Cristian Gaşpar

Theodoret's Φιλόθεος ἱστορία: The Epic of Syrian Monasticism

M. A. Thesis in Medieval Studies

The Central European University

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by

Cristian Gaşpar

(Romania)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU

Chair, Examination Committee

External Examiner

Thesis Supervisor

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I, the undersigned, Cristian GAŞPAR, candidate for the M. A. degree in Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of this thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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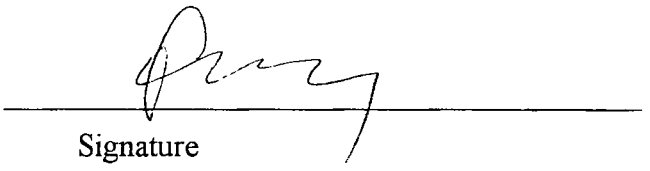

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ABSTRACT

Theodoret's Φιλόθεος ἱστορία: The Epic of Syrian Monasticism

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The present thesis is an attempt to investigate the use of heroic terminology, themes and images in the literary portraits of the Syrian ascetics composed by Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus (*vixit* AD 393-466), in his work, the *Philotheos historia* (AD 444). It also aims at providing an "ideological" justification for the abundant and rather singular use Theodoret made of Greek heroic terminology and imagery.

After the preliminary remarks, which contain a brief bio-bibliographic portrait of Theodoret and a succinct review of the scholarly literature (mainly the work done by Pierre Canivet, since this particular topic was not particularly favoured by previous researchers), a few methodological questions are raised concerning the literary status of the *Philotheos historia* and its possible relation with the social realities of the Late Roman Empire. Since Theodoret's work is to be included among the literary writings which employ a hagiographic discourse, characterised by stylisation of the contents and a polemical function, this relation is shown to be at least problematic.

An attempt is then made to summarise and analyse the accusations against the Christian ascetics which appear in works written by non-Christians (such as Libanius, Eunapius, and Julian) and Christians (such as Synesius of Cyrene) in the fourth and fifth centuries. The image of the Christian monks painted by these sources contains a negative image of the monks, devoid of certain traditional heroic elements usually contained in representations of exceptional individuals in the Hellenic tradition.

The possible audience of the *Philotheos historia* is determined in the following chapter, by analysing significant features of the text (language, specific stylistic choices, dissimulated programmatic declarations). The work was most probably addressed to members of the intellectual elite, and, consequently, the image

of ascetics was shaped along the lines of the ideal heroic figures specific to this social category.

An investigation of some of the traditional heroic themes and terms occurring in the *Philotheos historia* is made in the last two chapters. The use Theodoret made of such *topoi* as the heroic appearance, the sacred rage of the warrior and the consequences of losing control over it, the heroic fame (κλέος), the visible virtue, etc. suggests that he made a conscious effort to adopt non-Christian thematic and terminology and to adapt it to new, typically Christian concepts and meanings. The purpose was to create a prestigious Christian heroic tradition which might successfully oppose the existing one and, because of its terminologic and thematic continuity, appeal both to the Christian and to the non-Christian members of the educated audience for which the *Philotheos historia* was composed.

The concluding chapter sums up the results obtained and indicates possible directions on which future research might proceed in identifying and analysing the remaining heroic elements which were not included in the present thesis (viz., the way the ascetics use well uttered speech as a means of conviction rather than brute force).

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ABBREVIATIONS

Curatio Graecarum affectionum curatio

HE *Historia ecclesiastica*

HM *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*

HR *Historia religiosa*

MST *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr*

NPNF *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*

PG *Patrologia Graeca*

SC *Sources Chrétiennes*

CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Theodoret, the future bishop of Cyrrhus, but at the time of this story still a young reader in one of the splendid churches of Antioch, was visiting one of his favourite ascetics, Zeno, who dwelled on Mt Silpius not far away from the city. After a long conversation in philosophy (Theodoret liked to prove himself and inquisitive visitor, for the benefit of his future readers as well as for his own), he begged the holy man's blessing before departing. The answer came somewhat unexpectedly: "He refused, saying that it was we who lawfully performed prayer and calling himself a civilian and us soldiers (ἡμᾶς πληροῦν τὴν εὐχὴν ἔννομον εἶναι λέγων, καὶ ἑαυτὸν μὲν ἰδιώτην καλῶν, στρατιώτας δὲ ἡμᾶς ὀνομάζων) . . ."[1]

It is, perhaps, significant that we know best Theodoret as a fighter. Both the dates of his birth and that of his death had to be approximated by learned scholars through ingenious conjectures and calculation since precise information about them is absent from the sources.[2] If little is known about his coming into and going out of this world (apart from the "legendary" account he gave of his birth in the *Philotheos historia*)[3], we are better informed on his monastic and ecclesiastic career: a reader in his early youth, then, following the death of his parents, a monk, possibly in one of the two monasteries near Nikertai, and from 423 bishop of Cyrrhus in Northern Syria, successfully waging war against the heretics in his diocese and endowing the dusty

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[1]*Philotheos historia*, 12, 4. All the subsequent references are made to the text published in the *Sources Chrétiennes* collection: Théodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des moines de Syrie: Histoire Philothée*, Vol. 1-2, Introduction, critical text, translation, and notes by Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen (Paris: Les Editions de Cerf, 1977 and 1979); however, the references will be made in the form *HR*, followed by the number of the chapter and of the passage, since I preferred to preserve in the footnotes the traditional title of Theodoret's work, *Historia religiosa*. The translation is R. M. Price's in Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks in Syria,* translated with an introduction and notes by R. M. Price (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 97. All Greek passages occurring in the present work without any indication concerning their translator have been translated by me.

[2]The most probable dates seem to be 393 for his birth and 466 retained by M. R. Price in the "Introduction" to *History*, ix . Cf., Y. Azéma, "La date de la mort de Théodoret de Cyr," *Pallas* 31 (1984): 137-55, who believes that Theodoret died in 460.

[3]*HR*, 13, 16-18.

little town which was his see with magnificent buildings for the pride and admiration of the generations to come.[4] As a bishop, we find Theodoret involved in all the major doctrinary debates of the fifth century for the sake of the ἀλήθειαν χαλεπῶς πολεμουμένην[5] and, because of his fierce polemic with Cyrill of Alexandria and of his support for Nestorius (which he finally withdrew after much hesitation) he had more than his share of hard times. Condemned and deposed in 448 by the Council of Ephesus (usually known as the *latrocinium* because of the violence and the illegal actions perpetrated there), he retreated in one of the Syrian monasteries until he was rehabilitated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 where his orthodoxy was confirmed. Little is known about his later years.

Among his works (which reached us in a quite impressive number)[6], the *Philotheos historia*, a collection containing thirty-one biographies of renowned Syrian ascetics, was considered by its latest editor, Pierre Canivet, as occupying "une place modeste dans l'oeuvre de Théodoret, où elle ne représente qu'un genre modeste."[7] The last among the great *Lives* of the first Fathers of the Desert (it was finished in 444), the *Philotheos historia*, "History of Those who Loved God," was translated into Latin only in the sixteenth century and, therefore, it must have been relatively ignored outside the Greek-speaking area of the Late Roman Empire.[8] Even in the East, its real circulation and impact outside the monastic circles remain problematic, despite a

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[4]*HR*, 21, 17, the war against the Marcionites. Theodoret's evergetic activity has been analysed by E. Bellini, "L'opera sociale di Teodoreto di Ciro alla luce del suo epistolario," *Augustinianum* 17 (1977): 227-36. For a detailed presentation of Theodoret's life and activity which synthesises Theodoret's own testimonies, see E. Venables, "Theodoret," in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines during the First Eight Centuries Being a Continuation of 'The Dictionary of the Bible'*," eds. W. Smith and H. Wace, vol. 4, (London: John Murray, 1887), 904-19.

[5]HR, 2, 16: "the truth. . . hard pressed in war" (Price's transl., 32).

[6]They amount "to an *oeuvre* unequalled in range by any of his contemporaries" (R. M. Price, "Introduction," x). For a complete presentation, see J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature: From the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics Inc., 1992), 550.

[7]"Introduction" to the *SC* edition, Théodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des moines de Syrie: Histoire Philothée,* Vol. 1 and vol. 2, Introduction, critical text, translation, and notes by Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen (Paris: Les Editions de Cerf, 1977 and 1979), 9.

[8]See ibid. Canivet's considerations on this issue.

manuscript tradition characterised by A. Leroy-Molinghen as "touffue,"[9] comprising manuscripts that range from the ninth to the nineteenth century and numerous ancient translations in Oriental languages.[10] The factors that determined this reduced influence and the probable audience of Theodoret's monastic history will be discussed in the third chapter of the present work.

The scholarly literature on the *Philotheos historia* is still insufficient, especially if compared to that dedicated to Theodoret's other works, most notably the ones dealing with dogmatic issues.[11] Even if "recent scholarship has achieved some correction of this imbalance" and "both Theodoret and the monks of Syria are now accorded more sympathetic attention than for centuries past,"[12] these contributions by no means reflect the potential value of the text which has "a variety of claims on the attention of students of Christian antiquity."[13]

The present thesis is an attempt at analysing one particularly intriguing aspect of the *Philotheos historia*, namely, the abundant use that Theodoret made of Greek heroic terminology and themes in order to create and present to his audience a heroic image of the Syrian ascetics. I intend to define an "ideology" that could have served as

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[9]Alice Leroy-Molinghen, "Introduction" to the *SC* edition of the *Philotheos historia*, 108. For other problems concerning the manuscript tradition, see idem, "A propos de la Vie de Syméon le Stylite," *Byzantion* 34 (1964): 375-84; "De quelques abrégés et recueils d'extraits de l'*Histoire Philothée*," *Byzantion* 35 (1965), 2: 601-5; "Notule théodorétienne," *Byzantion* 50 (1980), 1: 340-1 and P. Canivet, "Le Περὶ θείας ἀγάπης de Théodoret de Cyr, postface de l'*Histoire Philothée*," *Studia Patristica* 7 (1966): 143-58; P. Canivet and P. Malraux, "La tradition manuscrite du Περὶ τῆς θείας ἀγάπης (Recherche d'une méthode mathématique de classement des manuscrits et critique textuelle)," *Byzantion* 34 (1964): 385-413 as well as P. Devos, "La structure de l'Histoire Philothée de Théodoret de Cyr: Le nombre de chapitres," *Analecta Bollandiana* 97 (1979): 319-36.

[10]On these, see B. Outtier, "Notule sur les versions orientales de l'Histoire Philothée," in *ANTIΔΩPON: Hommage à Maurits Geerard* (Wetteren: Cultura, 1984): 73-9 and an interesting analysis of several fragments translated into Georgian in V. Jugeli, "The Works of Theodoret of Cyrus According to Georgian Manuscripts" (M. A. Thesis in Medieval Studies, The Central European University, 1997), 71-93.

[11]See, for instance, M. Mandac, "L'union christologique dans l'oeuvres de Théodoret antérieures au Concile d'Ephèse," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 47 (1971), 1: 64-96; M. Richard, "Notes sur l'évolution doctrinale de Théodoret," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 1936: 459-81; J.-N. Guinot, "La christologie de Théodoret de Cyr dans son Commentaire sur le Cantique," *Vigilia Christiana* 39 (1985): 256-72 to quote just a few examples.

[12]R. M. Price, "Introduction," x.

[13]Ibid., ix.

a possible motivation for such an attempt. The terms, themes, and representations that will be discussed in what follows have been selected from many others present in Theodoret's work as they seemed to me to have obvious associations with the Greek heroic tradition (both terminological and imagistic), especially with the Homeric epic tradition. The choice is by no means exhaustive (perhaps not even the most representative) but I tried to endorse it with solid textual evidence.

When speaking about the ways and means of Theodoret, it seemed natural that a particular attention should be devoted to the potential audience of the work, since the methods used to create and convey a certain representation of the ascetics are susceptible to have been chosen and accommodated in accordance to the imagistic universe, literary tastes and expectations and, last but not least, to the conventions which governed the way this audience reacted to texts similar in contents and purpose with the *Philotheos historia*.

This, of course, means establishing the purpose which inspired Theodoret to write the thirty-one biographies of Syrian ascetics included in the *Philotheos historia*, a question that has been subject to debate and to which various answers were offered. In most of the cases, these were designed mostly to suit a certain purpose of the scholar who analysed the text. Perhaps the most illustrative case in this respect is Peter Brown's groundbreaking article about the function of the holy men as "mediators" and "patrons."[14] Trying to reject the previous interpretations of the character and function of holy men which he considered inappropriate and not reflecting the material to be found in the sources, Brown went so far as to claim that

> what men expected of the holy man coincides with what they sought in the rural patron. The *Historia Religiosa* of Theodoret deserves careful attention from this point of view. It was written to validate and publicize the local traditions surrounding the holy men of Syria, and so it reflects all the more faithfully what Theodoret and his informants wanted from a holy man: . . . a version of the good patron of Libanius, a man with sufficient power to 'reach out a hand to those in distress.'[15]

[14]P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, 103-52 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[15]Ibid., 120.

From this perspective, the *Philotheos historia* would be no less than a codification of the patron-villagers relationship, a handbook of the good patron and, as such, it would have as the most appropriate preface the discourse of Libanius on the forms of patronage.[16] This is, undoubtedly an exaggerated claim, and, as later critics pointed out, based on a strained interpretation of textual data which reveals itself, at a more attentive examination, rather scanty.[17] Nevertheless, the enthusiasm provoked by Brown's article was great and soon an entire literature on the subject appeared, trying to define and analyse the character and functions of various "holy men," both Christian and non-Christian.[18]

The present thesis will not consider Theodoret's holy men as mediators since I think that the *Philotheos historia* should be approached not as a codification of any social *realia* characteristic of the time when it was written, but rather as a text produced and circulated in a polemical context, and therefore, likely to have been shaped according to a polemic function and in response to existing texts, rather than actual realities. In other words, I believe that Theodoret did not depict his monks bearing in mind the expectations of the Syrian peasants and certainly not in order to impose a code of behaviour to the holy men in their function as mediators.

I shall argue that it would be more plausible to think that the impetus which determined the presence of a certain traditional heroic terminology and imagery in the *Philotheos historia* was rather connected with the conflict which opposed, during the last decades of the fourth and late into the fifth century, Christians and non-Christians.

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[16]P. Brown, "Town, Village and the Holy Man: The Case of Syria," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 157: "the *On Patronages* of Libanius is the best introduction known to me to the *Historia Religiosa* of Theodoret."

[17]See, for instance, a recent point of view by J.-C. Fredouille, "Le héros et le saint" in *Du héros païen au saint chrétien: Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre d'Analyse des Rhétoriques Religieuses de l'Antiquité (C.A.R.R.A.), Strasbourg, 1er-2 décembre 1995*, eds. Gérard Freyburger, and Laurent Pernot (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1997), 18-20 as well as the ones quoted by Marc van Uytfanghe, "L'Hagiographie: Un «genre» chrétien ou antique tardif?" *Analecta Bollandiana* 111 (1993), 139-40.

[18]The study of Garth Fowden, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982): 33-59 is illustrative in this respect. This author seems extremely confident about the possibility of reconstructing the real figure of the pagan holy man on the basis of the literary biographies composed in Late Antiquity.

Brown convincingly warned, in his recent works, that historians should be extremely careful when speaking about the dimensions of the "conflict between Christianity and Paganism" in the fourth century, since the image and the concept itself were a propagandistic construct wielded by the Christian historiography of the time. I completely agree that the sources produced and circulated in that particular period should not be taken at face value and, hence, any conclusions about the *social* reality of this conflict should be made with extreme caution.

However, as T. D. Barnes remarked about Alan Cameron, whose writing is very much in the line of Brown's conclusions, this perspective, while laying much importance on continuity and on untroubled transition from old to new in matters of faith (but not exclusively), "seems to downplay the religious tensions and even hostility between Christians and pagans which surfaced not infrequently."[19] Since the image of the Christian - non-Christian relations at the turn of the fourth centuries is constantly painted by the extant sources in terms of conflict and rivalry, it would be unwise to dismiss it too easily as a smoke screen fabricated by the cunning Christian ecclesiastic historiographers of the age.

The texts which are our main sources for the Late Antique period bear, most often than not, clear marks of this underlying tension and of their polemical destination. I believe these marks can be identified in Theodoret's *Philotheos historia* although Theodoret usually does not openly state his polemical intentions. Although sometimes considered a historical work,[20] this history of the Syrian monks belongs rather to the hagiographic genre, or, to use the more accurate terminology put forward by M. van Uytfanghe among the texts "véhiculant un discours hagiographique."[21] As such, it is likely to employ not images reflecting the reality, but, following the laws of the genre, highly stylised representations with a definite "performative" function: to

[19]"Religion and Society in the Age of Theodosius," in T. D. Barnes, *From Eusebius to Augustine: Selected Papers 1982-1993* (London: Variorum, 1994): XXI: 168.

[20]As, for instance, in Quasten, 550.

[21]"L'Hagiographie," 148-9.

provide an apology for a holy character faced with accusations or incredulity, to idealise his figure (so as to provoke the admiration or veneration towards it) or to instruct an audience by presenting the same character as an living image of an ideal of perfection to be imitated.[22]

In Pierre Canivet's opinion, Theodoret had all these purposes in mind when writing the *Philotheos historia* and, in his impressive interpretative synthesis dedicated to Theodoret's work, the French scholar analysed the way in which each of these motivations was realised in the text itself.[23] His treatment of the heroic elements in the *Philotheos historia* was, however, limited at some considerations about the place of the agonistic ideal in the ascetic life and the use of military terminology to describe the ascetic efforts towards perfection.[24] He preferred to pay more attention to the philosophical elements present in the image of the Syrian ascetics as painted by Theodoret.[25]

I shall undertake, in what follows, to identify other heroic elements in the *Philotheos historia* and analyse their relation to the non-Christian accusations present in the sources produced and circulated among the members of the educated elite of the late Roman empire. At least in Theodoret's case, it is possible to account for the warlike terminology and certain heroic themes he applied to the Syrian ascetics by considering them a reaction of a sophisticated Christian intellectual (and a particularly militant one, for that matter) to the existing literary image of the Christian ascetics. Theodoret structured some of the literary portraits of the Syrian monks along the recognisable lines of the traditional heroic ideals in order to give a proper answer to the accusations made by Libanius, Julian, and Eunapius. He also intended to present these new heroes as the perfect models for all Christians to follow on their path to

[22]These are some of the characteristics which define, according to van Uytfanghe, the hagiographic discourse; see ibid.

[23]See P. Canivet, *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1977), 65-78.

[24]Ibid., 257-72 where Canivet provided a detailed analysis of what he called "l'ascèse héroïque." Also see his considerations in the "Introduction" to the *SC* edition, 44-6.

[25]Ibid., 273-90.

perfection. The very nature of the literary form he used allowed for this double function.[26]

By presenting his ascetics as valiant heroes which fought incessant wars, unseen wars, Theodoret was fighting his own war. He had started it early in his career while still among the monks in Nikertai (if that is really the place where he spent his monastic years) by writing *The Cure of Hellenic Maladies*, "the finest vindication of the superiority of Christianity over paganism,"[27] where he sketched the first systematic attempt to bring arguments in favour of the Christian cult of martyrs. It was equally in the *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* that he had put his Plato to good work in arguing the superiority of the Christian ascetics over the non-Christian philosophers.[28] Even his exegetic works bear the traces of this relentless polemic inclination of the bishop of Cyrrhus.[29] The *Philotheos historia* came as a fulfilment of the *Defence and Illustration of the Syrian Ascetics* he had begun with the *Cure*. To paraphrase Peter Brown's words, the Περὶ πρακτικῆς ἀρετῆς[30] of Theodoret the monk is the best introduction known to me to the *Historia Religiosa* of Theodoret the bishop.

The following chapters will try to see whether Zeno, the old ascetic, was right in humbly refusing the title of *miles Christi* that Theodoret bestowed so liberally on all the ascetics he whom set up as models both for the educated Christians and the non-

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[26]On this, see Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 17-44. This author emphasised the militant side of biographies of exemplary philosophers: "equally important for the uniqueness of biography as a genre was its propagandistic, often polemical, mood. . . . The conclusion that many of these biographies were written to sway, perhaps even create, opinion about certain political and philosophical principles is unavoidable" (ibid., 16) and emphasised that the biographies of the holy men (Theodoret's portraits of the ascetics belong to this category) had "all the idealising and propagandistic features of Graeco-Roman biography, but with a crucial addition. They were involved in religious controversy and so attempted to sway not mere opinion but belief" (ibid.).

[27]Price, "Introduction," ix.

[28]See P. Canivet, *Histoire d'une entreprise apologétique au V^e siècle,* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1958), 106-25.

[29]See, on this point, the conclusions of J. N. Guinot, "Un évêque exégète: Théodoret de Cyr," in *Bible de tous les temps*, vol. 1, *Le monde grec ancien et la Bible*, ed. Claude Mondésert (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 356-360 who emphasises rather Theodoret's contribution to the strengthening of the orthodox faith than the anti-pagan polemic. Unfortunately, I was not able to consult Guinot's recent book, *L'Exégèse de Théodoret de Cyr* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996).

[30]"On the Practised Virtue," the title of the last book of *The Cure of Hellenic Maladies.*

Christians to whom his book was appealing. I shall argue that Theodoret the bishop knew how to choose and make use of the most effective weapons in the textual war that was still going on in the fictional universe of the fifth century. His impressive classical culture and his mastery of rhetorics give us a clear sign by which we can recognize his presence behind every ascetic fighter of the "unseen wars" in the *Philotheos historia*.[31] The words he put in Zeno's mouth should serve as a clear enough proof for this.

And yet, at the end of the last century, the Cardinal John Henry Newman was still puzzled by what he called the "easy credence, or as moderns would say large credulousness" of Theodoret, the learned bishop, before the miracles he recounts of in the *Philotheos historia*:

> What made him drink in with such relish what we reject with such disgust? Was it that, at least some miracles were brought home so absolutely to his sensible experience that he had no reason for doubting the others which came to him second-hand? This certainly will explain what to most of us is sure to seem the stupid credulity of so well-read, so intellectual an author.[32]

Others, more intuitive, had already attempted an answer: "One would deceive oneself utterly if one presupposed any lack of intelligence among the leaders of the Christian movement: oh, they are clever, clever to the point of holiness, these good church fathers!"[33]

[31]As Momigliano had put it: "the real difference between a pagan and a Christian holy man. . . was the invisible presence of the bishop in the life of a Christian holy man. . . . The Christian saint had to reckon with the bishop, if he was not himself a bishop" ("Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion in the Roman Empire," in *Poikilia: Etudes offertes à Jean-Pierre Vernant*, n. ed. (Paris: Editions de L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1987), 48).

[32]*Historical Sketches*, vol. 3, 314 as quoted in Venables, 918.

[33]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (n. p.: The Viking Press, 1954), 651 as quoted in J. Shiel, *Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1968, 112.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNHEROIC MONK: REASONS FOR AN APOLOGETIC HISTORY OF THE MONKS

In the twelfth book of his *Therapy of the Hellenic Diseases* Theodoret has gone to great length and skilfully employed his knowledge of Plato in order to demonstrate to his virtually pagan audience that the Christian ascetics are the only perfect representatives of the πρακτικὴ ἀρετή, the virtue put into practice, surpassing by far all that the non-Christian world could ever offer as counterparts. And yet, he has to complain that even when confronted with arguments drawn from their own spiritual heritage, his Hellenic auditors still prove reluctant in accepting the superiority of the Christian monks over their philosophers, of whom no one dared to really put into practice their teachings,[1] however inspired and close to the truth these might have been:

> But you do not wish either to look at these (viz., the monks) while they struggle nor to admire them. Even if you might happen to see some of those who take upon them this way of life, and not living completely in agreement with it, you immediately rise your voices to insult [them].[2]

Even if Theodoret's words are addressed to an ideal audience against whose disbelief and reluctance he has to deploy all the traditional weaponry of the apologetic genre, the rejection of the monks and of the type of life they were practising and advocating at the same time was far from being purely a litterary construct in the society of the Late Roman Empire. As soon as the Christian ascetic movement started

[1] *Curatio*, 12, 29: "The writings of old are enough to show that none of the philosophers among the Hellenes lived in the mountains, having set his abode (σήκον) there. But you bring yourselves testimony to it even while blaming those who indeed take up this way of life." Theodoret had previously quoted Plato's words (*Theaetetus*, 174 d-e) where the perfect sage is described as follows: ἄγροικον καὶ ἀπαίδευτον ὑπ᾽ ἀσχολίας οὐδὲν ἧττον τῶν νομέων τὸν τοιοῦτον ἀναγκαῖον γίνεσθαι, σηκὸν ἐν ὄρει τὸ τεῖχος περιβαλλόμενον "boorish and uneducated because the lack of leisure, no less than herdsmen, penned in, as he is, by fortifications, like the herdsman's fold in the mountains." (*Theaetetus*, translated with notes by John Mc Dowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 51 slightly altered).

