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In the Margins of Strabo: Menander Protector on Persian Religion and the *Passio S. Isbozetæ**

ABSTRACT: This paper concerns the content, character and transmission of Menander Protector's *History*, a fragmentary work of classicizing historiography written in the later sixth century. Investigation of a previously unexamined scholion to Strabo's *Geography*, which recommends Menander's *History* as an especially accurate source on "Persian customs", establishes the provenance, context and significance of this rare testimonium and questions why the ninth-century scholiast directed readers of Strabo to this late antique text in preference to well-established classical authorities on ancient Persia. As the scholion responds to Strabo's uniquely detailed treatment of Persian religion, particularly magi and Zoroastrian sacrificial rituals, it becomes necessary to reconsider evidence for this subject in Menander's extant writings, notably those fragments of his *History*, together with a separately transmitted epigram (*Palatine Anthology* I 101), that concern the martyrdom of Isbozetes (Yazdbōzēd), a Persian magus who converted to Christianity (AD 553). Widening the inquiry to include largely overlooked martyrial acta, particularly an Armenian *Passio S. Isbozetæ*, reveals an early textual tradition characterized by accurate and precise information about magian practices and paraphernalia, which closely and exclusively corresponds to Strabo's account of Zoroastrian fire-cult. Menander's interest in this story of an apostate magus both explains the scholiast's recommendation and casts new light on Menander's aims and sources, including East Syriac hagiographical tradition. In line with recent scholarship, a more variegated picture of Menander's historical writing emerges beyond the focus on diplomacy imposed by the thematically determined transmission of surviving fragments in the Constantinian *Excerpta*.

KEYWORDS: Greek Classicizing Historiography; Textual Transmission; Byzantine Scholia and Excerpta; Hagiography; Armenian Literature.

This study is essentially an extended note on a note. It concerns the content, transmission and reception of Menander Protector's *History*, a work of classicizing historiography written in the 580s, which survives only as Byzantine excerpta and derivative lexical extracts. Given the fragmentary state of the received text, even the thinnest thread of textual tradition can have value in scholarly assessments of Menander and his oeuvre. The most recent edition, by Roger Blockley, commences with just three testimonia¹. The first and earliest is a citation by Menander's continuator, Theophylact Simocatta, who, at the beginning of his *Histories*, explains that his predecessor provided a lucid account of events leading to the Avars' capture of Sirmium in 581/2, one of the last episodes Menander recorded². The second occurs in *De thematibus*, in which Constantine VII adduces Pro-

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¹ R.C. BLOCKLEY, *The History of Menander the Guardsman. Introductory Essay, Text, Translation, and Historiographical Notes*. Liverpool 1985, 38–39. All testimonia and fragments are cited from this edition. A new edition with German translation in preparation by Bruno Bleckmann and Markus Stein is eagerly awaited.

² Menander Protector T1 (38–39 BLOCKLEY) = Theophylact Simocatta, *Histories* I 3, 5 (ed. C. DE BOOR, rev. P. WIRTH, *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*. Stuttgart 1972, 45, 1–2): τὸ δ' ὅπως Μενάνδρῳ τῷ περιφανεῖ σαφῶς διηγόρεται, "in what manner has been clearly related by the distinguished Menander." Terminal date of Menander's *History*: BLOCKLEY, Menander 4–5, 15, 25, 32; W.T. TREADGOLD, *The Early Byzantine Historians*. Basingstoke – New York 2007, 295–296. B. BALDWIN, Menander Protector. *DOP* 32 (1978) 101–125 at 106–107 mulls possibilities of a later terminus. Theophylact's use of Menander: T. OLAJOS, *Les sources de Théophylacte Simocatta historien*. Leiden 1988, 21–27, 96–106; L.M. WHITBY, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian, Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare*. Oxford 1988, 227–

copius, Agathias, Menander and Hesychius as historical authorities he consulted for his investigations into imperial administrative toponymy³. In neither case, the continuator's preliminary scene-setting nor the scholar-emperor's erudite inquiry, is a reference to Menander particularly surprising. In contrast, the third testimonium is remarkable for both its unusual context or "cover-text" and its allusive content, at least as hitherto presented and understood. Blockley's edition is reproduced here in full, inasmuch as it represents the current—and, indeed, long-term—state of research:

(Margine cod. Paris Strabonis n. 1394 ap. Dindorf *HGM* II p. 131)

Ἀκριβέστερον τὰ Περσικὰ ἔθνη Μένανδρος ὁ Προτίκτωρ ἐν τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ἱστορίᾳ παρέθετο

Προτίκτωρ scripsi [Πρακτίκωρ cod.]

In his English translation, Blockley clarifies the source: "In the margin of MS Strabo, Paris n.1393", that is Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec. 1393 (Diktyon: 51009). He translates the Greek text "Menander the Guardsman in his History has very accurately described the customs of the Persians."⁴ Most extraordinary is the lack of interest this rare testimonium has elicited. Scholars of Menander have not asked even basic questions about its provenance, context and significance. Evidently a marginal annotation to Strabo's *Geography*, is this paratext unique to the cited codex or found in other copies of Strabo's work, indicative of a broader textual tradition? That is to say, is this a scribal or editorial annotation contemporary with and specific to *Parisinus gr.* 1393, dated 1250–1300, and thus exceptionally late evidence of familiarity with Menander's *History* in the Palaeologan era? Or is it the product of a prior—perhaps much earlier—scholiast's intervention as part of a more extensive paratextual apparatus? Both scenarios raise further questions about the transmission and reception of Menander's *History*, especially given a common impression that his was never a popular or well-known work (see below). Most importantly, how does this paratext relate to Strabo's text? Neither the folio of the manuscript nor the passage of the *Geography* is indicated. What was it exactly in Strabo's *Geography* that inspired this exceptional recommendation of Menander—in preference to well-established classical authorities on ancient Persia—and how might this assist in understanding the content and character of his *History*. To answer these questions, it will be necessary to trace how editors of Menander first introduced and subsequently treated this testimonium, to assess the limited *Nachleben* of Menander's *History* and, above all, to reconnect this marginal annotation with scholarship on Strabo's *Geography* and its scholia. Ultimately, in line with some recent studies, this inquiry seeks to illuminate aspects of Menander's *History*, particularly religion, that are largely obscured by the diplomatic focus of surviving fragments.

The annotation cited by Blockley is found at *Parisinus gr.* 1393, fol. 217^r. It was first reported by Carl Heinrich Tzschucke (1811) in his monumental re-edition (with Johann Philipp Siebenkees) of Strabo's *Geography*⁵. Although Tzschucke consulted the manuscript first-hand, he did not provide a folio reference, while his printed text contains garbled Πρακτίκωρ (Praktiktōr). The codex

230, 242, 275; B. BLECKMANN, Die letzte Generation der griechischen Geschichtsschreiber. Studien zur Historiographie im ausgehenden 6. Jahrhundert (*Historia-Einzelschriften* 267). Stuttgart 2021, 47–63; M. WHITBY, Review of Bleckmann, Die letzte Generation, *Plekos* 24 (2022) 25–36 at 27–28.

³ Menander Protector T2 (38–39 BLOCKLEY) = *De thematibus* 2, 9–12 (ed. A. PERTUSI, Costantino Porfirogenito, De Thematibus. Introduzione, testo critico, commento. Vatican 1952, 63): Καὶ φαίνεται νεωτέρα ἢ τοιαύτη ὀνομασία· οὔτε γὰρ Προκόπιος, οὔτε μὴν Ἀγαθίας, οὔτε Μένανδρος, οὔτε Ἡσύχιος ὁ Ἰλλούστριος ἐμνημόνευσαν τοῦ τοιοῦτου ὀνόματος, οἱ τὰ χρονικὰ συντάξαντες ἐπὶ τῆς Ἰουστινιανοῦ βασιλείας, "And it seems that this nomenclature [sc. Armeniakon] is more recent, for neither Procopius nor indeed Agathias nor Menander nor Hesychius *illustris* mentioned this name, they having compiled chronicles in the reign of Justinian". See below n. 22.

⁴ Menander Protector T3 (38–39 BLOCKLEY).

⁵ J.P. SIEBENKEES – C.H. TZSCHUCKE, with F.T. FRIEDEMANN (eds.), Strabonis rerum geographicarum libri XVII. Leipzig 1796–1818, VI [1811] 226 (§16), n. 1: "In margine cod. Paris. scriba haec adleverat: Ἀκριβέστερον ...". When Siebenkees died in 1796, Tzschucke continued the project (from *Geography* VII) until his own death in 1813; Friedemann completed the final volume.

reads correctly Πρωτίκτωρ (Prōtiktōr), in fact so clearly that one can only suspect Πρακτίκωρ of being a printer's error rather than Tzschucke's transcriptional blunder. All subsequent scholarship relating to Menander is, directly or indirectly, indebted to this publication and replicates its shortcomings. Understandably, Tzschucke's discovery in a codex of Strabo was initially overlooked by editors of Menander: Immanuel Bekker and Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1829) and Karl Müller (1851) were seemingly unaware of this item⁶. Subsequently, in his more comprehensive edition of Menander's fragments, Ludwig Dindorf (1871) reproduced Tzschucke's text of the annotation, evidently without further investigation, including erroneous Πρακτίκωρ, marked "(sic)." Furthermore, as Dindorf did not indicate where in the *Geography* this annotation occurs, it now became detached from its exegetical relationship to Strabo's text⁷. Mostly recently, Blockley (1985) in turn replicated the text of the annotation directly from Dindorf, without reference to Tzschucke or inspection of *Parisinus gr.* 1393; thus Blockley again reports Πρακτίκωρ as the transmitted reading and supplies his own emendation: "Πρωτίκτωρ scripsi [Πρακτίκωρ cod.]"⁸ The most significant effect of this editorial pedigree has been to divorce the marginal annotation from the text that inspired it and to which it refers. Consequently, it is assumed or implied that the annotation, irrespective of its date and author, merely alludes, in general terms, to Persian-related content in Menander's *History*⁹. That might have been a plausible inference in the case of a well-known and widely cited authority on τὰ Περσικὰ ἔθνη (ta Persika ethē), most obviously Herodotus or Ctesias, but, in the case of Menander, the rarity of his *History* and the specificity of the annotation call for closer inspection.

TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION OF MENANDER'S *HISTORY*

The differing reception of the four sequential classicizing historians of the sixth century—Procopius, Agathias, Menander and Theophylact—brings into sharper relief the tenuous transmission and meagre *Nachleben* of Menander's *History*, at least beyond the initial impact that prompted Theophylact to write a continuation¹⁰. Menander typically has the lowest profile, and not only because his work alone did not survive in a direct tradition—indeed Theophylact's *Histories* narrowly escaped the same fate by the peripheral survival of a single codex¹¹. Clearly, Procopius became the most admired and influential, even if the currency and popularity of his *Wars* was neither uniform nor unilinear over successive centuries¹². Following a long-recognised cessation of classicizing

⁶ I. BEKKER – B.G. NIEBUHR (eds.), *Dexippi, Eunapii, Petri Patricii, Prisci, Malchi, Menandri historiarum quae supersunt* (CSHB 14). Bonn 1829, 279–444; C. MÜLLER – T. MÜLLER (eds.), *Fragmenta historicorum graecorum*. Paris 1841–1872, IV [1851] 200–269. Much later, BALDWIN, Menander 101, also omits this scholion from cited testimonia.

⁷ L. DINDORF (ed.), *Historici graeci minores*. Leipzig 1870–1871, II 131: "Margo cod. Paris. Strabonis n. 1393 apud Tzschuckium vol. 6, p. 226".

⁸ BLOCKLEY, Menander 38 (T3).

⁹ E.g. BLOCKLEY, Menander 13.

¹⁰ BLOCKLEY, Menander 3–4, infers a limited circulation of Menander's work even among contemporaries. W.T. TREADGOLD, *Early Byzantine Historians* 298–299, is slightly more positive.

¹¹ The *codex unicus* is early tenth-century *Vaticanus gr.* 977. P. SCHREINER, *Die Historikerhandschrift Vaticanus Graecus 977: Ein Handexemplar zur Vorbereitung des konstantinischen Exzerptenwerkes?* *JÖB* 37 (1987) 1–29 identifies this manuscript as the exemplar used by the Constantinian excerptors; see further C. MANGO (ed.), *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History* (CFHB 13). Washington, DC 1990, 19–21; A. NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana and the Byzantine Appropriation of the Past*. Cambridge 2018, 59, 102. If this thesis is correct, the tradition of Theophylact's *Histories* would be exceptionally narrow. An annotation (fol. 93^v) locates the codex on Samos and Kos in 1417/1418. See additional clarifications in T. OLAJOS, *Remarques sur la tradition manuscrite de l'Histoire universelle de Théophylacte Simocatta*. *Revue d'histoire des textes* 9 (1979) 261–266.

