

# Fremde Wirklichkeiten

Literarische Phantastik  
und antike Literatur

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## The Textual Transmission of Ancient Fantastic Fiction: Some Case Studies

How did fantastic literature circulate in the Greek and Roman world? Why has so little of it reached us, and why has that little survived? To be sure, all these questions actually imply a preliminary one: what shall we mean by 'fantastic literature'? For the limited scope of this paper, I shall adopt the expression not as a genre-identifying term, but rather as a useful label to single out a number of works, belonging to different literary genres, whose main features include a prominence of the fantastic in one or more of its manifestations (the supernatural, the irrational, the SF-like ...). Within this broader domain, I shall concentrate – with one exception (§ 3) – on works of fiction, to try and illustrate some of the main factors and processes that determined the loss or the survival of what Greek and Roman minds brought out in the multifaceted field of the fantastic. The available evidence will lead me to focus chiefly on the Graeco-Roman *koiné* world; but where possible I will exploit some earlier, interesting testimonies as well.

### 1. The shortcomings of orality

A first important fact stems from the very nature of ancient fantastic fiction: a great deal of this patrimony is likely never to have reached beyond an oral stage of transmission. There can hardly be a definite way to prove it, but our sources as a whole suggest that fantastic stories *et similia* were more often told than written: so a major part of that output never even enjoyed the prospect of an enduring survival in the form of a more or less stabilized text. But can we at least gain an overall idea of that – arguably – 'major part'? A brief survey of some evidence will be helpful.<sup>1</sup>

At a fair, a market, or even simply a crossroad, you might be addressed by a storyteller saying: "Get your copper ready and you'll hear a tale of gold"<sup>2</sup>; as soon

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller treatment see STRAMAGLIA 1999, 82-87, with further bibliography (updated, where needed, in the following footnotes).

<sup>2</sup> *Assem para et accipe auream fabulam*: the *fabulator*-like formula with which the Younger Pliny opens a well-known letter (*Epistulae* 2, 20, 1). I have adopted the insightful translation by HORSFALL 2003, 78-79.

as enough bystanders had flocked around him, the *fabulator*<sup>3</sup> started his narration. We know that such tales often indulged in the marvellous, but our sources tell us hardly more than that.<sup>4</sup> If, however, we resort by analogy to other categories of storytellers, we can reasonably infer that professional *fabulatores* gave ample space to ogres, bugbears, ghosts and the like.

The above is suggested in the first place by another sort of 'professional' narrators: nurses.<sup>5</sup> To coax children into sleeping, they told them about "towers of Lamia" – the most typical of children's *terriculae*<sup>6</sup> – and "combs of the Sun";<sup>7</sup> to scare them, they spoke of the ghostly Maniae;<sup>8</sup> and lest they should sneak out of the house, the young were warned that the biting Mormo was lurking beyond the threshold...<sup>9</sup> In sum, all sorts of bugbear stories were used to make children behave, and Plato's warning<sup>10</sup> that little boys and girls should be spared all this nonsense remained apparently unheard. An idea of how these 'Schauermärchen' were devised can be gleaned from Dio Chrysostomus' *Oration* 5, centred on the value and function of μῦθοι ("myths").<sup>11</sup> By way of example Dio recounts some tales about *lamiae*, and his sample-case is all the more instructive because the sophist affects the oral, informal style in which these stories usually circulated.

<sup>3</sup> Or *aretalogus*, or also – with a more generic term – *circulator* (see SALLES 1981, 7 n. 9; HORSFALL 2003, 57; 98-99 and notes; O'NEILL 2003, 151-157, with further bibliography).

<sup>4</sup> Ancient sources and discussion in SCOBIE 1983, 11-16 and notes; add SALLES 1981, 7ff., esp. 11-13; 1992, 207-209 and notes; HORSFALL 2003, 78-79 and notes.

<sup>5</sup> And, though less copiously attested, mothers. Standard treatment in SCOBIE 1979, 244-252; 1983, 16-30 and notes; also important TANDOI 1974-92, 22-24; MASSARO 1977, 131-132 and *passim*; BREMMER 1987, 200-201; ANDERSON 2000a, 2-4. Remarkably, the malignant characters haunting nurses' tales sometimes ended up by being identified with the nurses themselves: cf. MENCACCI 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Lucilius 484 Marx; cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica* 340, with Porphyrio *ad loc.* (p. 174 Holder; and see *ad Epistulae* 1, 13, 10 [p. 332 H.]); Strabo 1, 2, 8; Lucian, *Philopseudeis* 2; Marcus Aurelius 11, 23; Isidorus, *Origenes* 8, 11, 102. For further sources and bibliography on Lamia(e) see STRAMAGLIA 1999, 226-227 and nn. 46; 48.