[2] Ibid., 33.

to emerge as an important factor on the late antique social and spiritual scene it was met with fierce criticism from the non-Christians, which gained in intensity and bitterness as the Christian monks became more and more intrusive in the life of the empire and of its subjects. The aim of the present chapter is to analyse some aspects of this criticism, concentrating mainly on those features of the monks' "literary" representations that presented them as unheroic figures, in contrast with the exemplary heroes which were the central ideal characters of the age. It is not the purpose of the following lines to give a complete analysis of the non-Christian accusations against Christian ascetic figures since this has already been done,[3] and the complexity of the image they created would certainly require far more space than allowed here. Although there are schematic qualities to the accusations uttered against the monks by various non-Christian (but not solely non-Christian) writers in the fourth and fifth centuries which are easy to perceive, these accusations were nonetheless complex and varied. They shaped a certain "literary" image of the monk against which Christian reactions soon appeared.

Time and again, the Christian writers dwelt upon the humble origins of their faith, making this a title of glory against the criticism of the pagans who found this particular aspect of Christianity worthy of scorn and used it as one of the reasons for rejecting the new religion.[4] Even after it started spreading through the Roman Empire, Christianity remained associated for quite some time mostly with the lower strata of the

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[3]See the brief but excellent study of D. H. Raynor, "Non-Christian Attitudes to Monasticism." *Studia Patristica* 18 (1989) of which I shall make extensive use in what follows. The (still) classic work on the subject is that of Pierre de Labriolle, *La réaction païenne: Etude sur la polémique anti-chrétienne du 1^er^ au 6^e^ siècle* (Paris: L'Artisan du Livre, 1942), 336-423 *praesertim.*

[4]To quote just an example, Julian the Apostate scolded the Christians: "but to tell the truth, you have taken pride in outdoing our vulgarity (this, I think, is a thing that happens to all nations, and very naturally) and you thought that you must adapt your ways to the lives of the baser sort, shop-keepers, tax-gatherers, dancers and libertines"(*Contra Galil.*, 238 d-e, Wright's transl., 391). Minucius Felix reported some of the earliest accusations of this kind in his *Octavius* (8, 4) where one of the participants in the dialogue speaks of the Christians as being *de ultima faece conlecti* and building up their congregation, *profanae coniurationis*, with *conlectis inperitioribus et mulieribus credulis sexus sui facilitate labentibus* (as quoted in *I Pagani di fronte al Cristianesimo: Testimonianze dei secoli I e II*, ed. Paolo Carrara, Florence: Nardini Editore-Centro Internazionale del Libro, 1984, 90).

urban milieu, although attempts to penetrate the elite were neither rare, nor unsuccessful. Since it "had made little progress among the aristocracy, or indeed among the educated upper classes in general," late into the fourth century, as some historians believe, "the main strength of Christianity lay in the lower and middle classes of the towns, the manual workers and clerks, the shopkeepers and merchants."[5] In time this situation will, undoubtedly change. But the image of Christianity as a faith for the humble and the poor persisted for some time, if only as a literary *topos* in the eastern Christian discourse.[6]

This picture has exerted a particularly strong influence on the image usually associated with the emergence of the Christian ascetic movement, so powerful that a part of the scholarly literature of the twentieth century still maintains the image of the poor, illiterate, and simple-minded going into the desert and mortifying their bodies in search of salvation (but mostly fleeing human oppression or economic poverty).[7] Such is the picture of the beginnings of the Christian ascetic movement, which, within Christianity itself, is almost inseparably related to the monastic movement that emerged

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[5]A. H. M. Jones, "The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity" in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 19 and 21. Cf., however, Samuel Rubenson, "Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition" in *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantsis (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 52, who believes that "there is . . . no evidence that Christianity primarily attracted the lowest level in society," but rather "it seems that the literate middle class of the towns constituted the majority in the church" (ibid.). However, the image he paints of the "leading monks of the first generation" as "educated and prosperous leaders of a certain social standing" (ibid.) may not be as relevant for fourth and fifth century Syrian monasticism.

[6]Theodoret, in his *Curatio* (8, 3-4), acknowledged the humble origins of the first Christian preachers: "with fishermen, tax collectors, and a leather dresser as ministers, it brought the people the salutary and divine teachings," but placed them in the universalist context of the new religion: "But [the Source of Wisdom] did not wish only for five, ten, fifteen, a hundred men to benefit from the streams of salvation, but for all the people, Greeks and barbarians, those nurtured by studies and those deprived of them, the leather dressers, the weavers, the smiths as well as all those who practise some craft, and along with them even the servants, the beggars, the peasants and the woodcutters, as well as the women, both those who are surrounded by riches and those who are forced to toil and compelled to earn their living through the work of their hands."

[7]Marcel Simon, for instance, holds that "les premiers ermites chrétiens sont les plus souvent des hommes frustes, voir totallement illettrés, qui voient dans la culture profane elle-même le fruit du mal" and, thus, are the opposite of those who practised pagan forms of asceticism which are expressions of an "idéal philosophique d'intellectuels cultivés" (*La civilisation de l'Antiquité et le Christianisme*, Paris: Arthaud, 1972, 401).

in fourth-century Egypt. Almost all the sources agree in giving a portrait of St Antony, whom the tradition usually regards as the founder of Egyptian monasticism, much in the line of the one sketched above. However, fairly recent research by Samuel Rubenson has shown how inadequate such an image of the humble beginnings of Christian monasticism may be and has pleaded that the extant sources, on which this traditional image is based, be "critically reviewed"[8] and corroborated with a thorough study of the intellectual landscape in which the ascetic movement had its roots, in order to draw relevant conclusions about the origins of monasticism.

In his study devoted to the figure of St Antony, Rubenson argued that the two major sources on Antony, his *Vita* written by Athanasius of Alexandria, "which has shaped the image of Antony and of monasticism in general"[9] and the *Apophthegmata patrum*, had received exclusive attention from the part of the researchers. Thus, they established an inadequate image of the saint as a "penitent monk fleeing into the desert."[10] However, the two writings should no longer be given preference over other sources, such as the seven letters attributed to the saint, which, in his opinion, are much more relevant for Antony's teaching than some "literary composition presenting an ideal of monastic life in the shape of a historical person whose image is reworked according to the interest of the author."[11] "Philosophical or religious quest," Rubenson maintained, "combined with an aversion to the disruption occasioned by the worldly concerns of property, social obligation, and the material side of the emerging Church"[12] are much more likely to have determined the strong need to separate ascetic

[8]Ibid., 50.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid., 51.

[11]Ibid., 50. Rubenson has undertaken a careful analysis of the *Letters* ascribed to St Antony proving their authenticity and giving, on their basis, a wholly different image of the saint: on this, see S. Rubenson, *The Letters of Saint Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition, and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis: Forster Press, 1995).

[12]Rubenson, 52.

practice from ordinary life and thus create an "autonomous city (*polis*)"[13] in order to allow for a successful and genuine ascetic life, marked by spiritual warfare, a need that led to the emergence of monasticism. A further element in Rubenson's portrait of the early monks (at least as far as Egypt is concerned) is their role in christianising the Hellenic ascetic tradition by spreading Origen's synthesis of Platonic philosophy and the teachings of the New Testament, and becoming themselves the embodiments of these teachings, absolutely free from all social constraints, creating the prestige of the "holy man" as well as setting "a canon probably as influential as the biblical writings."[14]

Nevertheless, a look at the extant literary sources from the period that has seen the birth and the emergence of the monk as a Christian "holy man" will reveal a much more complicated picture, allowing one to see why so many scholars went along the paths opened by these sources instead of radically questioning their perspective. The main reason for this, in my opinion, is the important part "literary" works played in shaping a certain image of Christian monks, both in the midst of the debates of the fourth and fifth centuries. On one hand, the *Vita Antonii*, "a literary composition presenting the ideal of monastic life in the shape of a historical person,"[15] rapidly became the most influential model on which subsequent hagiographic literature was constantly shaped. On the other, the intellectual climate of the age was characterised by a constant appeal to writings belonging to the biographical genre as powerful weapons in the various debates and quarrels (between Christians and non-Christians, although not exclusively) of which one of the favourite topics was the supremacy of a certain way of leading the "perfect" life. As one researcher has recently put it, the need for writings illustrating the perfect model of existence through the life of a certain "holy man" was floating in the air at the time[16]. This may very well make otiose and

[13]Ibid., 55.

[14]Ibid.

[15]V. supra, n. 5.

[16]Marc van Uytfanghe, "L'Hagiographie", 170: "on pourrait dire de manière quelque peu triviale que, généralement parlant, dans le milieu hellénistique, le milieu juif et le milieu chrétien, ce discours

irrelevant all the learned debates that have been going on concerning the dependence of Christian hagiographic writings on pre-Christian literary forms, in this case on the various *Lives* of "holy men." Nevertheless, the fact that, in the fourth and in the fifth centuries both the non-Christians and the followers of the new faith used biographies of this kind extensively to advocate, in a polemical and conflictual context, their own way as *the* way to perfection still holds.[17] And in my opinion, it has to be seriously considered when dealing with literary compositions such as Theodoret's *Philotheos historia*.

Pierre Canivet, to whose thorough and scholarly efforts we owe the modern edition of the *Philotheos historia*, had no doubts about placing this work of Theodoret in a polemical context and assigning its composition to an unexpressed apologetic concern on the part of the author. *The History of the Monks* would come as the fulfillment of the chapter dedicated to them in Theodoret's previous work, the *Graecarum affectionum curatio*, where, a fact significant enough, he sacrificed certain traditional apologetic themes to defend the cult of the martyrs and the Christian ascetics. In Canivet's opinion,

> cette intention a guidé Théodoret au cours de son entreprise, alors qu'il était moine lui-même, en attendant qu'il écrive un jour l'histoire édifiante des moines, ajoutant à l'exposé de la théorie celui de la pratique en une sorte de tryptique qui s'achèvera par le traité de la divine Charité.[18]

I shall analyse later the elements which, within the work itself, plead in favour of an apologetic design. I shall also try to analyse some of the accusations laid

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était alors en air. Des récits et motifs particuliers pouvaient être empruntés, mais il pouvaient tout aussi bien «circuler» parallèlement en des endroits différentes. Quand on envisage les choses de cette façon, la discussion sur le «droit d'aînesse» devient une affaire plutôt stérile."

[17]M. van Uytfanghe acknowledges that "entre la tradition païenne et la tradition chrétienne il a existé, à n'en point douter, une interaction touchant aussi bien le fond que la forme" (ibid., 167). It is doubtful, though, that this interaction could be described only in terms of anxiety and concern on the non-Christian side ("les non-chrétiens observaient apparemment d'un oeil inquiet et jaloux") and admiration on that of the Christians ("les chrétiens étaient eux-mêmes nombreux à admirer") as this author tends to do (ibid.). That some of the Christian biographies of holy men were put together as a *reaction* to non-Christian accusations expressed in literary composition of similar form is, at least, an equally valid hypothesis.

[18]*Entreprise*, 326.

down in writing against the monks and which Theodoret may have had in mind when structuring his work along certain lines. But first, a survey of the attacks directed against the Christian monks (and against the Syrian ascetics in particular) during the period previous to the composition of the *Philotheos historia* is necessary in order to substantiate Canivet's rather dramatic claim that the monastic ideal was, by the fifth century, "compromis par les abus et décrié dans le public."[19]

The accusations appeared gradually, as Christian monasticism emerged and started gaining in importance and becoming more and more vehement in affirming itself in society. As monks began to play an important and contested role in the religious battles of the fourth century and indulged more and more often in quite concrete forms of the battle which was supposed to be "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly places,"[20] especially after the establishment of Christianity as the dominant religion, they were viewed in increasingly darker colours both by the non-Christians and by some of their coreligionists. Consequently, in the writings of the fourth century there is "a large number of instances of widespread pagan disapproval, and even vicious hatred, of Christian monks: the development of monasticism is regarded in some quarters as a particularly pestilent outbreak of the noxious Christian disease."[21]

The pagans were not alone in criticising the monks: some of the Christians themselves were not blind to what Raynor calls the "unsavoury elements in monasticism"[22]. Thus, many of the important elements in the criticism coming from the non-Christians finds some parallels inside the Christian Church and sometimes even

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[19]Ibid.

[20]Eph., 6, 12.

[21]Raynor, 267.

[22]Ibid., 268.

within the monastic milieu.[23] This the more so since the situation of the ascetics was paradoxical:

> the hermits were a clear menace to orderly Christian society. Each of them organised his life on his own lines, defying the authority of the bishops and claiming to be the embodiment of the perfect Christian. While official Christianity was now bent on organising the world and on achieving a working compromise with the worldly ambitions, the hermit expressed contempt for the world. On the other hand . . . the hermits were the true representatives of Christian asceticism. They could not be eliminated.[24]

The accusations against the monks cover an extensive range: from hypocrisy and acting out of material motivations, to unlawfully fleeing from honest working life and indulging in parasitic forms of existence, such as depending on alms and to gluttony and baseness.

Thus, Libanius speaks of the "artificially contrived pallor of the monks"[25] to which they resorted in order to attract new converts and adds that "others, again, claim to worship their god with fasting, and yet grow fat on the misfortunes of other folk."[26] Eunapius of Sardis inserted in his *History* the story of a Germanic group which wanted to cross the Danube and settle within the borders of the Empire. In order to convince the authorities, they pretended to be Christians and dressed up some of their folk as bishops and priests. Besides these, "they also had with them some of the tribe of so-called 'monks,' whom they had decked out in imitation of the monks amongst their enemies. The imitation was neither laborious nor difficult, but *it sufficed for them to trail along grey cloaks and tunics to both become* (εἶναι καὶ πιστεύεσθαι) *and be accepted as evil doers*."[27] Eunapius' cynical remark suggests that acquiring grey

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[23]For examples of such criticism from within, see ibid., 268-9.

[24]A. Momigliano, "Introduction: Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire" in *Conflict*, 11.

[25]*Or.* 30, 8, Norman's transl., 107.

[26]Ibid., 11 and 26-28, Norman's transl., 111.

[27]*History*, 9, 48 (fr. 2). The translation is R. C. Blockley's in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, vol. 2 (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1981), 76.

clothes was the only real condition one had to fulfill to both be, and pass themselves as, monks, or rather, in his words, as "evil doers."[28]

As far as monastic life as a convenient alternative to honest hard work is concerned, Libanius, in the same *Oratio pro templis* quoted above, eloquently summarized his accusations in one sentence, presenting the monks as ruthlessly (and, in his opinion, in a manner contrary to any law) exploiting the poor peasants: "These are the bees, those are the drones."[29]

Accusations of gluttony and baseness can be documented from Libanus' speeches. The "classical" formulation is that of *Or.* 30, 8: "But this black-robed tribe, who eat more than elephants and, by the quantities of drink they consume, weary those that accompany their drinking with the singing of hymns. . ." Eunapius also calls them "men in appearance but [who] led the lives of swine, and openly did and allowed countless unspeakable crimes"[30].

Even more serious objections have been raised against the violent and unruly behaviour displayed by some Christian ascetics in their efforts to Christianise different areas of the Empire. Libanius spoke of the plundering and terrorising of the peasantry under the pretext of bringing them the faith: "So, they sweep across the countryside like rivers in spate, and by ravaging the temples, they ravage the estates, for wherever they tear out a temple from the estate, that estate is blinded and lies murdered"[31] (*Or.* 30, 9). In fact, the destruction of the temples is just another name for utter theft: "They claim to be attacking the temples, but these attacks are a source of income, for, though some assail the shrines, others plunder the wretched peasantry of what they have, both the produce stored from the land and their stock; and the invaders depart with the loot

[28]Libanius also wrote (*Or.* 2, 32) about "these people who fill the caves and have nothing ascetic about them except their cloaks."

[29]Or. 30, 12, Norman's transl., 113. Criticism on this aspect is also available from within Christianity: see Augustine, *On the Works of the Monks* and *Cod. Theod.* 12, 1. 63, which speaks of the *ignaviae sectatores.*

[30]*Vitae soph.*, 472, Wright's transl., 423.

[31]Norman's transl., 109.

from the places they have stormed."[32] The same accusation is made by Eunapius when speaking of the destruction of the Serapeum in 391: "In this fashion they fought so honourably against the statues and votive offerings that they not only conquered but stole them as well, and their only military tactics were to ensure that the thief should escape detection."[33]

Last, but certainly not least, the monks were looked down upon because of their lack of education (that is, traditional education), illiteracy in Greek and in all the cultural "baggage" which defined the Ἑλληνισμός; deprived of these basic requirements, their claims to "any legitimate authority in religious matters"[34] were met with scandalised disapproval.[35]

The texts quoted to support all these accusations seem to indicate that, more than concerns with the eating habits of the Christian monks or with their solitary life, the main aim of those who put down all these objections was to deny the Christian ascetics any right to appear as an elite in society, especially a spiritual one. There are several elements which lead to this conclusion. The constant non-intellectual profile that emerges from the accusations, the rejection (both practical and theoretical if one is to believe John Chrysostom) of the idea that the monks could be proper teachers for the younger generation,[36] and the accusations against extreme ascetic practices

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[32]Ibid., 11 (Norman's transl., 111). Libanius has other similar complaints to make, suggesting that the plundering parties of monks would not hesitate to take human lives in their frantic assaults on the temples: "then utter desolation follows, with the stripping of roofs, demolition of walls, the tearing down of statues and the overthrow of altars, and the priests must either keep quiet or die. After demolishing one, they scurry to another, and to a third, and trophy is piled on trophy, in contravention of the law" (*Or.* 30, 8, Norman's transl, 107). His ironic use of the military terminology in describing the monks' "holy war" is to be noted.

[33]*Vitae soph.*, 472, Wright's transl., 423; the same ironic use of military terminology is obvious here as well.

[34]Raynor, 267.

[35]Libanius, Or. 30, 31: "these people who have cast asides tongs, hammers and anvils and now claim to discourse upon heaven and its occupants" (Norman's transl., 129).

[36]The classical defence against accusations of this kind is John Chrysostom's *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*. The principal grounds held against the monks as educators of the youth were analysed by Festugière (see *Antioche paienne et chrétienne: Libanius, Chrysostome et les moines de Syrie,* (Paris: Editions E. de Boccard, 1959), 192-210). I find extremely interesting the

common among certain monastic circles and flowering mainly in Syria, which would estrange those who practiced them from anything resembling a life among human beings.[37]

Moreover, and, in my opinion this element should be given the proper credit, the image of the Christian monks that emerges from the antagonistic sources is one devoid of any heroic elements. In an age which is still culturally dominated by the classical Greek formative paradigm of a heroic individual who accomplishes great deeds during his life, thus gaining for himself immortal glory and, sometimes, divine status after his death,[38] the monks are presented by their critics as an undifferentiated mob, acting together, mainly in a destructive way, fighting the gods with an unheard of impiety. None of those who criticised the monks cares to mention any individual figure among them, referring merely to the "men clad in black raiments."[39] Thus, none of the monks is ever given the chance to accomplish an ἀριστεία, a brave deed in single

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claim that there were no Christian writings which could serve as a base for a Christian *paideia* and even the existing Scriptures were improper for assuring a "normal" training of the youth, that is in conformity with the Hellenic ideals. A passage in Julian's *Contra Galilaeos* (229 d-e) is most eloquent in this respect: "But you yourselves know, it seems to me, the very different effect on the intelligence of your writings as compared with ours; and that from studying yours no man could attain to excellence (ἐκ τῶν παρ' ὑμῖν οὐδεὶς ἂν γένοιτο γενναῖος ἀνήρ) or even to ordinary goodness, whereas from studying ours every man would become better than before, even though he were altogether without natural fitness. But when a man is naturally well endowed, and moreover receives the education of our literature, he becomes actually a gift of the gods to mankind, either by kindling the light of knowledge, or by founding some kind of political constitution, or by routing numbers of country's foes, or even by travelling far over the earth and far by sea, and thus proving himself a man of heroic mould (καὶ τούτῳ φανεῖς ἡρωικός)" (Wright's transl., 385-7). Eunapius speaks contemptuously about the scantiness of the Christian literary means of education: When Julian was entrusted to the care of Christian teachers "he had their books so thoroughly by heart that they fretted at the scantiness of their erudition, since there was nothing that they could teach the boy" (*Vitae soph.*, 473, Wright's transl., 429).

[37]On the ascetic practices of the Syrian monks, see Festugière, *Antioche*, ch. 9 "Traits caractéristiques de l'anchorétisme syrien," 291-310 and Sebastian P. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1973), 12-3. Peter Brown spoke of "ferocious and fully visible asceticism" (*Body and Society*, 327) and of the "living signs of so vivid a nature [which] could be perceived as exotic and threatening to other Christians less attuned to their distinctive spiritual messages" (ibid., 333).

[38]"Only small groups of pagans believed that Pythagoras or Diogenes was the best possible man. The great majority of pagans was more interested in Hercules, Achilles and Alexander the Great" (A. Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A. D.," in *Conflict*, 88).

[39]Synesius speaks of the "men who wear the black [mantle]," *Ep.* 154, 1553 a as quoted by Jay Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher-Bishop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 130, n. 22. See also Libanius' words quoted above, p. 18.

combat as all the true heroes of the Greeks, starting with Homer's warriors, do. They are shown as the exact opposite of the traditional ideal of authentic, aristocratic warriors who meet and defeat their adversaries face to face, in single combat, abiding by the heroic code of behaviour. The monks are just anonymous petty brigands whose main force lies in their number and the official guarantee of impunity for whatever offence they might commit. As such, they are relegated among the anonymous fighters of an unholy war.[40] Such men are capable of the worst things, and the fact that Eunapius presented them in the shameful posture as those who, by their impiety, opened the gates of Greece to Alaric's invading hordes, in this way becoming the traitors of Greece and of Hellenism, is again significant by the connotations it evokes.[41] The very arms they use in their assaults against the temples are not the "clean" ones, the ones true heroes fight with, but rather natural weapons and materials in their raw state traditionally associated with figures such as the Giants in their destructive upsurge against the Olympians.[42]

Moreover, complaints from educated non-Christian individuals stress the discretionary power the monks enjoy in a society on its way to becoming Christianised and the tyrannical manner in which they exercise this power. In the world of the Late Roman Empire power and its use were ideally subject to rigorous regulations embedded in a code of behaviour shared by the members of the ruling elite. These

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[40]Eunapius is the most indignant in this respect: his description of the attack against the Serapeum in Alexandria mocks the "holy war" of the monks precisely by using the warrior terminology in an ironic way: "For these men . . . made a raid on the temples, and though they could not allege even a rumour of war to justify them, they demolished the temple of Serapis and made war against the temple offerings, whereby they won a victory without meeting a foe or fighting a battle. . . . Then these warlike and honourable men, after having thrown everything into confusion and disorder and had thrust out hands, unstained by blood but not pure from greed, boasted that they had overcome the gods, and reckoned their sacrilege and impiety a thing to glory in" (*Vitae soph.*, 472, Wright's transl., 423).

[41]Ibid., 476, Wright's transl., 439: "For this gateway of Greece was thrown open to him (viz., to Alaric) by the impiety of the men clad in black raiment, who entered Greece unhindered along with him, and by the fact that the laws and restrictions of the hierophantic ordinances had been rescinded."

[42]Besides being a band of looters rather than an army, the monks also use as weapons "sticks and stones and bars of iron, and in some cases, disdaining these, . . . hands and feet" (Libanius, *Or.* 30, 8, Norman's transl., 109) all of which are improper fighting means, usually associated with desperados.

rules of proper conduct were communicated mainly through the traditional educational system. In such a context, the accusations of extreme tyranny voiced against the Christian monks certainly did not contribute to bettering their image among the educated public to whom the writings containing these accusations were primarily addressed.[43] Peter Brown, when speaking about the reasons that made "so many sources present the Christian monk in disproportionately high relief"[44]referred precisely to this misuse of power:

> Spasmodic, largely unpredictable violence of this kind was inconsistent with the perpetual, controlled violence of a heavily governed society. If violence was to happen, it was essential that the traditional elites should not lose the monopoly of such violence. They did not want it to slip into the hands of erratic outsiders.[45]

These "erratic outsiders" were even less qualified to wield any sort of power since they were propagating a religion constantly presented as a debased belief, proper for slaves, and having nothing noble and heroic about it.[46]

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[43]Eunapius laments:"in those days every man who wore a black robe and consented to behave in unseemly fashion in public possessed the power of a tyrant (τυραννικὴν γὰρ εἶχεν ἐξουσίαν), to such a pitch of virtue (τοσόνδε ἀρετῆς) had the human race advanced!" (*Vitae soph.*, 472, Wright's transl., 423). On the conventions regulating the proper display and use of power in Late Antiquity, see P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 48-61.

