religion of the Book could not afford to leave its offspring without proper education. This did not mean accepting its values; Marrou<sup>39</sup> points to a letter of Saint Jerome – obviously eager to take out a splinter in his neighbour's eye, despite his love of Cicero – warning anybody who would dare to read profane authors for the pleasure of it. The surrounding culture had its own habits, difficult to avoid: *Absit, ut de ore Christiano sonet 'Iuppiter omnipotens' et 'mehercule' et 'mecastor' et cetera magis portenta quam numina*, Jerome thunders. *At nunc etiam sacerdotes Dei omissis evangeliis et prophetis videmus comoedias legere, amatoria bucolicorum versuum verba cantare, tenere Vergilium et id, quod in pueris necessitatis est, crimen in se facere voluntatis*.<sup>40</sup> The children, who read for the sake of necessity, are an obvious exception, they have to get their schooling and are supposed to study those texts; all others should shun such perilous pastimes.<sup>41</sup>

This cohabitation of Athens and Jerusalem had a double effect. On the one hand, it guaranteed that the Christians would eventually end up in the best of the available schools; Saint John Chrysostom, who was brought up in a resolutely Christian family, had no problem with attending the lectures of a talented pagan such as Libanius.<sup>42</sup> In the long run, this was bound to bring a significant amount of social capital and political influence, according to Brown's analysis, to the already growing community. For quite a long time, there was no opposition. It was only in the fourth century that this ambivalent predilection which Christians displayed for the classical school began

<sup>38</sup> A fascinating example of this is P. Lit. Lond. 207 with Psalm 109 on the recto and Isocrates, *Ad Demonicum*, on the verso. Both marked syllables and frequent mistakes “suggest that the texts were either written from memory or taken down none too intelligently from dictation. We may well get a glimpse here of a school where reading exercises were taken impartially from the scriptures and the classics.” Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt: The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1977* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 321.

<sup>40</sup> Hieronymus, *Epistulae* 21.13.17–19.

<sup>41</sup> A similar point is made by both Tertullian, *De idololatria* 10, and Saint Basil, *De legendis gentiliis libris*.

<sup>42</sup> See Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.11; cf. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 323.

to provoke a nervous reaction in the same field, this time coming from the seriously threatened pagan elites.

Its first manifestation came from the emperor Maximinus Daia, a man with a penchant for somewhat Bismarckian, if not Stalinist strategies, with his edict on schools from 311. Its subject were the *Acts of Pilate*, an anti-Christian forgery, πάσης ξμπλεα κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ βλασφημίας, as Eusebius says, which suddenly ranked among the classics as a text that should be studied and even learned by heart; the emperor ordered τοῖς τε παισὶ τοὺς γραμματοδιδασκάλους ἀντὶ μαθημάτων ταῦτα μελετᾶν καὶ διὰ μνήμης κατέχειν παραδιδόναι.<sup>43</sup> Daia was dead by 313 and so was his new and aggressive curriculum, but the precedent for the *Kulturkampf* had been established.

Half a century later, the idea was repeated, this time in full force. The Christian participation in παιδεία was by now understood to be the crucial cause of the prosperity of the Church – and was treated as such by its opponents. In 362, the emperor Julian made it illegal for Christians to teach. In fact, his law demanded a mere permission to teach given by the authorities. A further imperial letter, discussing the nature of παιδεία ὀρθή, explained who could not expect such approval; those who did not believe in the gods of the canonical authors. Τί οὖν; Ὀμήρῳ μέντοι καὶ Ἡσιόδῳ καὶ Δημοσθένει καὶ Ἡροδότῳ καὶ Θουκυδίδῃ καὶ Ἰσοκράτει καὶ Λυσία θεοὶ πάσης ἡγούνται παιδείας· οὐχ οἱ μὲν Ἑρμοῦ σφᾶς ἱεροῦς, οἱ δὲ Μουσῶν ἐνόμιζον;<sup>44</sup> The letter was directed against a very specific opponent: the teachers who could not conform to a sincere reading of the classics were given advice to stop spoiling the pupils with their double morals and to go εἰς τὰς τῶν Γαλιλαίων ἐκκλησίας, ἐξηγησόμενοι Ματθαῖον καὶ Λουκᾶν.<sup>45</sup> The idea was clear; Christian teachers were to go first, Christian students were to follow, and deprived of the advantages of the παιδεία, the religion that had already gained a dangerously strong social standing was to be “thrown back into its original ‘barbarism’.”<sup>46</sup> The attempt did not succeed, since the edict was as short-lived as the emperor himself; Julian died in 363 and so did his concept of παιδεία ὀρθή; the teaching ban was lifted in 364.

