Monophysite Christology in an Oracle of Apollo

PIER FRANCO BEATRICE*

In the so-called Tübingen Theosophy there is an oracle attributed to Apollo, in which the Greek god complains of his defeat brought about by the divine power of Christ. The aim of the present essay is to demonstrate that these verses are the first part of a longer written text, unearthed in only two other manuscripts. This longer version of the oracle contains in the second part three monophysite texts concerning the person and miracles of Christ, and was part of the original text of the Theosophy. It was composed as a direct apologetic response to an authentic pagan oracle of Apollo, mentioned and commented on by Porphyry in his anti-Christian treatise On the Philosophy from Oracles, which denied the divine nature of Christ and approved his condemnation to death. The Christian oracle of Apollo is a forgery written around 500 ce by a monophysite theologian with classical learning—who is most probably to be identified with Severus of Antioch—in order to strengthen the idea of the definitive victory of Christianity over the old Greek gods.

1. Greek oracles in the conflict between Pagan and Christians

The Theosophy was a work in four books added, as a juridical appendix, to a seven-book treatise On True Belief, written around the year 500 ce. Both works are now lost, but a Byzantine epitome of the Theosophy, fortunately preserved in a manuscript of the sixteenth century now in the University Library of Tübingen, gives some useful information about its contents. The first book was a collection of oracles uttered by pagan gods, especially Apollo; the second book contained various sayings of Greek philosophers (the Seven Sages, Heracleitus, Plato, Porphyry, and many others) and Egyptian sages (Hermetic writings), while the third book was entirely devoted to

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List of abbreviations: ACCO = Archivio Conventuale Osservanza; ANRW = Ausgabe und Neudruck der Klassischen Wehr; BCP = Corpus Christianorum Series Latina; CSCO = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium; CSSL = Corpus Scriptorum Scolastico-Latinum; DCH = Die griechischen christlichen Schriften der ersten Jahrhunderte; FG = Patrologia Graeca; FO = Patrologia Orientalis; FTS = Patristica Textualis Studien; RA = Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum; SCS = Sources Chrétiennes; TST = Theologische Studien und Quellen; TD = Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur

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I. Greek oracles in the conflict between Pagans and Christians

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the prophecies of the Sibylline Oracles. In the fourth and last book there were some excerpts from the Book of Hystaspes, followed by a very concise chronicle of universal history from Adam up to the emperor Zeno (474–491 ce). This very singular anthology of texts explicitly aimed at demonstrating that pagan gods and sages had already prophesied the Christian truth and that between pagan Wisdom and the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation there is fundamental harmony.2

Many oracles transmitted in the first book of the Thesaurus have a definitely pagan origin and can be placed with sufficient precision in their religious-historical framework. They came mainly from shrines located in Asia Minor, the land where the Greek god Apollo had his most important sanctuaries in Late Antiquity, such as Claros and Didyma.3 Oracles certainly played an important role in the pagan attack on Christianity, and the Christian apologists of the first three centuries expressed in turn harsh judgments against the charlatanism of pagan prophets, thus finding a natural ally in the Cynic philosopher Oenomaus of Gadara.4 For this reason, the Christian recourse to pagan oracles in order to give solid confirmation to the Biblical revelation is to be seen as the result of a considerable change of attitude, derived from a new approach to the problem.

As far as is known, Lactantius was the first writer to invoke the evidence of Apollo in favor of Christian monotheism:

> Born of himself, taught by none, motherless, unshakable, his name is unutterable, dwelling in fire; this is god. We messengers are just a small part of god.5

These three verses quoted by Lactantius are taken from a Clarion oracle which presents striking similarities with an oracle engraved on a wall at Oenomaus,6 and can also be read at the end of an oracle where the entire text is reproduced in the Thesaurus.7 It


3. His extant fragments have been edited by J. Hartmann-Sachs, Die Odyssee des Kynikus Oenomaus (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 110), Frankfurt am Main 1968. See also Eichrodt, "Der Kyniker Oenomaus von Gadara," in W. Havemann (ed.), ANRW II 264.1, Berlin-New York 1990, 2834–2866.

4. Lactantius, Divina Institutionem 1.7 (CSEL 19.1, 75).


6. Thess. 813 (Festes, 7). On this controversial text, see the recent discussion by D.S. Potter, Prophecy and History in the Oracle of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the "Thesalian Sibylline Oracle", Oxford 1999, 351–353.
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1. The Greek text of the Tiibingen compilation was published for the first time by K. Buresch, Klaros. Untersuchungen zum Orakelwesen des spateren Altertums, Leipzig 1889, 87-126. The best critical edition of the entire collection now available, from which we quote, is that by H. Erbse, Theosophorum Graecorum fragmenta (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), Stuttgart-Leipzig 1995.


4. Lactantius, Divinae Institutiones 1,7 (CSEL 19/1, 25).
5. See G.E. Bean, Journeys in Northern Lycia 1965-1967 (Österreichische Akademie der

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is not by chance that Lactantius (Deosvove) is mentioned with particular emphasis in the section of the Theosophy containing the prophecies of the Sibyls.7

Nevertheless, the Christian reinterpretation of authentic pagan oracles was not sufficient to guarantee the complete success of this apologetic procedure. Already in the preceding centuries, strong support had been found both in the Christian reshaping of old pagan, Greek and oriental, writings, such as the Apocryphal Gospels and, more frequently, following the example of the Hellenistic Jewish apologetics literature, in the composition of completely new religious texts falsely attributed to pagan authorities, such as, for instance, the so-called Testament of Orpheus and the Sybiline Oracles. These works were conceived as perfect literary imitations of their Greek models (orphic hexameters and pagan Sybiline oracles), both in metre and vocabulary. The oracles attributed by the Christians to the gods, in particular, were moulded on the so-called "theological" oracles, i.e., special oracular utterances, mainly by Apollo and Helios, about the nature of the godhead, which became common in the pagan world from the end of the second century CE to satisfy the increasing desire for religious certainties.

All of these Christian forgeries were intended to convey the new doctrine of God through the familiar language of pagan traditions. We know that several collections of false pagan prophecies of Christianity, such as, for example, the famous Ἑρμήσιον τῆς Ῥωμαίας, were circulating in the fifth century.8 The author of the Theosophy also gives us a very interesting example of a bogus oracle put in the mouth of Apollo to strengthen the impression that paganism had definitely lost any historical relevance. We are dealing with a famous oracle whose text has left significant traces in the manuscript tradition, but which also presents numerous problems of interpretation. In the present essay we plan to contribute to this discussion.

II. The text in the manuscript tradition

In the Tübingen Theosophy we read the following oracle uttered by Apollo in the sanctuary at Delphi:

Most wretched of temple wardens! You need not ask me this final question about God the Father and the beloved King, who is responsible for every divine utterance and presage, and concerning the Spirit who encompasses all things round about like a grape cluster: mountains, earth, rivers, sea, Hadès, air and fire. This Spirit against my will will shortly drive me out of this temple, of which the prophesying threshold will be left deserted. And he adds: Woe to me, O triads, gods; Apollo goes away, he goes away, because a bright heavenly man presses me with violence (οἶκος, ἄνωθεν ἄνεμῳ.

This oracle, in which the Greek god complains of having been defeated by the superior power of Christ, is plainly a fake invented by a Christian author in the fifth century.