[44]*Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 50.

[45]Ibid.

[46]*Vitae soph.*, 472, Norman's transl., 425: "They settled these monks at Canopus also, and thus they fettered the human race to the worship of slaves, and those even not honest slaves, instead of the true gods." Julian the Apostate also had complained about this when he wrote that Christian education could only produce slaves: "Now this would be a clear proof: choose out children from among you and train and educate them in your scriptures, and if when they come to manhood they prove to have nobler qualities than slaves, then you may believe that I am talking nonsense. . ." (*Contra Galilaeos*, 229 e-230 a, Wright's transl., 387). When judged by Hellenic standards, Christianity appears unheroic in its very roots: the Hebrews could never produce anything like Alexander or Caesar: "point out to me among the Hellenes a single general like Alexander or Caesar! You have no such man. And indeed, by the gods, I am well aware that I am insulting these heroes by the question. . ." (ibid., 218 b-c, Wright's transl., 381). Jesus Himself has never accomplished any great deed: "during his lifetime he accomplished nothing worthy hearing of, unless anyone thinks that to heal crooked and blind men and to exorcise those who were possessed by evil demons in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany can be classed as a mighty achievement" (ibid., 191 d-e-205 e, Wright's transl., 377). The Apostate further blames Eusebius for speaking of the existence of an epic heroic tradition among the Jews: "the wretched Eusebius will have it that poems in hexameters are to be found even among them" (ibid., 222 a, Wright's transl., 383).

There is another feature of the monks' portrait as painted by the adverse sources, one also associated with their unheroic profile. In a world which treasured more than anything the ability to convince by the power of the well uttered word, and for which liberty of speech (παρρησία) was the sign of the superior individual,[47] the monks appear as constantly recurring to brutal force in the relations with their rivals. They prefer destruction and violence as their most powerful arguments used to convince and convert.

Expressed mainly in written works as they were, the real influence of such accusations on their intended audience is difficult to establish.[48] The extent to which Christian writers took the care of answering them might, however, give us a clue as to how potentially damaging or not they were perceived. And there is significant

> evidence that the pagan criticism struck home fairly at certain elements in monasticism. Further, the various excesses tended to give the movements a bad name among ordinary Christians as well as among pagans. For those very Christian writers who acknowledge and attempt to correct the faults of monasticism also write with an eye to rehabilitating the movement in the opinions of ordinary Christians.[49]

This was more the case since the criticism that came from the non-Christian side was more often than not inspired only by a strong polemical intention, and acknowledgement of the monks' virtues and achievements by the pagans, although not absent, is fairly rare, and even this does not go beyond a few generalities.[50] In any case,

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[47]On the values of παρρησία, see P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 61-70 and A. Momigliano, "La libertà di parola nel mondo antico" in idem, *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, vol. 2 (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1980), 430 ff.

[48]Raynor, 268.

[49]Ibid., 270.

[50]Before becoming a bishop, Synesius of Cyrene "criticises Christian monks without the usual bitterness and vituperation of his pagan contemporaries" (Bregman, *Synesius*, 132). Speaking about their ascetic efforts, he says: "I have hitherto observed barbarous men . . . who have devoted themselves to contemplation; thus they have become uncivil and unsociable, inasmuch as they continuously strive to liberate themselves from nature. They had their sacred songs, holy symbols and certain ordered paths to the divine. All this has prevented them from sinking back into matter. They also live apart from one another, so as to keep anything pleasant out of sight and out of mind, 'for they do not eat grain, nor do they drink fiery wine'" (*Dion*, 7, 45 d as quoted ibid.).

"pagan appreciation of the monastic phenomenon was far outweighed by criticism and polemic."[51]

Polemic seems indeed to be the proper keyword in this case: most of the means used in attack and in defence, such as wielding (more or less skilfully, depending on the ability of the writer) half-truths, perversions, falsifications, biased appraisals, and even the omission of certain facts that would not have served the cause of the speaker, indicate that the literary works dealing with the monks have been produced and circulated in a strongly polemical context.[52] Born as a defence or an accusation, in reaction to reality, but even more, I think, to the "image" created by the literary productions of opponents, each new writing contributed to the accumulating tension and provided new reasons for a reaction. It might well be that all this polemical context involved no more than an exclusive club of educated individuals, but, nevertheless, several writings were produced that clearly bear the mark of this polemic atmosphere and exhibit, in the case of the Christians, a more or less clear apologetic concern.[53] In my opinion, the conflict that existed at least in the fictional world created by various writings produced and circulated at the time, was "real" and had an important role in shaping the image we have today of the fourth century (not to speak of those who lived in that time), even if in reality, a sharp polarisation of the society

[51]Raynor, 268. Understandably, the Christian apologists display the same shyness when it comes to acknowledging the virtues of some pagans. See Theodoret, *Curatio*, 12, 73 where he mentions *en passant* several pagan women who had lived virtuously and were, therefore, "worthy of praise" (ἀξιεπαίνους)

[52]Raynor, 267 rightfully warned that even if "there is ample evidence from the Christian side that many of the non-Christian criticisms were well founded . . . this should not blind us to their polemical context."

[53]Peter Brown, who has criticised time and again the tendency of modern scholarship to view the fourth century as an age of "conflict between Paganism and Christianity" blamed for this distorted picture the "representation of the religious history of the age that was first constructed by a brilliant generation of Church historians, polemicists and preachers in the opening decades of the fifth century" (*Authority and the Sacred*, 4). He argued that this literary "smoke screen" which hides from us an important part of the realities of the time was "largely intended to give a satisfying sense of narrative pace and direction to the progressive triumph of the Church" because of the "starkly supernatural quality of this narrative that made it so useful to contemporaries." This "facilitating narrative . . . held in suspense precisely what we would call the 'problem of Christianisation'" and "provided a firm narrative closure of what had been, in reality, in the well chosen words of Pierre Chuvin, a 'Wavering Century'"(quotations taken from ibid., 4-6).

arround Pagan and Christian ideals might have never been too obvious, despite attempts (like that of Julian the Apostate) to enforce it.

Theodoret's *Historia religiosa* is, in my opinion, one of these writings. The following chapters will be dedicated to analysing some of the elements that may be adduced as proofs to support such an affirmation.

CHAPTER THREE

BEHOLDERS OF THE UNSEEN WARS: REACHING THE AUDIENCE

As the previous chapter has shown, the image of the Christian monks painted by the texts produced and circulated in the last decades of the fourth century was dominated by gloomy shades. The Christian attempts to shed some light on it were, as far as we know, still relatively few at the turn of the century.[1] Their number increased only in the first decades of the fifth century, when two *Histories of the Monks* were produced: Historia monachorum in Aegypto[2] and Historia Lausiaca.[3] Among these, Theodoret's *Philotheos historia* stands apart.[4]

After reading the author's explicit statements of purpose one is left with the impression that the apologetic concern had not played one of the most important parts in writing the *Philotheos historia*, and, therefore, did not deserve to be mentioned either in the prologue, the traditional place for statements of purpose, or in the programmatic declarations disseminated in the text itself. Theodoret's main preoccupation while writing the *Philotheos historia* was, according to his own words, to preserve the memory of the Syrian ascetics he had come to meet personally or about whom he had heard:

> If the memory of profitable narratives remained inviolate and the injury of oblivion did not, like some spreading mist, render it extinct, it would of course be superfluous and redundant to record such actions, since the benefit from them would most easily make its way to posterity. But since time injures bodies by inflicting old age and death, and injures achievements by

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[1]John Chrysostom's *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae* (written between 378 and 385) is declaratively polemical. On the image of the monks depicted by him, see Festugière, *Antioche*, 192-210 and Eric Osborn, *La morale dans la pensée chrétienne primitive: Description des archétypes de la morale patristique*, transl. by E. Latteur (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 176-8.

[2]Written by an anonymous author at the beginning of the fifth century. The original was probably Greek, although an early Latin version by Rufinus (ca. 405) is extant. See *Historia monachorum in Aegypto:* Ἡ κατ' Αἴγυπτον τῶν μοναχῶν ἱστορία, Critical edition of the Greek text and an annotated translation by André-Jean Festugière (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1961).

[3]Composed by Palladius (364/4-ca. 431), a pupil of Evagrius Ponticus, in 419/20. On this, see Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, 177-9.

[4]On this see Canivet, "Introduction" to the SC edition of the *Philotheos historia*, 42-3.

> causing oblivion and blunting memory, surely no one could reasonably be indignant with us for trying to write down the way of the men who have loved God...[5]

This unimaginative reason (for, in fact, it has been a traditional opening of works belonging to the historiographic genre ever since Herodotos[6]) is just one of the *topoi* that can be found in Theodoret's *Prologue*, many of which it shared with other prologues of the histories of the monks produced at the time, and these, in turn, with the lives of non-Christian philosophers written by authors such as Porphyry or Eunapius.[7] It was for this reason that R. M. Price who translated Theodoret's *Philotheos historia* into English regarded the *Prologue* as a mere "elegant tissue of commonplaces"[8] A look at the closing sentences of the work will also provide us with an expressly stated motivation:

> For those who wish to cull some profit, what has been said is sufficient to provide what they desire. We have recalled different lives, and added accounts of women to those of men, for this reason: that men old and young, and women too, may have models of philosophy (φιλοσοφίας ἀρχέτυπα), and that each person, as he receives the impress of his favourite life, may have as a rule (κανόνα) and regulator (γνώμονα) of his own life the one presented in our account . . . so too one who wishes to emulate a particular life must apply it to himself in place of a rule, and cut off the excesses of vice, while supplying what is lacking in virtue. [9]

The ascetics are offered here as models for the entire Christian community, for their lives are perfect since they imitate closely the ideal patterns of Christian life set by Christ in his earthly existence and illustrated by the example of so many apostles and martyrs of whom the monks are rightful heirs. Through their asceticism they became

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[5]*HR*, Prologue, 2. The translation is R. M. Price's, 3-4.

[6]"These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus which he publishes in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions (ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά) of the Greeks and the Barbarians from loosing their due meed of glory (μήτε. . . ἀκλέα γένηται)" (*Historiae*, 1, 1). Although "unimaginative" according to the modern standards, Theodoret's beginning had thus a definite purpose: it was supposed to set the work within a well established genre.

[7]On this, see A. J Festugière, "Lieux communs littéraires et thèmes de folk-lore dans l'hagiographie primitive," *Wiener Studien* 73 (1960), 124-37 *praesertim*. See also Canivet's notes in his edition of the *Philotheos historia*, vol. 1, 147-59.

[8]R. M. Price, *Preface*, *History*, n. 1, 10.

[9]*HR*, 30, 7.

"living and rational images of God."[10] As a justification, this sounds logical and perfectly reasonable. Nonetheless, while reading some of the lives of these Syrian ascetics, one is made to think whether their author believed that putting them into practice within society would have been possible at all. Or, at least, for everyone, as Theodoret seems to imply. While striving to attain perfection was a justified ideal for every Christian, it is doubtful that wearing chains, practising extreme forms of fasting and sleep deprivation as well as other extravagant forms of ascesis such as hanging down from a tree in a wooden structure or spending one's entire existence in a wooden box or on top of a pillar enduring cold and rain as some of Theodoret's heroes did would have been possible to implement in everyday life and on a larger scale.[11] This way of life, however perfect, was an ideal one. In the same way as Theodoret's intended audience was also an ideal one. I will try, in the following paragraphs to gather some indications from the text that could help identify and describe the nature of this ideal audience.

In my opinion, some of these indications may be found elsewhere than in those paragraphs of the *Philotheos historia* which contain explicit programmatic declarations. Since they have not been expressly stated, one is left with interpreting the textual evidence and then correlating it with the background created by the actual characteristics of the work (that is, language, style, rhetorical devices). One story in particular is relevant in this case since it presents the way the ascetics' fame spread and how it was accepted (or rejected) by contemporaries, in other words the mechanisms which regulated, in Theodoret's vision, the working of "hagiographic" reports. After having become a stylite,

[10]In the *Curatio*, 12, 7 the ascetic is referred to as a living image of God: "For he, by setting in order and shaping his soul in this way, not only copies the features of the divine laws, but also becomes himself a living and rational image of the Lawgiver."

[11]And this despite the strong encratite roots of the Syrian Christianity and the possible appeal such forms of ascesis might have had among the average Christians. On this, see P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 325-33, A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. 2, 174-9 *et passim*, S. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 4-12, and Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Asceticism," 220-2 *et passim*, with an useful bibliography on the subject.

Symeon's fame spread to all the parts of the world and reached even the court of the Persian King of Kings. The reaction of those who heard about the saint's miracles (for, before being written down, the tradition about the saint's miracles was oral) was different from case to case, but Theodoret distinguishes basically two types of behaviour. On one hand, the king himself "tried to get informed carefully about the man's life (τίς τε εἴη τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ὁ βίος) and about his miracles (καὶ ὁποῖα τὰ θαύματα)" before reaching any conclusion. He was followed by all those in his retinue: "and all those around the king, struck by his (viz., Symeon's) reputation, even if they also heard all kind of calumnies against him from the *magi*, tried to inform themselves exactly (ἀκριβῶς ἐπυνθάνοντο) and, once they had learnt (διδασκόμενοι) [about him], called him 'holy man' (θεῖον ἄνδρα ὠνόμαζον)."

In opposition to these, "the other crowd (ὁ δὲ λοιπὸς ὅμιλος) went to the muleteers, to the servants and to the soldiers and, bringing them money (χρήματα προσέφερον), begged (ἱκέτευον) to procure for them the benediction of the oil (τῆς τοῦ ἐλαίου εὐλογίας)." The queen herself is presented in the same posture: "they also say that his wife, on the other hand (τὴν δὲ ὁμόζυγα τὴν τούτου), had asked for oil that had been honoured by his benediction (ἔλαιον αἰτῆσαι τῆς τούτου εὐλογίας ἠξιωμένον) and had received it as the greatest gift."[12]

Two different categories of recipients of the hagiographic material emerge from the story as well as two different types of attitudes towards it. On one hand, there is the king and the ones around him who do not accept any narrative about the life and miracles of the saint solely on the basis of the fame which reached them. Even if it is the fame that draws their attention to the saintly figure, they need to conduct a careful investigation into his life and miracles and to obtain accurate information and only then, after having *learnt* thoroughly about these, possibly by listening to the other side as well (that is the wise men

[12]*HR*, 26, 20.

of the realm who "calumniate" Symeon), they make up their mind and declare him a "holy man." The others, the undifferentiated crowd and the queen as a mere woman, do not need such an objective inquiry: the minute they hear the stories told by muleteers, servants and soldiers, rush to give them the money that can procure the desired talisman. Different sources of information, different ways of treating them, different outcomes. To speak of the two levels of religion (i. e. popular and aristocratic) on the basis of this single story would be, undoubtedly, exaggerated and simplistic.[13] And still, it is obvious that, at least in Theodoret's text, different people had different ways of crediting stories about supernatural events and powers: to put it in Platonic terms, some founded their belief on rational research, others on mere faith.

The same opposition is to be found with Synesius of Cyrene, who, while still a philosopher, but already close to becoming a Christian bishop, wrote in his famous letter to Theophilus of Alexandria, in which he was setting down his conditions for accepting the episcopal duty:

> It is difficult, if not completely impossible, for opinions to be shaken which the soul has received as true knowledge through dialectical demonstration. You know that philosophy vigorously opposes those opinions which are generally discussed and adhered to by the majority. . . . The philosophic mind, although it perceives truth, consents to the use of falsehood. For light is to truth as the eye is to the mind: as enjoyment of an excess of light could hurt the eye, and as darkness is of greater benefit to those who suffer from opthalmia, so also I believe that the false is beneficial to the people, and truth is harmful to those who have not the strength to gaze intently upon the clear manifestations of reality. If the laws of our priesthood allow me these reservations, then I can become a priest; one who philosophizes in private, but 'mythologizes' in public (δυναίμην ἂν ἱερᾶσθαι τὰ μὲν οἴκοι φιλοσοφῶν τὰ δ' ἔξω

[13]And, indeed, inappropriate since Arnaldo Momigliano has shown that the two levels can hardly be distinguished in the world of the Late Roman Empire: "there is no way of defining a clear separation between an upper-class culture and a lower-class culture in the second half of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century. While this applies also to the Pagans, it is really a distinctive feature of Christian culture. The Pagans are compelled to accept in self defence a reshaping of their own world. By the end of the fourth century even the most imperceptive pagan rhetorician and philosopher must have been acquainted with saints, miracles and relics." ("Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians" in *Quinto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, vol. 1 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1975), 93). This does not mean, however, that the educated themselves did not make *any* distinction (it did not have to be stated *expressis verbis*) between the way of believing proper to the crowd and that of the intellectuals.

φιλομυθῶν) . . . . For what has philosophy to do with the people? The truth about divine things is of necessity ineffable; but the multitude needs another system.[14]

To which of these two attitudes was the *Philotheos historia* appealing? There are several reasons to think the first. It was not simply a collections of stories (μύθοι)[15] for "the rest of the crowd,"[16] telling about unseen and unheard of miracles to a multitude ready to take them for granted and rush with ready money to whomever might obtain for them a drop of blessed oil, used as a talisman against various diseases and against the power of the demons.

First and foremost, in my opinion, there is the very language of the text. Although no extensive investigation has been conducted on it,[17] all those who studied Theodoret's works agree that he wrote an exquisite Attic, namely, the one which, after the Second Sophistic, had become the standard literary language of all cultivated Greeks.[18] It bears the distinct signs of a thorough rhetorical education despite Theodoret's constant concern to stress the preference that should be given to the naked truth over the embellished style of

[14]*Ep.* 105, 1485a-1488b as quoted by J. Bregman, 155-6. Bregman speaks about Synesius' *aristocratic* concept of religion: "his conception of Christianity was always Hellenic: for him the vulgar, who comprise the congregation and follow the precepts of the Church, are inferior to the mystic and philosopher who 'knows the reason of things' and can have a direct experience of the divine" (ibid., 135).

[15]Theodoret expresses, in another of his traditional beginnings (*HR*, 26, 1), his concern that the story about the life and miracles of St Symeon the Stylite might be treated by some as a "myth totally devoid of truth" (μῦθος . . . πάμπαν τῆς ἀληθείας γεγυμνωμένος). In his *Letter 33* he defined the myth as being διήγημα τῶν πραγμάτων γεγυμνωμένον "a story devoid of any factual basis."

[16]Synesius spoke with condescension about the multitude of those who "even at this late date, . . . think that Agamemnon, son of Atreus, is still in power, the same noble hero who attacked Troy. For we have been traditionally taught from childhood that this is the king's name. The good herdsmen say that he has a certain *amicus* named Odysseus, a bold man, but clever at handling practical affairs and finding his way in difficult circumstances. And indeed, they laugh when they speak of him, believing that he blinded the Cyclops last year" (*Ep.* 148, 1549 b-c as quoted in Bregman, 76).

[17]Only certain aspects received the attention of specialists: see D. C. Five, *The Use of the Optative in the Works of Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus*, Washington: Washington Catholic University, 1937.

[18]The salient Atticist features of Theodoret's language in the *Philotheos historia* include: the use of the reflexive σφᾶς αὐτούς (Prol., 2), the dative δένδρεσιν (1, 4), the dual (12, 3: ἀμφοῖν τοῖν χεροῖν and 21, 14: ἤστην, ἐγενέσθην) which was not employed anymore in the *koine*, classical βασιλίς instead of the usual βασίλισσα "queen," condemned by the Atticists, all signalled by Pierre Canivet in the notes of the *SC* edition.

the Hellenic letters. As other Christian writers, especially the Cappadocian fathers, he preached simplicity in a most refined and canonical Greek.[19]

Then, the fact that Theodoret was writing in Greek in a province where the majority of the simple people had an extremely limited access (if any) to basic Greek[20] (let alone the one of Theodoret) must also be taken into account when trying to circumscribe the possible audience of the *Philotheos historia*. Undoubtedly, some of those who spoke Syriac as their mother tongue eventually acquired a working knowledge of Greek and some of them, the ones fortunate enough to go through the proper *paideia* even rose to a complete mastery of Homer's language, as Theodoret himself had done.[21] But their number would, nevertheless, have remained limited when compared with all the society.

A further difficulty in accepting Theodoret's claim that his work was intended for a large group of believers is the existence in fifth-century Syria of what Peter Brown described as "a tacit model of non-involvement"[22] regulating the relationship between urban and rural collectivities and to which "barriers of language, of class, of non-

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[19]While discussing the pretence of the Cappadocians to present in their works only the "unadorned truth", Ihor Ševčenko noticed "the discrepancy between their literary practice and their theoretical pronouncements on literature. The former is all of a piece; the latter are ambivalent. The fathers speak on both sides of their mouths" ("A Shadow Outline of Virtue: The Classical Heritage of Greek Christian Literature (Second to Seventh Century)" in idem, *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982), II, 60). Theodoret suffers from the same diglossia. For some examples illustrating the divorce between stylistic theory and practice in the works of Gregory Nazianzen, Basil the Great, and John Chrysostom, see Eduard Norden, *Die Antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*, vol. 2, fifth edition (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1958), 564-72.

[20]As the one spoken by Aphrahates (*HR*, 8, 2: τῇ δὲ μιξοβαρβάρῳ κεχρημένος γλώττῃ). Some of the holy men are presented as being totally illiterate in Greek: Maesymas was Σύρος μὲν τὴν φονήν, ἐν ἀγροικίᾳ δὲ τεθραμμένος (ibid., 14, 2) and Abrahames received prayers from the empresses Eudocia and Pulcheria although οὐδὲ ἐπαίνειν τῆς ἑλλάδος ἐπιστάμενον γλώττης (ibid., 17, 10).

[21]He considered Greek to be his language (see *Ep.* 130, 7).

[22]"Town, Village and Holy Man", 155. In opposition to "many studies of Syria in Late Antique period [which] have been written in terms of a rhythm, of a dialogue, of assimilation and resistance [and which] may be mistaken precisely because they presuppose a relationship between town and village which, in the conditions of the eastern Mediterranean in the later Empire, may have never existed" (ibid., 154-5), Brown has put forward his thesis that "the basic and unchanging relationship between town and village was a *non-relationship*" (ibid., author's italics).

participation in classical culture are peripheral."[23] Although I hold this last conclusion to be an overstatement, due mainly to Brown's polemic intention to present his own theory of the holy man as the only relevant "category" in describing the relationship between the urban and rural Syrian milieux, I think that its basic tenets are still valuable. The Syrian peasants must have had little need of a literary work describing the holy men (and, what is more, in a language a relatively reduced number among them would understand) in order to adopt and put into practice one of the ideal models presented by Theodoret in the *Philotheos historia*. For those of them who were Christians, the holy men were there, not far from the boundaries of their villages, easy to be seen and approached as Theodoret himself depicts them.[24] And for those who had not yet received the Good News or had slipped into heresy, the arguments by which the orthodox faith was enforced were not of a literary kind.[25] Another social category that may have been targeted by Theodoret, namely, the urban lower orders, needs also to be considered when speaking about the possible impact of the *Philotheos historia*. But even if the fifth-century society was a fluid one and an increased social mobility could have assured an increased number of those who

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[23]Ibid., 155.

[24]*HR*, 22, 1. A man in need of assistance could immediately find the holy man since he had encamped not far from the village (ibid., 5, 5: οὐ πόρρω τῆς κώμης ἐσκηνωμένον).

[25]HR, 26, 5 and 21, 18. Canivet thought that "Théodoret n'apprécie guère sans doute les descentes qu'opéraient alors les moines contre les temples, car elles risquaient de provoquer des ripostes violentes" (*MST*, 259). Whether this was the real reason or not, it is true that in the *HE*, 5, 29 he presents such an action of the monks as entirely legitimate: "On receiving information that Phoenicia was still suffering from the madness of the demons' rites, John got together certain monks who were fired with divine zeal *armed them with imperial edicts* and despatched them against the idols' shrines." However, in the *HR*, 17, 5, Abraham made use of all the available means in order to convert the city of Carrhae, "which was steeped in sottishness of impiety and had given itself to the frenzy of the demons," (R. M. Price's translation, 122). They included "cutting" and "burning," but these are used only as metaphors to describe the healing process the holy man performed upon the city. On the Christianisation of the Syrian countryside and the role of the monks therein, see J. H. G. W. Liebeschuetz, "Epigraphic Evidence on the Christianisation of Syria" and "Problems Arising from the Conversion of Syria," in idem, *From Diocletian to the Arab Conquest: Change in the Late Roman Empire* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1990), VIII: 485-508 and IX: 17-24. Also see Frank L. Tombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianisation: c. 370-529*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), ch. 3, sect. 4.

might have had access to education, the people for whom Theodoret's work still remained incomprehensible (at least in its original form) would have been the majority.