The tension and the distrust were not building up on one side only; all indications show that, even before the uncouth attack of Maximinus Daia, the Church was not entirely happy with the educa-

<sup>43</sup> Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.5.1; cf. also 9.7.1.

<sup>44</sup> Iulianus Apostata, *Epistulae* 61c.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 324.

tional system either. The side effect of its socially and institutionally beneficial acquisition of παιδεία was a phenomenon which Rowan Williams, David Brakke and others have called “academic Christianity.”<sup>47</sup> The term denotes Christian study circles that had been springing up from the second century onwards; in Alexandria, they were led by such personages as Valentinus, Pantaenus, Clement, Origen and, eventually, Arius. Armed with the classical philosophical apparatus, they “tolerated and even encouraged philosophical speculation and diversity of opinion on certain Christian teachings,”<sup>48</sup> which eventually led to one institutional split after another. In accordance with the Middle Platonic doctrine on the σπερματικὸς λόγος, they sought for revealed truth in a wide range of Christian, Jewish and pagan writings, effectively resisting the idea of a closed canon. The central position of this philosophical approach caused another type of diversification; believers were divided “into subgroups based on their progress – or lack thereof – in the intellectual understanding of the scriptures.”<sup>49</sup> A whole nomenclature was devised to distinguish this learned elite from the ordinary believers; they were called “lovers of wisdom,” “gnostic” and “spiritual people.”<sup>50</sup> All of a sudden, the pagan social markers of παιδεία were showing their influence in the Christian community as well. The bishops dealt with both dogmatic and social implications of all this in various ways, but on the whole, the phenomenon did little to foster their confidence in the educational system that produced it. Particularly those bishops “whose agenda was to create a church in which all could have easy access and full status”<sup>51</sup> were bound to realise its potentially disruptive effect.

What is more, the echo of classical education was clearly beginning to make its mark on the nascent monastic movement as well. Until recently, the desert monks were thought to have been uneducated, even illiterate peasants, unable to indulge in the lofty philosophical musings of the period. This prejudice has been conclusively overturned by the work of Samuel Rubenson, whose analysis

<sup>47</sup> See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987), 82–91, and David Brakke, “Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria’s Thirty-Ninth ‘Festal Letter’,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 399–410.

<sup>48</sup> Brakke, “Canon Formation and Social Conflict,” 401.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, on the basis of Origen, *Hom. in Gen.* 5.7.17, *Comm. in Matt.* 17 and *Comm. in Cant.* praef.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, based on Origen, *Princ.* 1, praef. 3, Clement Alex., *Strom.*, passim, and Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.6.4, referring to Valentinian practice.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Valantasis, review of David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, *The Journal of Religion* 77 (1997): 293.

of Antony's letters excavated a consistent system of philosophical principles. And this was not only the case of Antony, the only son of the incredibly wealthy owner of "three hundred fertile and beautiful" *arurae* of land,<sup>52</sup> but more or less the rule; the monks came from "the demoted elite and the middle class of the growing towns,"<sup>53</sup> and although the sources indicate a number of less than learned men among them, these were apparently exceptional enough to be specifically characterised as such.<sup>54</sup>

But the problem was not their intellectual bent; their *Weltanschauung*, at least as seen in Antony's letters, was strangely Origenist. It thus seems that even in the desert, far from the circles of the Alexandrian 'academic Christianity,' the influence of the latter was being felt. Not surprisingly, since the papyri indicate a strong contact between Alexandria and the towns of Upper Egypt.<sup>55</sup> In a situation where monks were, more often than not, fleeing not only women but bishops as well,<sup>56</sup> such a course of development could result in unexpected intellectual fragmentation of the *corpus mysticum* of the Church; the bishops, who considered themselves charged with the task of τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης,<sup>57</sup> suddenly realised that their mission was becoming increasingly difficult.

This atmosphere of mutual suspicion and anxiety could not fail to leave its imprint on the *Life of Antony*. The text was written after 356 and certainly not later than 361, its *terminus post* being the death of the hermit, described in its final chapter, and its *terminus ante* the ascendance of Julian, of which its author makes no mention. With this cultural context in sight, its unusual attitude to the problem of παιδεία begins to appear prudent and cautious, as befits a carefully weighed contribution to a broader struggle.