7. Thes. Sib. 3 (Erbe, 63-65).
8. See Sozomen, Historia Ecclesiastica I, 7-8 (SC 349, 110-112) and other sources discussed by E. Beatrice, Das augenwarme Religionsgeschicht. am Hof der Sassiden (TD 4/7), Leipzig 1896, 128-217.
9. Thes. 5 16 (Erbe, 1).
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9. Theos. i 1
waged against the resistance of paganism. From this point of view, the significance of this oracle of Apollo corresponds exactly with another oracle that the Thebaid attributes to Artemis. The goddess laments to her priest:

A Hebrew child, God who, being King of the blessed, came from heaven and took care of a human body, now commands me to descend into Hades and to go to Chaos. His decree cannot be evaded. I draw back as he wishes. What shall I now attempt. O you other demons!11

It is worth noting that a similar response had also been given by the Pythia to the emperor Augustus, according to a parallel tradition reported by the Byzantine chronicler John Malalas in the sixth century.12

Cassius Heliocles, quite rightly remarked that Apollo's prophecy had been invented by a Christian,13 and Pierre Bailleul did not hesitate to suggest that the prophecies of both Apollo and Artemis, which share the same inspiration, must be considered, together with other oracles of the collection, the result of a Christian forgery. He also put forward the hypothesis that they might date to the times of the Christian emperors Constantine II and Theodosius I (the second half of the fourth century), that is, to the period in which the oppressive action against paganism undertaken by the imperial legislation was at its height.14

Bailleul's showed explanation met with the unconditioned consent of Arthur D. Nock.15 Indeed, it appears indubitable that the oracle of Apollo is a Christian fake, as has also been acknowledged recently by Saul Levin16 and Frank R. Trombley.17 Apollo's answer to the question on the nature of the godhead, which was part of the traditional pagan formula of the "theological" oracles, has been changed into a declaration of his own defeat and the victory of Christ. It may be useful to remember that a century

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10. For the various forms assumed by the struggle of Christianity against the survival of paganism from the fourth to the sixth century, see in general the collection of essays edited by P. E. Despey, L'Antichita cristiana nei secoli del paganesimo, Bologna 1999.
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14. P. Batiffol, "Oracula hellenica," Revue biblique 13 (1916), 177-199, esp. 194-199: "On peut émettre l'hypothèse que ces oracles défabrication chrétienne ont été composés vers le milieu ou dans la seconde moitié du IVe sicle, avec l'intention de justifier la suppression du culte païen au moyen d'oracles par lesquels les dieux eux-mêmes annonçaient leur défaite et prophétisaient l'avenement de la religion chrétienne."

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before the Theosophy, Gregory of Nazianzus had already represented Apollo as pronouncing a fictitious oracle in which the god announces his own end brought about by Christ. 18

But evidently Batiffol did not notice that the oracle of Apollo reported in Theosophy 316—and reproduced among the epigrams of the Anthologia Palatina 22—is actually only the first part of a longer ocular oracle which Buresch had already found in its entirety in the codex Athanasianus Gr., vol. I, p. 172 (second or early fourteenth century). 22 15 The longer version of the oracle is placed here at the end of a collection of prophecies attributed to the Seven Sages, which was later published by Armand Delatte 23 and reprinted by Hartmut Erbse. As we shall see, in these supplementary verses Batiffol would have found a definitive confirmation to his thesis of the Christian origin of the oracle.

Unfortunately, no systematic exploration of the numerous manuscripts that contain this oracle has yet been completed. 22 But that the original version of the oracle is the longer one seems to be confirmed with sufficient certainty not only by the Athos manuscript edited by Buresch, Delatte and Erbse. This same long form of the oracle, with just slightly variant readings, is also to be found in the much older codex Verona, Marcianus Graecus 573, ff. 225-28, of the tenth century. 24 We give here a tentative translation of the second part:

And he who suffered is God, and it was not the godhead itself that suffered (καὶ ὁ θεός τεκτόνει καὶ ἰδιοίς καὶαὐτὸς ἐκ τῆς σκοτεινᾶς). He was both mortal and immortal at the same time, undying and mortal, Word of God, human flesh, indeed rather was altered nor did they mingle or exist separate from each other (οὐδὲ ἔχετο ἐστὶν ἢ ὁ ἀναπαύεται τοῦ ὄντος ἢ ἰδιοίς εἰς ταῦτα ἢ ἀπαντεῖ). God himself is also a man, receiving everything from his Father, possessing everything of his Father, having the life-giving force (ζωοποιοῦ δείκτη), from his mortal mother the cross, tomb, outrage, sorrow, all things at once surveying, overlooking and hearing. From his eyes hot tears once flowed, when the sad news about his friend reached him. He also abolished the cause of grief, bringing out of Hades into the light the man whose

20. See the test published by Buresch, Kaye [n. 1 above], 130-131.
24. A description of this manuscript is to be found in the catalogue by E. Mau, Bibliotheca Graecae Maior (Pompeii antiqua rerum Gentium 609-628, Rome 1955, 478. I have consulted this manuscript personally in St. Mark's Library.
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20. See the text published by Buresch, Klaros (n. 1 above), 130-131.
21. A. Delatte, Anecdota Atheniensia, t. I: Textes grecs ineditis relatifs a l'histoire des religions

(Bibliothbque de la Facultd de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Universit6 de Lidge, fasc. 36),

Liege-Paris 1927, 328-330. On this manuscript see M. Tziatzi-Papagianni,Die Sprüche der Sieben Weisen. Zwei byzantinische Sammlungen. Einleitung, Text, Testimonien und Kommentar

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thousand men he fed from five loaves on the lofty hills: such was the will of
his divine might (τὸ γὰρ ὦλεν ἐμφανῶς ὄλον) Christ is my God, who was
stretched out on the tree, who died, who went into the tomb, who ascended
from the tomb into heaven.

Several partial quotations found in various Byzantine hagiographic texts and in
miscellaneous late manuscripts confirm the previous existence of the long form of the
oracle of Apollo from which they come. For example, in the codex Parisinus Angelicus 48
(fifteenth century), I. 249v–250v, the oracle is broken off at τοῦτο ποιησάτω τῷ
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III. A survey of the scholarly debate

Wolf was therefore wrong in claiming that the verse "And he who suffered is God, and it was not the godhead itself that suffered," which closes the oracle of Apollo

25. See Erbe, 121.
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29. Erbse, 103-104.


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in the Pari Nor does it seem possible to accept the explanation proposed by W. Scott: "The verse καὶ ὁ σωτήρ τιτ. has nothing to do with the oracle to which it is appended in Ar.[text] fasc. 4." It is the first line of a poem which different origin in which the speaker is not the god Apollo, but a human worshipper of Christ (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός θεὸς ἐγγέρυ). That poem is given in full (as a continuation of the oracle μὴ διδαχθῇ ... ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ θεὸς) in Bursch's Athanas M5, and, in less complete form, in one of the MSS. of Art. Fasc. (viz. cod. T; Furtimus, sec. XIII); but in the other MSS. of Art. Fasc. only the first verse of it has been retained, and it is altogether absent in Exx. a Theosophy. It must have stood next after the oracle of Apollo in the common source of the Athens M5, and in the text of Art. Fasc and the transcribers mistakenly supposed it to be a continuation of that oracle. It is also difficult to support the stand taken by Erbe, according to whom the oracle developed in various stages, from the short original form, preserved in Thesmophy 45, to the expanded version of the Athens manuscript published by Bursch and Debrunner.

In our opinion, the long version of the oracle of Apollo, recorded both by codex Marc. Gr. 577 and codex B.N. Athen. Gr. 1070, is part of the original text of the Theosophy. Later on, in the course of the manuscript tradition, it was divided into two parts, the first of which contains Apollo's prophecy taken on his final ritual, while the second describes the two natures and the miracles of Christ. The fact that the Byzantine compiler of the Theosophy copied out only the first part of the oracle which he found in his original, stopping at Apollo's complaint about the weakness he was suffering because of a celestial man, should not give grounds for surprise. After the discovery and publication of an original fragment of the third book of the Theosophy by Karl Mann, we are now in a position to have a fairly precise idea of the working method of the scribe and of the extent of his intervention in epitomizing the original.

The unity and the exclusively Christian nature of the long version of the oracle of Apollo have until now been defended only by Joseph Bidez and by Ernst Klostermann and Erich Seeburg. These two German scholars also undertook to shed light upon the very obscure problem of the historical and theological setting in which such an unusual text could have come into being. For this reason their contribution constitutes important progress and marks a decisive turning-point in the investigation of the oracle of Apollo and, consequently, the Theosophy as a whole.