¹² Reception of Procopius' *Wars*: B. RUBIN, *Prokopios von Kaisareia*. *RE* XXIII.1 (1957) 273–599 at 587–594 (= R. RUBIN, *Prokopios von Kaisareia*. Stuttgart 1954) is still useful. See recently, with differing emphases, M. JANKOWIAK, *Procopius of Caesarea and His Byzantine Successors*, in: *A Companion to Procopius of Caesarea* (*Brill's Companions to the Byzanti-*

historiography around the 630s, it is difficult to trace readers of this genre across the literary-cultural “Dark Age” up to the late eighth century, except for scattered testimonia and vestigial influence¹³. Thereafter, evidence for the reception of the four authors is sporadic and uneven. The chronological scope and manuscript tradition of Patriarch Nicephorus’ *Concise History*, dated to the 780s–790s, implies knowledge of Theophylact’s work and intent to continue its narrative¹⁴. In compiling his *Selection of Chronography* in c.808–810/13, George Syncellus incorporated an excerpt from Agathias’ *Histories*, a self-contained digression on Near Eastern chronology, though such secular histories are uncharacteristic of George’s source material and his direct use of Agathias’ text is uncertain¹⁵. When Theophanes Confessor continued this *Chronography* in c.810/13–814, he variously adapted Procopius’ *Wars* (I–IV) and Theophylact’s *Histories*, but his knowledge of Agathias and Menander cannot be verified. It remains unclear to what extent Theophanes’ sources were determined by a prior “dossier” inherited from George Syncellus and/or authorial choice among available bookholdings¹⁶. Perhaps more tellingly, three or four decades later, Photius similarly included Procopius and Theophylact in his expansive literary survey, chronologically arranged as items 63 and 65 of the *Bibliotheca*. Placed between them at 64 is Theophanes of Byzantium’s *History*, now entirely lost, which covered much the same period as Menander’s work. Following at 66 is Patriarch Nicephorus’ “sequel” to Theophylact. Yet Photius omits Agathias and Menander from this sequence¹⁷. While it might be tempting to assume their obscurity or inaccessibility rather than intentional exclusion, interpretation of Photius’ silence is complicated by evidence, within the *Bibliotheca* itself, that he was in fact familiar with Agathias’ *Histories*. Although

ne World 11), ed. M. Meier – F. Montinaro. Leiden – Boston 2021, 231–251; S. KENNEDY, A Lost Classic: The Reception of Prokopios’ *History of the Wars in Byzantium*. *BSI* 79 (2021) 5–40.

¹³ Testimonia: John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 92, 19–20 (tr. H. ZOTENBERG, La Chronique de Jean de Nikioû. Paris 1883, 397) cites Agathias and Procopius; see JANKOWIAK, Procopius 240–241. Historiographic influence: a lost Procopius-inspired account of the plague of 747–748 posited as the common source of several late eighth-/early ninth-century texts: TREADGOLD, The Middle Byzantine Historians. Basingstoke – New York 2013, 20 n. 82; S. KENNEDY, A Classic Dethroned: The Decline and Fall of Thucydides in Middle Byzantium. *GRBS* 58.4 (2018) 607–635 at 621–625; KENNEDY, A Lost Classic 24–25.

¹⁴ MANGO, Nikephoros 7, with dating evidence at 8–12; TREADGOLD, Middle Byzantine Historians 27–31.

¹⁵ George Syncellus, *Selection of Chronography* 439, 23–440, 25 (ed. A.A. MOSSHAMMER, Georgius Syncellus. Ecloga chronographica. Leipzig 1984) derives from Agathias, II 25, 4–27, 3 (ed. R. KEYDELL, Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri quinque [CFHB 2]. Berlin 1967, 73, 23–76, 8). See A.M. CAMERON, Zonaras, Syncellus, and Agathias – A Note. *Classical Quarterly* 14.1 (1964) 82–84; thus MOSSHAMMER, Georgius Syncellus xxix, 439 (app. crit.); W. ADLER – P. TUFFIN. The *Chronography* of George Synkellos: a Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation. Oxford 2002, lxii, 516–519 (footnotes).

¹⁶ Theophanes’ sources: Y.N. LYUBARSKIJ, Feofan Ispovednik i Istochniki ego «Khronografii» (K voprosu o metodakh ikh osboenija). *VV* 45 (1984) 72–86; C. MANGO – R. SCOTT, The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Oxford 1997, lxxiv–xcv (esp. lxxxi), xci–xcv, with annotations at 306–313, 321, 374–420; TREADGOLD, Middle Byzantine Historians 68–75, 477; R. SCOTT, The First Half of Theophanes’ *Chronicle*. *TM* 19 (2015) 239–260 at 239–260; NÉMETH, The *Excerpta Constantiniana* 93–94; JANKOWIAK, Procopius 241–247. Recently, KENNEDY, A Lost Classic 11–12 discerns Theophanes’ isolated use of Agathias’ *Histories* (V 4, 4–6 [169, 4–21 KEYDELL]) to supplement a Malalas-derived account of an earthquake, though KENNEDY (11 n. 39) seemingly conflates two entries with similar details, referring to Theophanes, *Chronography* AM 6050|AD 557 (ed. C. DE BOOR, Theophanis Chronographia. Leipzig 1883, 231, 34–232, 2) but citing AM 6046|AD 554 (229, 10–13 DE BOOR). This issue cannot be resolved here, but, rather than familiarity with Agathias’ *Histories*, Theophanes’ text may alternatively reflect differing traditions of Malalas’ *Chronicle*, including those now witnessed only in Syriac sources.

¹⁷ See W.T. TREADGOLD, The Nature of the *Bibliotheca* of Photius. Washington, DC 1980, 62, 79–80, 89; Middle Byzantine Historians 290–293; NÉMETH, The *Excerpta Constantiniana* 94–95, 178–179; JANKOWIAK, Procopius 246. On the long-disputed chronology of the *Bibliotheca* see M. LOSACCO, Photius, la Bibliothèque, et au-delà: l’état de la recherche, l’usage des classiques et les préfaces du corpus, in: *Autour du Premier humanisme byzantin & des Cinq études sur le XI^e siècle, quarante ans après Paul Lemerle* (= *TM* 21.2), ed. B. Flusin – J.-C. Cheynet. Paris 2017, 235–308 at 259–61, with bibliography.

a satisfactory explanation remains elusive, even if Photius did know Menander's *History*, he evidently preferred Theophanes of Byzantium's parallel account¹⁸.

A slightly more positive image of Menander emerges in the Macedonian era. The core component of the so-called *Lexicon Haimōdein* (Αἰμωδεῖν) is a glossary of uncommon words found in Procopius, Agathias, Menander and Theophylact, originally compiled between the mid-ninth and late tenth centuries, though later variously abridged and interpolated, and now in parts reconstructed using derivative lexis¹⁹. Modern editors of these four historians have almost entirely overlooked this early textual witness²⁰. While the intellectual context of this author-specific glossary awaits further investigation, presumably the lexicographer sought to elucidate vocabulary likely to be unfamiliar to current readers of the four classicizing historians, suggesting renewed or sustained interest and, perhaps, perceived value as curricular texts and/or historiographical or rhetorical models²¹. This collective treatment also implies that the four histories were then viewed as a literary-historiographic quartet, in line with modern scholarly perceptions, even if evidence for conjoined manuscript transmission is elusive.

Around 934, as noted above, Constantine VII cited Procopius, Agathias and Menander, along with Hesychius, as historical authorities in *De thematibus*²². A certain quasi-canonical status might be inferred from the selection of Procopius, Agathias, Menander and Theophylact as “base-texts” in Constantine's project of historical excerption in the 940s/950s, though not to the exclusion of other sixth-/seventh-century authors writing in a range of historiographical formats (John Malalas, John of Antioch, Peter the Patrician, Hesychius). Excerpts from Menander's *History* are found primarily in both volumes of *De legationibus* and, to a much lesser extent, in *De sententiis*²³. Lexical citations of Menander in the *Suda* derive from the excerpts in *De legationibus* and several now-lost

¹⁸ J. KLINKENBERG, *De Photi bibliothecae codicibus historicis*. Bonn 1913, 40–42 detected material from Agathias I, proem. 23 and IV 27, 1–4 (7, 24–31; 157, 20–158, 6 KEYDELL) interpolated into the entry on Procopius at *Bibliotheca*, cod. 63, 21b–22a (ed. R. HENRY, Photius, Bibliothèque. Paris 1959–1991, I 64–65). He deduced that a section on Agathias, formerly placed between cod. 63 and 64, has gone astray. This interpretation—though not Photius' familiarity with Agathias—is variously refuted by P. MAAS, *Rez. Klinkenberg, De Photi bibliothecae codicibus historicis*. *BZ* 23 (1914/19) 265; A. DILLER, *The Scholia on Strabo. Traditio* 10 (1954) 29–50 at 45–46 n. 38; TREADGOLD, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca* 62. See also T. HÄGG, *Photios als Vermittler antiker Literatur. Untersuchungen zur Technik des Referierens und Exzerpieren in der Bibliothek*. Uppsala 1975, 191–192.

¹⁹ Critical edition: A.R. DYCK (ed.), *Epimerismi Homerici. Lexicon AIMΩΔΕΙΝ quod vocatur seu verius ETYMOΛΟΓΙΑΙ ΔΙΑΦΟΡΟΙ (SGLS 5/1–2)*. Berlin – New York 1983–1995, II 825–1016, 1033–1034 (Addenda et corrigenda). Dating termini c.850–994: DYCK II 848–850, 859–884, esp. 861–863. Textual evolution, sources and transmission: 845–864.

²⁰ With respect to critical texts, only Keydell's meticulous edition of Agathias takes account of this lexicon: KEYDELL, *Agathiae* xx–xxi, xxxiii–xxxiv, 1 (siglum: Etym). See further DYCK, *Epimerismi Homerici* II 857–858, 996, 998. A study of the Menander-derived content of the *Lexicon Αἰμωδεῖν* is in preparation.

²¹ NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana* 245–248 argues for a compositional link between the *Lexicon Αἰμωδεῖν* and the Constantinian *Excerpta*, similar to the derivative relationship of the *Suda* to the *Excerpta*. The limited prior scholarship concluded, on the contrary, that the *Excerpta* and *Lexicon Αἰμωδεῖν* descend from separate traditions: KEYDELL, *Agathiae* xxxiii–xxxiv, though Keydell's argumentation does not conclusively validate his stemma (proving only that the *Lexicon* (Etym) does not descend from the hyparchetype of the direct tradition (ψ), but without excluding an affinity with the *Excerpta* (C)). Further comparative analysis by DYCK, *Epimerismi Homerici* II 857–858 lacks sufficient corresponding passages to resolve this question.

²² See n. 3. Dating of the first redaction of *De thematibus* to c.934: PERTUSI, *Costantino Porfirogenito, De Thematibus* 18–49, esp. 39–43. Constantine's opinion that Menander, like the other three authors, wrote ἐπὶ τῆς Ἰουστινιανοῦ βασιλείας, “in the reign of Justinian”, may imply superficial acquaintance; thus BALDWIN, *Menander* 103. *De thematibus* 11, 10–15 (97 PERTUSI) also cites an epigram from Agathias II 10, 8 (54, 22–27 KEYDELL). Additional remarks in NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana* 129 n. 29, 232–233; JANKOWIAK, *Procopius* 248.

²³ *Conspectus of Excerpta* from Menander: BLOCKLEY, *Menander* 31–32. General remarks and bibliography in NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana* 9–11, 270–277; excerptive methodology (based on Procopius' *Wars*): 77–86, 105–106. Catalogue of excerpts from Procopius' *Wars*: RUBIN, *Prokopios* 589–592; from Agathias' *Histories*: KEYDELL, *Agathiae*, xviii–xxi.

volumes of the *Excerpta* rather than a direct tradition²⁴. Similarly, contemporary court-centred historiography also drew material from the *Excerpta*, including excerpts from late antique classicizing histories, but this further stage of adaptation arguably belongs more to the reception of the *Excerpta*, as an independent oeuvre, than of those original authors²⁵. As a parallel development, among broader shifts in taste, emphasis and agenda in historical writing, Byzantine military resurgence and territorial “reconquista” from around the mid-tenth century fostered a historiographical environment that favoured emulation and creative adaptation of analogous Justinianic narratives. Again, Procopius’ *Wars* was an obvious choice, though Leo the Deacon’s selective adaptation of both Procopius and Agathias in the mid-990s attests the broader appeal of late antique models²⁶. If, however, Leo the Deacon too knew the texts of Procopius and Agathias only via the *Excerpta*, as recently proposed, their incorporation into his *History* would not in fact reflect direct textual traditions or contemporary readership, but more simply Leo’s court milieu and access to the *Excerpta*²⁷. In any case, as the loss of most of Menander’s text precludes recognition of its influence, the possibility that passages of his work may likewise lurk undetected—and undetectable—beneath the textual fabric of tenth-century histories can be no more than a tantalising prospect. Overall, it is difficult to escape the impression that Menander was the “poor relation” of this family of four. It is

²⁴ Correlation of *Suda* entries and the *Excerpta*: BLOCKLEY, Menander 297–298. Dependence of the *Suda* on the *Excerpta*: see now NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana* 238–255, with older bibliography.

²⁵ Most notably, identified sources of the *Life of Basil* or “*Theophanes Continuatus V*” include excerpts of Procopius, Menander and Theophylact transmitted in *De legationibus*. See *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilii imperatoris amplectitur*, ed. and Eng. trans. I. ŠEVČENKO (CFHB 42). Berlin 2011, 479–501 (Index locorum), esp. 485, with TREADGOLD, *Middle Byzantine Historians* 176, nn. 86–87; NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana* 151–155, 161–164. In contrast, I am not convinced that a quoted remark about “the Wheel of Fortune” by Soldan at *De administrando imperio* 29.123–126, ed. Gy. MORAVCSIK; rev. ed. (CFHB 1) Washington, DC 1967, 128, must derive from the tale of Sesostris as told in Menander Protector fr. 6, 1 (64, 212–66, 236 BLOCKLEY) via *Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3 (177, 12–34 DE BOOR), whereas an identical episode relating to Soldan in the *Life of Basil* 56 (202, 12–204, 19 ŠEVČENKO) undoubtedly draws the same legend from Theophylact Simocatta, *Histories* VI 11, 10–15 (243, 10–244, 18 DE BOOR – WIRTH) via *Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 5 (224, 23–225, 18 DE BOOR). See Moravcsik’s apparatus at 128, 123–126, and “Sources and Parallel Passages” at 340, with remarks of I. ŠEVČENKO, Re-reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in: *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin. Aldershot 1992, 167–195 at 191, n. 60 (who confuses Sesostris with Sardanapalus), and NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana* 162–163 (who conflates the Persian Shah and the Avar Chagan; and (n. 92) mistakenly ascribes Menander’s phrase τὸ ἀσπάζμετόν ... τύχης (66, 231 BLOCKLEY) to Theophylact). It seems that the only grounds for positing a connection with Menander is a single verbal parallel concerning “turning wheels”: *De administrando imperio* 29, 124: τροχοὺς κυλιόμενους; Menander Protector fr. 6, 1: τροχὸν κυλινδούμενον ... τροχῶ κυλιόμενῳ (66, 224, 231–232 BLOCKLEY = *Exc. de Leg. Rom.* 3, 177, 22, 29–30). However, this noun-verb combination is not sufficiently remarkable to be diagnostic; note in particular that Theophanes, *Chronography* 273, 21–22 (DE BOOR), demonstrably reworking Theophylact’s version of the story, changed the original wording τὴν ἐπὶ τῶν τροχῶν κίνησιν at VI 11, 12 (244, 4–5) to τὸν τροχὸν ... κυλιόμενον, without any need to invoke the influence of Menander. The compiler(s) of *De administrando imperio* could easily have made the same adjustment.