Fortunately enough, there is evidence in the textual tradition of the *Philotheos historia* which suggests that the gap between the expressly designated wide audience of the work and those who may have actually had access to Theodoret's text in the form he had given it was a reality. Among the numerous manuscripts which have preserved the lives of the Syrian monks, there is one containing solely the life of Symeon (the twenty sixth in the corpus) which has undergone significant changes in its history, attesting a concern for simplifying its language and updating its contents in order to make it more easily available to a different category of readers than the ones to which it was originally intended. Thus, the *Parisinus graecus 1454*, dating from the tenth century,

> contient uniquement la Vie de Syméon le Stylite (XXVI) sous le titre d' ἐγκώμιον, mais ce chapitre a été délibérément coupé du recueil dont il faisait partie, comme l'atteste la supression de toute allusion ou référence aux autres Vies. . . . En outre, le *Parisinus gr. 1454* présente un texte qui a été minutieusement remanié au moment de la mort du Stylite ou peu du temps après. . . . Outre les modifications dont nous venons du parler, il en est d'autres . . . qui visent à simplifier le vocabulaire là où étaient employées des expressions qui paraissent trop littéraires et peut-être peu compréhensibles pour une partie du public de moines et de pèlerins auquel le ré cit était vraisemblablement déstiné.[26]

These modifications resulted in a systematic elimination of some elements from Theodoret's peculiar monastic vocabulary, replacing the exotic terms he had employed to designate monastic institutions and titles with their current synonyms (i. e. μοναστήριον for φροντιστήριον[27], μαθηταί for θιασῶται[28]). The pure Attic of Theodoret's text was

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[26]Alice Leroy-Molinghen, "Introduction" to the *SC* edition of the *Philotheos historia*, 66-8.

[27] *HR*, 26, 4, 10. The first term is the usual Christian designation of the monastery, conspicuously absent from Theodoret's *Philotheos historia*, where φροντιστήριον, a word coined by Aristophanes (*Nub.*, 94, 142, 182 etc.) to name Socrates' school of philosophy as a "thinking place," is preferred, possibly under the influence of Philo's usage. The only other instance when Theodoret uses μοναστήριον is when he is rendering direct speech occurring between two characters belonging to the lower social strata (*HR*, 3, 14). On this, see Pierre Canivet's important study, "Catégories sociales et titulature laïque et écclésiastique dans l'*Histoire Philothée* de Théodoret de Cyr" *Byzantion* 39 (1969): 209-50. The terms Theodoret used to denote the monastic dwelling places (οἰκίδιον, οἰκίσκος) are also specific to his style, κέλλιον, the usual Christian term being absent from his works (see Canivet's note 2 in the *SC* edition of the *Philotheos historia*, vol. 1, 203).

also purged, some of the obsolete words he used being replaced with more familiar terms.[29] These ulterior modifications show that when there appeared a need to produce a version of the text recounting the life and miracles of St Symeon which had to be made available to a large audience, Theodoret's initial text, upon some of the later *Lives* were based, had to be changed in the sense of making it more "democratic."[30]

All the arguments presented so far suggest that the real audience of Theodoret's *Philotheos historia* has to be restricted to a fairly reduced group of individuals who had sufficient linguistic knowledge and literary education to enjoy and understand it. In the Late Roman Empire, such a group can be easily identified as the ruling urban elite, one of the main distinctive features of which was precisely the classic education (*paideia*) they had shared in all the regions of the empire and which functioned as a powerful cohesive factor.[31] The fourth century had seen the dramatic rise of the Christians within this closed social category. Julian's dramatic attempt to deprive the newcomers of the only possibility of access to this elite certainly stands as a proof to it. As his attempt to link the values of Hellenism with a dangerous religious exclusivism was met with sharp criticism from the

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[28]Ibid., 26, 8, 9 and 8, 3 where the noun occurs in the dative. The use of these two terms in the writings of Christian authors has been studied by G. J. M. Bartelink (see "Θίασος et θιασώτης chez les auteurs chrétiens," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 45 (1979), 2: 267-78). While noticing that "les termes θίασος / θιασώτης n'ont pas acquis droit de cité chez les chrétiens" (ibid., 279) because of their strong associations with non-Christian cultic realities, he singles out two important exceptions from this rule: Eusebius and Theodoret. Among the works of Theodoret, the *Philotheos historia* contains the greatest number of occurences (see ibid., 276). The explanation put forward by Bartelink for this peculiar taste of Theodoret, namely that it is due to his "maniérisme stylistique" (ibid., 275) fails to convince me.

[29]For examples, see A. Leroy-Molinghen, "Introduction," 68-9.

[30]A. Leroy-Molinghen calls this "la version «démocratisée» du *Parisinus gr. 1454*" (ibid., 113). To say that the modifications have been made "à une époque que l'on ne peut préciser" (ibid., 68) does not exclude the possibility that they had indeed followed very soon after the saint' s death (and, therefore, some years after Theodoret's death). In my opinion they were determined mainly by the need to use the text as an element of the cult of the saint, and, consequently, to make it accessible to a wider audience.

[31]On this, see, among others, R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 20-4 and Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 121-2: "leadership in local society meant possession of *paideia*" because *paideia* "was not the trivial statement of a leisure class. It was the exquisite condensation of hard-won skills of social living, the one reliable code that governed the behaviour of the powerful."

non-Christian side and with fierce polemic on the part of the Christians, it failed and the Christians were free to use (next to those who were still attached to the old ways) the traditional educational system and to share the privileges and the prestige this *paideia* conferred upon them.[32] By the middle of the fifth century when Theodoret was writing his *Philotheos historia*, the educated class who could appreciate his stylistic and imagistic refinements, and of whom he himself was a part, was made up of both Christians and non-Christians (the last presumably in a decreasing number) whose religious differences were bridged by "shared assumptions."[33]

There are several reasons which support such an identification. Among them, Theodoret's peculiar stylistic choices in the *Philotheos historia* are, perhaps, the most significant. Both Canivet[34] and Bartelink[35] observed that Theodoret carefully avoided employing the traditional Christian terminology when writing about the Syrian monks. To the already mentioned examples other specific technical terms may be added (such as ἐπίσκοπος, μοναχός) which are absent in the *Philotheos historia*. Instead, Theodoret uses consistently classical terms to name the ecclesiastical and monastic realities of his age. Many of these terms still carried powerful non-Christians cultic connotations, others were already obsolete at the time.[36] Such a choice might have been motivated exclusively by stylistic considerations as both Canivet and Bartelink think, the latter even exaggerating

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[32]The literature on Julian's failed attempt to redefine Hellenism and exclude the Christians from the educational system is abundant. See Růžena Dostálová, "Τινὸς τὸ Ἑλληνίζειν. Controverse au sujet du legs de l'antiquité au 4^{e} siècle," in *From Late Antiquity to Early Byzantium: Proceedings of the Byzantinological Symposium in the 16th International Eirene Conference*, ed. Vladimír Vavřínek (Prague: Academia, 1985), 179-83 with a useful bibliography and Jean Bouffartigue's insightful comments in *L'Empereur Julien et la culture de son temps* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustinéennes, 1992), 596-603 .

[33]V. infra, n. 61.

[34]See Canivet, "Catégories sociales," 230 *et passim*.

[35]See Bartelink, "Θίασος et θιασώτης ," 274.

[36]See Canivet's thorough analysis of this terminology, "Catégories sociales," 230. His conclusion is that "le vocabulaire de Théodoret en ce domain (viz., monasticism) était original" both among his contemporaries and his forerunners (ibid., 240).

Theodoret's manneristic tendencies.[37] On the other hand, this peculiar terminology is strikingly consistent, to the point that the few exceptions to the rule have made the editors of the *Philotheos historia* reject some passages of the work as interpolated.[38]

To my mind, it seems improbable that this feature of the *Philotheos historia* might have been determined by stylistic concerns only. To say that Theodoret uses φροντιστήριον, the classical name for "school of philosophy," instead of the specific Christian term, μοναστήριον "monastery," only because of his taste for "exotic terms"[39] would be to miss the point, although it would be a convenient and comfortable solution.[40] However, I think that in this case it would also be a very inappropriate one. The more so since Theodoret's *Historia ecclesiastica* (finished in 449, only a few years after the *Philotheos historia*) does not exhibit the same striking anti-neologistic preoccupations, the specific Christian terms being here a common appearance instead of the "exotic" ones.[41] It seems improbable that Theodoret's taste in matters of style should change so radically in such short a period. Moreover, in his *Letters*, many of which are dated to the same period (around 449), his style is the same.

There is another explanation which may account for the stylistic and lexical differences between the two works. Theodoret's choice of terminology was determined by

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[37]With Canivet, this reason is merely suggested as possible: "Théodoret paraît éviter, plus encore que les titres civiles et ecclésiastiques courants, les dénominations habituelles monastiques, *peut-être* parce que, dans un ouvrage auquel il voulait assurer une certaine qualité littéraire, il éstimait d'un usage trop ré cent ou vulgaire la terminologie qui s'imposera plus tard" (ibid., italics mine). He also spoke about the author's "méfiance. . . pour les emplois nouveaux et sa fidélité au vocabulaire classique" which made him "recourir à un vocabulaire technique païen" (ibid., 250).

[38]*HR*, 10, 7, where μοναστήριον appears is such a case. See A. Leroy-Molinghen, "Les manuscrits de l'*Histoire Philothée* de Théodoret de Cyr," *Byzantion* 34 (1964): 34-5.

[39]Bartelink, "Θίασος et θιασώτης ," 279.

[40]And it was adopted by Bartelink who speaks of Theodoret's "style recherché et classicisant" as well as of his "maniérisme stylistique" (ibid.) which he holds to be the only justifications for such an unique choice of words. Canivet, while suggesting the same, still makes the important observation that "le vocabulaire de Théodoret implique une représentation et une certaine conception de la vie ascétique et monastique" ("Catégories sociales," 250), in other words, that his choice is coherent and consistent.

[41]See Canivet, ibid., 279.

the character of the works and by the quality of the audience they were intended for, rather than by his mannerism. I have invoked above the case of the *Parisinus graecus 1454* to support the hypothesis that we must look for the audience of the *Philotheos historia* among the educated urban elite rather than elsewhere. Other indications point in the same direction. Yvan Azéma investigated Theodoret's use of classical quotations and allusions in his *Letters* and remarked a " souci évident chez notre auteur d'adapter sa manière aux goûts du destinataire et de faire appel aux manifestations de la culture toutes les fois qu'il s'adresse à des personnes elles-mêmes capables, de par leur formation et leur qualité, d'en apprécier l'intérêt et l'agrément."[42] The *loca classica* appear predominantly in the letters to non-Christians (especially sophists like Aerius and Isocasius). In the letters dealing with doctrinal problems or with matters specifically Christian the number of such quotations and allusions becomes appreciably smaller.[43] After analysing the *loca Homerica* in Theodoret's works, Bartelink has reached similar conclusions.[44] It would appear then that Theodoret's works can be divided into two groups according to the extent they make use of classical quotations. One would comprise the *Therapy of Hellenic Diseases* and the *Letters*,[45] whereas the other would include the doctrinal works where classical quotations are rare[46] (although not inexistent), being by far outweighed by the biblical quotations. The *Historia ecclesiastica* and the *Philotheos historia* would belong to the last category.

Two factors seem to govern such choices: the function of the individual works and, in close connection with it, the type of audience that is targeted. Theodoret's peculiar

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[42]Y. Azéma, "Citations d'auteurs et allusions profanes," 8. He also noticed that "l'appel aux souvenirs de la culture classique apparait surtout dans les épîtres adressées à des correspondants que Théodoret sait être eux-mêmes imbus de cette culture" (ibid., 10).

[43]See ibid., 10-12.

[44]G. J. M. Bartelink, "Homère dans les oeuvres de Théodoret de Cyr," *Orpheus* n.s., 2 (1981), 1: 6-28.

[45]The *Curatio* contains the most classical quotations and allusions, on which see Canivet's exhaustive analysis in *Entreprise*, 192 ff. Furthermore, the *Letters* can also be divided into two categories, since those which deal with theological matters are almost devoid of any classical allusions: see Bartelink, ibid., 8.

[46]Although Bartelink's failure to identify some of them, at least in the *HR*, reduces even further their number. On this, v. infra, ch. 5, n. 34.

choices, both in the *Letters* and in his other works confirm this. The *Curatio*, as an apology for Christianity addressed to a mainly non-Christian audience, and the letters that have as recipients non-Christians, display a multitude of quotations and classical allusions. On the other hand, in the *Historia ecclesiastica* as well as in the other doctrinal writings their presence is insignificant. Does this mean that Theodoret's use is influenced by a sharp distinction he made, when writing his works, between predominantly non-Christian audiences and Christian ones? And, if so, what would be the case of the *Philotheos historia*?[47]

The hypothesis of a non-Christian audience to which some of Theodoret's works were addressed (the *Philotheos historia* in particular) is tempting since there are several arguments which could be adduced to support it. First of all, it is far from certain that the "pagan impiety" had been eradicated as the official proclamations boasted.[48] Pierre Chuvin has written the history of the "last pagans," showing that they were indeed an endangered species but by no means extinct in the fifth century.[49] Peter Brown has repeatedly warned

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[47]I fail to see how "in the *Historia Religiosa*, a collection of biographies of monks and ascetics, this display of learning is absent, presumably because it would have been out of place in a description of the lives of unlettered people" as Pauline Allen thought ("Some aspects of Hellenism in the Early Greek Church Historians" *Traditio* 43 (1987), 377). This author also unduly lamented "the disease which was to become virulent among classicising historians of the fifth and sixth centuries, the litterary affectation which prevented even Christian authors from calling a spade a spade where Christianity was concerned" (ibid., 375). On this, see Cyril Mango, "Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror," in id., *Byzantium and Its Image: History and Culture of the Byzantine Empire and Its Heritage* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), II, 3-18 and Averil and Alan Cameron, "Christianity and Tradition in the Historiography of the Late Empire," *Classical Quarterly* 58 (1964), 416 ff.

[48]*Cod. Theod.*, 16, 10, 22. Other examples quoted in P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 127-33. Theodoret concluded the *Curatio* on such a triumphalist tone: "We see that all their (viz., the pagan philosophers') [teachings] have been extinguished and abandoned to the darkness of oblivion, whereas ours flourish and prosper and have myriads of followers in every city and in every village and teachers, lacking Platonic eloquence but offering the healing power of Truth. And the error of the so-called gods has been forgotten, but the teachings of our Saviour are being preached" (12, 95).

[49]Pierre Chuvin, *Chronique du derniers païens: la disparition du paganisme dans l'empire Romain, du regne de Constantine à celui de Justinien*, 2d edition (Paris: «Les Belles Lettres» and Fayard, 1991), 18: "Des communautés païennes subsistent donc, localement, tout au long du V^{e} et du VI^{e}, réparties à travers l'Empire, d'une manière qui nous échappe le plus souvent, mais en tout cas avec un dynamisme et une vigueur intellectuelle plus grands en Orient qu'en Occident. Leurs fidèles sont exclus du pouvoir politique, administratif et militaire, mais ni des charges civiques ni de l'enseignement, et ils fournissent à la bonne société chrétienne des practiciens ès sciences «occultes»." See also Canivet, *Entreprise*, 3-21.

against taking *talia qualia* the triumphant proclamations of the fifth-century Christian historiography.[50] Theodoret himself, despite his boastful tone at the end of the *Therapy of the Hellenic Diseases*, occasionally breaks the "conspiracy of silence," mentioning certain pagan practices that were surviving even in his days.[51] The survival of the Hellenic element seems to have been particularly strong within the educational system, where it was still dominant even in the fifth century. And this traditional system of education was one of the main factors (if not the most important) which produced the urban élite, despite the blows that this élite had received as a result of increased social mobility. As I have argued above, Theodoret's *Philotheos historia* was addressed to this particular social stratum which had provided in the previous century both the sharpest critics of the Christian ascetics, and some of their few defenders. Expressed in high-quality literary works, shaped upon the classical models, the critiques were sure to influence those who had access to them, that is, the members of the intellectual elite. Theodoret's *Philotheos historia* would represent a perfectly justified literary attempt to mend the endangered reputation of the monks with people whose opinion carried some weight in Late Roman society.

For a modern reader, the purpose and the efficiency of such an attempt might be difficult to conceive. But, as J. Bouffartigue pointed out, for the ancient, ad especially for those sharing the background of traditional *paideia*,

> la littérature fournit à l'écrivain un univers de référence, une sorte de «haut univers», seul vraiment digne du «haut langage» qu'est l'expression littéraire. . . . En littérature antique, ce ré

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[50]"This was a literary construct, an insistent *basso profondo* to the celebration of modern times, associated with the Christian empire" (*Power and Persuasion*, 129).

[51]*HE*, 4, 13:" Some lads were playing ball in the market place and enjoying the game, when Lucius was passing by. It chanced that the ball was dropped and passed between the feet of the ass. The boys raised an outcry because they thought that their ball was polluted. On perceiving this Lucius told one of his suite to stop and learn what was going on. The boys lit a fire and tossed the ball through the flames with the idea that by so doing they purified it. I know indeed that this was but a boyish act, and a survival of the ancient ways; but it is none the less sufficient to prove in what hatred the town held the Arian faction." (Blomfield's transl. in Theodoret, *The Ecclesiastical History, Dialogues, and Letters of Theodoret*, translation with notes by Jackson Blomfield, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus, *Historical Writings, etc.*, ed. Philip Schaff and H. Wace, 2d series. (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson publishers, 1995), 117). See also Canivet, *Entreprise*, 118-25.

> el immédiat doit impérativement être situé et étalonné par rapport aux êtres et aux choses de l'univers littéraire. Cet univers, qui fait songer à la fois au monde des dieux du polythéisme grec et au monde intelligible de Platon, est celui de l'exemplarité.[52]

The important battles of the fourth and of the fifth century were fought in this ideal world. All those who had taken time and effort to produce or refute, time and again, attacks and denigrations made by one side against the other seem to have been guided by the ancient *dictum*: *Verba volant, scripta manent.* Time meant little in a world which, by its nature, was supposed to be long lasting: Origen refuted the attacks against the Christians made by Celsus some eighty years after *The True Word.* Cyrill of Alexandria wrote against Julian's accusations after approximately the same number of years. The disappearance of the opponent meant little as long as his words could still be read and could still sound with the same (if not greater) force. The need for defence (and, implicitly, for polemic) remained, even when, by imperial decree, the writings of one of the sides in the conflict were outlawed.[53]

The *Philotheos historia* is, in my opinion, very much part of this "conflict." As Cyrill had written his *Contra Julianum* to show that Christianity had its own exemplary figures, Theodoret declared that there were among the Christian athletes of piety heroes who deserved to be sung in epic more than the athletes who had won the Olympic games.[54] And, since the future generations, which did not have the possibility to see for themselves the brave deeds of the ascetics, might be inclined to cast some doubt on the

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[52]Bouffartigue, *L'Empereur Julien*, 613.

[53]Julian's work against the Christians was proscribed, together with that of Porphyry, by an imperial decree in 448. See, A. Meredith, "Porphyry and Julian against the Christians," in *Aufstieg un Niedergang der Römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Speigel der Neueren Forschung*, 2d series, eds. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, vol. 32, *Principat*, 2d fasc., *Religion: Vorkonstantinisches Christentum: Verhältnis zu Römischen Staat und Heidnischer Religion*, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), n. 26, 1138.

[54]*HR*, Prol., 3: "the athletes and pancratiasts who compete in the Olympic games are honoured with images, and even victorious charioteers appearing in the horse-races receive the same honour. And not only these but men who are womanish and effeminate, so that it is ambiguous whether they are men or women, are painted on panels by those who love to gaze at them, in emulous zeal to extend their memory as long as possible, although this memory causes not profit but injury to their souls" (Price's transl., 4).

wonderful lives and miracles he put in his *History*, Theodoret takes all the precautions required by the rules of the historical genre. Every account based on oral tradition is accompanied by an accurate statement of the sources.[55] The miracles which he had himself witnessed, and which are considerably less "problematic" than the ones gathered from others, are always authenticated by his own word.[56] The way Theodoret treated the miracles he included in his work indicates that he was addressing an audience susceptible to scepticism, who need to consider carefully the evidence before passing any judgement.[57] In short, not a crowd willing to accept any "myths" without question. That at least part of this audience could have been non-Christian might be suggested by the constant emphasis on the conversions which follow many of the miracles described in the *Philotheos historia*[58] and by the author's concern to present many of his holy men (Symeon the Stylite

[55]For Theodoret's treatment of miracles and a full inventory of the passages containing names of witnesses, see A. Adnès and P. Canivet, "Guérisons miraculeuses et exorcismes dans l'*Histoire Philothée*," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 171 (1967): 64-5.

[56]*HR*, Prol., 11; 13, 1; 14, 19; 21, 5; 26, 2; 28, 1. The words which authenticate these miracles (οὐκ ἄλλων δὲ μόνον διηγησαμένων ἀκήκοα, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτόπτης ἐγενόμην) occur as a formula.

[57]Ibid., 2, 12: "One of those who like carping and have learnt only to mock what is fine would say, possibly, that this story is not worthy of mention" (Price's transl., 29). See also ibid., 6, 3 and 11; 13, 15 and 21, 29:"I know many more stories than these, but I do not wish to record them, lest their quantity become for the more weak an excuse for disbelief" (Price's transl., 145) since " if anything is said that lies beyond the limits of nature, the account is judged to be false by those uninitiated into divine things (τοῖς τῶν θείων ἀμυήτοις) (ibid., 26, 1, Price's transl., 160). While these declarations might be suspected as mere rhetoric devices (examples of which to be found in Festugière, "Lieux communs," 132-7), in *HR*, 21, 35 Theodoret seems to suggest that James of Cyrrhestica was really faced with real accusations: "since some people accuse him of peevishness of character and are annoyed at his love of solitude and tranquillity' (Price's transl., 145).

[58]The miracles operated by Jame of Nisibis against the Persian army in Theodoret's account of the siege of that city are said to have been performed in order that the pagans, "recognizing the power of God, at some later date learn piety" (ibid., 1, 13, Price's transl., 20). About Symeon the Stylite, Theodoret remarked that the purpose of his unusual form of ascesis was to "attract, by the singularity of the spectacle, those who would not heed words and could not bear hearing prophecy, and [to] make them listen to the oracles" since "the novelty of the sight is a trustworthy pledge of the teaching, and the man who comes to look departs instructed in divine things" (ibid., 26, 13, Price's transl., 166). These theoretical considerations of Theodoret seem, to take his word for it, to have worked in practice: "I myself was an eyewitness of this, and I have heard them (viz., the pagan tribes) disowing their ancestral impiety and assenting to the teaching of the Gospel" (ibid., Price's transl., 167).

especially) as taking part in incessant holy wars: "now fighting pagan impiety, now defeating the insolence of the Jews, at other times scattering the bands of the heretics."[59]

However, definite proof that the *Philotheos historia* was intended for a non-Christian audience is hard to find. Perhaps it is not even worth looking for, as the distance between Christian and non-Christian members of the Late Roman intellectual elite might have been smaller than one usually imagines.[60] Or, at least, it could have been easily bridged, in the fifth century, by the common language of the traditional *paideia* which offered them a "much needed neutral space."[61] The common language still had two distinct dialects, mutually comprehensible, yet distinct. One of them was now the official language, and had achieved this status by selectively incorporating elements of the second, which had been the literary standard for centuries and would remain so for some time. In addressing an audience fluent in both, one had to use the right tone and to quote the right authorities in order to carry conviction.[62]

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[59]Ibid., 26, 27 (Price's transl., 171).

[60]"The difference between pagan and Christian intellectuals was in fact much smaller than they themselves would have avowed. On both sides of the iron curtain the notion of character, the experience of the interchange between insividual ambitions and political circumstances was being replaced by mystical experiences and contacts with divine beings" (A. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography," 47).

[61]P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 125. Brown also thinks that "possession of a common culture had always muted tensions between conflicting segments of the governing classes. It now served to veil deep-seated, private divisions between Christians and non-Christians. *Paideia* was shared by both, It was imparted in schools that continued to serve the city as a whole, not solely the dogmatic interests of the bishop's palace" (ibid.).