Klostermann and Seeburg believed that the formulation of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ found in the oracle of Apollo indicates that the Christological view-
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point of its author, developed at the time of the post-Chalcedonian debates, is probably closer to the Antiochene than to the theopaschite tradition. However, they expressly refused to get involved in a discussion of the matter and to state their opinion as to the theological position of the author of the oracle, prudently limiting their intervention to drawing attention to the fact that the structure of the oracle, based on the position of Christ and his miracles, points to representations and problems that were formulated and used during the controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries. This question is clearly of prime importance in understanding the cultural background of the author of the oracle and the theological attitude of the Theophylact in his historical context.

We can state without hesitation that the author of the oracle is a supporter of the theory of the two natures of Christ, considered as distinct but not separate. Ethes has remarked that we are dealing here with the use of typical categories of the Christological thought of Cyril of Alexandria as related to the two natures and their hypostatic union. Unfortunately, he did not develop this idea as much as he deserved; besides, his investigation is invalidated by the groundless conviction that the final, enlarged form of the oracle was part of a collection compiled after the year 519 to be placed at the service of the Chalcedonian-Cyprian orthodoxy (for neo-Chalcedonian) favoured by Justinian. Dagron, too, thinks of a Chalcedonian, non-heretical inspiration of the entire literary corpus to which this oracle belongs.

According to a recent, extremely interesting article by Brian E. Daley, the theological content of the longer version of the oracle undoubtedly reveals its neo-Chalcedonian origin. He writes: "It deals with the themes of the suffering and death of Christ (43–45), his 'double consubstantiality' with his divine Father and his human mother (46–49), and the continuous 'operation' of his two natures through the intertwining of his human emotions with acts of divine power, as revealed in events like the raising of Lazarus (42–45). The focus on the 'theopaschite' question, and the emphasis on the unambiguous divine identity of Christ ('Christ is my God'), are characteristic of the growing 'neo-Chalcedonian' interpretation of the Council. Yet, the stress on the balance between his divinity and humanity, and the insistence that both exist together without change or separation (46–47), is almost a direct paraphrase of Chalcedon's formula of faith." It is certainly true, as Daley has pointed out, that the oracle of Apollo in the codex Marc. Gr. 727 is taken from a neo-Chalcedonian Kontakion, whose aim was to prove the agreement of Cyril's teaching and the Scripture with the dogmatic definition of Chalcedon. It should, however, be acknowledged that the later reception and adaptation of the oracle in a text supporting the neo-Chalcedonian orthodoxy tells us nothing.

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41. Erbse, Fragmente griechischer Theosophien, 146. His opinion was welcomed by A.J. Festugiere in Revue des études grecques 55 (1942), 379-381.

42. G. Dagron, Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des 'Patria' (Bibliothèque byzantine - Études 8), Paris 1984, 102, n. 13: "Le corpus se constitue entre la fin du Ve et le début du Ve siècle; l'inspiration est chalcidoniennne et non pas hellénique."


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about its true origin and meaning. We have seen how much this oracle has been manipulated and mutilated in the course of its manuscript transmission from the eighth through the sixteenth century. Thus, we feel that a re-reading of the oracle might give rise to a different explanation of its distinctive features. To resolve this problem, we plan to take a completely new path.

IV. A Monophysite forgery

The manuscript tradition supports the claim that the original version of the oracle of Apollo is the long one. The comparison with a passage of the Theophyly containing statements about Christology can add another important piece of evidence in favour of this, and help us discover its true theological purpose. The author of the Theophyly is generous in giving interesting and fairly explicit details. The following description of the incarnation of the Word of God is to be found there:

Being thus so by nature (that is, immortal and immaterial, eternal and always the same, unchangeable and without form, being God), the Word of God united himself (through) to the human nature through grace and love toward humanity, becoming incarnate without the issue of semen, mingling or changing (διότι ἐνθάδε ἐνθαδὲ κατασχαιμονίαν καὶ κάθαρσιν καὶ ἐξομολογοῦντος). Herein lies the mystery, in the fact that the human nature was conquered (ἐν τῇ ἐκκατάληψει τῆς καθαρίσεως ἐνθαδε) and that the Word of God became man voluntarily and without changing (ἐκκατάληγον καὶ ἐξομολογημένον) and remained one and the same, and that man became God through grace by union (ἐν ἐνθαδε).

This is clearly a monophysite standpoint, for the author states the existence of the two natures of Christ, but at the same time he maintains that, after the union, only godhead remained exactly the same, while manhood was conquered and possessed by the Word. Furthermore, the stress on the will of the Word of God clearly precludes Monothelitism. We find strong support in favour of our suggestion about the monophysite nature of the Christology developed in the Theophyly, in the aforementioned study by Daley, when he admits that “it is more than likely that it (the Theophyly) reflected an anti-Chalcedonian Christology, since Alexandria was the stronghold of resistance to that Council from the late 450s onwards.”

The oracle of Apollo uses very similar language and reveals precise theological connections with the monophysite Christology of the Theophyly. The doctrine of the two natures has its immediate antecedents in the teachings of the monophysite patriarch of Alexandria, Timothy Aelurus (1477 CE), on the “double consubstantiality” of the Word of God with man in respect to the flesh and with the Father in respect to the godhead (θαυματουργός δὲ εἶναι τῆς ημῶν νόμον καὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας).

64. Reisner, 49.
65. As has been recently observed by P. Allen, art. “Monophysites,” in TLF XXII (1994), 219-239, 252: “Die monophysitische Erklärung der einen zusammengegessenen Mater in Christus handelt jedoch, und zwar hauptsächlich im folgenden Zusammenhang zwischen physe und hypostase, in der Verstellung einer überwiegend göttlichen Natur, die für die christliche Menschheit möglichstweise nur ausleuchtendes Licht war.”
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44. Erbse, 88.


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Theodore's view that the Only-Begotten is to be found, still more clearly, in the Christology of the emperor Zeno’s Hypatode (482).

We also confess that the Only-Begotten Son of God, also God, who according to truth was made man, our Lord Jesus Christ, consubstantial with the Father in respect to Godhead and himself consubstantial with us in respect to manhood (οὐδὲ γὰρ τοῦ τε Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ τε θεονομοῦ καὶ τοῦ τε θεωνομοῦ αὐτὸν τοῦ τε θεονομοῦ καὶ τοῦ τε θεωνομοῦ), having descended and having been incarnate from the Holy Spirit and Mary, the Ever-Virgin Mother, is one God and not two. We say in fact that both his miracles and his sufferings, which he willingly underwent in the flesh, are of one person (ὁ θεός τοῦ θεονομοῦ καὶ τοῦ θεωνομοῦ καὶ τῆς κόσμου ἑαυτῆς ἑαυτῶν ἑαυτῶν ἑαυτῶν), the Only-Begotten Son of God.

For we do not accept at all the persons who divide or combine (τὸ γὰρ οὐκ ἔχει οὐκ ἐνείποντο καὶ ἐνείποντο), the Only-Begotten Son of God. The doctrine of the Passion offers other eloquent parallels and significant arguments in favour of the monophysite nature of our text. The author of the Thessalonians appropriately reports a Sibylline oracle stating that men without faith will inflict slaps on God with impious hands, and invoking the most blessed wood of the Cross on which God had been stretched out. From this it may be deduced that the archaic patristic theology of the Sibylline oracle was still attracting the attention of our author at the end of the fifth century and that his religious sensibility was not far removed from that which inspired the typical formulations of monophysite theology around the same period. Important confirmation of this is to be found in the introduction to the Symposia, a ninth-century collection of oracles and philosophical sayings which, like the Tuchingen summary, also selected fragments from the Thessalonians. There is a mention of the incarnate economy of one of the all-holy and praiseworthy blessed Trinity (τὸ τρίτον τοῦ τριών τοῦ Θεοῦ Θεού), that is of God the Word. It is evident that the economy in the flesh means the whole earthly experience of Christ from birth to crucifixion.