²⁶ Procopius: L.R. CRESCI, Procopio al confine tra due tradizioni storiografiche. *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica* 129 (2001) 61–77, esp. 65–70; A. KALDELLIS, The Byzantine conquest of Crete (961 AD), Prokopios’ *Vandal War*, and the Continuator of the *Chronicle* of Symeon. *BMGS* 39.2 (2015) 302–311; JANKOWIAK, Procopius 247–248; KENNEDY, A Lost Classic 28–33. The textual analysis in KALDELLIS, The Byzantine conquest, is now modified and corrected in J. SIGNES CODOÑER, Les Excerpta Constantiniana et le métier d’historien au Xe siècle: le livre VI du Theophanes Continuatus et le poème de Léon le Diacre, in: *Le destin d’un manuscrit. Du vice et de la vertu: de Constantinople à Tours via Chypre*, ed. M.-F. Auzépy – A.-M. Cheny – P. Trelat. Leiden, forthcoming, who demonstrates that the tenth-century compiler did not use Procopius’ *Wars* directly but rather a derivative section of Theophanes’ *Chronography*. Agathias: P. RANCE, *Simulacra pugnae*: the Literary and Historical Tradition of Mock Battles in the Roman and early Byzantine army. *GRBS* 41.3 (2000) 223–275 at 258; A.-M. TALBOT – D.F. SULLIVAN, The *History* of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century. Washington, DC 2005, 11–12, 262 (Index locorum); TREADGOLD, *Middle Byzantine Historians* 241, 243; KENNEDY, A Classic Dethroned 625–627.

²⁷ This proposition requires comprehensive analysis, but preliminary observations by NÉMETH, *The Excerpta Constantiniana* 158–161 are persuasive.

therefore all the more striking that a ninth-century scholiast should single out Menander's *History* for recommendation to readers of classical geography.

THE SCHOLION ON STRABO

As tersely referenced in previous scholarship on Menander, the source of this testimonium is *Parisinus gr.* 1393, a bombycine paper codex of 260 folios, dated to the second half of the thirteenth century. Excepting lacunae, it contains all seventeen books of Strabo's *Geography*²⁸. Books X to XVII (from fol. 116^r) are furnished with marginal annotations, ranging from one-word variant readings to longer exegetic remarks. The citation of Menander's *History* is found in the middle of the outer margin of fol. 217^r. It occurs beside the ending of a section of *Geography* XV concerned with Persian religious customs. The significance of this placement will be discussed below. The marginalia are by the same hand as that of the main text and in identical ink. Even if there were no other witnesses, one would infer that the copyist reproduced these annotations from his antigraph rather than having devised his own paratextual apparatus while copying Strabo's text; in any case, intervention by a posterior editor or scholiast is ruled out. In fact, seemingly unknown to Tzschucke—and certainly to Dindorf and thence Blockley—the same marginalia, including the citation of Menander, are found in other manuscripts of Strabo's *Geography*, which thus testify to a pre-existing ensemble of scholia.

Our understanding of Byzantine scholia on Strabo is deeply indebted to Aubrey Diller's foundational study, which assembled the texts and assessed their transmission, interrelationships and sources. Diller restricted inquiry to "old scholia" or "the earliest fund of scholia ... that appear to derive from ancient archetypes", distinct from recent annotations unique to individual codices and specific to their production and editorial histories²⁹. He edited around 125 such scholia, unevenly distributed throughout *Geography* I–XVII, with the last three books accounting for nearly a quarter of the total. Acknowledging the rarity of a testimonium to Menander, Diller's exhaustive investigation found this scholion in four codices³⁰. Besides *Parisinus gr.* 1393 (= C), the witnesses are: early fourteenth-century Hagion Oros, Monē Vatopediou, 655 (Diktyon: 18799) (= W / Diller's B)³¹, early fifteenth-century Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, gr. 418 (G 93 sup.) (Diktyon: 42839) (= v) and mid-fifteenth-century Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 174 (Diktyon: 66805) (= g)³². All four contain Strabo's complete work and independently descend, wholly (CWv) or in part (g: X–XVII only), from the same hyparchetype (see below).

Rehearsal of the extensive—and especially recent—scholarship on the textual tradition of Strabo's *Geography* is unnecessary³³. It suffices to observe that the "old" scholia variously transmitted

²⁸ See A. DILLER, *The Textual Tradition of Strabo's Geography*. Amsterdam 1975, 70–76, with older literature. *Parisinus gr.* 1393 is conventionally dated to the end of the thirteenth century; see also G. AUJUC – F. LASSERRE (eds.), *Strabon, Géographie I.1 (Introduction générale – Livre I)*. Paris 1969, lxxii; S. RADT (ed.), *Strabons Geographika, mit Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Göttingen 2002–11, I [2002] viii. Recently, Pérez Martín proposes a somewhat earlier date of production "vers le milieu ou le troisième quart du XIII^e siècle": A. COHEN-SKALLI – I. PÉREZ MARTÍN. *La Géographie de Strabon entre Constantinople et Thessalonique: à propos du Marc. gr. XI.6. Scriptorium* 71 (2017) 175–207 at 202 n. 91.

²⁹ DILLER, *The Scholia*, quoting 29, 43; summarised DILLER, *The Textual Tradition* 30–31, 39.

³⁰ DILLER, *The Scholia* 41 (referencing XV 733B Casaubon), "This scholium, lacking in Müller [*FHG*], is almost the only citation [of Menander] outside the historical excerpts of Const. Porph. and *Suda*."

³¹ A. DILLER, *The Vatopedi Manuscript of Ptolemy and Strabo. American Journal of Philology* 58.2 (1937) 174–184; A. DILLER, *The Tradition of the Minor Greek Geographers*. Lancaster, PA 1952, 10–14; DILLER, *The Textual Tradition* 77–79; D. MARCOTTE (ed.), *Géographes grecs, introduction générale, Pseudo-Scymnos*. Paris 2000, c–cix: "le premier tiers du XIV^e s."

³² DILLER, *The Textual Tradition* 107–109.

³³ Among older studies, the most influential are AUJUC – LASSERRE, *Strabon* xlviii–lxxxi, and DILLER, *The Textual Tradition*, with stemma codicum at 26; summarised in RADT, *Strabons Geographika*, I [2002] vii–xvii. See additions and adjustments

in extant manuscripts ultimately derive from a single annotated copy of *Geography* (ω), divided into two volumes (I–IX and X–XVII), in which each book was furnished with preambular arguments and marginalia: indices, scholia and variant readings. The origin of this annotated text pre-dates 900. Diller’s comparative analysis of contemporary manuscript production, editorial practice and scholiastic activity pointed to a Constantinopolitan intellectual milieu around the third quarter of the ninth century. In this context, the scholarly circle around Photius offers an obvious and attractive setting, though partly for want of alternative scenarios. Conceding that “there is no trace of Strabo” in any of Photius’ ascribed works, Diller identified affinities between the repertoire of sources cited in the scholia and Photius’ documented lexical interests and historical reading, albeit with some exceptions, including Menander, as previously noted. A connection between the oldest scholia and Photius has since become generally accepted³⁴. This reconstruction allows—even requires—that some scholia, as an intrinsically accumulative medium, were added slightly later. In particular, historical content and/or geographical focus assign several scholia to a redactive or exegetical stage attributable to Arethas around 900, which may have been responsible for other paratextual features³⁵. Although the evidence leaves room for interpretative differences, scholarly consensus holds that this later ninth-/early tenth-century interest in Strabo produced archetype ω (Lasserre = Σ Diller), the common ancestor of the annotated tradition transmitted in all manuscripts, derivative texts and indirect witnesses. The four codices CWvg that transmit our scholion are descendants of hyparchetype δ (Lasserre = α Diller), which contained a composite, multi-stage text copied from more than one exemplar, whereby only X–XVII preserved the original annotated format, whereas preceding books were devoid of marginalia. The complex and largely obscure editorial and collative sequence that led from ω to δ can be only very loosely dated between c.950 and c.1250³⁶. Nevertheless, the format, vocabulary and content of the scholion citing Menander are consistent with other “old” scholia attributed to Photius or his circle, while broader characteristics of the textual tradition give no reason to suspect that this scholion was not part of the earliest ensemble (pre-900), much less that it was added during the creation of δ³⁷.

to the textual tradition, with further bibliography, in P.-O. LEROY, Deux manuscrits vaticans de la Géographie de Strabon et leur place dans le stemma codicum. *Revue d'histoire des textes* 8 (2013) 37–60, esp. 39–41, 55–59, with stemma at 60; P.-O. LEROY – B. LAUDENBACH, Nouvelles données sur la tradition manuscrite de la Géographie de Strabon. *Eikasmos* 26 (2015) 213–230; P.-O. LEROY (ed. and trans.), Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV). Paris 2016, cxxxv–clxiii, with stemma at clxiii; COHEN-SKALLI – I. PÉREZ MARTÍN, La Géographie; A. COHEN-SKALLI, La famille des codices decurtati et la division en tomes des manuscrits de Strabon. *Eikasmos* 29 (2018) 369–380.

³⁴ DILLER, The Scholia, esp. 31–33, 43–50 (quoting 46); AUJUC – LASSERRE, Strabon lvii–lxi, lxvi–lxvii, lxxvii–lxxx; DILLER, The Textual Tradition 29–31, 38–40; with remarks of LEROY, Deux manuscrits 37–38, 55–59; LEROY – LAUDENBACH, Nouvelles données 222–255; LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV) cliv–clv. In his comparative study of authors cited in the scholia and in Photius’ *Bibliotheca*, DILLER, The Scholia 45–46 notes the absence of Menander’s *History*; nonetheless, since Photius omitted – but demonstrably knew – Agathias’ *Histories* (above n. 18), Diller infers that “he probably knew Menander as well, however we explain the omission”; see also DILLER, The Textual Tradition 30. This conjecture becomes a certainty in AUJUC – LASSERRE, Strabon lxxix, “[l]es auteurs qu’elles citent, ... et Ménandre Protictor [sic], ont tous laissé à la littérature byzantine des extraits dus à l’activité compilatrice de Photios et nous savons qu’il en avait des oeuvres dans sa bibliothèque.”

³⁵ These scholia are distinguished by local knowledge of Patras and neighbouring regions and of the Slavs settled in the Peloponnese. See DILLER, The Scholia 43–44, 48–49; AUJUC – LASSERRE, Strabon lxi–lxii, lxvi–lxvii, lxxvii–lxxx; DILLER, The Textual Tradition 79–81. Whether Arethas annotated Photius’ archetype (as Diller) or produced his own redaction (as Lasserre) is of no immediate consequence.

³⁶ DILLER, The Scholia 29–30; AUJUC – LASSERRE, Strabon lxxv–lxxi, lxxxii; DILLER, The Textual Tradition 27, 54–55; with revisions and refinements in LEROY, Deux manuscrits 40, 58–60; LEROY – LAUDENBACH, Nouvelles données, esp. 215–222, 224–230; LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV) clvi–clxiii; additional remarks in COHEN-SKALLI – PÉREZ MARTÍN, La Géographie, esp. 187–191, 201–204.

³⁷ For example, likewise transmitted in codices CWvg (as well as F), compare scholion ad XVI 4, 6 (770A): (τοπάζια) ἀκριβέστερον περὶ τοῦτου ἰσθόρηται Ἀγαθαρχίδῃ ἐν τῷ περὶ τῆς Ἐρυθρᾶς θαλάσσης ὑπομνήματι, “(topazia [a gemstone]) this matter has been more accurately reported by Agatharchides in his treatise *On the Red Sea*”. As with the scholion citing

The following analysis is based on the two oldest and most authoritative witnesses: *Parisinus* gr. 1393, fol. 217^r, and *Vatopedinus* 655, fol. 265^r. The text and apparatus published in editions of Menander require minor adjustments. As noted above, the *Parisinus* reads Πρωτίκτωρ rather than previously reported Πρακτίκωρ. The *Vatopedinus* reads Προτίκτωρ. The orthographic variation is unremarkable. Otherwise, the two witnesses are identical except for minor differences of linear arrangement and graphic features specific to each copyist³⁸. More importantly, previous editors did not enquire concerning the inspiration and context of this scholion. Strabo devotes *Geography* XV 3 to Persis and Susiana, and their inhabitants. In both witnesses, the scholion occurs in the same marginal position in relation to the main text, at the juncture of XV 3, 15 and 3, 16 (733B Casaubon), according to the subdivision and numbering of modern editions. This locus directly precedes a thematic shift in Strabo's exposition. Having surveyed physical geography and ancient history (3, 1–12), Strabo discusses diverse aspects of regional society. He first treats religious beliefs and practices in Persia, with particular reference to magi, on the basis of historical sources (3, 13–14). This material he augments with information about magi and fire-sanctuaries in Cappadocia, based on his autopsy of that region, to provide a deeper understanding of the magian cult (3, 15). He then concludes his treatment of religion in Persia with a few additional details on beliefs and rituals (3, 16), again, it seems, drawn from textual sources, before turning to social customs and culture (3, 17–22), followed by some final historical remarks (3, 23–24)³⁹. As the exceptional content, focus and character of XV 3, 13–16 are relevant to the following inquiry, these chapters are quoted in full below⁴⁰:

13 Τὰ <δ'> ἔθη τὰ Περσικὰ καὶ τούτοις καὶ Μήδοις τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ἄλλοις πλείοσι, περὶ ὧν εἰρήκασιν μὲν πλείους, τὰ δὲ καίρια καὶ ἡμῖν λεκτέον. Πέρσαι τοίνυν ἀγάλματα μὲν καὶ βωμοὺς οὐχ ἰδρύονται, θύουσι δ' ἐν ὑψηλῷ τόπῳ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἡγούμενοι Δία· τιμῶσι δὲ καὶ Ἥλιον – ὃν καλοῦσιν Μίθρην – καὶ Σελήνην καὶ Ἀφροδίτην καὶ πῦρ καὶ γῆν καὶ ἀνέμους καὶ ὕδωρ· θύουσι δ' ἐν καθαρῷ τόπῳ κατευξάμενοι παραστησάμενοι τὸ ἱερεῖον ἐστεμμένον· μελίσσαντος δὲ τοῦ Μάγου τὰ κρέα τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ τὴν ἱερουργίαν ἀπίασι διελόμενοι, τοῖς θεοῖς οὐδὲν ἀπονείμαντες μέρος· τῆς γὰρ ψυχῆς φασὶ τοῦ ἱερέου δεῖσθαι τὸν θεόν, ἄλλου δὲ οὐδενός· ὁμῶς δὲ τοῦ ἐπίπλου τι μικρὸν τιθέασιν, ὡς λέγουσιν τινες, ἐπὶ τὸ πῦρ.