[62]*Ep.* 16 (Sirm.): "this fact must be borne in mind that the accused party is bound to produce unimpeachable witnesses, whose testimonies even his accusers canot impugn" (Blomfield's transl., 256). He put this into practice himself: when he wrote recommendation letters for Celestiacus, whom he entrusted to the hospitality of a pagan, Aerius the Sophist, and of a Christian, Apelion, Theodoret adapted his classical allusions according to the readers. Thus, in *Ep.*, 29 (Sirm.) he asks Apelion to receive Celestiacus as his guest and to show towards him the wisdom (viz., the hospitality) of Abraham (Ἀβραμιαίας ἀξιωσάτω φιλοφροσύνης). In *Ep.*, 30 (Sirm.), addressed to Aerius, he makes the same request, but this time exhorting his friend to emulate the hospitality of Alcinous (τὴν Ἀλκινόου ζηλῶσαι φιλοξενίαν). On another occasion, after having invoked the testimony of poets, in a letter addressed to a Christian, he added: "similar passages might easily be collected from poets, orators and philosophers, but for us the divine writings are sufficient" (*Ep.* 21 Sirm., Blomfield's transl., 258). On the function of the classical quotations, Bouffartigue noted: "la citation est indispensable. Elle est un signe de reconnaissance qui permet à l'écrivain et à son public de se constituer comme partenaires en un lieu d'échange clos, ré unissant ceux-là seuls qui participent à la même *paideia*" (*L'Empereur Julien*, 613-4).

Furthermore, as he tried to introduce new characters (the Christian holy men) into the fictional universe created and kept alive by the members of this elite,[63] Theodoret had to shape them according to the already existing ideal patterns which had been sanctioned by a centuries-long tradition. The monks' opponents had tried to deny them any right of citizenship in this ideal world, and, therefore, any prestige precisely by invoking their incongruence with the already established paradigms (of both heroism and wisdom) as I have tried to show in the previous chapter. The obviously distorted picture they created came both as a reaction to the "sacralized violence"[64] of the monks and as a response to the "outrances de la propagande ascétique."[65] And it represented a powerful challenge for the Christian component of the intellectual elite.

Theodoret took up this challenge and employed all his skill in responding. He had a masterful command of the common language of *paideia*: while the *Philotheos historia* is full of biblical quotations, the background in which they are set is woven of terms and concepts strongly reminiscent of the Hellenic culture. Whether he spoke to the Christians only (which to me seems improbable)[66] or exclusively to the pagans (which, in turn, is hard to prove) what matters is that Theodoret wrote for an educated audience and tried to speak their "language." In doing so, he had to keep in mind the stereotypes and the ideals this audience had received as a result of growing up and living in a world fashioned by *paideia*. The result was that his beloved Syrian ascetics were set and shaped against the patterns of Hellenic philosophers[67] and heroes and, while still retaining some of their

[63]"The fifth- and sixth-century eastern empire had its fair share of men of *paideia* in high places who learned to keep their beliefs to themselves. The more devout of these lived in a world that was as much of their own creation as was the mirage of a totally Christian empire proposed by their opponents" (Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 131).

[64]Ibid., 125.

[65]Labriolle, *La réaction païenne*, 336.

[66]Although F. Tombley seems quite certain that Theodoret had "Atticised" the events that led to the Christianisation of Syria "for the adherents of the Christian sophistic" (*Hellenic Religion*, vol. 2, 143).

[67]I agree with Canivet's thesis that Theodoret Hellenised as much as he could the image of the Syrian ascetics: "et il s'il le faut, pour achever de conformer le portrait à l'original, Théodoret retouche ses héros

original features, finally emerged as Christian heroes, "mediators" between the old and the new worlds.

philosophes, redresse leur tendances, corrige leur moeurs, comme l'apologiste qu'il était autrefois arrangeait avec plus ou moins de bonheur les citations de Platon pour les faire plus chrétiennes" (*MST*, 283). Cf., however, Brown, "Rise and Function," n. 91, 121 whose reservation on this point I do not share.

CHAPTER FOUR

FIGHTING THE UNSEEN WARS: THE ATHLETES OF PIETY

Whatever the true face of the Syrian ascetics might have been beyond all the exaggerated reports that painted them as "unwashed, unkempt, often homeless, usually poorly educated, making a positive virtue out of physical deprivation,"[1] to make them into great heroes of an epic must have been no easy task. Not even for Theodoret. Since his cultivated audience would have had a certain representation of what a hero should look like (as shown in the previous chapter), the real figures of the ascetics whose lives are told in the *Philotheos historia* had to be shaped against the "literary" heroic prototype of the age. And, as a consequence, become "verbal icons"[2] rather than true portraits. There was nothing new about stylisation of figures of holy men. It is, in fact, one of the laws of the hagiographic genre.[3] What is challenging in Theodoret's case is the way in which "materials" belonging to two different worlds were shaped in an ancient mould and the extent to which transformation and adaptation of the classical heritage were employed in order to obtain a picture which contained both reassuring old shades and prestigious new meanings. And which could appeal to both components of the intellectual elite, Christian and non-Christian alike.

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[1]R. M. Price, "Introduction" to Theodoret, *History*, xxix.

[2]Griffith, 221. In his opinion, research on the true face of Syrian monasticism should not rely on Byzantine texts (*Philotheos historia*, *Historia Lausiaca*, Sozomen's *Historia ecclesiastica*) "and others of their ilk" (ibid.) since they reflect more the standards of an hagiographic profile than the historical portraits of the Syrian ascetics. Scholars should rather draw on the information contained in the more indigenous Syriac materials (as he does, see ibid., 223-41). While his scepticism is partly justified (and the present thesis aims at giving some reasons to account for it), one should certainly not think that the *Philotheos historia* is entirely devoid of valid historical data. Canivet, who has insisted on this aspect (see "Introduction" to the *SC* edition of the *HR*, 40-41 where the work is termed "livre de bonne foi") did not fail to remark that "épuré par le regard complaisant de Théodoret, le monachisme syrien ne présente plus que des figures de médaille" (*MST*, 76).

[3]As defined by Van Uytfanghe, 148 who also thinks that "la fonction de cette littérature (viz., the one that employs a hagiographic discourse) et sa stylisation sont corrélatives" (ibid., 156). See also, H. Delehaye, *L'ancienne hagiographie byzantine: les sources, les premiers modèles, la formation des genres,* inedit texts published by B. Joassart and X. Lequieux, Foreword by G. Dagron (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1991), 14-5.

The aim of the present chapter is to investigate some of the ways in which Theodoret structured the heroic portrait of the Syrian ascetics whose exemplary lives he depicted in the *Philotheos historia*. In doing so, I shall look mainly at the elements which define the monks as *heroes*, leaving aside the other component of their literary individuality, the philosophical one. To operate such a disjunction between elements that are almost inseparably associated in Theodoret's conception might seem inappropriate. However, a justification for this exists: whereas the elements that compose the image of the monks as philosophers have received the attention of the specialists,[4] the heroic elements have not been favoured in the same way.[5] I will undertake this task in what follows, looking at some of the components which make Theodoret's holy men emerge as heroic figures and paying special attention to the polemic intention of the work, that is, trying to correlate Theodoret's narrative strategies and the means he employs (terminology, imagery) with the already existing image of the Christian ascetics. I shall also try to explore the way in which traditional heroic themes and vocabulary acquire a new, Christian meaning. As my research is by no means exhaustive, only those elements which I considered most representative are treated here. They have been grouped under three headings (v. infra) mainly for the sake of the clarity of the argument. It should not be inferred that this arrangement reflects in any way Theodoret's own plans or dispositions.[6]

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[4] More traditional scholars (Canivet, for instance) have analysed the features that Theodoret's ascetics share with the classic Greek philosophers as they appear in the numerous *Lives* of the Hellenistic and Late Antique period: see *MST*, 69 and 273-84 for a detailed and pertinent analysis of the common motives, expressions and conceptions. As the holy men have been also extensively (perhaps even more than necessary) treated in their function as "patrons" and "mediators," especially since Brown's groundbreaking study, this aspect will not concern me here (v. supra, "Introduction," 5).

[5] Again, Canivet's remarks are precious on this topic, but they are somewhat schematic (see, *MST*, 256-73) which is understandable given the character of this particular work, intended as a companion to the *Philotheos historia*, and, therefore trying to give a general (even if in some points superficial) image of the work and the problem it raises. Even so, for the treatment of the heroic elements in the *Philotheos historia*, some of which were contained *in nuce* in Canivet's work, I have found his comments stimulating.

[6] The more so since the *Philotheos historia* seems to have been written without a plan carefully sketched in advance. Canivet thought that "en rédigeant son récit au courant de la plume et des jours, Théodoret y introduit un plan qui n'existait sans doute pas au départ" (*Philotheos historia*, the *SC* edition, vol. 1, n. 1, 291).

I. The Warriors of the Faith

That Theodoret's history of the Syrian monks is an epic is made obvious from its very beginning: "How fine it is to behold the contests of excellent men, the athletes of virtue (Τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀθλητῶν καλὸν μὲν ἰδεῖν τοὺς ἀγῶνας)..."[7] Ἄνδρες ἄριστοι "the heroic men" are the heroes of the traditional epic poetry, brave fighters in single combat, striving to achieve great deeds during their lifetime and die heroically in battle, by the hand of a better hero, become the subjects of epic songs (ἀοίδιμοι) and thus gain imperishable fame (κλέος ἄφθιτον).[8] However, in this case, the traditional heroes are immediately termed as "athletes of piety": they are indeed fighters, but in a holy war which aims at conquering virtue, not glory. By employing both these formulae Theodoret makes clear that he will recount the deeds of those who led spiritual, not material, fights. Later on in the *Philotheos historia*, the formula τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀθλητής reappears[9] with slight, yet significant, modifications as ἀθλητὴς τῆς φιλοσοφίας[10] "athlete of philosophy" and ἀθλητὴς τῆς εὐσεβείας[11] "athlete of piety." The formulaic use of these expressions suggests that the three terms, "virtue," "philosophy," and "piety" are almost synonymous. Appearing in the context of traditional heroic terminology they help diffuse the tension between the two archetypes on which the figure of the ascetic is built: the hero and the sage.[12]

It is true that some of the terms belonging to the warrior terminology of the Greek epic were taken over by philosophy and applied to moral concepts, so that they came to express ethic values rather than the concrete, physical ones to which they were

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[7]*HR*, Prol., 1 (Price's transl., 3).

[8]See Canivet's note *ad loc.* in the *SC* edition, 147.

[9]*HR*, 3, 4; 6, 13; 18, 1; 19, 2; 21, 1; 31, 1.

[10]Ibid., 2, 9.

[11]Ibid., 21, 35. On the origin of the formula ἀθλητὴς τῆς εὐσεβείας, see the bibliography quoted by Canivet, ibid.

[12]See Canivet, *MST*, 70 and n. 2, 257.

originally associated. The theme *militia Christi* which was to enjoy such a prosperous fate within the monastic movement came into being as a result of this metaphoric use of the traditional vocabulary, although the Christian writers are not the ones to whom this transformation was originally due.[13] Even if the primary meaning of the heroic terminology did not have its original force at the time when Theodoret was writing, the fact that it was part of a long-established literary tradition, which was, moreover, the basis for the education of every individual who aspired at a higher position within society made it appealing to the writer. If he was to give prestige to the ascetics, presenting them in terms that still carried important connotations seemed a most appropriate way to do it since it would anchor them in the classic heroic tradition. At the same time, Theodoret always gave new Christian meanings to the old formulae he employed, thus creating the basis for continuity between the two traditions.

The contact was not difficult to establish since a Christian heroic tradition, associated to the martyrs, already existed at the time Theodoret was writing, and it employed much of the military and heroic terminology and imagery it had taken over, via the Jewish tradition, from the pagan world.[14] Since the ascetics were the inheritors of the martyrs, this terminology was extended to them as well "en vertu d'une assimilation progressive."[15] For Theodoret, the monks, the martyrs, and the apostles were imitating a heroic paradigm established by Christ in his fight with the devil and which he described in terms taken from the classical agonistic vocabulary:

> Hence he proceeded towards the fight (πρὸς τοὺς ἀγῶνας) against the tyrant: and the desert became the stadium (στάδιον) for the combats (τῶν ἀγώνων), the angelic multitudes the spectators (θεαταίι), and the enemy of piety His enemy. . . . But the Creator of our

[13]The literature on this topic is extremely vast. See, for instance, Jean Leclercq, "*Militare Deo* dans la tradition patristique et monastique," in *Militia Christi e crociata nei secoli XI-XIII: Atti della undecima settimana internazionale di studio, Mendola 28 agosto-1 settembre 1989*, (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1992), 3-13 and the bibliography quoted therein. On Theodoret's treatment of this *topos*, see Canivet, *MST*, 199-203.

[14]As shown by Zeph Stewart in "Greek Crowns and Christian Martyrs," in *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière: Antiquité paienne et chrétienne,* eds. E. Lucchesi and H. D. Saffrey (Geneva: P. Cramer, 1984), 119-24.

[15]Canivet, the *SC* edition of the *Philotheos historia*, n. 1, 324-5. For some of the heroic *topoi* associated with the martyrs see Victor Saxer, "Leçons bibliques sur les martyrs," in *Bible de tous les temps*, vol. 1, *Le monde grec ancien et la Bible*, ed. Claude Mondésert, 195-222 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 198, 205-7, 210-1, 215-6.

nature, our Champion (πρόμαχος) and our Judge (ἀγωνοθέτης), the One who awards us the crowns [of victory] (στεφανίτης) feared not His opponent (ἀνταγωνιστήν)...[16]

The adverse sources had depicted the monks as an unruly, violent mob. They were an undifferentiated mass of people "clad in black raiment" ravaging and plundering the countryside, bringing destruction upon the ancient temples and death to those who might have stood up in their defence. No individual was worth of being singled out by mentioning his name among this turbulent multitude, which was often just a *masse de manoeuvre* of some unscrupulous bishop. This mass could hardly appear as heroic. Theodoret paints literary portraits of heroic *individuals*, recounting the brave deeds of each and every one of them. Even when the biography is merely a succession of commonplaces,[17] which makes it difficult to actually picture the ascetic as an individual, he is clearly identified with his name. Homer invoked the Muses in order to be able to sing the heroic deeds of every single important warrior who was counted as such (ἐναρίθμιος). The multitude, the many anonymous fighters, were not worthy mentioning. While the death of an individual hero was an important event requiring many hexameters to be told, the anonymous crowd remained so even in death which occasioned the poet no more than a few words.[18] Theodoret's ascetics are singled out from among all their innumerable contemporaries[19] and they are thus given the privilege of an ἀριστεία. As were the sophists and philosophers whose lives were written by Eunapius towards the end of the fourth century.

Besides being heroic individuals rather than insignificant anonymous members of a mob, some of Theodoret's ascetics also have a heroic appearance in accordance with the classical canons of beauty. They are safe against criticism concerning this

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[16]*De providentia*, PG, vol. 83, col. 752.

[17]See, for instance, the life of Maron (*HR*, 16, 1).

[18]*Il.*, 4, 538: πολλοὶ δὲ περικτείνοντο καὶ ἄλλοι. If the funeral of Patroklos takes 118 hexametres in the twenty-third canto of the *Iliad* (23, 107-225) and that of Hector another twenty two at the end of the last canto (24, 782-804), the accomplishment of the funeral rites for the anonymous crowd is dispatched in nine verses in the seventh canto (7, 424-31).

[19]*HR*, 23, 2: "God, the Umpire of Virtue, has very many other contestants in our mountains and plains; it would not be easy merely to number them, let alone record the life of each one" (Price's transl., 153).

aspect which, in Greece was almost always intended to belittle the adversary. Homer's description of Thersites, an essentially unheroic fellow, is a good example for this: "Evil favoured was he beyond all men that came to Ilios: he was bandy-legged and lame in the one foot, and his two shoulders were rounded, stooping together over his chest, and above them his head was warpen, and a scant stubble grew thereon."[20] And when Julian wrote about bishop Diodorus of Tarsus, it was the same criticism of his appearance that he used as the most effective weapon to discredit the much hated Christian bishop.[21]

It is true that Eusebius, for instance, would have hardly qualified as a hero when set against these canons, with "his face shrivelled up and all the limbs of his body wasted away." Theodoret further said about the same character that "he so exhausted his body with many labours that his belt could not even stay on his waist, but slipped downwards, since there was nothing to hinder it; for his buttocks and hips had been worn away. . ."[22] But not all of the ascetics are presented as emaciated and mummified by prolonged exposure to the elements. Marcianos, for instance, had received "great bodily size and beauty from the Creator of nature"[23] and even after severe fasting he still retained a "very big body, being indeed the biggest and most handsome of all the men of his time."[24] Such a portrait is only natural for someone who had a noble origin (ἐξ εὐπατριδῶν) and was also endowed with spiritual, not merely physical beauty, in

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[20] αἴσχιστος δὲ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθε / φολκὸς ἔην, χωλὸς δ' ἕτερον πόδα τὼ δέ οἱ ὦμω / κυρτὼ ἐπὶ στῆθος συνοχωκότε αὐτὰρ ὕπερθε / φοξὸς ἔην κεφαλήν, ψεδνὴ δ' ἐπενήνοθε λάχνη. (*Il.*, 2, 216-9; Homer, *The Iliad*, with an English translation by A. T. Murray, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd, 1960), 67).

[21] *Ep.*, 55: "For many years past, he has been in danger, having contracted a wasting disease of the chest, and he now suffers extreme torture. His whole body has wasted away. For his cheeks have fallen in and his body is deeply lined with wrinkles. But this is no sign of philosopgic habits, as he wishes it to seem to those who are deceived by him, but most certainly a sign of justice dne and punishment from the gods which has stricken him down in suitable proportion to his crime, since he must live out to the very end his painful and bitter life, his appearance that of a man pale and wasted" (Wright's transl., 189-91).

[22] Ibid., 18, 1 (Price's transl., 126-7).

[23] Ibid., 3, 2: μέγεθος σώματος παρὰ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ τῆς φύσεως καὶ κάλλος δεξάμενος (Price's transl., 37).

[24] Ibid., 3, 3: καὶ σῶμα μέγιστον ἔχων καὶ τῶν ἐπ' αὐτοῦ πάντων ἀνθρώπων μέγιστός τε ὢν καὶ κάλλιστος (Price's transl., 38).

perfect accord with the ideal of καλοκαγαθία.[25] Another ascetic, Publius, also of a noble descent,[26] was "both good-looking in physique and possessed a soul that matched his physique".[27] Body and soul in full harmony, one mirroring the other, both the image of perfection. In this respect, the two ascetics do not differ significantly from the portraits of philosophers depicted by Eunapius and which were inspired by the same ideal.[28]

Moreover, not all the ascetics in the *Philotheos historia* are "comme le philosophe barbu, avec robe longue et bâton, visage pâle et allongée."[29] Sabinus, who was otherwise known for eating food that had become mouldy and stinking appears in a dream to a lady, whose daughter was possessed, as having rosy cheeks (ὑπέρυθρον) and this is precisely the sign which leads to his identification among the other monks living in the coenobium.[30] This was certainly not the "contrived pallor" of which Libanius had spoken.

It might be that others were the features which made the high military official, who was hunting on the same mountain where one of the ascetics had settled, dismount and throw himself at the feet of the holy man. He might have not necessarily seen him as a heroic figure.[31] However, there is, in the *Philotheos historia* one

[25]Ibid., 2: "and having a soul adorned with sagacity" (Price's transl., 37).

[26]Ibid., 5, 1: ἐκ βουλευτικῆς μὲν συμμορίας ὁρμώμενος.

[27]Ibid.: τὸ εἶδος ἀξιοθέατος καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τῷ εἴδει συμβαίνουσαν ἔχων (Price's transl., 58). Also, about Maris (Ibid., 20, 2), Theodoret said that he possessed bodily beauty (τοῦ σώματος τὸ κάλλος), brilliance of voice (τῆς φωνῆς ἡ λαμπρότης), and beauty of soul (τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς κάλλος) which remained unaffected by the first two qualities.

[28]"The physical beauty of Prohaeresius . . . was so striking, even then he was then an old man, that one may well doubt whether anyone had ever been so handsome, even in the flower of youth, and one may marvel also that in a body so tall as his the power of beauty sufficed to model a shape so admirable in all respects. His height was greater than anyone would be inclined to believe, in fact one would hardly guess it correctly. For he seemed to stand nine feet high, so that he looked like a colossus when one saw him near the tallest men of his own time" (*Vitae. soph.*, 487, Wright's transl., 485).

[29]Canivet, *MST*, 262.

[30]*HR*, 3, 22.

[31]Ibid., 13, 6. But on another occasion, when the entire city of Antioch was fearfully awaiting the two high officials sent by the emperor to take punitive measures following the riot, the same ascetic is clearly presented as an imposing figure: "He descended from the mountain and stopped the two generals as they were crossing the square; on learning who it was, they leapt down from their horses, clasped his hands and knees, and asked for his salutation" (Ibid., 13, 7, Price's transl., 103). That the

instance when a holy man, namely, James of Nisibis, indeed appears to the Persian king, who was besieging the city, in a typically heroic posture, so much so that he is mistaken for the Emperor himself:

> when the impious king saw . . . the man of God walking on the wall and supposed it to be the emperor himself supervising the works, as he was seen dressed in purple robe and diadem (ἁλουργίδα γὰρ καὶ διάδημα περικείμενος ἑωρᾶτο), . . . he disbanded his army and returned to his own palace as quickly as he could.[32]

This particular passage is significant since in the *Historia ecclesiastica* Theodoret told a different story: it was no the holy man's appearance on the wall in kingly attire that frightened the Persian king, but a supernatural being, and it was really the mosquitoes (as well as the other insects) summoned to attack the Persian army by the holy man's prayers which drove away the invaders.[33] In 337, when the events took place, James was no more among the living, so his presence among the defenders of Nisibis is purely legendary. In the *Historia philotheos*, the legend is reworked by Theodoret in order to present James as the ultimate defender of the city, whose majestic appearance on the walls frightened king Sapor into fleeing back to Persia. Theodoret gave the holy man a heroic outlook, visible from afar and invested with prestige and power, depicting him much in the manner in which royalty was depicted in the Hellenic literature. In the *Curatio*, he had opposed this majestic and heroic image of royalty to the simple and less glorious matters treated in the Holy Scriptures:

> For it is not a visible royalty that they present to their followers, bedecked with purple (ἁλουργιδι κοσμουμένην) and embellished with a crown (στεφάνῳ λαμπρυνομένην), dignified with the number and the grandeur of its shield-bearers and its spear-bearers, and having a great army and commanders good at fighting heroically (ἀριστεύειν) in wars and all the other things that render famous those who posses them. Instead, [they (viz., the Holy Scriptures) speak of] a cave, a manger and a poor virgin, a babe swaddled in miserable diapers and lying in the empty manger, a small, unknown village where all these happened. And afterwards, the poverty in which the child was raised, the hunger, the thirst, and the

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passage was reworked in order to give Macedonius a more heroic and imposing appearance is obvious if one bears in mind that one of the generals was a pagan and also if one takes a look at the passage of the *Historia ecclesiastica* where the same story is told, in a more realistic key this time (see *HE*, 5, 20, 5).

[32]Ibid., 1, 12 (Price's transl., 19). On the imperial insignia, see Canivet's note ad loc. in the *SC* edition, vol. 1, 189.

[33]*HE*, 2, 27.

tiredness of the voyage and, after these, the Passion sung by everyone, the slaps on His face, the lashes on His back, the cross, the nails, the gall, the vinegar, the death. [34]

James of Nisibis appears, in the passage mentioned above, with the distinctive traits of this Hellenic, heroic, and fully visible royalty. Chasing away the Persian King of Kings, he is presented by Theodoret as a providential defender of the city. It might have been the impiety of the men in black which opened the gates of Greece before Alaric's barbarians as Eunapius suggested, but this time, it was the heroic appearance of a Christian monk which drove away other barbarian hordes. This explains why James is named πρόμαχος "champion" and νικήφορος ἀρίστευς "victorious hero."[35]

II. The Unseen Wars

From the very beginning of the *Philotheos historia*, Theodoret warned his readers that the wars he was going to depict were unseen, fought not against visible enemies, but within the body, against passions and the demons that might use them to prevent the ascetics from reaching perfection.[36] This was a logical consequence of the fact that what he was describing was the "angelic rule" ἀγγελικὴ νομοθησία,[37] the life of bodiless beings which the monks were striving to imitate. This was a commonplace in the literature of the time which employed a hagiographic discourse, both Christian and non-Christian, although some Christians tended to see in it a feature specific to their literature and reacted vehemently when Eunapius, for instance, spoke of Julian[38] in the same terms in which Theodoret would speak of his monks.[39]

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[34] *Curatio*, 8, 8.

[35] *HR*, 1, 14: when Nisibis was surrendered to the Persians by Jovian in 363, "all the inhabitants of the city departed, but took with them the body of their champion, aggrieved and bewailing their exile, but chanting the power of their victorious hero" (Price's transl., 20).

[36] "We are recording a life that teaches philosophy and has emulated the way of life in heaven; we do not portray their bodily features nor do we display for those in ignorance representations of them, but we sketch the forms of invisible souls and display unseen wars and secret struggles" (*HR*, 1, 3, Price's transl., 4).