Anyone who is aware of the developments of post-Chalcedonian debates knows that the formula unum ex trei Trinitate, before becoming an integral part of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy in Justinian’s time, had been a distinguishing feature of monophysite Christology in monophysite circles during the second half of the fifth century. Peter the Iberian, the monophysite theologian who deeply inspired Severus

69. Edeus, 79.
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But the closest parallels are to be found, still more clearly, in the Christology of the emperor Zeno's Henotikon (482):

We also confess that the Only-Begotten Son of God, also God, who according to truth was made man, our Lord Jesus Christ, consubstantial with the Father in respect to godhead and himself consubstantial with us in respect to manhood (6poo'6iov utp ~iapi tKaT aiv 8e6tira ica lC6oooolov 'Cv Til v ov za6v Kica& 'zv dv6popm6ktira), having descended and having been incarnate from the Holy Spirit and Mary, the Ever-Virgin theot6kos, is one son and not two. We say in fact that both his miracles and his sufferings, which he willingly underwent in the flesh, are of one person ('Evb% ydp evvaio iatEv rdt e Oitiixt Kat& rnde0q &~aep ~ciiKoiacao j;inetve oapdi), the Only-Begotten Son of God. For we do not accept at all the persons who divide or combine (to'; ... &tatpoivtora i ol'uXovrat) or introduce an apparition, inasmuch as accord- ing to truth the sinless incarnation from the theot6kos has not made an addi- tion of a son, for the Trinity has remained a Trinity, even after one of the Trinity, God the Word, became incarnate (aapicoeivro; roi oev6;, rij z ptcdo; Oeo) A6yov).48

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49. Erbse, 78.
50. Erbse, 79.
51. Erbse, 91.
52. The best recent treatment of this complex topic is by A. Grillmeier, Christ in Christian
of Antioch, used the technical expression "one of the Trinity" when speaking of the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. Philoemerus, the monophysite bishop of Melitene, composed a ten-book work entitled One of the Trinity twice incarnate and suffered.

It would seem reasonable to conclude at this point that the long version of the oracle of Apollo should be seen as a coherent literary unity intended to proclaim simultaneously the truth of monophysite Christology and the victory of Christianity over the old Greek cults. Therefore, nothing prevents us from recognizing this monophysite forgery as an integral part of the original text of the Theophany which perfectly suits its theological programme.

V. *An apologetic response to Porphyry on the divinity of Christ*

There is, however, another important aspect of this oracle which has not yet received the attention it deserves. None of the aforementioned scholars have so far raised the question of why this short treatise on Christology has been put in the very mouth of Apollo and not of another character. In order to find an acceptable answer, we should consider the possibility that this text was intentionally conceived as a hagio oracle to give a direct apologetic response to an authentically pagan oracle of Apollo concerning the human nature of Christ and the meaning of his death. The original Greek text of this oracle is no longer extant; except for just three verses quoted by Lactantius: "He was mortal in the flesh, wise for his wonders, but condemned by the Chaldean judges, nailed to the cross, he underwent a terrible death." Nevertheless, we are in a position to know its content thanks to the precious testimony of Augustine. Augustine writes in the City of God:

> In his work *Heracleon* (πολιορκία), Porphyry brings together in orderly form some so-called "divine" utterances on theological topics. I quote his words as translated from the Greek: "Apollo gave this admonition in metre to a client seeking to learn which god he should placate with a view to winning his wife away from Christianity." There follow the words which Apollo is supposed to have uttered: "It would be easier for you to write lasting words in water, or to fly in the air like a bird on weightless wings, than to get back any..."

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83. Lactantius, *Divinitatibus IV*, 13, 11 [(CELI 19/2), 315].
84. See also T. H. Huxley’s, “Entwicklungsrichten in der Haltung der nordchristlichen Kirche zur theologischen Frage,” in *Cristianitas e specifita regionem nel Mediterraneo Antico* (Studia Epigraphica Augustana, 48), 1944, 215-228, 216: “Die Gewalt...dass die schöne Evangelische und ethische Lektüre der römischen...”

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Tradition 1I/2, tr. P. Allen-J. Cawte, London-Louisville 1995, 317-320. See also Th. Hainthaler,

"Entwicklungsstufen in der Haltung der nordafrikanischen Kirche zur theopaschitischen
Frage," in Cristianesimo e specificith regionali nel Mediterraneo latino (sec. IV-VI) (Studia
Ephemeridis Augustinianum, 46), Roma 1994, 215-228, 216: "Die Formel ... diente gerade

Eutychianern und erklirten sog. Monophysiten wie Philoxenus und Severus als Schlachtruf gegen die
Chaledonier."

53. See John Rufus, Plerophories XXXVII (PO 8/1, 86-87).
54. PO 39, 549-753; PO 40, 203-351. See A. de Halleux, Philoxbne de Mabbog. Sa vie, ses &crits, sa
thWologie, Louvain 1963, 225-238.
55. This conclusion confirms the acute judgment of W. Speyer, Die literarische Falschung im
heidnischen und christlichen Altertum. Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung (Handbuch der Altertums-
wissenschaft, 1/2), Miichen 1971, 246-252: "Fiir die zeitliche Bestimmung derartiger Falschungen ist es
wichtig zu wissen, dafl die spateren Weissagungen in ihren Begriffen oft die christologischen Streitigkeiten widerspiegeln. Der
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56. Lactantius, Divinae Institutiones IV, 13,11 (CSEL 19/2, 319).
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Augustine continues by quoting Porphyry's comment:

Following these verses of Apollo, here translated into prose, Porphyry comments: "In this oracle Apollo has shown how incurable are the Christians, for it is the Jews, not they, who have regard for God." See how he approve Christ and puts the Jews ahead of the Christians by saying that they have more regard for God! He takes Apollo's words about Christ being killed by upright judges to mean that their verdict was just and that He got what He deserved. . . . What he does say here is that the Jews, as being upholders of God, judged Christ justly when they decreed to torture Him in the most ignominious of all deaths.\textsuperscript{58}

Immediately after, Augustine discusses a similar anti-Christian oracle uttered by Hekate, a goddess often identified with Artemis, which equally demises the divinity of Christ and strongly supports the idea of the just condemnation of Christ for having involved his followers in error.\textsuperscript{59} There is an abridged version of this oracle also in Eusebius' \textit{Proof of the Gospel},\textsuperscript{60} and it may certainly be assumed that Apobates was already polemizing against it.\textsuperscript{61} The oracle of Apollo, Augustine observes in conclusion, presents Christ as a criminal justly executed, while the oracle of Hekate, though admitting that Christ was a pious man, confirms that he had been justly condemned to die. Both oracles have the common aim of denying the divinity of Christ and thus of preventing men from becoming Christians.\textsuperscript{62}

These pagan oracles were fundamental pieces of anti-Christian propaganda; that's why they were quoted and commented upon by Porphyry in his \textit{Philosophy from Oracles}. Actually, the intention of Porphyry in writing this fifteen-book treatise was to lend his readers in the knowledge of theosophy (macrocosm) through a philosophical interpretation of the oracles of the Greek gods, mainly Apollo and Hekate, in the context of a pointed criticism of Christianity.\textsuperscript{63}


\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 236.

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\textsuperscript{60} Eusebius of Caesarea, \textit{De Somnium Evangelista} (ed. I.A. Halkin, CCS 23, 139).\textsuperscript{61}


\textsuperscript{62} \textit{De Civitate Dei} XIX, 23 (Engl. tr., 239).

\textsuperscript{63} See Eusebius of Caesarea, \textit{Fragmenta apologetica} (ed. K. Meuck, CCS 23, 139). On the anti-Christian character of this work, which in my opinion should be
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58. Ibid., 236-7.
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60. Eusebius of Caesarea, Demonstratio Evangelica 111,7 (ed. I.A. Heikel, GCS 23, 139 f.).
63. See Eusebius of Caesarea, Praeparatio evangelica IV,6,3 (ed. K. Mras, GCS, Eusebius Werke VIII.1, 176). On the anti-Christian character of this work, which in my opinion should be
As I have shown in a previous essay, the author of the Theosophy had a direct knowledge of Porphyry’s work.\textsuperscript{46} In particular, he quotes two oracles of the Philosopher from Oracles: “In the second book of his Philosophy, Porphyry quotes the following oracle on the immortal god…” (“Ὅτι Πορφύριος ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ βιβλίῳ τῆς ἐν λόγωι αὐτοκρατορίας προφητείας χρησμὸν ἔχει τοῦ ὑπερήφανον ἐξωτερικάς…”).\textsuperscript{47} “According to Porphyry, he uttered this oracle” (“Ὅτι…”).\textsuperscript{48} Even the title of this Christian collection of oracles and sayings, Theosophy, clearly echoes the key-word of Porphyry’s religious philosophy. Evidently, the Christian apologist aimed at writing a theological work which would oppose Porphyry’s treatise by demonstrating that the pagan deities, like Apollo and his fellow goddesses Hekate-Artemis, who had been in the past fierce adversaries of the Christian faith, were at that time compelled to acknowledge their defeat.