14 Διαφερόντως δὲ τῷ πυρὶ καὶ τῷ ὕδατι θύουσι· τῷ μὲν πυρὶ προστιθέντες ξηρὰ ξύλα τοῦ λέπους χωρὶς, πιμελὴν ἐπιτιθέντες ἄνωθεν εἶθ' ὑφάπτουσιν ἔλαιον καταχέοντες, οὐ φουσῶντες, ἀλλὰ ῥιπίζοντες (τοὺς δὲ φουσῶντας ἢ νεκρὸν ἐπὶ πῦρ θέντας ἢ βόλβιτον θανατοῦσι)· τῷ δ' ὕδατι, ἐπὶ λίμνην ἢ ποταμὸν ἢ κρήνην ἐλθόντες, βόθρον ὀρύξαντες εἰς τοῦτον σφαγιάζονται φυλαττόμενοι μή τι τοῦ πλησίον ὕδατος αἵμαχθειῇ, ὡς μιανοῦντες· εἶτ' ἐπὶ μυρρίνην ἢ δάφνην διαθέντες τὰ κρέα ῥάβδοις λεπταῖς ἐφάπτονται οἱ Μάγοι καὶ ἐπάδουσιν, ἀποσπένδοντες ἔλαιον ὁμοῦ γάλακτι καὶ μέλιτι κεκραμένον οὐκ εἰς πῦρ οὐδ' ὕδωρ, ἀλλ' εἰς τοῦδαφος· τὰς δ' ἐπὶ ὁδοὺς ποιοῦνται πολὺν χρόνον ῥάβδων μυρικίνων λεπτῶν δέσμην κατέχοντες.

Menander, here too initial ἀκριβέστερον precedes subject, author and work. Agatharchides is also cited in scholion ad XV 2, 1 (720D) and is the uncited source ad XI 2, 12 (495D). Unlike Menander's *History*, Photius includes—and approves of—Agatharchides' *Periplus* in his *Bibliotheca*, cod. 213, 250. See DILLER, *The Scholia* 39, 41–42, with remarks at 45.

³⁸ In *Parisinus* gr. 1393 (217^r), the scholion covers five lines: ἀκριβέστερον τὰ | Περσικὰ ἔθη Μένανδρο(ς) | ὁ Πρωτίκτωρ ἐν τῇ | ἑαυτοῦ ἱστορίᾳ παρέθετο. See the digitisation of the Bibliothèque nationale de France: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8468312f/f443.item> (last accessed Sept. 2023). The copyist of *Vatopedinus* 655 (265^r) arranged the text across four lines, with greater use of superscription: ἀκριβέστερον τὰ Περσικὰ | ἔθη Μένανδρο(ς) ὁ | Προτίκτωρ ἐν τῇ | ἑαυτοῦ ἱστορίᾳ παρέθετο. No digitisation is available; I consulted a microfilm copy courtesy of the Patriarchal Institute of Patristic Studies, Thessaloniki (Nov. 2022).

³⁹ LEROY, Strabon, *Géographie* XII (Livre XV) vii–xvii summarises the structure of *Geography* XV.

⁴⁰ Strabo's text is cited from RADT, *Strabons Geographika*, IV [2005] 260–264. See also LEROY, Strabon, *Géographie* XII (Livre XV) 87–89.

15 Ἐν δὲ τῇ Καππαδοκίᾳ – πολὺ γὰρ ἐκεῖ τὸ τῶν Μάγων φῶλον (οἱ καὶ Πύραιθοι καλοῦνται), πολλὰ δὲ καὶ τῶν Περσικῶν θεῶν ἱερά – οὐδὲ μαχαίρα θύουσιν, ἀλλὰ κορμῷ τινι ὥς ἂν ὑπέρῳ τύπτοντες. ἔστι δὲ καὶ Πυραιθεῖα, σηκοὶ τινες ἀξιόλογοι, ἐν δὲ τούτοις μέσοις βωμός, ἐν ᾧ πολλή τε σποδός καὶ πῦρ ἄσβεστον, <δ> φυλάττουσιν οἱ Μάγοι καὶ καθ' ἡμέραν δὲ εἰσιόντες ἐπάδουσιν ὥραν σχεδόν τι πρὸ τοῦ πυρὸς τὴν δέσμην τῶν ῥάβδων ἔχοντες, τιάρας περικείμενοι πλωτὰς καθεικυίας ἐκατέρωθεν μέχρι τοῦ καλύπτειν τὰ χεῖλη τὰς παραγναθίδας. ταῦτα δ' ἐν τοῖς τῆς Ἀναΐτιδος καὶ τοῦ Ὠμάνου ἱεροῖς νενόμισται· τούτων δὲ καὶ σηκοὶ εἰσι, καὶ ξόανον τοῦ Ὠμάνου πομπεύει. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἡμεῖς ἐωράκαμεν, ἐκεῖνα δ' ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις λέγεται καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς.

16 Εἰς γὰρ ποταμὸν οὗτ' οὐροῦσιν οὔτε νίπτονται Πέρσαι, οὐδὲ λούονται οὐδὲ νεκρὸν ἐμβάλλουσιν οὐδ' ἄλλο τῶν δοκούντων εἶναι μυσαρῶν. ὅτῳ δ' ἂν θύσῃσι θεῷ, πρῶτῳ τῷ πυρὶ εὐχονται.

13 The Persians' customs are the same as those of these [peoples] and Medes and several others; much has been said about them, but I too must make some opportune remarks. Now, Persians do not erect statues and altars, but offer sacrifice on a high place, regarding the firmament as Zeus; they also worship Helios—whom they call Mithras—and Selene and Aphrodite, and fire and earth and winds and water; they offer sacrifice in a purified place with earnest prayers, presenting the victim crowned. And when the magus, who directs the sacrifice, has cut the meat into pieces, they divide it up and depart, without assigning a portion to the gods, for they say that the god requires the soul of the victim, but nothing else; yet, some report that they place a small part of the caul upon the fire.

14 It is especially to fire and water that they offer sacrifice: to fire by adding dry wood without bark and placing soft fat on top, then they light it from below, pouring oil on to it, while not blowing but fanning it; for those who have blown the fire or placed anything dead or filthy upon it they put to death. And to water [they offer sacrifice] by going to a lake or river or spring, and, having dug a trench to it, they slaughter a victim, being on their guard lest any of the nearby water should become bloody, thereby polluting it. Then, placing the meat upon myrtle or laurel branches, the magi touch them with slender twigs and sing incantations, pouring out oil mixed together with milk and honey, not into fire nor water, but upon the ground. They make the incantations for a long time, holding a bundle of slender tamarisk twigs.

15 In Cappadocia—for there the sect of the magi (who are also called fire-kindlers) is numerous, and also temples of the Persian gods are many—it is not with a knife that they sacrifice [victims], but by beating with a kind of log as with a cudgel. There are also fire temples, certain enclosures worthy of note, and in the middle of these is an altar, on which is a large amount of ash and the fire that the magi keep constantly burning. And entering each day, they sing incantations for close to an hour, holding before the fire the bundle of twigs and wearing headdresses of felt, which have cheekpieces coming down on both sides as far as to cover their lips. The same is customary in the temples of Anaïtis and Omanus; these also have enclosures, and they carry in procession an image of Omanus. These things I myself have seen, but those [other] matters, and what follows, are recorded in the histories.

16 For Persians neither urinate nor wash themselves in a river nor bathe nor cast in anything dead or any other thing deemed defiled. And to whatever god they sacrifice, to him first they offer prayer with fire.

In both the *Parisinus* and the *Vatopedinus*, the beginning of the four-/five-line marginal annotation coincides with the final words of XV 3, 15⁴¹. When Tzschucke first published the scholion in his edition of Strabo, he placed its text in a footnote to the opening line of XV 3, 16: Εἰς γὰρ ποταμὸν οὐτ' οὐροῦσιν οὔτε νίπτονται Πέρσαι ..., “For Persians neither urinate nor wash themselves in a river ...”, with the implication that the scholion has particular relevance to these words⁴². The evidence clearly indicates otherwise. First, in the *Parisinus*, this line of the main text is parallel with the end of the annotation rather than its beginning; in the *Vatopedinus*, without discernible intent or significance, these words of the main text are parallel with the middle lines of the annotation. It is most unlikely that the original scholiast or subsequent copyists, in writing the annotation, so positioned its four/five lines down the margin that it finished at—or ran past—the point in the text that had inspired the scholion. On the contrary, common annotational practice leads one to expect marginalia to begin at the point of reference. In both manuscripts, this would mean that the operative word or phrase is to be sought in the sequence καὶ ξόανον ... καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς at the end of XV 3, 15.

Second, this expectation is confirmed by the realisation that the wording and content of the scholion are prompted by and in dialogue with the main text, specifically the “cue word” ἱστορία, “history”. Strabo writes: ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἡμεῖς ἐωράκαμεν, ἐκεῖνα δ' ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις λέγεται καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς, “These things I myself have seen, but those [other] matters, and what follows, are recorded in the histories.” Here Strabo draws a distinction between autopsy and written sources. To the former, autoptic category belongs the additional information he provides regarding the magian cult in Cappadocia (XV 3, 15). The latter, written category includes both “those [other] matters” (ἐκεῖνα), which can only refer to the immediately preceding material on magi in Persia (XV 3, 13–14), and “what follows” (τὰ ἐφεξῆς), which appears to refer to the concluding text-based information on religious beliefs in XV 3, 16 (but could conceivably be a broader reference also to the subsequent socio-cultural material in XV 3, 17–22)⁴³. Accordingly, in response to Strabo’s words ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις λέγεται, “are recorded in the histories”, the scholion observes: ἀκριβέστερον τὰ Περσικὰ ἔθνη Μένανδρος ὁ Πρωτίκτωρ ἐν τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ἱστορίᾳ παρέθετο, “Menander Protector in his own history more accurately described the Persians’ customs”. The scholiast thus, explicitly, directs future readers of Strabo towards a specific ἱστορία, rather than unspecified collective ἱστορίαί, and towards a history that, if ἀκριβέστερον is intended in a strict comparative sense, is “more accurate” or perhaps “more detailed” than what Strabo has to offer⁴⁴. In short, and in a modern annotational format: “see further Menander Protector”.

But concerning what exactly? What made a late ninth-century scholiast, presumed to be Photius or an associate, think of Menander at this point? And why particularly Menander, whose work, as previously discussed, seems never to have been widely known or especially well regarded? In addition to preceding observations on annotational technique and the “cue word” ἱστορία, there are other reasons why we should not follow Tzschucke in looking below the starting line of this mar-

⁴¹ In *Parisinus* gr. 1393, fol. 217^r, the five-line marginal annotation is inscribed beside lines 17–19 (of 35) of the main text (more precisely, the first line of the annotation is parallel to the interlinear space between lines 17–18; the final line of the annotation, which comprises merely the last two syllables of παρέθετο carried over from the preceding line, is parallel to the space between lines 19–20). These lines read: ¹⁷ καὶ τοῦ Ὠμάνου ἱεροῖς νενόμισται· τούτων δὲ καὶ σηκοί εἰσι, καὶ ξόανον ¹⁸ τοῦ Ὠμάνου πομπεῦει. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἡμεῖς ἐωράκαμεν, ἐκεῖνα δ' ἐν ταῖς ¹⁹ ἱστορίαις λέγεται καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς. Εἰς γὰρ ποταμὸν οὐτ' οὐροῦσιν οὔτε νίπτονται ²⁰ Πέρσαι ... In *Vatopedinus* 655, fol. 265^r, the four-line marginal annotation is inscribed beside lines 17–19 (of 39) of the main text (more precisely, the first line of the annotation is parallel to the interlinear space between lines 17–18). These lines read: ¹⁷ καὶ ξόανον τοῦ Ὠμάνου πομπεῦει. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἡμεῖς ἐωράκαμεν, ἐκεῖνα δ' ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις λέγεται καὶ τὰ ¹⁸ ἐφεξῆς. Εἰς γὰρ ποταμὸν οὐτ' οὐροῦσιν οὔτε νίπτονται Πέρσαι οὐδὲ λούονται οὐδὲ νεκρὸν ἐμβάλλουσιν οὐδ' ἄλλο ¹⁹ τῶν δοκούντων εἶναι μυσαρῶν. ὅτω δ' ἂν θύσωσι θεῷ, πρῶτῳ τῷ πυρὶ εὐχονται.