[37] *HR*, 3, 4.

[38] "For he, through the strength of his personality and his stature, as great as that of God, extirpated from himself that governing force of life which drags men down and, raising himself up from deep, deep waters, beheld the heavens and the beauty therein and, though himself clothed in flesh held converse with the incorporeal spirits" (*History*, 5, 28, fr. 1, Blockley's transl., 42). An unknown reader (possibly Arethas of Patras) unleashed his anger against the words of Eunapius in

However, not everything is concealed in the fights recounted by Theodoret. True, on one occasion Theodoret himself might reveal how he got in danger because of a devil which tried "to make war invisibly (ἀοράτως πολεμεῖν) by using magic spells and having recourse to the co-operation of evil demons."[40] But, most of the time, the athletes of piety wage their incessant wars against the devil in full sight of those who might wish to profit from this experience:

> Living in this place he is observed by all comers, since he has, as I said, no cave or tent or hut or enclosure or obstructing wall; but he is to be seen (ὁρᾶται) praying or resting, standing or sitting, in health or in the grip of some infirmity, so that it is unceasingly under the eyes of spectators that he strives in combat (διηνεκῶς ὑπὸ θεαταῖς ἀγωνίζεσθαι) and repels the necessities of nature.[41]

There is here one of the contradictions which Theodoret must have faced in his attempt to turn the Syrian ascetics into Hellenised epic heroes. On one hand, their fights and their virtues had to be "unseen" since revealing them during their lifetimes was regarded as a possible incentive to nourish sinful thoughts and to become infected with "the disease of vainglory."[42] On the other hand, fame was an essential component of the figure of the traditional Hellenic heroes. In the case of the philosophers and of the sophists it was fame that made the disciples gather around them and, exactly as in the case of the charismatic ascetics, once the fame had spread, it was impossible for the holy men to avoid the flock of disciples who, in their thirst for knowledge, could even resort to violence in order to force the holy man to share it. As Eunapius said about Aedesius, who, following an oracle, wished to retreat to the countryside and become a shepherd of sheep and bulls in order to associate with the blessed immortals,

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this way: "Why do you continue to babble on in this way? You really are a most ignorant and stupid fool. For who has been so instructed in the native doctrines of the Hellenes that, having escaped this life, he becomes a watcher of the heavenly mysteries or a consort of incorporeal spirits? . . . But you have stolen these things from the Christian mysteries--I mean, the bands of incorporeal spirits" as quoted by R. C. Blockley, *Classicising Historians*, vol. 2, n. 57, 135.

[39]*HR*, 21, 3: "Competing as if in the body of another, and striving with zeal to overcome the nature of the body--for clad in this mortal and passible one he lives as in an impassible one--, and practising in a body the life without a body. . . " (Price's transl., 134).

[40]Ibid., 21, 15 (Price's transl., 139).

[41]Ibid., 21, 5 (Price's transl., 134-5).

[42]Τῆς κενῆς δόξης τὸ πάθος (ibid., 21, 12).

> so great was his previous renown (κλέος) and so widespread that this purpose could not be hidden from those who longed for training in eloquence or for learning. They tracked him down and beset him like hounds, baying before his doors, and threatened to tear him in pieces if he should devote wisdom so great and so rare to hills and rocks and trees, as if he were not born a man or with knowledge of human life.[43]

Theodoret used a similar justification for revealing things that he should have kept secret during the lifetime of the ascetic who disclosed them to him. He put "the benefit" of the others (that is, the instruction) before the ascetic's wish to be spared the undesired troubles brought about by fame.[44]

But there was no need for stories for those who could go and see for themselves the monks' incessant fights and their virtues, for, despite Theodoret's claims about the "unseen wars" many of these battles were fully visible. As he himself avowed, "to those who see the man of God, no story of this kind appears incredible, because *the virtue they see* (τῆς ὁρωμένης ἀρετῆς) confirms the stories."[45] Even when a holy man tried to conceal his power, it only became more and more manifest and he seemed to accomplish miracles even against his own will.[46] Furthermore, the outcome of the "unseen wars" are almost always, if not visible, then, accessible to other senses: for instance, the demons cried out loudly the power of their enemies when chased away so that everyone may hear them.[47] Some of the miracles are introduced with the phrase καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν "and you could see. . . ": "One could see fevers quenched by the dew of his blessing, shivering quieted, demons put to flight, and varied diseases of every kind cured by a single remedy."[48]

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[43]Eunapius, *Vitae soph.*, 465, Wright's transl., 393.

[44]Theodoret was warned by James of Cyrrhestica, as he put it, "to keep the knowledge to myself and not make others share it; but I, for the sake of the benefit, have not only recounted the story to many, but also entrusted it to writing" (*HR*, 21, 21, Price's transl., 142).

[45]Ibid., 21, 29, Price's transl., 144 (italics mine).

[46]"He was keen to hide his power, suspecting the machinations of the thief of virtue, for he sows secretly the passion of arrogance and tries to steal the fruits gathered with toil. Eager to hide the grace given to him, he worked miracles reluctantly, as the splendor of his achievements flashed forth and revealed his hidden power" (Ibid., 3, 9, Price's transl., 40).

[47]See, for instance, ibid., 3, 9 and Canivet's note *ad loc.* (vol. 1, 264) with other examples of this well known *topos* of monastic literature.

[48]Ibid., 16, 2, Price's transl., 117. See also ibid., 6,3.

Since the battles against the demons had outcomes that could be seen, heard, or otherwise sensorially experienced, many of those who came to the holy men's abode were indeed attracted by their fame, but also wanted τῇ πείρᾳ διδάξαι τῆς φήμης τὸ ἀληθές.[49] The fight of the ascetic with the demons, in its most dramatic form, the exorcism, could even be put on stage, as the strange story told in the life of Peter the Galatian proves. The holy man ordered the devil out of a cook and then forced him to tell how he had got into the man, which the demon did, however reluctantly.

> He declared that in Heliopolis, when the master of this domestic was once ill and the mistress was sitting by her husband because of his illness, the maidservants of the mistress of the house where they were staying were recounting the life of the monks practising philosophy at Antioch and how much strength they have against demons, and then these servants, as girls who enjoyed play, acted the part of the raving demoniacs, while this domestic, putting on a goat's hair cloak, exorcised them like a monk. 'While this was being performed,' continued the demon, 'I was standing at the door. Finding these boastful remarks about monks unbearable, I decided to learn by experiment (τῇ πείρᾳ μαθεῖν) the power these servants bragged of them possessing. For this reason, leaving the maidservants, I intruded myself into this man, wanting to find out how I would be driven out by the monks. And now (he concluded) I have found out (μεμάθηκα) and need no further proof (πείρας ἑτέρας οὐ δέομαι). . .[50]

The power of the monks and their many victories might have led the beholders of the unseen wars to conclude that they were superhuman beings, unlike the other mortals, however often and clearly Theodoret (and, for that matter, so many other hagiographers) emphasised that it was the power of God which drove out the demons, not the ascetics themselves, who were merely tools in the process.[51] From afar, Symeon the Stylite, with his superhuman endurance of rain, cold, snow and flocks of pilgrims which could sometimes be quite a nuisance, really seemed to defy any boundaries known to mortals. So, when some learned deacon asked him whether he was "a man or a bodiless being (ἄνθρωπος ἢ ἀσώματος φύσις)," Symeon allowed

[49]"To learn through experiencing the truth of the fame" (Ibid., 16, 2).

[50]Ibid., 9, 9, Price's transl., 85.

[51]"But it is the Master who through His servants performed these miracles too; and now likewise it is by the use of His name that the godly Symeon performs his innumerable miracles" (ibid., 21, 17, Price's transl., 168).

him to climb up and "first examine his hands, and then to place his hand inside his cloak of skins and look at not only his feet but also his severe ulcer."[52]

The good deacon may have been convinced, but the ambiguity persisted. From the distance (and the literary works telling about the lives of the ascetics certainly did not contribute to reducing this distance), the monks appeared as superhuman heroes whose "unseen wars" had visible victories, whose virtues were exposed even against their will, and whose victories were seen, heard of and told by all.[53] This was close to the old heroic ideal, but, at the same time, carried with it serious risks. Theodoret, while taking the epic distance that would allow for his ascetics to look heroic enough for the taste of his audience, did not forget to approach them and reveal the hidden signs of their humanity.

III. The Enemies

The traditional enemies of the monks, at least as far as the unseen wars are concerned, are the various demons that use the most devious tricks in order to deprive the ascetics of the painfully earned fruits of their ascesis. Consequently, the wars of the ascetics are fought against these enemies. It happens, however, that other characters (mostly fellow humans, but not exclusively) come to be presented in opposition to the ascetics. To be certain, they are not the "enemy"[54]as the vocabulary used by Theodoret

[52]Ibid., 26, 23 (Price's transl., 171). Similarly, Theodoret wrote about Julian Saba that he became ill so that "everyone should learn that he was a human being" (ibid., 2, 18, Price's transl., 33).

[53]Ibid., 13, 1: "they all know him, both the neighbours and those who border on them, some by having been eyewitnesses to the miracles of the man, others by hearing the fame which sung about them."

[54]Even though some of them, particularly those who deviate from the Nicaean orthodoxy are spoken of in warlike terms. For instance, when Theodoret told about the participation of James of Nisibis in the Council at Nicaea, he said that "the great James arrived with the rest, to fight for the true doctrines like some hero and champion of the whole host (τῶν ὀρθῶν ὑπερμαχήσων δογμάτων οἷά τις ἀριστεὺς καὶ πρόμαχος ἁπάσης τῆς φάλαγγος)" and, after the end of the council departed "rejoicing like a victorious champion in the trophies of piety (οἷά τις ἀριστεὺς νικήφορος τοῖς τῆς εὐσεβείας τροπαίοις ἐπαγαλλόμενος)" (*HR*, 1, 10, Price's transl., 16 and 18). The same terminology is used in connection with Marcianos who "fought nobly (διεμάχετο δὲ γενναίως) against those of Sabellius' persuasion" (ibid., 3, 16, Price's transl., 44). The ascetics waged war even against other holy men: the same Marcianos, in his great zeal for the true teachings of the Church (which, in this case concerned the celebration of Easter) "engaged in just battle (δικαίαν ἀνεδέξατο

to describe their actions, identical in most respects with that used of the demons, suggests. For Theodoret (as well as for other Christian writers), beyond these human figures that, at some point or another, became the opponents of the monks, there are always, lurking in the dark, the archenemies of the ascetics, the demons. I have selected for analysis in what follows two terms that, in the *Philotheos historia*, are employed both in connection with the demons and in speaking about the characters set in opposition to the holy men by Theodoret.

The use of λύττη 'rage' and μανία 'insanity' is particularly significant in establishing a pattern of characterisation since it describes both the destructive actions of the demons and, as a result, the condition of those possessed by the demons. Thus, when defeated by the grace given by God to Thalelaios, a crowd of demons, filled with rage and insanity (λύττης καὶ μανίας), unleashed their ravaging anger in a most unfitting way against some olive trees.[55] The demon who kept attacking James of Cyrrhestica is also said to have been λυττῶν 'enraged' and the same word is used about a viper which bit an ascetic a dozen of times in its insanity (τῆς μανίας).[56] As the only remedy in such cases was the power of a holy man, Theodoret had it that the whole city of Antioch rushed to Symeon the Older to ask for "deliverance of the demonic rage (δαιμονικῆς λύττης ἀπάλλαγη)."[57]

When it passed into humans, the rage was ended by an intervention of the holy man: Peter the Galatian delivered a peasant from the rage (τῆς λύττης) of the demon that had been haunting him.[58] Those who became possessed by demons were 'enraged,' a state described by various forms of the verb λυττάω. For instance, the daughter of an important official was "delirious and raving, troubled by an evil demon

μάχην) with a man who was wonderful and godly (ἄνδρα θαυμάσιόν τε καὶ θεῖον) . . . a certain old man called Abraham, a man hoary in hair and hoarier still in thought, glorious in every virtue and always shedding the tears of compunction" (ibid., 3, 17, Price's transl., ibid.).

[55]Ibid., 28, 1.

[56]Ibid., 22, 5-6.

[57]Ibid., 6, 6.

[58]Ibid., 9, 10.

(ὑπὸ πονηροῦ δαίμονος ἐνοχλουμένης καὶ λυττώσης)."[59] Even the effects of the pain caused by a colic are described in the same way: "the agonising pain that this causes is known precisely both by those who have experienced it and by those who have been witnesses of it: they roll about like lunatics (λυττῶσι), turning over on this side and on that, at the same time stretching out and then bending back their legs."[60]

The same applies to μανία 'insanity' and to the verb μαίνομαι 'to be insane, mad' which is derived from it: they describe both the behaviour of a young girl who, possessed by a demon, made false accusations against someone[61] and that of a corybant equally under demonic influence.[62] Even the simulated possession of the girls who put on stage an exorcism is qualified with the same term.[63] Μανία is also the most adequate term to describe the state of mind of a murderer at the time of committing the crime,[64] the fury that overcame the inhabitants of Antioch and made them rage against the statues of the Emperor Theodosius,[65] as well as the violent behaviour of the pagan villagers who tried to bury alive Abraham and his companion when they tried to preach the Gospel in their village.[66]

In all the instances presented above, the presence of the demons who are inspiring the abnormal behaviour of humans may still be felt. Their action can be guessed, even when Theodoret does not indicate clearly their presence, behind the irrational gestures of various characters. However, in other cases, the demonic presence is more remote, only the use of λύττη or μανία suggesting that this is the real cause of someone's actions. In these cases, Theodoret clearly used λύττη and

[59]Ibid., 3, 9, Price's transl., 40.

[60]Ibid., 22, 4, Price's transl., 151.

[61]Ibid., 13, 12.

[62]Ibid., 9, 4.

[63]Ibid., 9, 9.

[64]Ibid., 7, 3.

[65]Ibid., 13, 7. Had it not been for the successful intercession of the holy men living near the city, particularly that of Aphrahates, the Riot of the Statues, which took place in 387, might have provoked the end of Antioch as people feared at the time.

[66]Ibid., 17, 2.

μανία in order to discredit the enemies of Christendom: expressions such as "the insanity of Arius" (Ἀρείου μανίαν)[67] and "the numerous insanities of polytheism" (πολλῆς πολυθέου μανίας)[68] clearly point to it. The Emperor Valens, a favourite target for Theodoret's attacks because of his Arian beliefs, constantly appears described in these terms: despite many signs and miracles performed for his edification by a holy man, "he was not freed of his earlier madness (τῆς προτέρας μανίας), but persisted in raging (λυττῶν) against the Only-begotten."[69]

To conclude, it is evident that, in the analysed contexts μανία and λύττη are employed to describe a state of mind which causes those who suffer from it to lose control over their actions and to resort to unchecked violence against others. For the demons, this is, in a way, their natural condition, but for humans, it is only a temporary induced state through demonic possession, which can only be ended by the salutary intervention of the holy man who, in this case, acts as an exorcist.[70] Sometimes, though, it only ends with the total destruction of the one who indulges in unleashing his irrational violence against innocents, as will appear presently.

Unrestrained violence, tyrannical power and total lack of measure in the use of force were, as shown in the second chapter, some of the most vehement accusations voiced against the Christian monks and, in the particular atmosphere of the late empire, potentially the most dangerous. In the *Philotheos historia*, Theodoret turned the same accusations against non-Christians and heretics.[71] In some significant cases,

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[67]Ibid., 3, 16.

[68]Ibid., 6, 4.

[69]Ibid., 8, 12, Price's transl., 79.

[70]On possession and exorcism in the *Philotheos historia*, see Adnès and Canivet, "Guérisons," 166-72 with a somewhat different perspective. I think that their statement on p. 169: "le verbe μαίνω que Théodoret n'emploie que dans ce passage de l'*Histoire Philothée*. . ." should be corrected: as the index of the *SC* edition indicates, μαίνω occurs four times in the *Philotheos historia* (1, 5; 9, 4 and 9; 26, 5) in all instances suggesting loss of control over one's words and actions. Only in 9, 4 and 9, 9 this loss is explicitely ascribed to a demonic influence.

[71]Although in the *Philotheos historia* Theodoret's tone towards the Jews is less vehement than in his other works, they still remain "the enemies of the truth" (δυσμενεῖς . . . τῆς ἀληθείας).

his reproaches of indiscriminate and unnecessary use of force go hand in hand with the attempt to create an unheroic image of those at whom they were directed.

The much abused Valens is accused of having neglected his duty as a good ruler and having "dispersed the whole assembly of the pious, eager like a wild beast to scatter the flock."[72] He carried his impiety even further and, "while the Scythians and other barbarians ravaged with impunity the whole of Thrace from the Danube to the Propontis, he . . . used his weapons against his compatriots and subjects and those illustrious in piety."[73] For a king, who was also supposed to be a heroic warrior, waging an impious war against his own subjects, especially if they happened to be followers of the Nicean teachings, certainly was a serious accusation.

And, in my opinion, it could have sounded even more serious for the people of the time, who still counted Homer among the authorities that shaped their real and ideal world. The members of Theodoret's learned audience might have remembered, while reading about "the rage and insanity" of the Emperor Valens, that, in the *Iliad*, whenever a warrior would cross the boundary between the legitimate heroic fury (μένος) and the uncontrolled, devastating rage, he was depicted as a madman, suffering from the same μανία and λύσσα. Both Achilles and Hector passed through the ordeal of losing control of their fury: "Hector exulting greatly in his might rageth furiously, trusting in Zeus, and recketh not of men or gods, for mighty madness had possessed him"; "Achilles pressed upon them furiously with his spear, for fierce madness ever possessed his heart, and he was eager to win him glory."[74]

And, if Homer's disapproval for their unrestrained outbursts can only be guessed, Theodoret, more concerned with divine judgement and morals, presents Valens' ignominious death as a due punishment for his unheroic conduct: "he became a

[72]Ibid., 8, 5, Price's transl., 74.

[73]Ibid., Price's transl., 75.

[74]Hector: *Il.*, 9, 237-9: Ἕκτωρ δὲ μέγα σθένεϊ βλεμεαίνων / μαίνεται ἐκπάγλως, πίσυνος Διί, οὐδέ τι τίει / ἀνέρας οὐδὲ θεούς· κρατερὴ δέ ἑ λύσσα δέδυκεν (Murray's transl., 399); Achilles: ibid., 21, 542-3: ὁ δὲ σφεδανὸν ἔφεπ' ἔγχεϊ, λύσσα δέ οἱ κῆρ / αἰὲν ἔχε κρατερή, μενέαινε δὲ κῦδος ἀρέσθαι (Murray's transl., vol. 2, 449).

casualty of a fire lit by barbarians and did not even receive a burial like servants or beggars."[75] That the bishop of Cyrrhus chose among the existing variants about the emperor's "strange" death the most unheroic version to put in his *Philotheos historia* is, to my mind, a deliberate attempt to oppose the already existing unheroic image of the monks with an equally unheroic figure of the ones who fought against the athletes of piety.[76]

Julian the Apostate, the impious emperor, received the same treatment: after having raged (λυττῶν) against "the One . . . who is saviour of his own and both a patient and a powerful enemy of aliens,"[77] "the wretch"[78] finally "paid the penalty for his impiety on barbarian soil."[79] Unlike him, Constantine's glorious death was a reward for his piety and Theodoret even used the martyric terminology when speaking about it: "after time had passed, that great (μέγας) and marvellous (θαυμάσιος) emperor departed life with the crowns of piety (μετὰ τῶν εὐσεβείας τροπαίοις)."[80]

In contrast with the traditional warriors, the athletes of piety never succumbed to μανία or λύττη. As they lived in the manner of the incorporeal beings, they have attained (or, as Theodoret carefully put it, strove to attain) the blessed state of ἀπάθεια.[81] Even in the rare instances when Theodoret allowed his holy characters to get angry, the verb used to describe their anger, δυσχεραίνω 'to loose one's patience,

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[75]*HR*, 8, 12, Price's transl., 78.

[76]The emperor mysteriously disappeared during a fight with the Goths (which ended disasterously for the Romans) near Hadrianopolis on 9 August 378. Eunapius, who is also hostile to Valens reported only that "the emperor in a fierce battle with the Scythians was done away with in a strange fashion (ξένον τινὰ ἠφανίσθη τρόπον), so that not even a bone was found to bury" (*Vitae soph.*, 480, Wright's transl., 459) while Ammianus (31, 13) said that *nec postea repertus est usquam.*

[77]*HR*, 2, 14, Price's transl., 30.

[78]Ἀλάστωρ (ibid., 2, 14), an epithet that Julian shares only with the demons (ibid., 9, 10; 21, 25, and 27, 1) and with Arius (ibid., 1, 10), but in a passage rejected by Canivet as interpolated.

[79]Ibid., 8, 5, Price's transl., 74.

[80]Ibid, 1, 11, Price's transl., 18.

[81]Ibid., Prol., 2: "men who in a mortal and passible body have displayed impassibility (ἀπάθειαν) and emulated the bodiless beings" (Price's transl., 4) and 2, 22: Julian Saba departed from this life after "having practised impassibility (ἀπάθειαν) in a mortal nature and awaiting the immortality of the body" (Price's transl., 34). Canivet observed that "Théodoret . . . emploie avec discrétion les mots ἀπάθεια et ἀπαθής en parlant de l'homme dans sa condition temporelle" (the *SC* edition of the *Philotheos historia*, vol. 1, n. 6, 148-9).

to bear with difficulty,' attenuates their outbursts which were, in any case, justified by higher reasons. None of the ascetics will ever unleash his fury against others since this is proper only to those possessed by demons.[82] And the ascetics successfully fight the demons rather than fall under their influence. At least in the *Philotheos historia*.[83]

Eunapius had accused the Christian ascetics of possessing and improperly wielding tyrannical powers. For Theodoret, this was most unlikely since the true tyrants, the demons,[84] were powerless before the spiritual strongholds of the monks. Through their incessant fights and thanks to their weapons, the ascetics have fortified themselves against the assaults of enemies that were "bodiless, invisible, encroaching unperceived, plotting secretly, setting ambush and attacking suddenly."[85]So that they never gave way to anger and remained always serene even when abused: David of Teleda was confronted once with a turbulent visitor, one Olympios the priest, who interrupted the old ascetic's discussion with his visitors,

> exclaiming against the godly David, calling his forbearance a general catastrophe, saying that his gentleness was harmful to everyone and calling his consummate philosophy not forbearance but folly. But the other took these words as if he had a soul of steel: he was not stung by words of a nature to sting, nor did he alter his expression, nor did he break off the discussion in hand, but in a gentle voice and with words that revealed his serenity of soul, he sent the old man away, urging him to attend to what he chose. [86]

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[82]Theodoret praises David of Teleda for having lived "without wrath and anger (θυμοῦ δὲ χωρὶς καὶ ὀργῆς) . . . unmoved, like a bodiless being, for no inducement could stir him to anger" (Ibid., 4, 9, Price's transl., 53-4). This was, of course a topos in the literature of the time, the power to restrain one's anger being considered the sign of superior beings. Eunapius reports that the Emperor Julian wrote a speech as a response to the insolence of the cynic philosopher Heracleios and "those who listened to the speech were awed by its power and they worshipped his clemency as if it were divine, in that he had sated his royal anger by taking revenge in a speech" (*History*, 4, 25 (fr. 3), Blockley's transl, vol. 2, 36).

[83]While there is no instance of a fallen monk, Theodoret suggests *en passant* that there were some who "being instructed in the things of God and doubtless transgressing somewhat" but they are excused as being mere beginners (ἄρτι φοιτῶντα) (Ibid., Price's transl., 54).

[84]The demons are compared to the tyrants in the *Curatio*, 10, 1: "Those who crave for tyranny usurp a power that was never given to them and, although they adorn themselves with the insignia of royalty--the purple, the crown, the throne, the chariot, the spear-bearers--, do not wish to imitate the royal character. For they do not wish to be called kind fathers but ruthless masters, nor caring lovers of mankind but most cruel rulers. It is precisely because of this that, often, the rightful kings, showing compassion for the ones oppressed by the tyrants, overthrow them. Sometimes also the soldiers and the people deprive them of their power unwilling to tolerate their audacity. This is what the most vicious demons both do and suffer."

[85]*HR*, Prol., 4, Price's transl., 5.

[86]Ibid., 4, 10, Price's transl., 54 (slightly altered).