<sup>52</sup> *Vita Antonii* 2.4.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1990), 118.

<sup>54</sup> One example is Antony's disciple Paul "the Simple," πλοῦς. (Ibid., 120.) A further analysis of the phenomenon is given by Annick Martin, "L'église et la khôra égyptienne au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 25 (1979).

<sup>55</sup> See Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 95, and Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> *Sancti Pachomii vita Graeca prima* 30.

<sup>57</sup> Eph 4:3.

### 3. The Critique of παιδεία in the *Life of Antony*

Considering this situation, what could be the paradoxical role of the shining display of erudition, classical parallels and even reminiscences, the persuasive marks of παιδεία, within a text that makes its opposition to the established educational system as clear as possible? The feature is not limited to the resemblances and relations with the corpus of late antique lives of philosophers; its intertextual dimension goes further, moving from the philosophers' lives to their discipline itself. As has been demonstrated by G. J. M. Bartelink, the author made an effort to demonstrate his familiarity with the body of classical philosophy as well. Although relatively brief and limited to the concluding paragraphs only, the analysis has yielded a remarkable number of close parallels.<sup>58</sup>

Having noted some of the well-known uses of classical philosophical terminology, not only of the neo-Pythagorean but also of the Stoic stock, such as for instance the phrase ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου κυβερνώμενος or ἐν τῷ κατὰ φύσιν ἐστώς,<sup>59</sup> Bartelink concentrates on a single Platonic source, namely *Phaedo*. The dialogue was held in certain esteem among the Christian philosophical circles, due to its topic, the immortality of the soul, and Bartelink points out several comparable details.

Describing the death of Socrates, Plato mentions that his disciples were left as orphans without a father, ὥσπερ πατὴρ στερηθέντες διάξειν ὀρφανοὶ τὸν ἔπειτα βίον.<sup>60</sup> Antony's disciples are described in a similar manner, ὡς ὀρφανοὶ γενόμενοι πατρός.<sup>61</sup> The final formula sounds much the same as well; Plato concludes with "Ἦδε ἡ τελευτή, ᾧ Ἐχέκρατες, τοῦ ἐταίρου ἡμῖν ἐγένετο,"<sup>62</sup> and the *Life of Antony* with Οἶον δὲ καὶ τὸ τέλος αὐτῷ τοῦ βίου γέγονεν.<sup>63</sup> In both cases, death is described as a passage, with *Phaedo* mentioning τὴν μετοίκησιν τὴν ἐνθὲνδε ἐκεῖσε<sup>64</sup> and the *Life* using the phrase ὁ γὰρ Ἀντώνιος μεταβαίνει.<sup>65</sup> Both descriptions make an effort to point

<sup>58</sup> See G. J. M. Bartelink, "Echos aus Platons *Phaedon* in der *Vita Antonii*?," *Mnemosyne* 37 (1984), and "Eine Reminiszenz aus Platons *Timaios* in der *Vita Antonii*," *Mnemosyne* 40 (1987).

<sup>59</sup> *Vita Antonii* 14.4.

<sup>60</sup> *Phaedo* 116a.

<sup>61</sup> *Vita Antonii* 88.3.

<sup>62</sup> *Phaedo* 118a.

<sup>63</sup> *Vita Antonii* 89.1.

<sup>64</sup> *Phaedo* 117c.

<sup>65</sup> *Vita Antonii* 91.9.

out, *expressis verbis*, how peaceful the death was by referring to the protagonists' countenance, Socrates leaving μάλα ἴλεως, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες, οὐδὲν τρέσας οὐδὲ διαφθείρας οὔτε τοῦ χρώματος οὔτε τοῦ προσώπου,<sup>66</sup> and Antony ἀνακείμενος ἱλαρῶ τῷ προσώπῳ.<sup>67</sup> Both Socrates and Antony discuss their own funeral,<sup>68</sup> and finally, both texts describe a piece of clothing as a medium which brings the beloved person back to memory.<sup>69</sup>

Although this evidence is circumstantial and some of the parallels sound less convincing than others, it is on the whole difficult to avoid an impression of conscious imitation; the sheer number of the loci, gathered in a relatively short text, is not easy to ignore. Considering all this, and furthermore the textual analogies with the lives of philosophers, one can partly understand Reitzenstein's train of thought.<sup>70</sup> While his idea on the Pythagorean nature of the text has been discredited, his question still remains; what made the author use and imitate his classical sources in such a profuse manner? And above all, what made him mask this strategy and rather adopt a "mixture of apparent simplicity and actual sophistication"?<sup>71</sup>

The answer to this problem is at least a twofold one. First of all, this might be a case of imitation. Confronting the task of putting together a text without any real predecessors in its genre, its author might have been tempted to use literary models, strategies and even phrases that had already worked elsewhere, in similar contexts. It is difficult to assess to what extent this might have been a conscious decision, and in the final analysis, the number of similarities renders the question relatively unimportant.