Apollo is seen in the oracle under examination as a demon who, like the deities in the Corpus (Mk 5,1-18 par.), must publicly confess the true divinity of Christ, explaining this theological tenet through the precise formulations of monotheistic orthodoxy. Apollo, who had once highly praised the piety of the Jews, thus meeting the approval of Porphyry, is now said, in another oracle of the Theosophy, to have insulted and threatened them as being impudent, foolish and licentious men who had denied the law of the Father.\textsuperscript{49} In this way, all the pagans, who were acquainted with Apollo’s harsh judgment on Christ recorded in Porphyry’s Philosophy from Oracles, noted that the Greek god was no longer of the same mind as before and that he had definitively converted to Christianity; Christ is my God!

VI. On the dating of the Theosophy

The present study of the Christian oracle of Apollo not only sheds light on the dogmatic and apologetic purpose of the Theosophy; it also enables us to date the composition of the entire work. Since the Byzantine exegete says that the Theosophy was concluded by a concise universal chronicle that went from Adam to the times of the emperor Zeno (474-491),\textsuperscript{50} scholars commonly deem that this work must have been composed during the reign of Zeno. But this widespread conviction is evidently contradicted by the two manuscripts containing the long version of the oracle of Apollo. Both agree in maintaining that this oracle was found at Delphi during the reign of Anastasius (ἐν Ἀναστασίῳ ἐν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ Ἀναστασίου…), after a mainarm that reached the dimensions of a flood, engraved on a tablet and buried in the foundations of the idol’s own temple.\textsuperscript{51} However one interprets this information, the age of Zeno is

\textsuperscript{47} Theos, 527-28 (Biblica, 18-21).
\textsuperscript{48} Thess. 505 (Biblica, 22).
\textsuperscript{49} Thess. 581 (Biblica, 24 f.).
\textsuperscript{50} Biblica, 2.
\textsuperscript{51} The text of the Venice manuscript edited by Daley, 51, says ἐν διήπτερῳ τῆς Θεοκρατίας, while the Athens manuscript, printed by Biblica, 122, has ἐν ἀπολύτῳ τῆς Ἰδωρίας. Both readings are evidently corrupt.
from Oracle

following oracle on the immortal god..." ("Otn Iop0iptoq v tjr a uE&Cpq ftii i t fq Kc xoy ov ~4taoo0ai a~boi~ r apaiOeOra Xpoapv i ep`~vt zo Oeo 'o5 dOavdtoa exovra ovso; ... .);6 "According to Porphyry ... he uttered this oracle" ("On [*] icar2 a6v Iop46ptov tot6v6E Xp11ab6v veyCE . . ).66 Even the title of this Christian collection of oracles and sayings, Theosophy, dearly echoes the key-word of Porphyry's religious philosophy. Evidently, the Christian apologist aimed at writing a theological work which would oppose Porphyry's treatise by demonstrating that the pagan deities, like Apollo and his fellow goddess Hekate-Artemis, who had been in the past fierce adversaries of the Christian faith, were at that time compelled to acknowledge their defeat.

Apollo is seen in the oracle under examination as a demon who, like the demons in the Gospels (Mk 5,1-18 par.), must publicly confess the true divinity of Christ, explaining this theological tenet through the precise formulations of monophysite orthodoxy. Apollo, who had once highly praised the piety of the Jews, thus meeting the approval of Porphyry, is now said, in another oracle of the Theosophy, to have insulted and threatened them as being impudent, foolish and impious men who had denied the law of the Father.67 In this way, all the pagans, who were acquainted with Apollo's harsh judgment on Christ recorded in Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles, noted that the Greek god was no longer of the same mind as before and that he had definitively converted to Christianity: Christ is my God!

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67. Theos. i52 (Erbse, 34 f.). 68. Erbse, 2.

69. The text of the Venice manuscript edited by Daley, 51, says 'v Aeoii; Tq eaooaoviclq, while
the Athens manuscript, printed by Erbse, 122, has tv AeX4oi ZTfi 'Izatioc. Both readings are
evidently corrupt.

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excluded and the work must necessarily be dated between April 14, 491, and July 1, 516.

Now, there is a delicate problem of textual criticism concerning the identification of the precise year of the reign of Anastasius in which the oracle was found, and which should therefore be taken as the terminus post quem for the composition of the entire work. The first editor of the oracle, Moreau, interpreted the letters στ βάρας of the manuscript A.M. 1080, f. 189v, as μηνιάτικα τω θανάτι, the first year of the reign of Anastasius, which was 491/2 ce.20 Delatte, too, pronounced himself in favor of this date,21 but in his later edition of the oracle he wrote in the approbation "et non ano," that is, the twenty-first year of the reign of Anastasius, which was 511/12 ce, thus leaving the question undecided.22 Promessi23 and Erbe,24 on the basis of the manuscript Paris, Suppl. Gr. 690, proposed reading the number as that of the twenty-first year. This dating is also welcomed by Dagron25 and Dalley.26

The codex Marc. Gr. 575, f. 26r, which is our oldest piece of proof, seems to give evidence for 491/2 ce as the correct date: μηνιάτικος τω θανάτι. In the course of transmission these words could easily have been changed into ελεύθερος τῶν. This would permit us to explain palaeographically how the reading κατ' was produced. Unfortunately, the Venice manuscript adds further confused details and chronological abbreviations, which make any attempt at an exact dating impossible. The oracle, says the anonymous excerptor, was found μηνιάτικος τω θανάτι. The 12th book, i.e., "in the month of August, on the eighteenth day, in the fourth indiction, on Monday." Such a day does not exist. With all due caution, we can only say that we are faced with an old textual corruption of very difficult interpretation. But if one takes the indiction as the basic and decisive element in dating, as is usually done in confusing cases, the fourth indiction of Anastasius' reign may point either to a Sunday of the year 496 or to a Thursday of the year 511.27 Now, since the author of the Theophyly is known to have expected the world to end at the latest in 597/8, we are left only with the year 496.

VII. The Theophyly and Severus of Antioch

If one asks oneself which Greek-speaking theologian might have expressed Chronological digress in the terms of the Theophyly around the year 500 ce, one immediately thinks of an exponent of the Cyrillic-inspired verbal Monophysitism, such as Severus of Antioch, who became the monophysite patriarch of Antioch some years later (512-518). To verify that the author of the Theophyly and Severus are indeed in agreement, one need only refer to the great wealth of documentation collected and skillfully analysed by various eminent scholars, such as A. Lehmann.28 W.J.C.

74. Erbe, Fragmenta graecorvm Theophylo, 194 and 196 cited, Fragmenta XLI f. 12 and 112.
75. Dagron, Commentaire de l'oracle (1927), 155, n. 162.
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The codex Marc. Gr. 573, f.26v, which is our oldest piece of proof, seems to give evidence for 491/2 as the correct date: EicK; oc r pdp o(p Eet. In the course of transmission these words could easily have been changed into dicoozt4, spoqc. This would permit us to explain palaeographically how the reading cd' was produced. Unfortunately, the Venice manuscript adds further confused details and chronological abbreviations, which make any attempt at an exact dating impossible. The oracle, says the anonymous excerptor, was found gTvA ajyodo'a tC"n 1 iv&t(ovdvo) ippo P', i.e., "in the month of August, on the eighteenth day, in the fourth indiction, on Monday."