There is a close parallel to this in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*, 560-1: aggrieved because of the death of someone dear, Herodes was called to plead his case before Marcus Aurelius, the emperor philosopher:

> when he came before the Emperor's tribunal he was not in his right mind but longed for death. For when he came forward to speak he launched into invectives against the Emperor, and did not even use figures of speech in his oration, though it might have been expected that a man who had been trained in this type of oratory would have had his own anger under control. . . . But among the eminently philosophic actions of Marcus we must include his behaviour in this trial. For he never frowned or changed his expression, as might have happened even to an umpire...[87]

I have analysed in the present chapter some of the ways and means used by Theodoret in order to shape the often troubling reality of the Syrian ascetics he had come to meet and give them a new, literary, individuality which could appeal to the educated audience that was probably the main recipient of the *Philotheos historia.* The image which emerged contains heroic features intended to present the Christian ascetics in tones and shades originating in the Hellenic tradition and to allow them access into the ideal universe of concepts used by the intellectual elite of the late Roman empire to represent and to shape the reality they were living in. But it also contains the new elements brought by the Christian tradition. The following chapter will attempt to see how the process of the blending together of the two traditions came about in Theodoret's writing. The term chosen for the case study, κλέος 'fame,' expressed, perhaps, one of the most characteristic concepts of the old world. And, in the case of the ascetics, it was a powerful challenge to match it with the values of the new world.

[87]Wright's transl., 171.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VICTORIOUS MONK: THE TERMINOLOGY OF 'FAME'

Among the various terms employed by Theodoret to render *the fame* gained by the ascetics as a result of their incessant wars with the demons, one deserves special attention (although not to the exclusion of others) insofar as it is part of the traditional epic vocabulary and is used by the author in formulae bearing a distinct Homeric flavour. The extensive use that Theodoret makes of κλέος (as well as of its cognates) in the *Philotheos historia* and in his other works is rather singular in the works of other Christian writers of the time. A comparison with the vocabulary of 'fame' used by the authors of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* and of the *Historia Lausiaca*, two writings closest to the *Philotheos historia* as far as topic and the time when they were written are concerned, shows that Theodoret's choice of words is rather singular, consistent, and, therefore, likely to be motivated by an ideology. After a close scrutiny of the occurrences of the aforesaid terms and of their contexts, I shall attempt to define the ideological reasons that stand behind this choice.

The first question that arises (almost naturally) is whether Theodoret's use of κλέος is really significant both quantitatively and qualitatively when compared with that of other more or less contemporary works belonging to the same genre. A statistical analysis conducted on the other two histories of monks written at the end of the fourth and in the fifth centuries, Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca* and the anonymous *History of the Monks in Egypt* arrives at negative results: κλέος does not occur in any of the two works, although they both contain numerous instances when the *fame* of the ascetics is mentioned.

In the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, for instance, many of the monks living in the desert and practising ascesis are said to have become famous, but the only

terms used in the context to describe their fame are ἐπίδοξος ἐν πολλοῖς,[1] διαβόητος,[2] ἐνδειξάμενος.[3] These occur in contexts which suggest that fame should be defined as the repute the monks enjoy among the people living in the neighbouring areas (but not exclusively) as a result of their ascetic prowess and of the great miracles they perform.[4] Moreover, the fame of the monks is clearly seen to proceed from the stories of their deeds incessantly spreading among the people, filling a given geographical area and begetting the conversion of many non-believers or the flow of other monks towards the celebrated ascetic.[5] The ascetics themselves were certainly not unaware of their continuously spreading and far reaching fame and this would occasionally give place to some boasting on their part.[6] The monk who uttered such words in an imprudent way displayed a φιλοδοξία that stands on the verge of κενοδοξία, the vainglory against which another ascetic whose life is recounted in the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* warns those who have come from afar to see him, attracted by the stories about his deeds:

> ὁρᾶτε εἰ κατὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπετάξαστε τῷ κόσμῳ, εἰ μὴ ὡς κατασκοπήσοντες τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν εἰσηλύθατε, εἰ μὴ πρὸς κενοδοξίαν τὰς ἡμετέρας ἀρετὰς θηρᾶτε, ἵνα ὡς ἐπιδεικτιῶντες φαίνησθε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ ἡμῶν ἔργα μιμούμενοι.[7]

Among the several terms used by the old ascetic to name the temptation of worldly fame, κλέος cannot be found.

On the other hand, in Theodoret's works, κλέος is a conspicuous presence, occurring forty-four times. The distribution of these occurrences is unequal among his

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[1] *HM*, 2, 11.

[2] Ibid., 7, 1; 8, 2, and 8, 8 where the ascetic is said to be διαβόητος . . . ἐν Θηβαΐδι.

[3] Ibid., 1, 43.

[4] Ibid., 8, 2: διαβόητος ἦν ἐν Θηβαΐδι καὶ ἔργα μεγάλα ἦν αὐτῷ καὶ δύναμεις πολλάς.

[5] Ibid., 8, 8: φήμης τε πολλῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ διαδραμούσης πάντες οἱ πέριξ σποράδην μένοντες μοναχοὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀεὶ ἔφθανον ὡς πατρὶ γνησίῳ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχὰς δῶρα προσφέροντες and 8, 29: διέδραμεν δὲ πανταχοῦ ἡ φήμη περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπίστευσαν πολλοὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον. See also 8, 36-7.

[6] Thus one of the Egyptian ascetics says about himself : ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀσκήσει πάντας ἀκήκοάς με εἶναι διαβόητον (ibid., 14, 8). On this, see A. J. Festugière's considerations in *HM*, n. 35, 92.

[7] Ibid., 1, 24. The same warning is repeated in other words later: ὁρᾶτε μὴ πάθος ὑμῖν ἐνοχλήσῃ, μὴ τιμὴ καὶ δόξα καὶ ἔπαινος ἀνθρώπινος (ibid., 1, 25).

various treatises: the *Commentaries on St Paul's Epistles* contain only one occurrence,[8] as does *On the Providence*; [9] the *Eranistes*[10] and the *Commentaries on the Book of Kings*[11] contain two occurrences of the term each, being closely followed by the *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*[12] where κλέος occurs three times and by the *Commentaries on the Psalms*[13] and *On the Book of Isaiah*[14] both with four occurrences. At the other extreme, the *Epistles*[15] contain six occurrences as does the *Cure of the Hellenic Diseases*[16]; there are seven instances when κλέος is used in the *Ecclesiastical History*[17] and eight in the *Philotheos historia,*[18] which has the highest number. Naturally, the simple statistics have a limited relevance (if any), but a comparison with the Chrysostomian corpus, for instance, where κλέος indeed occurs nine times, but only once in a number of nine works[19] renders more obvious the extensive and preferential use of the term in Theodoret's work. Together with the fact that neither the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, nor the *Historia Lausiaca* employ κλέος even once (as already mentioned before), this suggests that Theodoret's is rather an unusual usage among the Christian writers of his time.[20] This becomes clear through

[8] *PG* (ed. J. P. Migne), vol. 82, col. 757.

[9] Ibid., vol. 83, col. 752.

[10] *Eranistes,* critical text and prolegomena by Gerard H. Ettlinger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 61 and 91.

[11] *PG*, vol. 80, col. 629, 677.

[12] Ibid., vol. 81, col. 1601, 1885, 1944.

[13] Ibid., vol. 80, col. 1781, 1784, 1804, 1993.

[14] *In Isaiam*, 2, 399; 7, 70; 18, 51; 20, 637.

[15] *PG*, vol. 83, col. 1189, 1220, 1245, 1289, 1291.

[16] *Curatio*, 1, 25; 5, 46; 8, 1 and 10; 9, 11; 11, 39.

[17] *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1, 1; 3, 11; 4, 16 (twice); 4, 19; 5, 4; 5, 25.

[18] *HR*, 4, 8; 6, 14; 10, 3; 13, 19; 15, 1; 16, 2; 26, 20; 31, 18. Following Canivet's edition, I consider the treatise *On the Divine Love* as the thirty first chapter of the *HR*.

[19] *Panegyrica in Romanum martyrem* (*PG* vol. 50, 605); *Homiliae in 2 Cor.* (PG vol. 61, 429); *Homiliae in psalmum 118* (PG vol. 55, 681); *Sermones in Gen.* (PG vol. 56, 534); *Contra ludos et theatra* (PG vol. 56, 545); *In Stephanum protomartyrem* (PG vol. 59, 504); *Oratio catechetica in illud: Simile est regnum caelorum homini patrifamilias* (PG vol. 59, 582); *In Ioannem theologum* (PG vol. 59, 609); *De iis qui in ieiunio continenter vivunt* (PG vol. 64, 16).

[20] The only significant exceptions to the rule seem to be the works of Gregory Nazianzen. A careful analysis of these might yield extremely interesting results, but neither the available space, nor the scope of the present work allow for it here. I should say, however, than in Gregory Nazianzen's case,

a carefully conducted analysis of every occurrence. This is precisely the course I shall take in what follows, trying to identify the reasons that may account for each particular instance where the term is used.

But, before that, a preliminary excursus is needed in order to explain the choice of this particular term as the object for the present investigation. In Greek, κλέος is a stylistically marked term: it belongs to the epic language (namely to that of the Homeric epics), although Rüdiger Schmitt has shown that its origins can be traced even further in time. The exact concordance (of form, meaning, and even metric pattern) of the Homeric formula κλέος ἄφθιτον and Skr. *śravas aksitam* proves that both expressions have a common origin, being part of the common Indo-European poetic phraseology.[21] Without going that far back in time, a brief review of the Homeric uses of κλέος shows that the term expresses one of the fundamental concepts of the epic ideology: 'the glory,' 'the fame' that every warrior eagerly sought and was ready to die for. This glory was a consequence of the fact that epic songs were composed and sung about the deeds of brave warriors, being transmitted from one generation to another and thus keeping their glory eternal, undying, unextinguished. The extensive formulaic usage of κλέος and the large number of formulae in which it is contained are eloquent proofs of the importance assigned to 'fame' in the conceptual system of the epic, which is itself sometimes defined by this very term.[22] The various epithets associated with κλέος, the original meaning of which, "bruit qui court" and hence "réputation, renom,"[23] has been restricted to denoting almost exclusively the 'good reputation,' 'fame,' 'glory' of someone, or to qualify it as 'great' (μέγα κλέος),

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the use of κλέος might be stylistically justified to a greater extent than in Theodoret's case because most of the occurences are to be found in his poetic works, written in a much more conservative (and artificial) poetic diction than Theodoret's prose.

[21]On this see Rüdiger Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in Indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1967), 61-102, E. D. Floyd,"Kleos Aphthiton: An Indo-European Perspective on Early Greek Poetry" *Glotta* 58 (1980): 133-57, and Gregory Nagy, "Another Look at Kleos Aphthiton," *Würzburger Jahrbücher für Altertumwissenschaft* n.s. 7 (1981), 113-6.

[22]*Il.*, 9, 189, 524.

[23]Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histoire des mots*, vol. 2 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), 540-1.

'wide' (εὐρὺ κλέος), 'favourable, remarkable' (κλέος ἐσθλόν), 'inextinguishable' (ἄσβεστον κλέος), 'undestroyable,' (κλέος ἄφθιτον), 'reaching the broad sky' (κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἱκάνει) (i. e. extending to the ultimate boundaries of the world), and 'never perishing' (κλέος οὔ ποτ' ὀλεῖται).[24] Finally, as it expresses a fundamental value of the heroic code, it is not a surprise to see it appearing in numerous personal names, to the bearers of which it was supposed to bring the very qualities it evoked.[25]

There are instances when Theodoret does use κλέος with its "classical" meaning and in contexts similar to those of the epic, to denote the fame acquired by a warrior as a result of his victories in war[26] or the glory given by God to a great king.[27] But these are rather the exceptions than the rule. Most of the times when it is mentioned (forty-one times out of forty-four), the fame expressed by κλέος is ascribed to characters other than the warriors, its "classic" recipients: pagan philosophers,[28] prophets of the Old Testament,[29] the apostles,[30] the Christian martyrs,[31] and, most of all, the Syrian ascetics depicted in the *Historia religiosa*. These figures are also the only ones to occasion the most obvious examples of formulae taken from Homeric

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[24]On all these formulae and their occurrences in Homer's poems see *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*, founded by Bruno Snell, prepared and edited by the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), col. 1438-9.

[25]Ibid.

[26]About the Jews led by King David: τοσοῦτον γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς νίκης οἱ περὶ Ἰούδαν καὶ Ἰώναθαν ἐκαρπῶσαντο **κλέος**, ὥστε τοὺς περιοίκους, καὶ ἀστυγείτονας, καὶ πλησιοχώρους, τούτων ἁρπᾶσαι τὴν συμμαχίαν (*PG*, vol. 81, col. 1944).

[27]About King Solomon, who received from God gifts to the extent that τούτου τὸ **κλέος** πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην διαδραμεῖν (Ibid., vol. 80, col. 677).

[28]Pythagoras: Πυθάγοραν ἐκεῖνον, οὗ **κλέος** εὐρὺ παρ' ὑμῖν (*Curatio*, 8, 1), Plato: τοῦ πολυθρυλήτου ἀνδρὸς . . . τὸ **κλέος** (Ibid., 5, 46), the Brahmans of India: καὶ τῶν Βραχμάνων πολὺ παρ' ὑμῖν τὸ **κλέος** (Ibid, 1, 25), Lykurgus: τὸ πολὺ τοῦ νομοθέτου **κλέος** (Ibid., 9, 11).

[29]*In Isaiam*, 2, 399: Γνόντες γὰρ ἅπαντες, τίνος εἵνεκεν τὴν πολι(ορκί)αν ἐκείνην καὶ τὸν ἀνδραποδισμὸν ὑπέμειναν Ἰουδαῖοι, τοὺς τοῦ σωτηρίου κηρύγματος (ὑπηρέτας πά)σης τιμῆς καὶ θεραπείας ἠξίωσαν. Τούτων καὶ μετὰ θάνατον τὸ **κλέος** ἀείμνηστον, (καὶ παρὰ) (πάντων ἀνθρώπ)ων ἡ τούτων γεραίρεται μνήμη, οὗτοι καὶ εἰς τὴν ἄνω ἀ(πεγρ)άφησαν Ἱερουσαλήμ. . . and ibid., 18, 51: Καὶ μαρτυροῦσιν οἱ περὶ τὸν θεσπέσιον (Δανιὴλ) καὶ Ἀνανίαν καὶ Ἀζαρίαν καὶ Μισαήλ· ἀφαιρεθέντες γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων τὸ γενέσθαι πατέρες, (πολυθρύ)λητοι μᾶλλον ἢ οἱ πολλῶν παίδων πατέρες ἐγένοντο, καὶ ἄσβεστον αὐτῶν διαμένει τὸ **κλέος** .

[30]*In Isaiam*, 20, 637: Ταῦτα περὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀποστόλων λέγει, οὓς ἀοίδι(μους καὶ) πολυθρυλήτους παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἀπέφηνεν. Τούτων τὸ γέρας καὶ τὸ **κλέος** ποταμῷ (ἀπείκασε) καὶ χειμάρρῳ πλημμυροῦντι.

[31]*Curatio*, 8, 9 (v. infra, n. 42).

vocabulary and used by Theodoret. The epic formula κλέος ἄσβεστον 'inextinguishable fame' is used twice in the *Philotheos historia*, in both instances in connection with ascetics to whom their countless deeds brought far-reaching renown among the contemporaries.[32] But κλέος is also used unqualified in the *Philotheos historia*, in contexts containing the image of the fame that spreads and reaches even the most remote places in a short time, attracting crowds of admirers and followers to the abodes of the great ascetics,[33] an image already encountered above in the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*.

It appears from the examples quoted above that the characters in connection with whom Theodoret is using the term κλέος, belong mainly to the category of "holy men" (be they pagan or Christian) and this is barely surprising since θεῖος ἀνήρ emerges as a new heroic type (and as an exemplary figure) precisely during the late antique period. Theodoret is not the only writer of the time that bestows upon holy men the epic dimensions of glory that κλέος conveys: Eunapius of Sardis, when writing *The Lives of the Sophists*, a gallery of portraits of the most famous pagan philosophers of his time, proceeded in the same manner.[34] The prestige these holy men enjoyed among their contemporaries, based mainly on the stories circulated about their miracles and exemplary way of life, was both a result and a proof of their power and,

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[32]*HR*, 6, 14: εἰς τὸν ἀγήρω καὶ ἄλυπον ἀπεδήμεσε βίον, ἄσβεστον κλέος καταλιπὼν καὶ μνήμην εἰς ἀεὶ διαμένουσαν and 13, 19: Τὸ δὲ κλέος διέμεινεν ἄσβεστον καὶ οὐδεὶς τοῦτο χρόνος φανίσαι δυνήσεται. I, therefore, cannot agree with G. J. M. Bartelink, who studied the *loca Homerica* in Theodoret's works and concluded: "en ce qui concerne les citations d'Homère nous n'en avons trouvé . . . dans les Vies des moines de la *Historia religiosa* (seulement κλέος εὐρύ: 15, 1)" "Homère," 7.

[33]*HR*, 4, 8: Τοῦτο τὸ κλέος αὐτοῦ πάντοσε διαθέον εἵλκυσεν ἅπαντος πρὸς αὐτὸν τοὺς τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐραστὰς; 10, 3: Ἐπειδὴ δὲ, τοῦ χρόνου προϊόντος, πάντοσε αὐτοῦ τὸ κλέος διέτρεχε; and 16, 2-3: οὕτω γὰρ αὐτοῦ πλουσίως ὁ μεγαλόδωρος τὸ τῶν ἰαμάτων ἐδωρήσατο χάρισμα ὡς πανταχοῦ μὲν τοῦτον τὸ κλέος διαδραμεῖν, πάντας δὲ πάντοθεν ἐφελκύσασθαι καὶ τῇ πείρᾳ διδάξαι τῆς φήμης τὸ ἀληθές.

[34]*Vitae soph.* 4, 1, 10: τὸ δὲ Πορφυρίου κλέος εἰς Πλωτῖνον πᾶσα μὲν ἀγορά, πᾶσα δὲ πληθὺς ἀνέφερεν; 5, 3, 3: κατὰ δὲ τὸ κλέος ἀμφοῖν αὐξόμενον ἄνω καὶ συνέτυχόν ποτε ἀλλήλοις. . . ; 6, 4, 4: καὶ σοι κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται; 6, 4, 5: τοὺς δὲ λόγων δεομένους παιδείας διὰ τὸ προκατακεχυμένον κλέος οὐκ ἐλάνθανεν. . . ; 6, 6, 6: τοσοῦτον κλέος τῆς γυναικὸς ἐξεφοίτησεν, καὶ ἦν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς περὶ Ἔφεσον. . . ; 7, 1, 10: καὶ δὴ καὶ εἰς τὸ Πέργαμον ἀφικνεῖται κατὰ κλέος τῆς Αἰδεσίου σοφίας. . . ; 7, 6, 3: ἐνταῦθα δὲ αὐτῷ πάλιν διὰ τὸ πολὺ κλέος ταχύτερον ἀνέφυ πάθος. . . ; 23, 4, 10: κατ' ἐκείνους τοὺς χρόνους τῶν ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ περιβοήτων Χρυσανθίῳ κατὰ κλέος ἦλθον εἰς λόγον. . . .

at the same time, a powerful weapon to be used by those who believed in them against the holy men's rivals. To the κλέος of the ancient philosophers and legendary heroes of exemplary life (v. supra, n. 6) Theodoret opposes the κλέος of various holy men who appear as central figures of the Christian tradition. In the way he uses the same formulae to speak of the Old Testament prophets, of the apostles, of the martyrs, and, finally, of the ascetics of his time, there appears a concern to present a continuous Christian tradition as a response to the usual accusations brought against it by its critics, who often shunned it precisely because of its novelty and lack of prestige due to its lack of ancient roots and venerable ancestors.

By magnanimously bestowing κλέος upon all these characters, Theodoret is asserting the existence of an ongoing Christian tradition with roots as ancient as the Old Testament and, therefore, rightfully entitled to presenting itself as the possessor of essential truths. The prophets through whom God Himself uttered his message of deliverance to His people in the days of old were often received with suspicion and rejected by their contemporaries who subsequently had to endure the right vengeance of the Lord for not acknowledging the power of these holy men. These heralds of God's will were to receive everlasting fame and a place in the heavenly Jerusalem.[35] Others, namely, Daniel, Anania, Azaria, and Misael had to go through many hardships caused by their enemies, their very life being endangered. Theodoret makes use of this particular example to emphasize the existence of a sort of martyric paradigm: confronted with adverse powers, the holy men stood firm in their faith and, as a result, their fame remains inextinguishable for the future generations.[36]

Their followers on the path of fame, the apostles, followed the same model, persistently spreading the Truth often at the price of their lives. The fame they gained in this way is everlasting: they became ἀοίδιμοι, πολυθρύλητοι.[37] The martyrs themselves continued this tradition and became powerful examples of victorious

[35] *In Isaiam*, 2, 399 (v. supra, n. 30).

[36] Ibid., 18, 51.

[37] Ibid., 20, 637 (v. supra, n. 31).

combatants through their uncompromising persistence in the faith. The sacrifice of their lives in the name of the Truth made them famous among the people and earned them an undying fame.[38] Theodoret has the martyrs' fame increased even by the very adversaries they defeated, the demons,[39] much in the same way that the Homeric heroes when defeated have to acknowledge the victor's fame and valour. The adversaries themselves hesitate before the holy men whose fame had spread everywhere and seem reluctant to inflict violence upon them lest they should thus give them the occasion to die bravely and set a heroic pattern to be followed by many afterwards.[40]

The ascetics are rightful heirs of the martyrs though they are by no means the last representatives of the Christian tradition of κλέος, as we shall see presently. The transition from the martyric figure to that of the ascetic is not problematic since both are presented as confronting cruel and relentless enemies of the faith in fierce battle. It matters less that in the first case the opponent is a bodily one, the persecutor, and in the second, an unseen--but not less dangerous--one, the various demons that try to defeat the ascetic on his way towards Christian perfection. From Theodoret's point of view, the martyric ideal of death following a combat against the horrors of torture and violence is fame-bearing to the same extent as the death that brings to a glorious closure an ascetic life spent in incessant wars against the demonic powers. The positive valorisation of martyric death is obvious in passages such as *The Commentary on the Psalm 106*: Ἐὰν μὲν οὖν ἀξιάγαστον ἐκεῖνον ὑπομείνωμεν θάνατον, τῆς παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τιμῆς καὶ δόξης ἀπολαυσόμεθα, καὶ ἀείμνηστον καταλείψομεν

[38]*Curatio*, 8, 9-10: τοσαύτην γε πίστιν τοῖς πλείστοις ἐντέθεικεν, ὡς ἥδιστα τὸν ὑπὲρ τῶνδε τῶν δογμάτων θάνατον καὶ τοῖς ἀρνηθῆναι κελεύουσιν ἥκιστα μὲν προέσθαι τὰς γλώττας, προτεῖναι δὲ τὰ νῶτα τοῖς ἐθέλουσι μαστιγοῦν καὶ λαμπάσι καὶ ὄνυξι τὰς πλευρὰς καὶ τοὺς αὐχένας ὑποθεῖναι τοῖς ξίφεσι καὶ ἀποτυμπανισθῆναι προθύμως καὶ ἀνασκινδυλευθῆναι, καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἐμπρησθῆναι καὶ θῆρας ἀγρίους ἰδεῖν θοινωμένους τὰ σώματα. τῷ τοι καὶ ἄσβεστον αὐτοις ὁ ἀγωνοθέτης ἐδωρήσατο κλέος καὶ μνήμην νικῶσαν τοῦ χρόνου τὴν φύσιν.

[39]*HE*, 3, 11: Ὁ δὲ ψευδόμαντις δαίμων τοῦ μὲν μάρτυρος τὸ κλέος ἐπηύξησε, τὸ δὲ οἰκεῖον ἐγύμνωσε ψεῦδος.

[40]*HE*, 4, 19: τοῦ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς τὸ κλέος προπεπυσμένος πρώτῳ προσβαλεῖν οὐκ ἠθέλησεν, ἵνα μὴ γενναίως τὴν προσβολὴν δεξάμενος καὶ ταύτην ἀποκρουσάμενος ἀνδρείας τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀρχέτυπος γένηται.

κλέος.[41] As for the ascetic, at his death he leaves behind the everlasting fame of his exploits, and people attracted by this come from everywhere to see his abode and touch the objects that once belonged to him and which are now believed to perform miraculous healings.[42]

While insisting on the unbroken tradition of wisdom and exemplary life symbolised by the fame which the holy men enjoy, Theodoret is also providing a clear definition of what might be termed "Christian κλέος" thus opposing it to the previous concept of pagan glory to which it is presented as a valid alternative. There are several essential differences between the two that appear in the texts. The first, and perhaps the most important, is the fact that Christian holy men do not *win* their fame in the same way their Hellenic counterparts did, but it *is conferred* upon them by God, its only legitimate possessor.[43] He bestows it to those among humans who show themselves worthy of this through their accomplishments.[44] The heroes of the epic conquered their fame, snatched it away from their adversaries in single combat, and even paid for it with their lives, as stated in a traditional image used by Libanius in praise of the deceased Emperor Julian.[45] The praise of Theodosius I as uttered by Theodoret in his *Historia ecclesiastica*[46] is an eloquent counterexample to this traditional theme: "He charged both to hold fast to the true religion, 'for by its means,' said he, 'peace is preserved, war is stopped, foes are routed, trophies are set up and victory is

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[41]*PG*, vol. 80, col. 1804.