Another possible answer, however, and one fitting into the historical context of the *Life of Antony*, might be *captatio benevolentiae*. Mounting a major attack upon the classical system of education, its author had to produce his credentials; an angry rant, coming

<sup>66</sup> *Phaedo* 117b.

<sup>67</sup> *Vita Antonii* 92.1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 91.7 and *Phaedo* 115d.

<sup>69</sup> *Phaedo* 73d, ὅταν ἴδωσιν λύραν ἢ ἱμάτιον ἢ ἄλλο τι οἷς τὰ παιδικὰ αὐτῶν εἶωθε χρῆσθαι, πάσχουσι τοῦτο· ἔγνωσάν τε τὴν λύραν καὶ ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ ἔλαβον τὸ εἶδος τοῦ παιδὸς οὗ ἦν ἡ λύρα; cf. *Vita Antonii* 92.3, Καὶ τῶν λαβόντων δὲ ἔκαστος τὴν μηλωτὴν τοῦ μακαρίου Ἀντωνίου, καὶ τὸ τετριμμένον παρ' αὐτοῦ ἱμάτιον, ὥς τι μέγα χρῆμα φυλάττει. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ βλέπων αὐτά, ὥς Ἀντωνίου ἐστι θεωρῶν· καὶ περιβαλλόμενος δὲ αὐτά, ὥς τὰς νοουθεσίας αὐτοῦ βαστάζων ἐστὶ μετὰ χαρᾶς.

<sup>70</sup> Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius*, passim.

<sup>71</sup> Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 113.

from somebody who was denied the γλυκὺς κάρπος τῆς παιδείας, might work as yet another cry of the Aesopian fox complaining about sour grapes. Following the example of Saint Paul, who was well aware of the importance of establishing one's pedigree within the group before bringing up the problem – Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ Φαρισαῖός εἰμι, υἱὸς Φαρισαίων<sup>72</sup> – the author of the *Life* might have decided to improve his credibility with a demonstration of his learning. This would have to be done in a careful, concealed manner, which would not puzzle the uninitiated with contradictory references to the very system the text was ostensibly trying to dismantle, yet might still deliver a powerful message to those able to understand it.

And it had to be powerful; the assault on παιδεία was extensive. As the text repeatedly points out, Antony had nothing to do with its structures, from the very beginning onwards. As a child, he did not go to school and was raised by his parents: Καὶ παιδίον μὲν ὢν, ἐτρέφετο παρὰ τοῖς γονεῦσι, πλέον αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ οἴκου μηδὲν ἕτερον γινώσκων.<sup>73</sup> Later, his proclivity towards solitude provided him with an excuse to avoid secondary education, which would normally befit a person of his background: γράμματα μὲν μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, βουλόμενος ἐκτὸς εἶναι καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς παῖδας συνηθείας.<sup>74</sup> At this stage, the ascetic's wariness of the educational system seems to be predominantly moral. Late antique schools were not exactly famous for their ascetic ambience. "To Carthage then I came," Saint Augustine – and T. S. Eliot – would later remember compunctiously, *et circumstrepbat me undique sartago flagitiosorum amorum*.<sup>75</sup> The great educational centres enjoyed a dubious repute of unbridled debauchery. This is more than a mere rhetorical hyperbole from an austere Christian bishop; Augustine's evidence is corroborated by such sources as Libanius, who was less than impressed with his own students, a dissolute pack that pulled money out of their parents' pockets under

<sup>72</sup> Acts 23:6.

<sup>73</sup> *Vita Antonii* 1.2.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. The γράμματα, mentioned in Greek, are probably supposed to stand for 'letters,' namely Greek literature, taught by a γραμματικός; cf. *Vita Antonii* 20.4, where the pagans are said to be "crossing the sea" in search of γράμματα, hardly a necessary effort if the term would denoted mere literacy. See also Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 99–100. In a detailed historical analysis, Rubenson explains the term γράμματος as a common designation of a person "only able to read and write Egyptian or Coptic" and "not necessarily ignorant of Greek language and literature." Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 95–99. A similar view with further bibliography is presented by Bartelink in his footnotes to *Vita Antonii* 73.1.