⁴² See above n. 5.

⁴³ LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV), 289 (n. 905).

⁴⁴ BLOCKLEY, Menander 39 (T3), rendering ἀκριβέστερον as “very accurately”, loses the comparative sense.

ginal annotation. Another key element of the scholion is inspired by and drawn from the main text: the scholiast's phrase τὰ Περσικὰ ἔθη, "the Persians' customs", evidently reprises the words with which Strabo opens this entire section on Persian society, beginning with religion, at XV 3, 13: Τὰ <δ> ἔθη τὰ Περσικὰ καὶ τούτοις καὶ Μήδοις τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ἄλλοις πλείοσι, "the Persians' customs are the same as those of these [peoples] and Medes and several others"⁴⁵. This phrase—or any similar formulation—does not otherwise occur in *Geography* XV. The verbal concurrence clearly points the (medieval and modern) reader of the scholion back to the start of this subsection. More specifically, the scholiast constructed his scholion using two operative phrases, τὰ Περσικὰ ἔθη and ἱστορία, lifted respectively from the first and last lines of subsection XV 3, 13–15, concerning Persian religion, with the implication that the intervening material is the object of his comment. In contrast, Strabo's following remarks on Persian lore about urinating and washing in rivers (XV 3, 16), along with much of the subsequent account of family life, mores and elite education (XV 3, 17–20), could hardly have failed to remind the scholiast—or any educated ninth-/tenth-century reader—of corresponding content in Herodotus (or derivative texts), the *locus classicus* for τὰ Περσικὰ ἔθη⁴⁶. All the more so, given that, to varying degrees, Strabo's account of Persian religion and society is indebted to Herodotus, in both wording and substance, even if Strabo used other textual sources and sought to update this material⁴⁷. Without presuming to know the scholiast's intention or taste, it is hard to believe that he had in mind this commonplace "Herodotean" information when he directed the reader, instead, to a comparatively obscure sixth-century classicizing history. This content does not provide a compelling answer to the question: why Menander?

Third, although inevitably an argument from silence, the fragments of Menander's *History*, both historical excerpts and lexical citations, contain no evidence of—nor give any reason to suspect—a general excursus on Persian culture and society. Conversely, the fragments do evince a particular and exceptional interest in magi (or, at least, one magus) and, by extension, in Zoroastrianism (see below). Strabo's discussion of this arcane topic (XV 3, 13–15), framed by the key phrases Τὰ <δ> ἔθη τὰ Περσικὰ and ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις λέγεται reiterated in the scholion, is one of a handful of longer and uniquely detailed treatments to have survived, indeed "the most important description of Zoroastrian rituals in Greek literature"⁴⁸. The evidence therefore suggests that this material, rare and intriguing, is what reminded the scholiast of Menander's *History*, and in preference to any other source on Persian matters. More specifically, whereas Strabo's introductory explanation of the Persian pantheon, worship and sacrifice (XV 3, 13), as well as concluding remarks on the sanctity of rivers (XV 3, 16), exhibit selective but obvious correspondence with Herodotus (I 131–133, 138), it is precisely Strabo's supplementary information, with its narrow focus on cultic practices and paraphernalia—magi, sacrificial rites, libations and daily rituals performed at fire-sanctuaries (XV 3, 13–16)—for which Herodotean antecedents are entirely lacking, not least because some of these features demonstrably or probably reflect the subsequent development of Zoroastrianism. Consequently, in reading these passages, our scholiast—and presumably other ninth-/tenth-century

⁴⁵ LEROY, Strabon, *Géographie* XII (Livre XV), 87b, app. testimoniorum, reports the scholion as referring to text following XV 3, 13: Τὰ <δ> ἔθη τὰ Περσικὰ ..., but does not indicate the actual position of the scholion at the end of XV 3, 15.

⁴⁶ Herodotus I 138, 2: Ἐς ποταμὸν δὲ οὔτε ἐνουρέουσι οὔτε ἐμπτόουσι, οὐ χεῖρας ἐναπονίζονται ..., "They neither urinate nor spit in a river, nor wash their hands ..."

⁴⁷ Parallels between Strabo XV 3, 13–20 and Herodotus I 131–140: A. DE JONG, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*. Leiden 1997, 122–124, 127–130; RADT, *Strabons Geographika*, VIII [2009] 240; LEROY, Strabon, *Géographie* XII (Livre XV), lxxvii–lxxix, with commentary at 277–290. It has long been disputed whether Strabo drew on Herodotus (and/or other sources) directly or via a prior combination of Herodotean material and an alternative tradition(s); see most recently LEROY, Strabon, *Géographie* XII (Livre XV), lxxv–lvi, with cited scholarship. Strabo XV 3, 16 corresponds to Herodotus I 138, 2 with respect to urinating and washing in rivers; Strabo's further observations on defilement of rivers and fire offerings during prayers do not have parallels in Herodotus.

⁴⁸ DE JONG, *Traditions* 156.

readers—would not have thought of Herodotus’ better-known and more widely circulated *Histories*⁴⁹.

MENANDER ON PERSIAN RELIGION AND THE *PASSIO S. ISBOZETAE*

A continuator of a continuator is conscious of tradition. Aware of their respective places in a literary-historical continuum, sixth-century classicizing historians explicitly eschewed detailed discussion of events and topics that immediate predecessors had adequately treated⁵⁰. Conversely, in writing an avowed sequel, an author was alert to gaps in prior literature that might offer excursive opportunities to supplement or correct previously presented knowledge. Before the mid-sixth century, at least to judge by extant works, Roman historical writing reveals little awareness of the particularities of Persian religion, even when Roman-Persian military and diplomatic interaction are central themes⁵¹. Procopius’ *Wars* I-II, completed c.549/50, contain scattered and incidental references to selected Zoroastrian beliefs and practices, mostly conventional themes superficially treated, presumably reflecting his limited interest⁵². In contrast, Agathias, Menander’s direct precursor and model, was seemingly the only Greek historical author since the first century AD, and one of the very few writing in any genre, to discuss Zoroastrianism⁵³. Within Agathias’ narrative of Roman-Persian hostilities in the 550s, the death of the Persian general Mihr-Mihroe in Lazica in 555 occasions an excursus on Persian customs and religion (II 22, 6–25, 2), followed by a chronographical sub-digression (II 22, 3–27, 9) that incorporates a few details on the history and functions of magi (II 26, 3–5). Two topics predominate, funerary rites (II 23, 1–24, 1, 31, 5–9) and consanguineous marriage (II 24, 1–4), but Agathias shows some understanding of Zoroastrian dualist doctrine, conceived in “Manichean” terms (II 24, 9–10), while briefly reprising Greek literary topoi and/or popular traditions regarding fire-worship and the sanctity of rivers (II 25, 1–2). Overt moralising polemic depicts the historically obscure figure of Zoroaster as a perverting innovator of a tradition-

⁴⁹ See textual and historical analysis in DE JONG, Traditions 76–120 (Herodotus I 131–133), 121–156 (Strabo XV 3, 13–15), with 124–125 for Strabo’s focus on cultic rites and utensils; also LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV), lxxvii–lxxix, cxx–cxxiii, with commentary on Strabo XV 3, 13–16 at 277–290. Persian pantheon and sacrificial rites: Herodotus I 131–132; Strabo XV 3, 13; sanctity of rivers: Herodotus I 138, 2; Strabo XV 3, 16. Both authors treat burial as an aspect of social customs rather than “religion”: Herodotus I 140, 1–2; Strabo XV 3, 20, with commentary in DE JONG, Traditions 92–119, 125–130; LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV), 295–296.

⁵⁰ E.g. Agathias I, proem. 22 (7, 21–24 KEYDELL): on Procopius; Theophylact Simocatta, *Histories* I 3, 5 (45, 1–5 DE BOOR – WIRTH): on Menander.

⁵¹ Notably, Ammianus Marcellinus’ lengthy excursus on the Persians at *Res gestae* XXIII 6, 1–88, though recognising religion as an important aspect and aware of magi as a class of religious specialists, can provide few details of beliefs and customs (XIII 6, 5, 32–35, 79–80); see DE JONG, Traditions 289–290, 321, 418–420; J. DEN BOEFT – J.W. DRIJVERS – D. DEN HENGST – H. TEITLER, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXIII*. Groningen 1998, 168–175, 220.

⁵² Procopius, *Wars* (ed. J. HAURY, rev. G. WIRTH, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*. Leipzig 1962–1964, I: Bella I–IV), e.g. polytheism: I 14, 11; II 7, 22, 11, 1; fire-cult: II 24, 4; solar worship: I 3, 20; II 11, 1; funerary practices: I 11, 35, 12, 4; magi as priests, diviners, judges and royal advisers: I 3, 18–22, 5, 19–28, 7, 19; II 5, 9, 13, 9–10, 24, 4. See H. BÖRM, *Prokop und die Perser. Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasanidischen Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike*. Stuttgart 2007, 178–200, with commentary and further bibliography in G. GREATREX, *Procopius of Caesarea: The Persian Wars. A Historical Commentary*. Cambridge 2022, esp. 62–63, 84–85, 110–111, 159, 423, 496, 590–591. Although Procopius was demonstrably familiar with Strabo’s *Geography*, its influence on his depiction of Persian religious customs has not been detected. See generally M. MAAS, *Strabo and Procopius: Classical Geography for a Christian Empire*, in: *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, ed. H. Amirav and B. Haar Romeny. Leuven 2007, 67–83.

⁵³ Following Strabo XV 3, 13–16, two significant treatments survive: Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 46–47 (369D–370C) (ed. J. GWYN GRIFFITHS, *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride*. Cardiff 1970, 45–47): Zoroastrian theology and cosmogony; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Sophists* I 6–9 (ed. T. DORANDI, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Cambridge 2013, 70–72): summary of Greek literary traditions about magian beliefs and practices.

al belief system (II 24, 5–9)⁵⁴. Agathias freely combines authentic, apparently oral information, with rhetorical ornament and his own deductions. His declared use of Persian royal annals, via an interpreter named Sergius (II 27, 5; IV 30, 2–5), is evident in superior knowledge of Sasanian dynastic history (IV 23, 7–30, 5), but does not appear to have exercised much, if any, influence upon his treatment of Zoroastrianism. Nonetheless, Sergius is Agathias' most likely informant on contemporary customs and religious beliefs⁵⁵. Scholarship has variously accentuated or minimized Agathias' familiarity, direct or indirect, with Classical Greek sources on Persian society, especially Herodotus and/or Ctesias⁵⁶. In any case, it may be inferred that this section of Agathias' *Histories* inspired Menander likewise to address this subject, while, at the same time, the limitations and shortcomings of Agathias' account offered his continuator scope for additional content or alternative focus.

As has often been noted, the main interpretative challenge in assessing the fragments of Menander's *History* is that they come to us as a thematic pre-selection: the vast majority of what survives is transmitted via *Excerpta de legationibus*, and thus largely or exclusively concerns diplomacy. To what extent this sample accurately represents the actual prominence of diplomacy in Menander's work has elicited differing and inclusive opinions, though it is safe to assume that the excerptors deemed Menander an authoritative source on this subject. He clearly had access to diplomatic documents, whether published or archived; inference of his participation in diplomacy remains pure conjecture⁵⁷. Overall, those few passages relating to religion leave no doubt of Menander's Christian conviction and identity, including acceptance of divine orchestration of human affairs, while revealing awareness of religious beliefs and practices among other peoples, especially the Persians. The excerpts on diplomacy sometimes touch on religion, notably with respect to the Roman emperor's declared role as protector of Christian minorities living under Sasanian rule, as well as religious elements of ceremonies and procedures. Beyond this diplomatic framework, some fragments attest Menander's ambition to demonstrate the moral pre-eminence and efficacy of Christianity relative to other belief systems, specifically Zoroastrianism, the only potential counterpart to Christianity on the global stage and the chief obstacle to its universal triumph⁵⁸. Other traits discernible in the fragments could also have orientated Menander's *History* towards this topic. Imitation and emulation of Agathias' *Histories*, including correction and competitive inversion of his forerun-

⁵⁴ Commentaries: A.M. CAMERON, Agathias on the Sassanians. *DOP* 23–24 (1969–70) 67–183 at 90–111 (Agathias II 22, 6–27, 9 [70, 10–77, 3 KEYDELL]); DE JONG, Traditions 232–250 (Agathias II 23, 1–25, 2, omitting 23, 8–10 [70, 14–73, 19 KEYDELL]).

⁵⁵ Agathias and Sergius: CAMERON, Agathias on the Sassanians 69–70, 74–76, 90–92, 109, 112–116, 161–163; A.M. CAMERON, Agathias. Cambridge 1970, 38–42; DE JONG, Traditions 229–231, 247–248, 250; J. HÄMEEN-ANTTILA, *Khwadāynāmag*. The Middle Persian Book of Kings (*Studies in Persian Cultural History* 14). Leiden – Boston 2018, 14–21, with additional bibliography.

⁵⁶ Agathias' use of Classical Greek sources in II 23–27 (70, 14–77, 3 KEYDELL): G. FRANKE, Quaestiones Agathianae (*Breslauer philologische Abhandlungen* Hft. 47). Trebnitz 1914, 9–11 perceives extensive mimesis of Herodotus manifest in verbal borrowings; A.M. CAMERON, Herodotus and Thucydides in Agathias. *BZ* 57 (1964) 33–52 at 34–41, 51–52; CAMERON, Agathias on the Sassanians 75–76, 90, 92–94, 96, 98–99, 109, rejects alleged substantial and/or direct Herodotean influences and accentuates Agathias' use of Ctesias or Ctesian traditions and rehearsal of literary commonplaces.