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VII. The Theosophy and Severus of Antioch

If one asks oneself which Greek-speaking theologian might have expressed Christological dogma in the terms of the Theosophy around the year 500 CE, one immediately thinks of an exponent of the Cyrillian-inspired verbal Monophysitism, such as for example Severus of Sozopolis, who became the monophysite patriarch of Antioch some years later (512-518). To verify that the author of the Theosophy and Severus are indeed in agreement, one need only refer to the great wealth of documentation collected and skilfully analysed by various eminent scholars, such as J. Lebon,78 W.H.C.

70. Buresch, Klaros, 130.

73. A. von Premerstein, "Griechisch-heidnische Weise" (n. 23 above), 665-666.

74. Erbse, Fragmente griechischer Theosophien, 134 and 146; Idem, Fragmenta, XLVII f. and 122. 75. Dagron, Constantinople imaginaire (n. 42 above), 153, n. 102.
76. Daley, "Apollo as a Chalcedonian" (n. 43 above), 42 f.
77. For these technical aspects of the Byzantine chronological system, see V. Grumel, Traité d'êtudes byzantines, I. La chronologie, Paris 1958, in particular the table at p. 244.
Frend,79 Robert C. Chenut,80 I.R. Terrance,81 A. Ollivar,82 A. Grillmeier,82 and L.R. Wickham.84

Substantially, the Christology of Severus is based on the concept that, after the unformed union (ἀπόθεσις οὐσίας) out of two natures (ὑπὸ δύο ουσιῶν), in Christ there is only one immanent nature of God the Word (γνώμης τοῦ λόγου θεοτοκοῦ). He never tires of repeating his point of view, based explicitly on the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria, in an insistent, almost obsessive way, as can be seen in his polemical treatises, such as the "Philalethes"86 and the "Contra Iudaeos"87 in his "Cathedral Homilies,"88 and in his letters.89 In defense of this doctrine, he polemizes equally against Apollinaris of Laodicea and the radical Monophysites such as Eutyches, and against the Anti-Union Dyophysites (Diodorus, Theodorus, Nectarios), the Pope Leo and the Council of Chalcedon.

Other elements in the Christology of the "Philalethes" also recall the work of Severus, as for example the idea that the Word's sharing in humanity is voluntary and intentional,90 and that the source of the miracle-working of Christ is the divine act of will of the Logos.91 Besides, the terms "Immanuel" and "Monogenes" to designate Christ,92 and the key role played by Mary, who is involved with tender devotion under the titles of "Mother of God" and "Even-Virgin" (εὐμητέρου ἀσπίδος Ματρός),93 are characteristic traits of Severus's language and spirituality, as may be simply confirmed by the aforementioned sources.94

Severus of Antioch also makes repeated use of the formula "one of the Trinity suffered for us in the flesh," since for him this is the discriminating mark of the supporters of monophysite Christology in contrast with the heretical supporters of Chalcedon. In his "Philalethes", Severus argues against the Chalcedonians because they refuse this definition of the Only-begotten Word,95 elsewhere he defends

83. A. Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition II/2 (n. 52 above), 17, 175.
85. See the edition by R. Heppel, with French translation, in CSCO 132-134, Louvain 1952.
87. See for example, among many other texts, Rev. cœn. I. 10-12 (F 58/2, 229-235); IV. 4-6 (501-538); XVI. 17 (411): X. 10 (577): XI. 10 (581-583); XII. 110 (591): XXV. 81 (597): XXVI. 139 (597-605).
89. See the texts gathered by Terrance, Christology, 105.
90. See, e.g., C. Henne, Les homélies XLI (CSCO 102, 94).
94. L.20 (CSCO 102, 73).
Substantial unmixed u
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(301-303); XIV, 17 (411); XXI (PO 37/1, 79-81); XC (PO 23/1, 120-165); CXXV (PO 29/1, 245).

88. Epist. 6 (PO 12/2, 197); 25 (222-248); 65 (PO 14/1, 6-68). 89. See the texts gathered by Torrance, Christology, 109.
90. See, e.g., C. imp. Gramm. III,32 (CSCO 102, 94).
91. Erbse, 53; 69; 70; 73.
92. Erbse, 72-73; 85.
93. For Severus' mariology, see especially the Homilies XIV and LXVII, commented upon by P.


94. III,29 (CSCO 102, 73).
the formula against the objection of the Romans, who claimed that it would subject the Holy Trinity to a numerical division. In a letter, whose fragmentary text was discovered in Coptic translation in an Egyptian tomb, Severus says that one of the hypostases of the Holy Trinity, that is, God the Word, has taken the flesh because of mankind. The materials we have so far provided for comparison seem to us to confirm beyond all reasonable doubt that the name of Apollo shows clear monophysite tendencies. In particular, we believe it is legitimate to put forward the hypothesis that the author of Apollo’s oracle, and therefore of the Theosophy, of which this oracle is an integral part, can be identified as Severus of Antioch. His surviving writings contain statements concerning the Trinity, the incarnation and passion of Christ, and the Mother of God, all of which coincide surprisingly, and we think not fortuitously, with the monophysite message of the Theosophy.

VIII. The Pagan Education of Severus

But this is not enough. We deem that another, no less important reason makes crediting the composition of the Theosophy to Severus highly plausible, namely its author’s extraordinary familiarity with classical culture. Of all the monophysite theologians who could have written, in the years around 500 CE, a treatise On True Belief, only Severus, as far as we know, was also in full possession of that knowledge of both pagan religion and philosophy necessary to construct an apologetic treatise such as the Theosophy.

In his youth Severus studied not only Greek, but also Latin grammar and rhetoric in Alexandria, where he mastered the ancient literature of both languages. This may explain the surprising fact that in a Greek work such as the Theosophy there is a literal quotation in Latin from Lucan’s Pharsalia: “Vestigia fuit aetas.” Also the Aenidae of the Latin poet Vergil is mentioned in the Theosophy as an authoritative source for the catalogue of the Sibyls. Vergil’s De viris Illustribus (I.26) and Aeneid (IV.355) are quoted.

Severus continued his studies at the school of Berytos in Phoenicia, where he attended lessons on Roman law. It was widely believed in the sixth century that the young Severus had practised witchcraft in Berytos and worshipped demons and idols in the Phoenician temples. In order to refute this common charge, his friend Zacharias...

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95. Epist. 22 (PO 12/2, 215-216).


98. Erbse, 64-65.


Scholasticus wrote "The Life of Severus." From this report we learn, among other very interesting things, that Porphyry's anti-Christian treatise was well known in that milieu. These accusations were aimed at discrediting the monotheistic patriarch by denouncing the dangerous pagan connections of his heretical theology. According to the letter of the Eastern bishop to pope Agapetus, Severus was "of one mind with the pagans" (ἐν τῷ δόξῃ τῶν ἐθνῶν) and he was initiated into the mysteries of the pagans, which he honours, and taught the doctrines of Eudoxus and Mani (most of the "Ethnics" understood political and religious matters, not the Eleusinian mysteries with 

Mêthys). In the monk's pamphlet to Manes, the patriarch of Constantinople, we read that Severus, the worshipper of demons, had been caught at Berytus practicing magic arts (θεῖον μάγιαν θεραπεύει ὁ ἣτο τῆς ἐθνικῆς τοῦ Μανιαίου θεραπευτήν). That this charge was not a completely baseless slander is confirmed by Severus himself, who made a full public confession of the sins he had committed in his pagan past, in an autobiographical passage of the homily in honour of Saint Leonidas of Tricola, preserved in a Coptic translation. Not far from Berytus there were, in fact, the famous altars of the temples of Heliopolis (Habib) where Zeus uttered his oracles and the Phoenician Agathodame was honoured by people who devoted themselves to sacred prostitution. The young pagan student Severus was certainly one of those who frequently frequented that place with pleasure and admiration, but then abandoned that pagan way of life and became a Christian monk by intercession of the martyr Leonidas of Tricola. Severus praises him in a homily as the special healer sent