[42]*HE*, 4, 16: ὡς δὲ κἀκεῖ τὸ τούτου κλέος συνήγειρεν ἅπαντας, εἰς φρούριον ἔσχατον τοῖς ἐκεῖ γειτονεῦον βαρβάροις . . . ὁ τῶν οὐρανῶν ἄξιος ἀπήχθη πρεσβύτης. ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἀράδῳ φασὶ τὴν ἐκείνου μέχρι καὶ τήμερον μεμενηκέναι κλίνην, πλείστης ἀξιουμένην τιμῆς. πολλοὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀρροστοῦντων ἐπ' ἐκείνης κατακλινόμενοι τὴν ὑγιείαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως δρέπονται.

[43]*In Psalm. 111* (*PG*, vol. 80, col. 1781): Ἄληστον γὰρ ὁ τῶν ὅλων Θεὸς ἔχει τὴν μνήμην, καὶ ἀείμνηστον αὐτοῦ διαφυλάτται τὸ κλέος.

[44]HR, 16, 2-3 (v. supra, n. 36). Cf. the epic usage, where κλέος is usually accompanied by verbs meaning 'to take', 'to make for one's self' (ἄρεσθαι, ποιεῖσθαι, λαμβάνειν); see, for instance, *Il.* 5, 3, 273; 17, 16; 18, 121; 6, 446, etc.

[45]*Orat.* 30, 41: παρ' ὧν ἀκούσας ὡς τὸ τῶν Περσῶν αὔχημα ταπεινώσας εἶτα ἀποθανεῖται, τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπρίατο τὸ κλέος πολλὰς μὲν πολεῖς ἑλὼν . . . .

[46]*HE*, 5, 25: τὴν εὐσεβείαν δὲ τελείαν καὶ τοῦτον ἔχειν κἀκεῖνον παρήνεσε. διὰ ταύτης γὰρ, ἔφη, καὶ ἀνίσταται τρόπαια καὶ νίκη βραβεύεται. ἐκεῖνος μὲν οὖν ταῦτα τοῖς παισὶ παραινέσας ἐτελεύτησεν, ἀείμνηστον κλέος καταλιπών.

proclaimed.' After giving this charge to his sons he died, leaving behind him imperishable fame."[47]

The other salient feature of the new concept of fame emerging from Theodoret's works is its constant association with virtues typical of the ascetic way of life and its conditioning by this ἀσκητικὴ πολιτεία, which is the other title by which the *Philotheos historia* was known. In the *Commentaries on the Psalms*, Theodoret glosses the word δίκαιος 'the right (man)': Πολυθρύλλητος δὲ ὁ τοιοῦτος ἔσται, καὶ παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀοίδιμος, καί ἀείμνηστον καταλείψει τὸ κλέος.[48] Sainthood, of which the ascetics are living examples,[49] is presented here as the sole legitimate source of κλέος, righteous fame as opposed to κενοδοξία,[50] one of the sins of which the Syrian ascetics were sometimes accused, even by their less understanding Christian brothers, because of the extreme forms of ascetic practice these holy men favoured.

The next step in Theodoret's *démarche* was to present the ascetic way of life as an universal model for Christian life, an essential paradigm which, if correctly and persistently put into practice, would bring salvation and life eternal. Theodoret confesses this to be one of the main reasons that led him to compose the *Philotheos historia* together with the more traditional concern for preserving the glory of the ascetics which would otherwise fall into oblivion.[51] The portraits of the ascetics he depicted are intended to serve as models (ἀρχέτυπα) of Christian life and virtue, and

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[47]Blomfield's transl., 151.

[48]*In Psalm. 111* (PG, vol. 80, col. 1784).

[49]In the *Curatio*, 12, 7 the ascetic is referred to as a living image of God: ὁ γὰρ δὲ οὕτω ρυθμίζων τε καὶ διαμορφῶν τὴν ψυχὴν οὐ μόνον τῶν θείων νόμων τοὺς χαρακτῆρας ἐκμάττεται, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοῦ γε τοῦ νομοθέτου ζῶσά τις εἰκὼν καὶ λογικὴ γίγνεται. Theodoret's commentary *In Psalm. 150* (*PG*, vol. 80, col. 1993) clearly states: Μήτηρ γὰρ τῆς εὐκλείας ἡ ὁσιότης, καὶ οἱ ταύτης ἐργάται δι' αὐτὴν ἀοίδιμοι γίνονται.

[50]See Jerome's *Epistles* 17, 2, 52 and 17, 3, 53. Symeon the Stylite found himself accused by the monks of Egypt of practising extravagant forms of ascesis for the sake of vainglory (see R. M. Price, *A History*, n. 16, 174) and Theodoret makes evident efforts in order to defend him against such accusations (see *HR*, 26, 12).

[51]For this, the proemium of the *Ecclesiastical History* is significant: οὐ γὰρ ὁσίων ᾠήθην λαμπροτάτων ἔργων καὶ ὀνησιφόρων διηγημάτων τὸ κλέος παριδεῖν ὑπὸ τῆς λήθης συλώμενον (*HE*, 1, 1). In the commentary *In Psalm. 150* (*PG*, vol 80, col. 1993), fame is directly connected with its recording in writing: Ἃ γὰρ εἰς ἐκείνους ἐνδίκως εἰργάσαντο, ἀνάγραπτα γέγονε καὶ μέχρι τέμερον ἀείμνηστον αὐτῶν τὸ κλέος διέμεινε.

the fame they enjoy is a powerful incentive for the ones who would like to adopt such models. As already seen above, the martyric death (ἀξιάγαστος ἐκεῖνος θάνατος) is presented by Theodoret as desirable for anyone who wants to receive glory and honour from God and to leave behind an everlasting fame.

A valuable source for completing Theodoret's definition of κλέος are the letters he wrote to various contemporaries in which the motive of everlasting fame often appears in highly significant explanatory contexts. Thus, when writing to Alexandra, a Christian who was still mourning the loss of her husband, Theodoret sent her these words as consolation :

> Besides all this, even they who are mastered by bitterest sorrow may be comforted by the thought that the departed was the father of sons; that he left them grown up; that he had attained a very high position, and in it, so far from giving any cause for envy, made men love him the more, and left behind him a fame (κλέος) for generosity, for hatred of wickedness, for gentleness and indeed for every kind of moral virtue.[52]

Κλέος is, therefore, the product of generosity (ἐλευθερία), hatred of wickedness (μισοπονηρία), and gentleness (πραότης) as well as of every other moral virtue. Another letter, addressed to one Acacius the priest, mentions as a source of fame the care of orphans and the fight for the apostolic teachings.[53] Even more relevant is the instance when Theodoret is writing to a high official, Constantius, to whom he pleads the case of the poor peasants of his bishopric. The appeal is made more powerful by a reference to the name of James, one of the most famous Syrian holy men of the time, upon whose credit as an intercessor Theodoret fully relies, and

[52] *Ep.* 14; Blomfield's transl., 254 (slightly modified).

[53] *Ep.*, 108 (Sirm.): Ὁπόσην γὰρ τῶν ὀρφανίαν ὀδυρομένων ποιεῖται κηδεμονίαν ἡ σὴ θεοσεβεία, καὶ ὅπως ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀποστολικῶν ἀγωνίζῃ δογμάτων, ᾄδουσι πάντες, δήλων κατὰ τὴν προφητείαν τῶν κεκρυμμένων γεγενημένων. Τοῦτου δὴ χάριν κἀγὼ τοὺς ἀξιεπαίνους πόνους τῆς σῆς φιλοθείας μεμαθηκὼς γράφω, καὶ προσφθεγγόμενός σε, θεοφιλέστατε, καὶ παρακαλῶν αὐξῆσαι τὸ κλέος τῇ προσθήκῃ τῶν πόνων, καὶ τῆς εὐαγγελικῆς ὑπερμαχῆσαι διδασκαλίας, ἵνα καὶ τὸν πατρῷον κλῆρον φυλάξομεν ἄσυλον, καὶ τὸ τάλαντον τῷ Δεσπότῃ μετὰ τῆς καλῆς προσενέγκωμεν ἐργασίας.

by a final exhortation to the official, who is urged to acquire everlasting fame by acting as a just and clement man.[54]

It could, of course, be argued that the presence of 'everlasting fame' in these contexts is due to it being a *topos* belonging to the epistolary style of the age. Even if this be partially true, the repeated usage of 'everlasting fame', an ideal carefully instilled by the traditional παιδεία to all those who went through the usual educational cycle, perhaps the most important factor that contributed to creating, defining, and assuring cohesion to the ruling elite in Late Antiquity, was intended as more than mere courtesy.

On the other hand, and this counter-argument certainly deserves special attention, one may say that, among Theodoret's concerns when writing the *Philotheos historia*, the 'fame' of the ascetics (as expressed by κλέος) was of a lesser importance than that I have ascribed to it. In other words, it is doubtful that among the exemplary models of Christian life (as Theodoret presents the Syrian ascetics), 'fame', and especially one expressed by a term so closely connected with the Hellenic spiritual heritage, was of great importance. Nevertheless, even if for the *real* ascetics (for Theodoret's portraits tend to be closer to icons than to biographies) fame meant little, it is sure that it did mean a great deal to the innumerable pilgrims who flocked around the pillar of St Symeon, many of whom came from afar to see him and benefit from his advice, precisely because they were attracted by his far-reaching glory. But most of all, fame also plays an important part in the literary *Lives* of the Syrian monks *composed* by Theodoret, the bishop.

One particularly eloquent example is appropriate to illustrate this and to challenge the second objection. While waging war with the devil, one of the ascetics, the famous James, achieved such victories by his indifference to any emotions, that his opponent, exasperated by this stubborn resistance, resorted to a last weapon: he

[54] *Ep.*, 42 (Sirm.): Ἐγὼ δὲ συγγνώμην αὐτῷ πλείοσι χρησάμενος λόγοις, καὶ τὴν ὑμετέραν ἱκετεύω μεγαλοπρέπειαν ἀπώσασθαι μὲν τὰς κατὰ τῶν ἀθλίων συντελῶν γιγνομένας ψευδηγορίας, στῆσαι δὲ τῇ ταλαιπώρῳ χώρᾳ τὰς συμφορὰς καὶ ἐγεῖραι αὐτὴν κλινομένην. καὶ κλέος ἀείμνηστον ταῖς μετὰ ταῦτα καταλιπεῖν γενεαῖς..

threatened the athlete of virtue in these words: "I shall fill you with such a stench, and spread so evil a reputation, that no one from anywhere will look at you."[55] The menace was obviously directed against the holy man's repute as a saintly figure among the people who come to visit him, ask for his blessings, and experience his healing power. The holy man calmly retorted that the devil's action would simply be for him a blessing in disguise: "I shall concede thanks to you, for against your will you will be doing your enemy a kindness, by making him luxuriate all the more in remembering Good; for enjoying greater leisure, I shall keep up as my uninterrupted task contemplation of the divine beauty."[56] A wise answer indeed and well within the Christian tradition of rejecting κενοδοξία, fame for fame's sake. However, the enemy's threat was not an empty one, as the ascetic himself told Theodoret:

> After a few days had passed . . . when at midday I was performing the customary liturgy, I saw two women coming down from the mountain. When in vexation at this unusual occurrence, I tried to throw stones at them, I recalled the threat of the avenging spirit and guessed this to be the evil reputation (δύσκλεια). So, I shouted that even if they sat on my shoulders I would not throw stones at them or chase them away, but have recourse to prayer alone. When I said this, they vanished, and the visual illusion ended as I spoke.[57]

To attack when unprovoked and to unleash his anger against innocent passers-by would have been, undoubtedly, a sin and, what matters even more in this case, would have gained the saintly man an ill reputation.[58] Besides being vigilant and not falling for the tricks of the enemy, the ascetic also proved to be quite concerned with his own reputation. The devil's threat thus appears to be not entirely insignificant.[59]

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[55]*HR*, 21, 25: σε τοσαύτης δυσωδίας ἐμπλήσω καὶ τοσαύτην δύσκλειαν κατασκεδάσω ὡς μηδένα σε μηδαμόθεν θεάσασθαι ἄνθρωπον.

[56]R. M. Price's translation, *History*, 143.

[57]Ibid.

[58]It would have also been an unheroic deed for the brave warrior, whose duty is traditionally associated with protection, not attack.

[59]Εὔκλεια 'good fame' occurs six times in the *HR* (1, 14; 5, 9; 16, 6; 26, 4; 27, 4; 31, 16) and the contexts where it is used in connection with ascetics who have gloriously ended their life (26, 4 and 31, 16) bear a typical epic flavour: see, for instance, Hector's words when he is confronted with an imminent death: μὴ μὰν ἀσπουδί γε καὶ ἀκλειῶς ἀπολοίμην, / ἀλλὰ μέγα ῥέξας τι καὶ ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι "Nay, but not without a struggle let me die, neither ingloriously, but in the working of some great deed for the hearing of men that are yet to be" (Il. 22, 305; Murray's transl., vol. 2, 477).

As a possible conclusion to these arguments, I would say that the facts analysed in this chapter clearly suggest that Theodoret's use of κλέος is consistent, purposeful, and rather singular among the Christian writers of his age. By taking up a term that belonged to the traditional epic vocabulary and was charged with precise traditional significances, he tried to present Christian spirituality and, in particular, its representatives, the ascetics--embodiments of the Christian ideal of the holy man--as being in continuity, rather than in sharp disagreement, with the classical tradition. Theodoret also suggested that Christian doctrine, and the ones who put it into practice, were not below the standard of Hellenic wisdom in any respect, but possessed the necessary prestige to become a path towards the Truth on which everyone could (at least in theory) step.

However, the apologetic concern with which these two aims are connected was not the only one inspiring Theodoret when writing the *Philotheos historia.* The bishop of Cyrrhus also defined the individuality of the Christian concept of 'fame', based primarily on the virtues of ascetic life and charity towards others. He had to start from the concept wielded by the traditional παιδεία, centred on the agonistic ideal of life, as this was still promoted by an educational system which had not ceased to be the main creator of social elites even in the fifth century. To reject bluntly the old ideal, that of the hero striving for fame and accomplishing great deeds by which he might be remembered eternally, would have meant too radical a break with the world in which the Christians were still living among those whose traditional values were threatened by the new religion. A part of this change is the Christianisation of κλέος. The way in which this is achieved in Theodoret's works is significant because it is symptomatic of a more general attitude adopted by the Christian Church in the East when faced with the difficult but essential problem of the "classical heritage." Not a straightforward, intransigent rejection, but one of incorporation and transformation according to a new system of values. That Theodoret skilfully used his prodigious classical culture to achieve this conversion of the old ideal into a new, Christian, but not altogether alien one may be regarded as a confirmation of the fears expressed by Julian the Apostate

when he tried in vain to expel the Christians from the powerful stronghold of the Hellenic cultural tradition and to deny them access to the effective "weapons" treasured there:

> καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἀπηγόρευσε τῶν Γαλιλαίων τοὺς παῖδας (οὕτω γὰρ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν τοὺς θιασώτας ὠνόμαζε) ποιητικῶν καὶ ρητορικῶν καὶ φιλοσόφων μεταλαγχάνειν λόγων. τοῖς οἰκείοις γὰρ, φησι, πτεροῖς κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν βαλλόμεθα· ἐκ γὰρ τῶν ἡμετέρων συγγραμάτων καθοπλιζόμενοι τὸν καθ' ἡμῶν ἀναδέχονται πόλεμον.[60]

[60] *HE*, 3, 8: "First of all he prohibited the sons of the Galileans, for so he tried to name the worshippers of the Saviour, from taking part in the study of poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy, for said he, in the words of the proverb 'we are shot with shafts feathered from our own wing,' for from our own books they take arms and wage war against us." (J. Bloomfield's translation in *NPNF*, 97).

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of the portrait of the Christian ascetics as painted by various non-Christian texts during the last decades of the fourth century and in the first half of the fifth focused on the accusations that concerned the unheroic character of the Christian ascetics. The reason for this particular interest was that the existing scholarly surveys of the anti-Christian and anti-monastic accusations did not deal with the unheroic features suggested by the non-Christian writers as characteristic of the monks. These accusations were, to a certain extent, part of the general accusations Christianity had faced ever since it became a strong enough presence in the Roman empire that non-Christian writers might turn their attention to it, mostly in order to reject it as an alien and pernicious superstition. They treated the newly appeared religion as a debased belief, fit for slaves, women, and petty tradesmen, who, by employing their hands in earning their bread were the opposite of the ancient ideal of a free man and, as such, worthy of scorn and mockery.

In the changed conditions of the fourth century, especially after Constantine's conversion, as a result of the rise to prominence of the monastic movement and its association in the militant actions against the shrines of the old religion, the Christian ascetics increasingly caught the attention of members of the cultivated elite of the time, who produced the main part of the texts which are our sources of information for the period. The literary image of the Christian monks present in these non-Christian texts is, almost without exception, dominated by gloomy shades and extremely vehement accusations which follow easy definable patterns: illiteracy, baseness, hypocrisy, violence, rejection of the established social values, hatred of mankind.

This image is probably not an adequate one, but, unfortunately, the other sources that allow us access to the reality of the monastic life and pastimes in the fourth and the fifth century are not very helpful either. The texts produced by the opposing side as a response to the accusations are very much part of the polemical

context which dominated the intellectual life of the period. As a result, in the same way as their non-Christian counterparts, the Christian writers produced defences of monastic life and portraits of the monks susceptible of being biased, exaggerated, schematic and, therefore, with (at least) a problematic relation to reality. They exhibit, however, certain constant *topoi* which become significant, to my mind, when analysed in the context of the literary texts used as the basis of the educational system which was the main factor in generating and influencing the educated elite of the empire.

Its members, both Christians and non-Christians, might have been separated by an extremely thin, almost insignificant line in reality, and the famous "conflict between Christianity and Paganism" might have had less than the epic proportions ascribed to it by the Christian historiography at the turn of the fourth century. Nevertheless, it was precisely some of the members of this educated elite that produced, on both sides, the literary works which contained devastating attacks and fierce polemical argumentation intended to discredit their opponents. And it was also the members of the same elite among whom these potentially destructive works were primarily circulated.

The real battle aimed at conquering (or, on the other side, denying) the right to prestige, was first of all intellectual. Despite their seclusion and their constant avoidance of the world, the ascetics, envisaged by the Christian writers as perfect embodiments of the Christian ideal, were drawn into this fight. They became literary characters, *ideal* characters, which the Christian polemicists could oppose to the old ideal figures of perfection, the hero and the philosopher. Given these premises, it seemed natural to search for the explanation of the abundant presence of heroic terminology and themes, which is so characteristic of Theodoret's *Philotheos historia*, by analysing the nature and content of some of the accusations which define the image of the Christian monks in the works of writers such as Libanius, Julian or Eunapius of Sardis.

The existing studies of the anti-Christian polemic pointed out many of the recurring themes in it. However, the image of the monks as an unruly mob, a mass

which acted with destructive power, wielding improper weapons and being devoid of any of the heroic features the "true" Hellenic heroes had in the texts which shaped their image was seldom, if ever, brought into discussion. And, in my opinion, it never received the treatment it deserves. The present work tries to investigate this unheroic image of the monk presented by the non-Christian texts and suggests that, at least in Theodoret's case, it is possible to account for the warlike terminology and certain heroic themes he applied to the Syrian ascetics by considering them a reaction of a sophisticated Christian intellectual (and a particularly militant one, for that matter) to the existing literary image of the Christian ascetics.

Establishing Theodoret's possible audience (which I think can be fairly well circumscribed by the intellectual milieu composed of those who had access to *paideia*, although I could find no irrefutable argument to decide whether this audience was exclusively Christian or quite the opposite) appeared as a logical step. Once the potentially targeted group of readers was established--and in this case Theodoret's explicit statements are, in my opinion, misleading--the literary representations they would have had of the heroic individual became easily identifiable. And, consequently, the research had to proceed by searching, within the *Philotheos historia*, for the same representations, and by analysing the way Theodoret had employed them, as well as attempting to formulate an "ideological" motivation for this use.

The heroic features I analysed are the result of a selection that might appear, undoubtedly, subjective. Some of them (such as the beautiful physical appearance typical of the Greek heroic ideal or the individual character of the hero as opposed to the mob) were an obvious enough choice. Others, for instance the quality of the ideal warrior who is able to restrain his sacred fury so that its outbursts should not endanger his fellows, were the result of a personal interpretation of terms like μανία and λύττη and may, perhaps, be disputed. However, the connection established by Theodoret between the excesses of a heroic character against people he was supposed to protect and his unheroic way of dying seemed to me a reliable indication that their use in the *Philotheos historia* was not haphazard (as in the case of Valens, for instance).

The more so, since the portrait of some ascetics was shaped with elements belonging to the traditional heroic code. The image of James of Nisibis appearing on the walls of his besieged city in kingly attire and scaring off the Persian invader (an image that Theodoret reworked in his *Historia ecclesiastica*) or the Christian interpretation of a term such as κλέος, expressing one of the key concepts of the heroic epic tradition, as well as other elements analysed in the work, led me to believe that Theodoret probably structured some of the literary portraits of the Syrian monks along the recognisable lines of the traditional heroic ideals.

There were two probable reasons for doing so. First, his intention to give a proper answer to the accusations made by Libanius, Julian, and Eunapius (whose texts we can still read today) and to present in a befitting manner the monks of Syria, whose reputation for wild ascetic practices and lack of measure were certainly not a proper recommendation to an audience educated by Homer, Hesiod, Plato, and Demosthenes and used to believing that, although excesses might be tolerated (even necessary), once the feast of Dionysos had passed, it was still the ancient *dictum*, μέτρον ἄριστον "measure is the best (and the most beautiful, since Greek is ambiguous in this respect) thing" that applied. The other reason was given by Werner Jaeger when speaking about the literature produced by the Cappadocian fathers which displayed such an intriguing theoretical opprobrium of certain things Greek, while making a masterful and thorough use of them in order to express, in a prestigious cultural idiom, the ideas of a new world:

> if Christianity proved unable to take over cultural and intellectual leadership, even its external political victory, of which they felt certain in the long run, would be illusory. It was not enough to coin slogans and to proclaim Christ as the new pedagogue of humanity, as Clement of Alexandria had done, and Christianity as the only true paideia. Christians had to show the formative power of their spirit in works of superior intellectual and artistic calibre and to carry the contemporary mind in their enthusiasm. That new enthusiasm might become the creative force that was needed, but it would never achieve its goal without passing through the severest training of hand and mind, just as the ancient Greeks had had to learn the hard way: . . . they had to build up a Christian paideia.[1]

[1]W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1961), 72-73.

The use Theodoret made of κλέος might be, I think, a perfect illustration for Jaeger's words. It illustrates the way Theodoret saw fit to "convert" old forms and meaning into new building material. His action was polemical inasmuch as he applied Hellenic terms to Christian characters, thus proving them worthy citizens of the "ideal" world and suggested, by attaching new spiritual meanings to these terms, that they belonged, at the same time, to a new, superior reality. As such, they could serve as a perfect basis for a Christian paideia which was not completely cut off from the prestigious tradition it aspired to replace, but, at the same time, not devoid of its own, recognisable spirituality.

There remain many other unexplored features of the Syrian ascetics Theodoret presented in his *Philotheos historia* susceptible of interpretation along the lines followed in the present work. And I believe that the results such an interpretation might yield are certainly rewarding. To mention only one possible direction, Theodoret's heroes always make use not of brute force, as Eunapius and others complained, but of well uttered words. Their discourses always precede their acts. Only if unable to convince through the usual means of disciplined speech, which Theodoret might mock here and there, but which he certainly considered a powerful weapon not to be treated lightly, the Syrian holy men perform miracles that "convince" even the most reluctant opponent. Constantly putting words and actions in harmony, the ascetics are skilled masters of both. In a way, they are the perfect embodiments of the heroic ideal as defined by the words Homer put in the mouth of Achilles' old teacher, Phoenix, in the ninth book of the *Iliad*: faced with the hero's refusal to take part in the battle for Troy and with his eloquent speech about honour and heroic values, the old master reproached his pupil that he did not live up to the paideic ideal he had taught him: μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων[2] "to be a sayer of *mythoi* and a doer of deeds." These words might have certainly applied to Theodoret's ascetics, as they appear in the work written by the bishop of Cyrrhus.

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[2] *Il.*, 9, 443.

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