⁵⁷ BALDWIN, Menander 104–105; BLOCKLEY, Menander 1–2 with n. 5, 16–20; WHITBY, Emperor Maurice 243–244; L.M. WHITBY, Greek Historical Writing after Procopius: Variety and Vitality, in: *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East 1: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron – L.I. Conrad. Princeton 1992, 25–80 at 39–44; B. BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen in nachjustinianischer Zeit: Das Zeugnis des Menandros Protektor, in: *Une Antiquité tardive noire ou heureuse? Actes du colloque international de Besançon (12 et 13 novembre 2014)*, ed. S. Ratti. Besançon 2015, 227–250 at 227–228.

⁵⁸ See especially BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen, and now BLECKMANN, Die letzte Generation 64–94. See also earlier remarks in BALDWIN, Menander 101–102 with n. 8, 115–116, 121; BLOCKLEY, Menander 20–22, 25 n. 114; WHITBY, Emperor Maurice 243–244; Greek Historical Writing 44–45; D. BRODKA, Dariusz. Zum Geschichtsverständnis des Menander Protektor. *Electrum* 13 (2007) 95–103 at 96–97, 100.

ner's content and judgements, might point towards a treatment of Persian themes⁵⁹. The scholion to Strabo has seldom been adduced in this context⁶⁰. Inclusion of material about magi and Zoroastrianism would also be consistent with a broader taste for the exotic or sensational, as discerned by modern readers of Menander, particularly in connection with arcane rituals of foreign peoples⁶¹. Finally, unnoticed in previous studies, an inspection of the textual splinters of Menander's *History* variously preserved in lexical entries identifies isolated words that have apparently been extracted from a religious context⁶².

Menander provides information about magi and Zoroastrian beliefs and practices in several contexts. In two cases, reference is more detailed and explicit. First, a protocol appended to the ratified text of the fifty-year peace treaty of 561/2, evidently reproduced from official documentation, guarantees certain liberties to Christian inhabitants of the Sasanian empire, including building churches, freedom of worship and inhumation of the dead, without compulsion also to worship a plurality of unspecified Zoroastrian deities. In return, Christians undertook not to attempt to convert specifically magi, a prohibition that, by implication, concedes the possibility of proselytising other adherents of Zoroastrianism⁶³. Second, and directly related to this last point, Menander treats an episode of a magus who converted to Christianity. The few, mostly very short, fragments transmitted via *De sententiis*, constituting a much smaller proportion of the surviving text, furnish a sample of Menander's *History* that appears largely to escape the thematic boundaries that circumscribe the excerpts in *De legationibus*. Most are moralising clichés or proverbs without obvious historical context; a few also relate to diplomacy, others to accounts of military operations⁶⁴. Belonging to neither category, a sequence of two excerpts concerns a magus, here named Isaozites (Ἰσαοζίτης), who was executed for apostasy (fr. 13, 3–4 = *De sententiis* 24–25)⁶⁵. Menander's particular fascination is indicated by both his resort to first-person discourse and his insertion of a commemorative epigram on this martyr (fr. 13, 3 = *De sententiis* 24):

⁵⁹ Competition with Agathias: BLOCKLEY, Menander 2–3 with n. 9, 13. Stylistic and lexical imitation: M. APOSTOLOPOULOS, Menandros Protektōr mimētēs Agathiou. Athens 1894. Menander's language and style: BALDWIN, Menander 101, 116–120; BLOCKLEY, Menander 6–9.

⁶⁰ BLOCKLEY, Menander 13, "The third of the testimonia [the scholion] ... could indicate that Menander wrote a formal account of Persian customs (perhaps in competition with Agathias 2, 23–27) though it could merely refer to discrete pieces of information."

⁶¹ E.g. Menander Protector fr. 10, 3 (118, 9–20 BLOCKLEY): shamanistic rituals of Gök Türks; 19, 1 (176, 118–178, 131): their funerary rites and facial scarring; 25, 1 (220, 67–222, 89): Avar khagan swearing oaths. See BALDWIN, Menander 118–119, "addicted to the exotic"; BLOCKLEY, Menander 13, "indulge a taste ... for exotic details"; BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen 241–243, "Unbekannte exotische und auch primitive religiöse Vorstellungen."

⁶² For example, the *Lexicon Αἰμωδεῖν* contains one-word lemmata assignable, by default, to lost sections of Menander's *History* (above n. 19, with the list of lemmata at DYCK, Epimerismi Homeric, II 998). These include θεοκλυτοῦσιν, "they pray to the gods." This verb actually occurs in fr. 6, 1 (76, 403 BLOCKLEY) in connection with magian worship: μήτε καταναγκάζεσθαι ... μήτε μὴν θεοκλυτεῖν ἀκουσίως τοὺς παρὰ Μήδοις νενομισμένους θεοὺς, "nor compelled ... against their will to pray to the gods the Medes believe in." However, as each lemma in the *Lexicon Αἰμωδεῖν* cites the headword in precisely the form that occurs in the text, third-person plural present θεοκλυτοῦσιν cannot refer to infinitive θεοκλυτεῖν in fr. 6, 1, but must be cited from another, now-lost passage, which presumably also concerned religious matters.

⁶³ Menander Protector fr. 6, 1 (74, 398–76, 407 BLOCKLEY), with BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen 237–238; Die letzte Generation 85–87. On Zoroastrian-to-Christian conversion see R.E. PAYNE, A State of Mixture. Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity. Oakland, CA 2015, 48–56, 192–196, differentiating the responses of Zoroastrian authorities to apostasy of secular and religious elite individuals. In addition, the form of the oath used in the treaty indicates recognition of Persian polytheism: Menander Protector fr. 6, 1 (58, 96–99 BLOCKLEY), with BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen 240–241.

⁶⁴ Menander Protector fr. 1, 2; 4, 1–8; 6, 2; 7, 1–9; 12, 8; 13, 1–4; 14, 1–2; 15, 3–4; 20, 4–8; 23, 4, 10–12; 26, 2–7; 27, 1.

⁶⁵ Menander Protector fr. 13, 3–4 (144–146 BLOCKLEY) = *Excerpta de sententiis* 24–25 (ed. U.P. BOISSEvain. Berlin 1906, 22, 3–20).

Ὅτι ὁ ἱστορικός φησι Μένανδρος περὶ Ἰσαοζίτου τοῦ ἐν Περσίδι σταυρωθέντος· ἐγὼ δὲ πυθόμενος καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ἐσὸτι ἀγασθείς ἐν νῷ ἐβαλόμην ὥς καὶ ἄξιον τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ θεραπευτῇ τῷ βαρβάρῳ ἐν ἑξαμέτρῳ ἐπίγραμμα λέξαι. καὶ δὴ λέλεκταί μοι τὸ ἐπίγραμμα ὧδε·

ἦν πάρος ἐν Πέρσῃσιν ἐγὼ μάγος Ἰσαοζίτης
εἰς ὅλοῃν ἀπάτην ἐλπίδας ἐκκρεμάσας.
εὔτε δὲ πυρσὸς ἔδαπτεν ἐμὴν πόλιν, ἦλθον ἀρῆξαι,
ἦλθε δὲ καὶ Χριστοῦ πανσθενέος θεράπων.
κεῖνῳ δ' ἐσβέσθη δύναμις φλογός, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔμπης
νικηθεὶς νίκην ἦνυσα θειοτέρην.

The historian Menander says regarding Isaozites, who was crucified in Persia: When I learned (of him) and since I admired the man, I resolved to write a hexametric epigram worthy of this servant of god, though a barbarian. And here then is the epigram I wrote:

Formerly I, Isaozites, was a magus among the Persians,
upon a destructive delusion hanging my hopes.
When fire was consuming my city, I came to help,
there too came a servant of all-powerful Christ.
It was he who extinguished the flame's force, and yet, though
vanquished, I accomplished a victory that was more divine.

This epigram is also found in the *Palatine Anthology* (I 101), with an ascription to Menander Protector and under the lemma Εἰς Πέρσιν μάγον, γενόμενον χριστιανὸν καὶ μαρτυρήσαντα, “On a Persian magus, who became a Christian and suffered martyrdom.” Compared to the verses transmitted in *De sententiis*, the text in the *Anthology* contains two variants, of which the more significant is an alternative form of the martyr's name Isbozetes (Ἰσβοζήτης)⁶⁶. Judging purely by poetic criteria, the latter is to be preferred insofar as Ἰσβοζήτης (— | —) correctly scans as two spondaic metra, whereas Ἰσαοζίτης (Isaozitēs), however either iota is quantified, is metrically unsound⁶⁷. Overall, the evidence suggests that the epigram found its way into the *Anthology* via a separate tradition, independent of Menander's *History*, and certainly pre-dating the creation of *De sententiis*⁶⁸. As a poet Menander is otherwise unattested. In combining historiography and poetry, he may have consciously followed the example of Agathias, who quotes four, mostly anonymous epigrams or couplets in his *Histories*, though other examples could hint at a broader literary phenomenon⁶⁹.

⁶⁶ *Palatine Anthology* I 101 (ed. P. WALTZ et al. *Anthologie grecque*. Paris 1960–80, I² 39 = H. BECKBY, *Anthologia Graeca* 1965–82, I 168). Variants: 1 Ἰσβοζήτης *AP* : Ἰσαοζίτης *De sent.* | 5 πυρὸς *AP* : φλογός *De sent.* See also H. SCHULTE, *Griechische Epigramme der Kaiserzeit: handschriftlich überliefert*. Trier 2009–2011, I 83–84.

⁶⁷ P. PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta, martyre in Perside*. *AASS* Nov. IV (1925) 191–216 at 191B, ‘tamen salvo metro’, alludes to the issue. Other studies pass no comment.

⁶⁸ A. CAMERON, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes*. Oxford 1993, 150–159, 333–335 argues persuasively that book I of the *Anthology* was first compiled by Constantine Cephalas as part of the poetic collection he assembled in the late 890s. In light of preceding observations on the tradition of Menander's *History*, the variants in I 101 point to an independent transmission of the epigram that does not require Cephalas' knowledge of Menander's historical work. It appears, nonetheless, that the lemmatist of I 101 had access to contextual information, unless he inferred καὶ μαρτυρήσαντα, “and suffered martyrdom”, from the final line of the epigram: νίκην ἦνυσα θειοτέρην, “I accomplished a victory that was more divine.”

⁶⁹ Agathias' *Histories*: II 10, 8 (54, 22–27 KEYDELL): anonymous epigram reportedly inscribed on a battlefield memorial beside the R. Casilinum; II 17, 8 (63, 24–29 KEYDELL): anonymous epigram seen by Agathias on a statue base outside Tralles; II 31, 7 (82, 3–4 KEYDELL): anonymous hexametric couplet (= *Palatine Anthology* IX 498); IV 23, 5 (152, 22–23 KEYDELL): hexametric couplet (= Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* I 42–43). See CAMERON, Agathias 8 n. 5, 39 n. 5. See another example in the late fifth-/sixth-century *Vita S. Danielis Stylitis* 36 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Les saints stylites*. Brussels 1923, 34, 12–18)—I owe this reference to Michael Whitby.

Menander's case differs in that he explicitly inserts his own verse into his historical writing⁷⁰. Menander himself writes of the Emperor Maurice, whose financial incentives had enticed him to take up historical writing: "as a lover of the muses, he has a keen interest in poetry and history" (μουσῶν ἐραστῆς ποιημάτων τε καὶ ἱστορίας ἥδιστα ἐπαῖων), which he studied and patronized alike⁷¹.

Along with his expressed admiration for Isaozites/Isbozetes, Menander's endeavour in elegiac verse signals distinct interest in this story outside and irrespective of the compositional context of his *History*. Furthermore, the preliminary framing and intrusive character of the epigram within the *History* (fr. 13, 3 = *De sententiis* 24) suggest that Menander formally and self-consciously interrupted its narrative to digress on this martyrdom. The verses record the martyr's former priestly status and allude to the circumstances that inspired his conversion: the extinguishing of an urban conflagration by a servant of Christ, even if a historical event, must also be read as a metaphorical defeat of Zoroastrian fire-worship⁷². The second fragment (fr. 13, 4 = *De sententiis* 25) comes from an account of Isaozites' crucifixion, though the thematic focus of *De sententiis* restricts the content of this excerpt to edifying "sayings", stripped of narrative context. It thus reports, in *oratio obliqua*, the refusal of the former magus to retract his conversion and return to ancestral rites, his sole regret that he had not converted sooner, and his willingness to suffer earthly torment in expectation of eternal life⁷³. Menander's overall objective appears to be triumphant affirmation of the Christian faith, exemplified at a level of individual moral superiority. This apologetic-polemic function is consistent with other vestigial material from his *History*, notably a fragment concerning a reliquary of the true Cross (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec. 1140A (Diktyon: 50741), fols. 58^v–59^r = Blockley [fr. 17]), where a textual witness entirely independent of the subject-specific Constantinian *Excerpta* permits insights into otherwise lost or obscured aspects of Menander's work⁷⁴.

While Menander's source has not been traced, Blockley's opinion that "[n]othing further is known about Isaozites" is mistaken⁷⁵. On the contrary, the story of the converted magus, formerly called Machož but known by his baptismal name Yazdbōzēd (Middle Persian "saved by God"; Armenian Yizitbuzit), is well documented and gave rise to martyrial *acta* in several languages. Of the two transmitted Greek renderings of his name, metrical Ἰσβοζήτης recorded in the *Anthology* is also the more accurate onomastically and Isbozetes will be preferred below. In later Greek liturgical texts his name is sometimes translated Sositheos (Σωσίθεος)⁷⁶. An original Syriac *Passio* has

⁷⁰ BALDWIN, Menander 101, 103 n. 12, 115 draws a parallel with Olympiodorus, as the only other historian to quote his own verse: fr. 41 (ed. R.C. BLOCKLEY, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*. Liverpool 1981–1983, II 204) = Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 80, 63a (I 185, 22 HENRY). BLOCKLEY, Menander 2 n. 7 is sceptical that Menander's interest in poetry extends beyond these "six lines of doggerel" (an unfair description).