101. Zacharias, Vita Severi (PO 2/1, 9).
102. PO 2/1, 42.
103. See Epigraphical orientation ad Agathodame (ed. E. Schwemer, ACD III, 144). From the fourth century on, the word Hellenes was commonly used to designate both the pagans and the Christian heretics influenced by pagan ideas and practices. See R. Klein, art. "Hellenism" in RAC XIV (1968), esp. 438-458.
104. Ibid., 147. Tryphes was the most famous representative of the monotheistic movement; Manes was the founder of the Manichaean.
105. Latreia monodromias ad Leonidem (πόλεος).
106. Latreia s. Leonidem (4.5-6). This foundational text was discovered, published and translated into Latin by C. Garatta, "Testes hagiographici orientales relativi a Sant'Leonardo di Tripoli." L'Ombra corta di Sibfere di Antiochie, Le Studi 29 (1960), 335-386, 374. It is cognate with many other hymns which differ in language (some even in style)."Raisa" and Berytus are distinguished by their idiosyncratic religious traditions (orthodox in Berytus, not in Raisa). In contrast with the latter, the optative reflexive indicates a preference (fulness of life, fullness of life) over a reflexive (fulness of life, fullness of life) over a reflexive (fulness of life, fullness of life). At the time of the geographical development of religion, the concept of "fulness of life" was used in a reflexive manner (fulness of life) over a reflexive (fulness of life) over a reflexive (fulness of life) over a reflexive (fulness of life). For a thorough investigation of the sanctuaries of Heliopolis, their history, architecture and religious life, we must refer the reader to the work in three volumes by Y. Higou, Le triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek, Munich 1977-1985. The same author has given an excellent synthesis in his article "Heliopolis, grand centre religieux sous l'Empire," in W. Hauck (ed.), ANRW II 18.4, Berlin, New York 1991, 2488-2508.
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101. Zacharia 102. PO 2/1, 103. See Epist fourth centu and the Chr "Hellenen," i

104. Ibid., 14 Mani was the founder of Manichaeism.

105. Libellus monachorum ad Menam (ibid. 40).

106. Laudatio S. Leontii 4,1-6. This foundational text was discovered, published and translated into Latin by G. Garitte, "Textes hagiographiques orientaux relatifs A Saint Lonce de Tripoli. II. L'homélie copte de Svibre d'Antioche," Le Museon 79 (1966), 335-386, 374: Et cognosco ego multos e iuvenibus qui didicerunt leges Romanorum in civitate inordinata, id est Berytus, et abierunt ad eius civitatem ut orarent; et confestim reliquernnt eruditioem (mai6te ea;) suam Vanam resque vitae, purificaverunt mentem suam a fabulis gentilium ('ii.Xrv), mutati sunt mutatione bona et conversi sunt ab illis ad vitam plenam sapientia et ad conversationem beatorum monachorum; et ego ipse unus sum ex illis.... Ego autem oravi seorsum solus, cum adhuc essem gentilis (ijrlv); dicebam ita: 'Sancte Leonti martyr sancte, roga Deum tuum pro me ut salvet me a cultu gentilium (T.rjv) consuetudineque patrum meorum .... Et ita Deus universi Christus

lesus convertit me a seductione (wdvTil) gentilium ('rlyv) per orationes martyris sancti Leontii et vocavit me ad vitam castam monachismi.

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by God to rescue the Phœnicians from the pagan error and the cult of demons. Thanks
to him, many people had already renounced their pagan practices.109

However, one can easily imagine that the classical culture Severus had mastered
so well in his youth as a student in Alexandria and Berytus was not completely erased
after his conversion. Although there are not many traces of pagan readings in Severus' theo-
logical writings, it is worth noting in this respect that Severus was so deeply imbued with classical learning that sometimes he could not conceal his familiarity
with pagan sources, even in the homilies he preached as a bishop to the people of
Antioch. In the Coptic homily in honor of Saint Leonius of Tripolis, Severus quotes
the saying of a Greek sage: “One of your sages (φοιτητής) said: the virtue of a horse
reveals itself in war, the virtue of a friend in the day of trial,”110 and adds that “some
of your poets (ποίητοι) said that the gods are near even if they are far.”110 In another
homily Severus quotes Plato's Timæus 22 b: “That's why one of their philosophers
said: The Greeks are always young, and there is no old Greek.”111

A systematic survey of the available material would probably afford new discoveries. It is, however, certainly striking to see the attention Severus had for pagan sages
and poets, who play a central role in the Theosophy. It is quite understandable that the
general impression Severus gave his contemporaries and the subsequent generations
of orthodox theologians was that of a man who, very ambiguously, had been at the
same time both a monophysite leader and a thinker who was open to pagan influences.
In the dogmatic tractate known as "Declaratio fidei" (Declaratio fidei), Severus
is simply labelled as "the Pagan" (Eρημίτης ὁ Ἑλληνικός),112 and the polemical
image that still in the eighth century John of Damascus had of Severus was that of an
Ἀποστόλος and Ἐφήβων, that is a "monophysite heretic" and a "man deeply rooted
in the pagan tradition."113

The author of the Theosophy was a theologian who, like Severus, sensibilized his
monophysite faith with a thorough knowledge of the classical world, from both a
religious and philosophical point of view. If this coincidence, as we think, is not
fortuitous, the Theosophy could be viewed as one of the very few extracts in Greek of a
certain length that have survived to our day from Severus' numerous works. This is
certainly not to be underestimated, since it contributes to the solution of the delicate
and obscure problem created by the transmission and disappearance of Greek patristic
writings in the Byzantine Middle Ages.114

Consequently, we are now in a position to appreciate the reasons for the different
fates of the seven-book treatise De Thurifera and the four-book appendix entitled
Theosophy. The theological treatise was entirely lost without leaving any trace in later
Byzantine sources because of its monophysite tenets. Of a great work by Severus on

110. ibid. 8.11 (Cantire, 379). The two texts drawn upon here have not yet been identified.
111. May 7, 1974.
112. Hom. XXXVIII (P. 56, 571).
112. See 6, XIX (F. Delsaesp. E. Chrysos: Phanourakis, Declaratio fidei, 39 in.
113. See John of Damascus, De oppiis jünger (P. 55, 76 B).
114. See in this context see the clear methodology remarks by G. Demou, "Neurex fragments
grèces de Sever d'Antioche," in ANTHROPOLOGI. HEMSLE, 1986, 102–
by God to rescue the Phoenicians from the pagan error and the cult of demons. Thanks to him, many people had already renounced their pagan practices.08

However, one can easily imagine that the classical culture Severus had mastered so well in his youth as a student in Alexandria and Beryus was not completely erased after his conversion. Although there are not many traces of pagan readings in Severus' theological writings, it is worth noting in this respect that Severus was so deeply imbued with classical learning that sometimes he could not conceal his familiarity with pagan sources, even in the homilies he preached as a bishop to the people of Antioch. In the Coptic homily in honor of Saint Leontius of Tripolis, Severus quotes the saying of a Greek sage: "One of your sages (co06') said: the virtue of a horse reveals itself in war; the virtue of a friend in the day of trial,"1'9 and adds that "some of your poets (notvrlzr) said that the gods are near even if they are far."110 In another homily Severus quotes Plato's Timaeus 22 b: "That's why one of their philosophers said: The Greeks are always young, and there is no old Greek."'1

A systematic survey of the available material would probably afford new discoveries. It is, however, certainly striking to see the attention Severus had for pagan sages and poets, who play a central role in the Theosophy. It is quite understandable that the general impression Severus gave his contemporaries and the subsequent generations of orthodox theologians was that of a man who, very ambiguously, had been at the same time both a monophysite leader and a thinker who was open to pagan influences. In the dogmatic florilegium known as Doctrina Patrum de incarnatione Verbi,

Severus is simply labelled as "the Pagan" (YEihpoi too "ETIvo;),112 and the polemical image that still in the eighth century John of Damascus had of Severus was that of an 'AKi4ao; and "Eyqv, that is a "monophysite heretic" and a "man deeply rooted in the pagan tradition."113

The author of the Theosophy was a theologian who, like Severus, synthesized his monophysite faith with a thorough knowledge of the classical world, from both a religious and philosophical point of view. If this coincidence, as we think, is not fortuitous, the Theosophy could be viewed as one of the very few extracts in Greek of a certain length that have survived to our day from Severus' numerous works. This is certainly not to be underestimated, since it contributes to the solution of the delicate and obscure problem created by the transmission and disappearance of Greek patristic works in the Byzantine Middle Ages."4

Consequently, we are now in a position to appreciate the reasons for the different fates of the seven-book treatise On True Belief and the four-book appendix entitled Theosophy. The theological treatise was entirely lost without leaving any trace in later Byzantine sources because of its monophysite tenets. Of a great work by Severus on
108. Hom. cath. XXVII (PO 36, 565).
110. Ibid. 8,11 (Garitte, 377). The two texts drawn upon here have not yet been identified.