<sup>75</sup> *Confessiones* 3.1.1.



the pretext of tuition – but then used to spend it “in other ways, such as drinking, playing dice, and pursuing sexual escapades.”<sup>76</sup>

Yet Antony's flat refusal of school and its various benefits turns out to be a mere overture, a precautionary and character-building preliminary to the major fight that is to break out later in his life. The *Life of Antony* sums it up in his debate with the pagan philosophers, already mentioned in the introduction. As pointed out by David Brakke,<sup>77</sup> the contrast between the two parties is as sharp as possible. Antony, on the one hand, possesses practical wisdom, ready wit and understanding – he is φρόνιμος, ἀγχίνους, συνετός, – despite his lack of formal education, γράμματα μὴ μαθών. On the other hand, the philosophers possess education, γράμματα, and seem wise, σοφοί, by worldly standards. This contrast between practical and theoretical wisdom, between φρόνησις and σοφία, a familiar dichotomy in late antiquity, is then used to distinguish “between Christian faith as something that acts (ἡ δι' ἐνεργείας πίστις) and all other forms of religion that are merely talk (ἡ διὰ λόγων ἀπόδειξις).”<sup>78</sup>

Against this background, Antony's assault begins in full sail. The philosophers hardly get to say a word; although technically present in a long section of the *Life* (72-80), they act as helpless sparring partners to the ascetic's brilliant speech, all of them leaving in admiration, surrendering their position to their colleagues who are bound to repeat their own experience. In this position, they are forced to destroy their own standing; soon enough, the problem of παιδεία comes to the fore of the discussion. Τί πρῶτόν ἐστι, νοῦς ἢ γράμματα, Antony asks, καὶ τί τίνος αἵτιον, ὁ νοῦς τῶν γραμμάτων, ἢ τὰ γράμματα τοῦ νοῦ;<sup>79</sup> Taken by surprise, the philosophers answer that the mind is first and is the inventor of letters, and Antony then confronts them with a logically inexorable conclusion: Ὡς τοίνυν ὁ νοῦς ὑγιαίνει, τοῦτω οὐκ ἀναγκαῖα τὰ γράμματα.<sup>80</sup> The sound-minded person has no need of letters. The author immediately adds that despite this steady opposition to the worldly educational ideals, Antony did not lack the urbanity which these ideals were supposed to foster: καὶ

<sup>76</sup> Crihiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 65, based on Libanius, *Orationes* 3.6: νέος χρήματα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς λαμβάνων, ὡς τῷ σοφιστῇ κοιμῶν, ὣν τὰ μὲν εἰς πότους ἔτρεψε, τὰ δὲ εἰς κύβους, τὰ δὲ αἰδοίοις ἔδωκε θρασυτέροις ἔστιν οὐ τοῦ νόμου ...

<sup>77</sup> David Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 256.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 257. Both expressions are used in *Vita Antonii* 77.3.

<sup>79</sup> *Vita Antonii* 73.2.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 73.3.

γὰρ οὐχ ὥς ἐν ὄρει τραφεῖς, κάκεῖ γέρων γενόμενος, ἄγριον εἶχε τὸ ἦθος· ἀλλὰ καὶ χαρίεις ἦν καὶ πολιτικός.<sup>81</sup> Despite his secluded life on the mountain, his character was not wild; it was gracious and even cosmopolitan. Antony thus managed to achieve the personal qualities that one was supposed to gain from education, yet without exposing himself to its perilous sway.