⁷¹ Menander Protector fr. 1 (40, 18–28 BLOCKLEY). See BALDWIN, Menander 103; WHITBY, Emperor Maurice 21, 42; TREADGOLD, Early Byzantine Historians 294–295. Contemporary literary patronage: BLECKMANN, Die letzte Generation 114–140.

⁷² BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen 244 with n. 59.

⁷³ See BLOCKLEY, Menander 149 (app. crit.), 269 (n. 169) on textual difficulties.

⁷⁴ See now BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen 243–250; Die letzte Generation 66–82.

⁷⁵ BLOCKLEY, Menander 269 (n. 168); corrected by BLECKMANN, Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen 244 n. 59. Similar views are expressed by e.g. P. WALTZ et al. *Anthologie grecque*. Paris 1960–80, I² 39a n. 7, "Inconnu"; SCHULTE, Griechische Epigramme I 84, "Der anderswo nirgends belegte Name".

⁷⁶ Name forms: F. JUSTI, *Iranisches Namenbuch*. Marburg 1895, 147, sv Yazdbōzēd; PEETERS, De Sancto Isbozeta 191B, 196C–D, 200A, 201B n. 8. Historical contexts of the martyrdom of Yazdbōzēd: PEETERS, De Sancto Isbozeta 191–200 (2–17); G. GARITTE (ed.), *La Narratio de rebus Armeniae* (CSCO 132, Subsidia 4). Louvain 1952, 158–159; J.M. FIEY, Notes d'hagiographie syriaque. *L'Orient Syrien* 11 (1966) 133–145 at 133–137; N. GARSOÏAN, L'Église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient (CSCO 574, Subsidia 100). Louvain 1999, 228–229; J.M. FIEY, Saints syriaques, ed. L.I. Conrad (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 6). Princeton 2004, 195–196, n° 463; C. JULLIEN, Martyrs en Perse dans l'hagiographie syro-orientale: le tournant du VI^e siècle, in: Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e et VI^e siècles. Regards croisés sur les

not survived. Its composition exemplifies a strand of East Syriac hagiography, from the fourth to seventh centuries, which narrated sporadic martyrdoms of members of the Zoroastrian elite who converted (or sometimes reverted) to Christianity⁷⁷. Paul Peeters believed he had discovered a short, truncated fragment of an abridgement of that lost Syriac text, but subsequent scholarship showed that this morsel concerns another, homonymous figure⁷⁸. A complete Armenian *Passio* demonstrably derives from a Syriac archetype. In turn, an Armenian exemplar, close to the extant text, became the model of a Georgian version⁷⁹. The diverse implications of this material for the study of Zoroastrianism, East Syriac hagiography and Sasanian history and historiography go far beyond the scope of the present study, but three points merit attention. First, the *Passio* confirms and elaborates the episode outlined by Menander: following initial attraction to Christianity and preliminary instruction, the magus Isbozetes was ultimately convinced to reject the fire-cult and profess the true faith after he witnessed a destructive fire at Dvin. This started in the residence of a senior Persian official, where local magi were conducting a sacrificial ceremony in which Isbozetes himself participated. The sacred flame set the roof alight and the blaze spread uncontrollably, until Christian priests, summoned to assist, arrived bearing a cross and miraculously extinguished the flames. These events are undoubtedly the subject of Menander's epigram⁸⁰. The *Passio* then relates Isbozetes' arrest and successive interrogations and punishments over a six-year period of incarceration, during which he was baptised in prison, and ends with his final trial and crucifixion⁸¹. The procedural form and duration of the authorities' response to Isbozetes' apostasy, if not the mode of execution, are consistent with other cases of conversion by elite individuals and need not be linked to broader notions of state persecution of Christian communities⁸².

Second, whatever the detailed historicity of Isbozetes' *acta*, explicit dating references, partly secured by external evidence, trace his initial interest in Christianity to 542, around the age of twenty, and record his martyrdom at Dvin, on Sunday, 9 November 553, in the twenty-third regnal year of Khosrow I Anūšīrwān (553/4). Internal chronology thus places the conflagration and Isbozetes' public apostasy in 547/8⁸³. This dating is significant as it somewhat precedes the starting point of

sources, ed. J. Beaucamp – F. Briquel-Chatonnet – C.J. Julien Robin. Paris 2010, 279–290 at 282; PAYNE, *A State of Mixture* 119–122.

⁷⁷ PAYNE, *A State of Mixture* 48–56, 192–196 explores the socio-political and jurisprudential dimensions of apostasy.

⁷⁸ A single detached and mutilated folio of a ninth-/tenth-century parchment codex, bound in composite British Library, MS Add. 17216 (fol. 45), contains a hagiographical text concerning several interconnected sixth-century figures; the last five lines (26–30), incomplete and badly preserved, concern an Iazdbozid. See P. PEETERS, Une légende syriaque de S. Iazdbozid. *Analecta Bollandiana* 49 (1931) 5–22: Syriac text at 10, Latin trans. at 13, discussion at 17–21. FIEY, Notes 134–137 demonstrates that this Iazdbozid belongs to a different location and milieu.

⁷⁹ See the detailed “commentarius praevius”, with bibliography, in PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta*, esp. 191, 200–203 (§18–§26). Armenian *Passio S. Isbozetae* [BHO 433], ed. with Latin trans. PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 204–213. A shorter *Passio* or eulogy, later inserted into the Armenian synaxarion [BHO 434], has no independent value: ed. PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 213–216. Georgian *Passio S. Isbozetae*, ed. A. KHAKHANOV, *Materialy po gruzinskoj agiologii po rukopisjam X veka (Trudy po vostokovedeniju, fasc. 31)*. Moscow 1910, 51–57; Latin trans. PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 204–213 (lower register).

⁸⁰ *Passio* 2 (205–206 PEETERS), with discussion of historical and religious contexts at PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 193E–195B (§5–§8). The occasion of the ceremony may have been the festival of Nowruz, though the evidence is uncertain: PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 194B–D. See PAYNE, *A State of Mixture* 119–122 for political-religious contexts of such festivals.

⁸¹ *Passio* 3–9 (207–213 PEETERS). Two references to three-year intervals at *Passio* 4 (ed. 208A / tr. 207E, 208D PEETERS) appear to be successive rather than concurrent. See discussion of chronology at PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 196A and D with n. 10, 198E.

⁸² See recently PAYNE, *A State of Mixture* 48–56, 192–196: apostasy among Zoroastrian elites; 23–58 (citing older literature): the self-representational template of persecution and intolerance in East Syriac hagiography and polemic.

⁸³ The *Passio* connects Isbozetes' first attraction to Christianity with his having witnessed the martyrdom of another high-status convert, Pirangushnasp-Gregory, at Pirisabora/Perozshapur on 18 April 542, and provides a precise and internally consistent dating for Isbozetes' own execution on 9 November 553. Internal chronology places Isbozetes' birth c.522/3.

Menander's *History* in 559 and long predates the time of writing in the 580s. Consequently, when Menander writes of "learning" (πυθόμενος) about Isbozetes, he does not refer to a current report of a recent incident but to historical information, however conveyed, concerning events at least thirty years earlier. Moreover, within his *History*, Menander could not have discussed this martyrdom as an event that occurred during his chosen timeframe (559–582) and correctly placed in that narrative sequence. Rather, the case of the apostate magus, by definition, must belong to a retrospective treatment of prior events or to a thematic digression unrestricted by these chronological termini⁸⁴. The occasion remains guesswork: whether a general excursus on Persian religion or a more focused exemplum relevant to later developments⁸⁵. If the latter, one likely context, as previously mentioned, is Menander's documentary account of the treaty of 561/2, which addressed Roman-Persian tensions arising from Christian proselytising and/or conversion in Zoroastrian communities, with specific reference to magi⁸⁶. Blockley finds an alternative setting in Khosrow I's apparent enforcement of Zoroastrian observance, including construction of fire-sanctuaries, in Persarmenia from 570, which became a significant factor in the Persarmenians' decision to request Roman assistance, before revolting in early 572. Although Blockley's dating and analysis harbour clear misconception, it is conceivable that such a tale of Christian martyrdom, even one that had occurred two decades earlier in different circumstances, could have reinforced Persarmenian appeals to Constantinople⁸⁷. Whatever its narrative setting within Menander's text, the punishment of crucifixion is rarely reported in contemporary East Syriac hagiographical literature in any context, and this aspect, along with the martyr's prior membership of the Zoroastrian religious elite, may have elicited Menander's particular interest⁸⁸.

Third, what is most striking about the episode of the conflagration in the *Passio* (2) is its circumstantial accuracy and technical precision. The location of the sacrificial rites in an official's residence is consistent with the absence of a fire-temple in Dvin at this date. More importantly, for present purposes, the *Passio* relates specific details about Zoroastrian fire-worship that, in extant Greek and Latin literature, are recorded only in Strabo's *Geography* XV 3, 14–15, the very text that inspired the scholion citing Menander. To judge by the Armenian translation, the hagiographer wrote that, while Isbozetes was attending the fire-ceremony, he was "bound at the mouth" (պնդեալ գերանն). Subsequently, once Isbozetes had comprehended the miraculous quenching of the blaze, in a dramatic act of renunciation, he cast away the sacred implement he was holding "as well as the mouth-binding" (նյնսպէս եւ գերանաւկապն), before publicly professing Christianity. This form of apparel corresponds to Strabo's report of magi who officiate before the sacred fire "wearing headdresses ... which have cheekpieces coming down on both sides as far as to cover

See *Passio* 1, 3, 9 (204D, 207D, 212E PEETERS), with discussion at PEETERS, De Sancto Isbozeta 191E–193A, 198B–E (§14); GARITTE, La Narratio 158–159; GARSOÏAN, L'Église arménienne 228–231. Political-military contexts: G. GREATREX – S.N.C. LIEU, The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, part II, AD 363–630: a narrative sourcebook. London 2002, 110 n. 38, 120 n. 27.

⁸⁴ The chronological implications are also noted by A.D. LEE, Evagrius, Paul of Nisibis and the Problem of Loyalties in the Mid-Sixth Century. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44.4 (1993) 569–585 at 581 n. 57, but his deduction that Menander's Isaozites/Isbozetes and the Yazdbōzēd of the *Passio* must therefore be different individuals is mistaken—Menander's epigram evidently describes the same specific events as *Passio* 2. See above n. 80.

⁸⁵ WHITBY, Review of Bleckmann (see n. 2) 26. More generally, the fragments offer little or no assistance in assessing Menander's taste for formal digression: BLOCKLEY, Menander 13; WHITBY, Emperor Maurice 243 n. 39.

⁸⁶ See n. 63.

⁸⁷ See the arrangement of hard-to-place fragments 13.1–5, including the two concerning Isbozetes (13, 3–4), in BLOCKLEY, Menander 31, 144–147, with argumentation at 268–269 (nn. 166–170). Blockley's (269 n. 167) speculative identification of an unnamed ἡγέμωνα, "leader", in fr. 13, 2 (144, 7 BLOCKLEY) as Isbozetes, with the inference that he "might have been the governor of a Persian city" in 570–72, is obviously incorrect. For background to the revolt of Persarmenia in 572 see WHITBY, Emperor Maurice 250–253; GREATREX – LIEU, Roman Eastern Frontier 137–142.

⁸⁸ C. JULLIEN, Peines et supplices dans les Actes des martyrs persans et droit sassanide: Nouvelles prospections. *Studia Iranica* 33 (2004) 243–269 at 260; PAYNE, A State of Mixture 49, 195–196

their lips” (τιάρας περικείμενοι ... καθεκκυίας ἐκατέρωθεν μέχρι τοῦ καλύπτειν τὰ χεῖλη τὰς παραγναθίδας, XV 3, 15). Both texts refer to the well-documented Avestan *paitidāna*- (Middle Persian *padām*; New Persian *panām*), a cloth covering tied over the mouth and nose, worn during ceremonies to prevent an officiant’s breath from polluting the flame⁸⁹. In addition, in describing what occurred during the ceremony, the *Passio* recounts that the sacred flame surged up specifically “from the soft fat” (ἡ ὠρυμνη) towards the ceiling. This again recalls Strabo’s meticulous account of a peculiar aspect of Zoroastrian sacrificial ritual: “[they offer sacrifice] to fire by adding dry wood without bark and placing soft fat on top” (τῷ μὲν πυρί προστιθέντες ξηρὰ ξύλα τοῦ λέπους χωρὶς, πιμελὴν ἐπιτιθέντες ἄνωθεν, XV 3, 14)⁹⁰. The *Passio* records a third item of Zoroastrian liturgical apparatus, but its identity is initially lost in translation or transmission. The received Armenian text (and thence also the Georgian) states that, just before Isbozetes threw off his mouth-covering, he also “broke a hammer (qnlñ) that he was using in the rites and cast it away”. While the text is notably well informed about magian ritual, use of such a utensil is not documented elsewhere and the incongruous occurrence of *uṛn* (nlnñ), “hammer”, here raises suspicions of textual difficulties rather than authorial error. In contrast, in light of extensive textual, artistic and anthropological evidence for Zoroastrian fire-rituals, one would fully expect a magus in these circumstances to be holding a bundle of sacred twigs, the Avestan *barəsmān* (Middle Persian *barsōm*)⁹¹. Peeters’ linguistic ingenuity deduces that the Armenian translator misread his Syriac exemplar or guessed the meaning of a word unknown to him. Peeters finds a likely source of confusion in the graphic similarity of Syriac *qwrnsa* (ܩܪܢܣܐ), “hammer”, and *bwrsma* (ܒܘܪܣܡܐ), the Syriac rendering of *barəsmān*⁹². Although other possibilities for textual corruption within the Armenian tradition could be considered, arising from confusion of *uṛn* (nlnñ), “hammer”, and *uṛ* (nln), “twig, branch”, all the evidence points towards the same conclusion⁹³. Accordingly, the *Passio* again corresponds to the content of Strabo’s description of Zoroastrian rites, which twice refers to such bundles of “slender twigs” used in sacrifices to water: “the magi touch with slender twigs ... holding a

⁸⁹ *Passio* 2 (205D PEETERS): “oris vinculum gerens”, (206D): “oris vinculum procul abiecit”, with remarks at 205D n. 7, citing Strabo XV 3, 15. Strabo explains the religious belief underlying this practice in preceding XV 3, 14: οὐ φυσῶντες ἀλλὰ ῥυτίζοντες· τοὺς δὲ φυσήσαντας ... θανατοῦσι, “while not blowing but fanning it; but those who have blown the fire ... they put to death.” See textual and representational evidence for the *paitidāna*- in DE JONG, Traditions 150; LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV) 284 (n. 892), 288 (n. 901), with older bibliography.