Maybe Severus is the only one to quote them!

111. Hom. cath. XXVII (PO 36, 571).
112. See 6, XIX (F. Diekamp-E. Chrysos-B. Phanourgakis, Doctrina Patrum de incarnatione Verbi.


114. On this topic see the clear methodological remarks by G. Dorival, "Nouveaux fragments


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the orthodox, that is monophysite, faith in the Trinity and Incarnation, apparently enriched by a collection of traditional testimonies, there remains only a vague mention in a dogmatic florilegium preserved in Arabic.116 The Theroephy, on the other hand, managed to escape complete destruction and, as an independent collection of religious and philosophical pagan excerpts, continued to exert considerable influence on Byzantine theological literature, thanks to its nature as an "apologetic" work, that is, a work seen as useful in a strategy for the conversion of pagans. A good example of this influence can be seen in an anonymous work written at Constantinople in the seventh century, which explains the workings and purpose of this apologetic method: through the collection of many pagan testimonies of the Christian doctrines, its author aimed at preventing the pagans from finding excuses (διαστάσεις) for their refusal to embrace Christianity.117 But the fact that the Theroephy was originally composed by a monophysite theologian ensured that it was widely and quickly diffused in translation, above all among the Eastern monophysite communities. This is the reason why, still today, we find various collections of alleged pagan prophesies of Christianity in manuscripts which are written in languages such as Syrian,118 Coptic,119 and Arabic.120 Not by chance do we find here again a clear confirmation that the quotation of testimonies from gods and wise men, who belong to the same pagan tradition as the addressers, is intended to deprive them of any excuse for not believing their own religious authorities.121

IX. Concluding remarks

Since the fourth century ct the traditional pagan theme of the discovery of texts with a prominent meaning for the political and religious propaganda had found wide acceptance also among the Christians,122 Accounts of providential findings were not rare that era marked by the great Christological controversies. For example, a hagia oracle of Apollo concerning the Virgin Mary was said to have been discovered simultaneously at Cyzicus and Athens during the reign of Leo I (457-474).123

In this context, the story of the chance finding of the tablet in the temple of Delphi is aimed at supporting the special authority of the oracle under examination. The discovery of our antipagan and monophysite oracle is alleged to have taken place

115. See G. Graf, Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur, I. Band: Die Übersetzungen (Stud. et Testa., 118); Civit del Vecchio 1949, 418-419.
116. This work is completely lost. We know of its contents only from Photius, Bibliothek, ed. I.70 (ed. R. Henry, vol. II, Paris 1863, 162-165).
118. See A. van Lamoen, "Trois pseudo-prophéties massaliotes inédites," Le Monast 75 (1906), 32-39; Van der Broek, "Four Coptic Fragments," quoted above n. 11.
121. W. Schubart, De litteris scripturis in arabiis. Mit einem Ausblick auf Medival und Neuzt. (Hypomnemata 24), Göttingen 1980, offers a careful, well-documented analysis of the origin and diffusion of this "input" in ancient culture and of its survival in medieval and modern times.
122. There: §53 (Erbe, 35 f.).
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118. See A.v (1960), 27-32

119. Graf,Ge 120. See S. Br

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122. Theos. i53 (Erbse, 35 f.).

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during the reign of Anastasius, as if it had been a symbolic announcement of the anti- 
Chalcedonian religious policy of the emperor, which was revealed openly on the occa-
sion of the deposition of the Chalcedonian patriarch of Constantinople, Euphrasius 
(455–6). This claim is quite fitting for an author such as Severus, who is known to have 
found a valid supporter in that emperor with open monophysite sympathies. In this 
way the message of the oracle of Apollo is put under the patronage of the “pious king” 
Anastasius, the champion of monophysite orthodoxy.123

In conclusion, all that we have said so far leads us to believe that this oracle of 
Apollo is to be considered a forgery invented by a monophysite theologian who pos-
sessed wide and thorough knowledge in the fields of pagan philosophy and religion, 
thus presenting a striking resemblance to Severus of Sosaopolis (or “of Antioch”). The 
Therapeia was composed, together with the principal work On True Faith, after 456, 
the probable year of the alleged finding of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and not later 
than 507–8, i.e., the year of the supposed end of the world according to the calculations 
of the Alexandrian chronological era.

The analysis of the literary form and the religious content of this oracle encour-
age us to take it for granted that the Therapeia was a work devised primarily to 
contradict and replace Porphyr’s anti-Christian treatise, the Philopony from Crete, 
by showing that the oracles of the Greek gods were not in conflict with the Christian 
faith, but that there was, on the contrary, a fundamental agreement between their 
message and the true Christian theosophy concerning the Trinity and Incarnation. 
After the unconditional surrender of the gods who had for so long fought against the 
new religion, no further justification was left for those pagans who obstinately contin-
ued to refuse to embrace Christianity.

The production of literary forgeries such as the oracle of Apollo is to be paralleled 
with the numerous and intriguing theological forgeries produced during the 
Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries.214 In this context, forgery 
reveals itself as a formidable instrument of polemics and competition, seen as neces-
ary in an epoch of profound religious conflict and cultural transformation. On the 
other hand, the Christian oracle of Apollo is a special case in the general problem of 
the use of Greek mythology in a society ruled by Christian Emperors. There was 
certainly a secular, or neutral, use of the classical literary tradition to which Christians 
too could make reference.125 But, in addition to this, we must consider the strength of 
the apologetic appropriation of that material aimed at emptying it of all pagan mean-
ing. In this way, through the oracle of Apollo, it becomes clear how exceptionally 
important the Therapeia as a whole is for the study of the Christian reception, 
transmission, and radical reversal of ancient Greek religious ideas. This kind of trans-
formation of the classical heritage is beyond any doubt a matter of great significance in 
the history of the classical tradition.

123. Severus often calls Anastasius “pious,” “Christ-loving” and “God-loving”; see C. Capitelli, 

124. On their meaning there are some interesting remarks by P. T. Gray, “Forgery as an 
Instrument of Progress: Reconstructing the Theological Tradition in the Sixth Century,” 

125. For a fresh look at this issue see now W. Liebeschuetz, “Pagan Mythology in the Christian 
during the reign of Anastasius, as if it had been a symbolic announcement of the anti-Chalcedonian religious policy of the emperor, which was revealed openly on the occasion of the deposition of the Chalcedonian patriarch of Constantinople, Euphemius (495-6). This claim is quite fitting for an author such as Severus, who is known to have found a valid supporter in that emperor with open monophysite sympathies. In this way the message of the oracle of Apollo is put under the patronage of the "pious king" Anastasius, the champion of monophysite orthodoxy.123

In conclusion, all that we have said so far leads us to believe that this oracle of Apollo is to be considered a forgery invented by a monophysite theologian who possessed wide and thorough knowledge in the fields of pagan philosophy and religion, thus presenting a striking resemblance to Severus of Sozopolis (or "of Antioch"). The Theosophy was composed, together with the principal work On True Faith, after 496, the probable year of the alleged finding of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and not later than 507-8, i.e., the year of the supposed end of the world according to the calculations of the Alexandrian chronological era.

The analysis of the literary form and the religious content of this oracle encourages us to take it for granted that the Theosophy was a work devised primarily to contradict and replace Porphyry's anti-Christian treatise, the Philosophy from Oracles, by showing that the oracles of the Greek gods were not in conflict with the Christian faith, but that there was, on the contrary, a fundamental agreement between their message and the true Christian theosophy concerning the Trinity and Incarnation. After the unconditional surrender of the gods who had for so long fought against the new religion, no further justification was left for those pagans who obstinately continued to refuse to embrace Christianity.

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