This saved him from paying the price that was both intellectual and ethical. When another group comes, this time those who consider themselves to be the σοφοί, and starts to mock the Christian teaching about the God crucified,<sup>82</sup> Antony explodes; to use the language of the text, he “feels sorry for them,” paradoxically, “because of their ignorance,” οἰκτεῖρας αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγνώσῃ.<sup>83</sup> He takes upon the age-old problem of Greek education, one that Plato had tried to amend without any practical success, namely the morality of its literary content. The scandal of the Christian God on the cross cannot be compared to the scandal of the debauching and lewd Greek gods, Antony points out: Τί κάλλιον ἐστὶ, σταυρὸν ὁμολογεῖν, ἢ μοιχείας καὶ παιδοφθορίας προσάπτειν τοῖς παρ' ὑμῖν λεγομένοις θεοῖς;<sup>84</sup> As attested by the papyri, the curriculum in late antique Egypt was not much different from the one that had troubled Plato to the point of deciding to banish poets from his Republic. Homer was still the basis of all instruction, supported, *inter alia*, by Hesiod, Euripides and Menander.<sup>85</sup> Another part of Antony's invective sounds like a direct criticism of Hesiod's *Theogony*: τί βέλτιον ἂν εἴποιτε, ... μὴ πτήσσειν τὸν ὅπως δῆποτε θάνατον ἐπαγόμενον· ἢ πλάνας Ὅσιριδος καὶ Ἰσιδος, καὶ ἐπιβουλὰς Τυφῶνος, καὶ Κρόνου φυγὴν, καὶ τέκνων καταπόσεις, καὶ πατροκτονίας μυθολογεῖν; Ταῦτα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστὶ τὰ σοφά.<sup>86</sup> The devouring of children and killing of the father, all this belonged to the dubious wisdom of the divinely inspired poet that dominated the “high educational levels”<sup>87</sup> of the contemporary school

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 73.4.

<sup>82</sup> The emphasis on the σοφοί and the central role of the cross in this discussion seems to be a reference to the Pauline idea from 1 Cor 1:22-23: ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖα αἰτοῦσιν καὶ Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίοις μὲν σκάνδαλον ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν.

<sup>83</sup> *Vita Antonii* 74.2.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 74.3.

<sup>85</sup> Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 194-204.

<sup>86</sup> *Vita Antonii* 75.1-2.

<sup>87</sup> Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 197, where further data are given: the exceptional popularity of Hesiod is attested by over a hundred papyri and supported by various references from that period. Libanius, for instance, notes in his *Epistulae* 1036.4 that an educated person should fill his soul with Homer, Hesiod and other

system. Here, Antony refers to the very genealogy of the Greek pantheon, stained with incest, murder and mutilation. Once again, this obviously theodicean reproach appears to be loaded with an additional educational sting; as attested by the Egyptian papyri, lists of mythological and heroic genealogies were another frequently used pedagogical tool and a sign of advanced education.<sup>88</sup>

With a similar mythological list, Antony then takes the discussion to a higher level. Anticipating the reply from his philosophically trained opponents, he imagines their possible answer in advance: 'Εάν δέ, ὡς ἀκούω, θελήσῃτε λέγειν μυθικῶς λέγεσθαι ταῦτα παρ' ὑμῖν· καὶ ἀλληγορεῖτε ἀρπαγὴν Κόρης εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ 'Ηφαίστου χωλότητα εἰς τὸ πῦρ, καὶ 'Ηραν εἰς τὸν ἀέρα, καὶ 'Απόλλωνα εἰς τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ 'Αρτεμιν μὲν εἰς τὴν σελήνην, τὸν δὲ Ποσειδῶνα εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν ...<sup>89</sup> Cornered with the shameful, "irrational and brutish"<sup>90</sup> behaviour of their deities, the pagan philosophers were evidently prone to find an escape in allegory; the rape of Persephone would represent the earth, the lameness of Hephaestus the fire, Hera the air, Apollo the sun, Artemis the moon, Poseidon the sea and so on.

An almost identical set of allegories is already mentioned by Philo,<sup>91</sup> but the phenomenon is much older than that. Although still ridiculed and warned against by Plato,<sup>92</sup> the allegorical interpretation of mythology took strong roots in the Hellenistic period, with such authors as Crates of Mallus. It later became a mainstream exegetic tool for the Neopythagoreans and Neoplatonists from the second century AD onwards, with such influential texts as Porphyry's *De antro nympharum* and the *Commentaries on Plato's Republic* by Proclus, building up Homer as a kind of pagan prophet, parallel to Moses or Christ. This interpretation, which quite soon gained popularity in

poets (ἐνέπλησας τὴν ψυχὴν 'Ομήρου τε καὶ 'Ησιόδου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ποιητῶν Δημοσθένους). Two centuries earlier, Lucian had made Hesiod the central figure of an entire dialogue, complaining about the overzealous energy with which the poet was being studied (Lucian, *Hesiodus* 5).

<sup>88</sup> Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 198. One of the relevant papyri, combining mythographic lists and sentences from the Seven Sages, is P.Oxy. 61.4099; see Marc Huys, "P.Oxy. 61.4099: A Combination of Mythographic Lists with Sentences of the Seven Wise Men," *Zeitschrift für Papirologie und Epigraphik* 113 (1996).