⁹⁰ *Passio* 2 (205D PEETERS): “Porro flamma ex adipe assurgens”, with remarks at n. 8, citing Strabo XV 3, 14. See DE JONG, Traditions 135, distinguishing Strabo’s πιμελή, soft fat or grease, from στέαρ, hard fat; also LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV), 282–283 (nn. 890–891).

⁹¹ See evidence and extensive bibliography relating to *barəsmān* in DE JONG, Traditions 117, 142–143, 149–150, 360; LEROY, Strabon, Géographie XII (Livre XV) 284–285 (n. 893).

⁹² *Passio* 2 (206D PEETERS): “Malleum, quo in (ignis) superstitionibus utebatur, comminuit”, with remarks at nn. 1–3 and textual analysis at 200C–D (§18). This reconstruction assumes, not implausibly, that the Armenian translator knew nothing of Zoroastrian rituals and was unfamiliar with the term *barsmunk* (բարսմոնկ), the Armenian rendering of *barəsmān*; see É. BENVENISTE, Sur la terminologie iranienne du sacrifice. *Journal asiatique* 252 (1964) 45–58 at 51–54; J.R. RUSSELL, Zoroastrianism in Armenia (*Harvard Iranian Studies* 5). Cambridge, MA 1987, 482, 496.

⁹³ PEETERS, De Sancto Isbozeta 200D n. 7 acknowledges that the close similarity of Armenian *uṛn* (nlnñ), “hammer”, and *uṛ* (nln), “twig, branch”, might prompt conjecture of transcriptional error, but he rejects any possibility that this sacred instrument could have been so improperly described using such “rustic” vocabulary (“rusticana verborum abusione”). However, the factual accuracy of the information about fire-rituals transmitted in the Armenian text is not otherwise matched by a use of correct sacral or specific terminology: thus *beranakap* (բերանակապ), generic “mouth-binding, gag”, instead of the technical loan *p’andam* (փանդամ) from Middle Persian *padām*; see BENVENISTE, terminologie 54; RUSSELL, Zoroastrianism 482, 496. By implication, the Syriac text also contained a descriptive term or phrase for this mouth-piece, which the Armenian translator could comprehend and accurately render, rather than an obscure *terminus technicus*. The possibility of transcriptional error within the Armenian tradition remains open, especially as the received text *zuṛn* (զւրն), followed by a vowel-initial word, can mean either accusative singular indefinite “a hammer” or definite “the twig”. This would assume that the Armenian translator similarly found generic “twig, branch” in the Syriac original and not a technical Syriac rendering of *barəsmān*.

bundle of slender tamarisk twigs” (ράβδοις λεπταῖς ἐφάπτονται οἱ Μάγοι ... ῥάβδων μυρικίνων λεπτῶν δέσμην κατέχοντες, XV 3, 14), and once more, with greater relevance to the present case, in his account of rituals performed by magi at fire-sanctuaries: “they sing incantations for close to an hour, holding before the fire the bundle of twigs” (ἐπάδουσιν ὥραν σχεδόν τι πρὸ τοῦ πυρὸς τὴν δέσμην τῶν ῥάβδων ἔχοντες, XV 3, 15)⁹⁴. Obviously, there is no suggestion of a textual connection between Strabo’s *Geography* and the *Passio*. Rather, the original hagiographer reveals himself to be a knowledgeable and accurate witness to authentic Zoroastrian sacrificial practices in the later Sasanian period. This characteristic is consistent with a broader shift towards technical detail and circumstantial precision in East Syriac martyrological narratives in the sixth century⁹⁵. Peeters infers that the composition of the Syriac *Urtext*, like the saint’s early cult, originated in a milieu chronologically, geographically and culturally close to the historical setting of the *Passio*, in his view a Persian “Nestorian” (East Syriac Church) community at Dvin⁹⁶.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTEXTS

Among several points of interest in the central episode of the *Passio S. Isbozetae*, the rarity and specificity of specialized knowledge must again be stressed: of the three previously noted ritual elements—the mouth-covering worn by a magus (*paitidāna*-), the application of soft fat or grease on top of a sacrificial fire, and the use of bundles of sacred twigs (*barəsmān*) by officiating magi in fire-sanctuaries—in each case, outside oriental sources, Strabo (XV 3, 14–15) alone describes these magian practices and paraphernalia. Or, having now read the adjacent scholion in its correct context, should we say Strabo *and* Menander Protector? We have seen that some, unspecified aspect of Strabo’s treatment of Zoroastrian beliefs and rituals induced an erudite scholiast in late ninth-century Constantinople to think of Menander’s *History* and to single out for recommendation this comparatively obscure sixth-century classicizing work as a particular, indeed “more accurate” authority on this topic. Two fragments of Menander’s *History* preserved in *De sententiis* expressly state his especial interest in Isbozetes and indicate that, somewhere in his work, apparently within a digression rather than in a narrative sequence, Menander provided information about the converted magus. This section included the same crucial episode of the conflagration during the fire-ceremony—which, separately, also inspired Menander to compose an independently transmitted epigram—as well as details of the martyr’s crucifixion, including a report of his final words. It is extremely unlikely that the two short, dismembered and unconnected passages found in *De sententiis*, selected and incorporated solely insofar as they contain edifying “sayings”, represent the totality of Menander’s account of Isbozetes’ conversion and martyrdom. If his fuller version of this story mentioned all, some or even one of the ritual elements recorded in the corresponding episode

⁹⁴ PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 206D n. 1 cites corresponding Strabo XV 3, 14, but not 15. Strabo is the only Greek or Greco-Roman author to record this use of bundles of sacred twigs (*barəsmān*) in sacrificial rituals or fire-ceremonies. Schol. ad Nicander, *Theriaca* 613a (= Dinon, *FGrH* 690 F 3) reports tamarisk (and possibly other) rods or twigs used for divinational purposes by magi and others, though apparently alluding to a distinct practice of rhabdomancy; see text and commentary in D. LENFANT, *Les Histoires perses de Dinon et d’Héraclide*. Fragments édités, traduits et commentés (*Persika* 13). Paris 2009, 98–105.

⁹⁵ For literary-narrational and polemical developments in fifth-/sixth-century Syriac martyrologies see selectively: JULLIEN, *Martyrs en Perse*; R. PAYNE, *Les polémiques syro-orientales contre le Zoroastrisme et leur contexte politique*, in: *Les controverses religieuses en syriaque*, ed. F. Ruani. Paris 2017, 239–260.

⁹⁶ PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 199A–201A (§18–§19); endorsed by GARSOÏAN, *L’Église arménienne* 227–231, with further historical contexts. See also P. PEETERS, *Orient et Byzance. Le tréfonds oriental de l’hagiographie byzantine*. Brussels 1950, 154, “une pièce historique sobre et précise, reposant sur un fond de la plus parfaite solidité”. On the broader connections between martyrological texts, shrines and communal commemoration see R. PAYNE, *The Emergence of Martyrs’ Shrines in Late Antique Iran: Conflict, Consensus and Communal Institutions*, in: *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*, ed. P.A.V. SARRIS – M.J. DAL SANTO – P. BOOTH. Leiden 2011, 89–113.

in the *Passio S. Isbozetae*, then the scholiast's motivation for linking this section of Strabo with Menander's *History* becomes clear. If not, then we must assume a remarkable series of coincidences. By extension, this characterisation of the lost "narrative" content of Menander's treatment of Isbozetes would support the view that he had at his disposal a written source, which was, in parts at least, similar in content to the extant *Passio*, rather than orally transmitted hearsay about an event that occurred more three decades earlier. A textual relationship between Menander's *History* and the *Passio* has already been mooted⁹⁷. The observations offered here arguably enhance the possibility that Menander had access to a Greek version, even if the precise nature of intertextuality and linguistic transfer must remain obscure. Within the wide and complex diffusion of East Syriac hagiographical texts, a parallel may be drawn with Theophylact's decision to integrate into his continuation of Menander's classicizing *History* selected episodes of the story of Golinduch, a Persian noblewoman from a magian family, who converted to Christianity, suffered imprisonment and torture, and escaped to Roman territory, dying at Hierapolis (Manbij) in 591⁹⁸. Posing similar questions of provenance, transmission and language, Theophylact's source likewise originated in a lost Syriac archetype, from which derive an extant Georgian *Passio* and (presumably via a lost Greek version) a modified rhetorical Greek *Life*. As Theophylact was writing in Constantinople in the late 620s, a comparable interval separates the composition of his *Histories* from Golinduch's demise as separates Menander's work from Isbozetes' martyrdom, though clearly Golinduch's fame as a "living martyr" far exceeded awareness of Isbozetes⁹⁹.

Broader implications for interest in or understanding of Persian religious beliefs and customs in literary-intellectual circles at Constantinople in the later sixth century are also uncertain, especially as longer-term engagement with Zoroastrianism in preceding Greek and Greco-Roman literature appears to have been typically sporadic and author-specific, and shows little unilinear development. It seems reasonable to infer that Menander, as previously Agathias, was catering to a perceived taste for such content among consumers of Greek classicizing historiography, and not merely pursuing his own esoteric interests, possibly in response to an incipient intensification of religious motifs in renewed Roman-Sasanian hostilities from the 570s, a primary framework of high-register historical literature¹⁰⁰. In the absence of comparable material in this or other genres in the same literary-cultural milieu, however, it would be hazardous to extrapolate a more broadly enhanced knowledge of Zoroastrianism in the capital, even if a wider polemical discourse might be suspected¹⁰¹. Given the complexity of both Christian-Zoroastrian communal interaction within the Sasa-

⁹⁷ Originally, PEETERS, *De Sancto Isbozeta* 201 n. 1 contends that Menander knew of Isbozetes' martyrdom via an oral source, though Peeters infers too much from the absence of certain details in the two excerpts (fr. 13, 3–4 = *De sententiis* 24–25), apparently assuming that they necessarily contain all Menander wrote about this episode. Peeters reiterates this view in PEETERS, *Orient et Byzance* 154, "Ménandre le Protecteur, qui avait entendu raconter en Arménie la mort, alors toute récente", though at 197 he seemingly allows a textual connection: "Si son [Isbozetes] histoire, alors toute récente, est parvenue à Ménandre par une relation grecque, ce grec a été traduit d'une Passion arménienne".

⁹⁸ Theophylact Simocatta, *Histories* V 12 (210, 7–212, 5 DE BOOR).

⁹⁹ See texts and bibliography in OLAJOS, *Les sources* 67–82; WHITBY, *Emperor Maurice* 236–237, 328; M. DAL SANTO, *Imperial Power and its Subversion in Eustratius of Constantinople's Life and Martyrdom of Golinduch (c.602)*. *Byzantion* 81 (2011) 138–176 at 138–142, 148–154.

¹⁰⁰ Menander's taste for the "exotic": above n. 61. Religion and contemporary warfare: L.M. WHITBY, *Deus nobiscum: Christianity, Warfare and Morale in Late Antiquity*, in: *Modus Operandi, Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman*, ed. M.M. Austin – J.D. Harries – C.J. Smith. London 1998, 191–208, esp. 192–195; BLECKMANN, *Christentum und nichtchristliche Religionen* 243–250.

¹⁰¹ For example, the *Life* of Golinduch composed by Eustratius in Constantinople in c.602 hardly mentions Persian religious beliefs, practices or institutions, real or imagined: see *Life* 3 (151, 20–21): marriage to a magus; 12 (159, 1–4): Persians worship a serpent(s) (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Analekta Ierosolymitikēs stachyologias*. St. Petersburg 1891–1897 [repr. Brussels 1963], IV 149–174). See the nuanced analysis of DAL SANTO, *Imperial Power*, identifying the author's main purpose as enhancement of the sacral authority of Maurice's regime. Aside from his own digression on Golinduch (above n. 98), Theophylact rarely refers to magi and employs literary language that does not reveal or imply appreciation

nian Empire and confessional divergence across eastern Christianity, there is no reason to assume that the socio-religious, commemorative and literary dynamics that motivated the production of works like the *Passio S. Isbozetae* in distant East Syriac communities were understood or recognised by Menander or his audience, beyond a common basic objective of affirming the truth of Christianity against the lie of Zoroastrianism. Nonetheless, locating Menander's Isaozites/Isbozetes within the diverse historical, religious and linguistic contexts of Machož-Yazdbōzēd permits a more variegated picture of the content, concerns and possible sources of Menander's historical writing, outside the thematic confines of "diplomatic history".

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of Persian religion. See notably *Histories* II 2, 2–3 (72, 3–12 DE BOOR): magian prophesy depicted in terms of the Delphic oracle; also brief allusions at III 16, 10 (144, 21–23); IV 12, 5 (172, 3–4). Theophylact applies the same term (μάγος) generically to an Avar priest: I 8, 3 (53, 17–18).

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