<sup>89</sup> *Vita Antonii* 76.2.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 76.1.

<sup>91</sup> Philo, *De decalogo* 54-55: καλοῦσι γὰρ οἱ μὲν τὴν γῆν Κόρην, Δῆμητραν, Πλούτωνα, τὴν δὲ θάλατταν Ποσειδῶνα, δαίμονας ἐναλίους ὑπάρχους αὐτῷ προσαναπλάττοντες καὶ θεραπείας ὁμίλους μεγάλους ἀρρένων τε καὶ θηλειῶν, 'Ηραν δὲ τὸν ἀέρα καὶ τὸ πῦρ 'Ηφαιστον καὶ ἥλιον 'Απόλλωνα καὶ σελήνην 'Αρτεμιν καὶ ἑωσφόρον 'Αφροδίτην καὶ στίλβοντα 'Ερμῆν.

<sup>92</sup> See *Phaedrus* 229e and *Republic* 378d.

Egypt as well, was mocked by Christian authors such as Arnobius,<sup>93</sup> Firmicus Maternus<sup>94</sup> and eventually Augustine,<sup>95</sup> in a discourse analogous to the *Life of Antony*. Antony's key argument is ontological: the allegories cannot help, since they too fail to embrace the true nature of divinity and end up "serving the creation rather than God who created all things."<sup>96</sup>

However, there was another strong reason for the author of the *Life* to bring up the problem of allegorical interpretation. The approach itself was not limited to the sphere of pagan Greek culture; influenced by the same educational system, the circles of the "academic Christianity" were quick to reap its theological benefits as well. Origen began to apply the method to the Bible and his school soon exerted a remarkable influence, particularly in the newly established πόλις of the Egyptian desert. As Samuel Rubenson has convincingly demonstrated, one of the more devoted followers of this technique was Antony himself; his letters proclaim that "not only what is 'manifest' but also what is 'hidden' in the preaching must be understood as a revelation of God's acts of love to man."<sup>97</sup> Although the letters contain no explicit discussion of the methods of interpretation, his attitude is similar to Origen's; Rubenson suggests that the medium through whom Antony adopted the allegorical method was Didymus the Blind. Both Antony and Origen regarded the spiritual meaning, as allegorised in the text, as the one of importance.<sup>98</sup> Apart from Antony's letters, there are other pieces of evidence that indicate a strong impact of the Origenist doctrine within Egyptian Christianity; in the third-century papyri from Upper Egypt, texts by Origen are extremely frequent, in one instance even contemporary with the author.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>93</sup> *Adversus nationes* 2-4.

<sup>94</sup> Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* 2.1, in a very similar vein: *Aegypti incolae aquae substantiam consecrant, aquam colunt, aquam supplicant, aquam superstitiosa votorum continuatione venerantur. Sed in sacris suis quae mysteria vocant addunt tragica funera et funestae calamitatis metuenda certamina: incestum cum sorore adulteriumque commissum, et hoc facinus severis mariti animadversionibus vindicatum. Isis soror est, Osyris frater, Tyfon maritus.*

<sup>95</sup> For instance in *De civitate Dei* 4.10.16 and 7.16.25.

<sup>96</sup> *Vita Antonii* 76.2.

<sup>97</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 72, based on Antony's *Epistulae* 6.21.

<sup>98</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 72; cf. Jean Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique aux IIe et IIIe siècles (Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée II)* (Paris: Cerf, 1961), 217-33, 56-64.

<sup>99</sup> Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 114; Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief*, 8; 24.

The Origenist inclination of the desert monks seems to have been so vigorous and persistent that another prominent vita from that period, the first Greek life of Pachomius, makes a special effort to clear the founding father of the community of any potential suspicion. Its statement is unequivocal: 'Εμίσει δὲ καὶ τὸν λεγόμενον Ὀριγένην, ... ὅτι καὶ τοῖς συγγράμμασιν αὐτοῦ δεινὰ τινα ἀκούσας ἐπέγνω αὐτὸν βλάσφημον εἶναι καὶ τολμηρὸν κατὰ τῆς ἰδίας ζωῆς.<sup>100</sup> The danger of Origen lay in the seductive power of his very method: συνέμιξε γὰρ τὰ οκοῦντα πιθανὰ τοῖς ὀρθοῖς ῥήμασι τῆς θείας γραφῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν τῶν ἀγνοούντων, ὃν τρόπον ἀναμιγνύει τις μέλιτι δηλητήριο φάρμακον.<sup>101</sup> By employing the interpretative tools of his παιδεία, Origen was able to mix his seemingly probable theories with the true words of the Scriptures and thus fool and ensnare those less skilled in such craft. Pachomius then decided that like would not cure like in this case. In his opinion, avoiding the harmful mixture altogether was a much better option than trying to cure like with like, using the power of learning to distinguish the poison from the honey. He ordered his monks to refrain from reading Origen's writings and avoid even listening to his sayings. His dislike of the tradition represented by Origen is perhaps best illustrated with the moment when he chanced upon the book of Origen and immediately threw it into the water, with the memorable dictum: Εἰ μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ γεγραμμένον ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ, κατέκαυσα ἂν τὰς βλασφημίας καὶ φλυαρίας αὐτοῦ.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, Pachomius essentially ends his confrontation with the world of academic Christianity by a demonstration of power. Not that he lacks any other forms of argumentation; the text is unsparing of the reasons that convinced him to make a decision. Yet at the end of the discussion, the only thing that really mattered was action; the audience was obviously more persuaded by a curious blend of the argument of Gamaliel<sup>103</sup> and the *argumentum baculinum* than by another shining demonstration of discursive talent. It is this demonstration of power that Christopher Haas identified as the element

<sup>100</sup> *Sancti Pachomii vita Graeca prima* 31. This passage, which is missing from Halkin's *Sancti Pachomii vitae Graecae* due to a lacuna, is exceptionally taken from a later edition of a different manuscript, F. Halkin, *Le corpus athénien de saint Pachome*, Cahiers d'Orientalisme 2 (Geneva: Cramer, 1982), 11-72.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Acts 5:38-39: *Quoniam si est ex hominibus consilium hoc aut opus, dissolvetur; si vero ex Deo est, non poteritis dissolvere eos.*

which “often served as the final arbiter in evoking religious adherence from the populace” in the Alexandria of late antiquity.<sup>104</sup>

Not surprisingly, Antony returns to the same efficient concluding note in his dispute with the pagan philosophers. Οὐκοῦν οἷς πάρεστιν ἡ διὰ πίστεως ἐνέργεια, τούτοις οὐκ ἀναγκαία, ἢ τάχα καὶ περιττὴ ἡ διὰ λόγων ἀπόδειξις;<sup>105</sup> those in whom faith is actively working have no need of the “probably superfluous argumentation with words,” he tells them after five long paragraphs of that very same argumentation. The results speak for themselves: “You, with all your fine and fancy words, do not hinder the teaching of Christ; we, on the other hand, invoking the name of Christ crucified, are putting to flight all the demons, whom you fear as gods.”<sup>106</sup> The philosophers have no power to resist such reasoning; they are “astonished and truly amazed at the man’s wisdom”<sup>107</sup> once he supports his claims with a miracle, healing some people that were suffering from demons. They are left speechless and have to go away “embracing him and confessing that they had benefited from him.”<sup>108</sup> The classical παιδεία, a framework for all their “skill with words,” was clearly not a match for the likes of Saint Antony – and not worthy of imitation for those who wanted to become like him; Athanasius struggled hard to drive this message home. It was a nuanced and multilayered message, as shown above; still, its enormous resonance not only in the local milieu but across a culturally varied landscape, extending all the way to *ultima Thule*, shows how successful its formulation really was.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 186.

<sup>105</sup> *Vita Antonii* 77.5.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 78.4: Καὶ ὑμεῖς μὲν τῇ καλλιπερίᾳ οὐκ ἐμποδίζετε τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ διδασκαλίαν· ἡμεῖς δὲ, ὀνομάζοντες τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον Χριστὸν, πάντας διώκομεν δαίμονας, οὓς ὑμεῖς φοβεῖσθε ὡς θεοῦς.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 80.5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 80.7: ἐκεῖνοι δὲ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ θαυμάζοντες, ἀνεχώρουν, κατασπαζόμενοι αὐτὸν, καὶ ὁμολογοῦντες ὠφελεῖσθαι παρ' αὐτοῦ.

<sup>109</sup> For a more detailed handling see Pascal Bertrand, “Die Evagriusübersetzung der *Vita Antonii*: Rezeption - Überlieferung - Edition, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der *Vitas Patrum*-Tradition” (Universiteit Utrecht, 2005).

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