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 3, 3 Fredouille: *Iam si et in totam fabulam* (sc. the myths of the Valentinians) *initietur, nonne tale aliquid <reco>r-dabitur se in infantia inter somni difficultates a nutricula audisse, 'Lamiae turres' et 'Pectines Solis'?* "Towers of Lamia" and 'combs of the Sun' are possibly parts of a single story of the Rapunzel type: see ANDERSON 2000a, 3; HANSEN 2002, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Festus p. 114, 17-19 Lindsay = Aelius Stilo fr. 14 Funaioli: *Manias [...], quas nutrices munitentur parvulis pueris, esse larvas.*

<sup>9</sup> Theocritus 15, 40-43 (with Erinna fr. 4, 25-30 Neri; Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 15, 1040b and the other parallels in Gow <sup>2</sup>1952, II, 279).

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Republic* 2, 381e.

<sup>11</sup> A much studied piece: see recently (with previous bibliography) BRANCALEONE 1995, 65-68; VISINTIN 1997, 217-219; GEORGIADOU / LARMOUR 1997; 1998, 3-4; ANDERSON 2000b, 154-156; LEIGH 2000, 103-106.

A further kind of storytellers takes us still closer to our topic: symposiac narrators. When Xenophanes warned that “fictions of the ancients”<sup>12</sup> should not be told at banquets, this admonition fell within his coherent proposal of a new symposium: so the practice he anathematized was certainly the usual one. Odysseus’ *apologoi* at the court of Alcinous<sup>13</sup> are a paradigm in this respect. The persistence of the habit is confirmed by our later pieces of evidence.<sup>14</sup> The Younger Pliny reports on a dinner where *varia miracula hinc inde referuntur*<sup>15</sup>, and of course our thoughts immediately turn to Trimalchio’s *cena*, with the two freedmen telling their stories about werewolves and witches;<sup>16</sup> or to Byrrhaena’s more aristocratic banquet, where poor Thelyphron rehearses once more the misfortunes that witches and a revived corpse had brought him.<sup>17</sup> Petronius strongly affects the immediacy of oral narration, like e.g. Lucian with the ‘bedside storytellers’ in his *Lovers of Lies*;<sup>18</sup> yet, since what these authors do is precisely ‘affecting’ to reproduce oral storytelling, we ultimately get a vivid but nevertheless filtered and variously biased idea of this kind of fiction.<sup>19</sup>

This holds equally true when we turn to the rich and complex panorama of local legends. Many of them must have enjoyed oral circulation for centuries before being written down (and probably also after that), so the fact that not a few of these stories concerned ghostly heroes and other supernatural topics is promising, in principle. Pausanias – for one – is particularly willing to reproduce such materials.<sup>20</sup> But at this point we have to tackle a string of inescapable questions: Who did our written source rely on? What kind of relationship existed between this version of the story and the other – written or oral – one(s) possibly attested? Our sources seldom yield details on these topics, and things are even

<sup>12</sup> Fr. 1, 22 Gentili-Prato<sup>2</sup>: πλάσμα<τα> τῶν προτέρων, referred to the fights of Titans, Giants and Centaurs. For the meaning and the implications of the passage see now DE MARTINO / VOX 1996, II, 871-872; GOSTOLI 1999; and from a more philosophical standpoint SCHÄFER 1996, 193-202. For a perceptive survey on *Greek Table-Talk before Plato* cf. BOWIE 1993.

<sup>13</sup> *Odyssey* 9-12.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. TREKNER 1958, 19-20; SCOBIE 1983, 13 and notes; and more generally ROSATI 1993 on *La letteratura a cena* in ancient Rome.

<sup>15</sup> *Epistulae* 9, 33, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Petronius 61-63.

<sup>17</sup> Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2, 20, 4-2, 30.

<sup>18</sup> In this, as in many other respects, the *Lovers of Lies* is a reprise *cum variatione* of Plato’s *Phaedo*, as has long been recognized; see now EBNER 2001, 36ff., and especially the very thorough treatment by WÄLCHLI 2003, 15-17; 27-38 (who envisages Plutarch’s *De genio Socratis* as a possible intermediary between Plato and Lucian).

<sup>19</sup> A paradigmatic case – the werewolf story in Petronius 61-62 – has been highlighted and carefully scrutinized by BETTINI 1989, 72-77; BLÄNSDORF 1990, 201-211; SALANITRO 1998; D’AUTILIA 2003, 101-108.

<sup>20</sup> The most useful treatments are still KALKMANN 1886, *passim* across 13-53, and REGENBOGEN 1956, 1082-1085; for further points I refer to JACOB 1980, 54-63 and notes; and especially to PRITCHETT 1998, *passim* across 61-363 (*Pausanias on Greek religion*).

worse when we have to deal with such elusive beings as ghosts and the like. Let us pick one of the best known stories: the legend of the ghostly Hero of Temesa, beaten by the overstrong athlete Euthymus of Lokri.<sup>21</sup> The story was widely known in and out of *Megale Hellas*. Our main source, Pausanias, introduces the narrative with a generic "they say (φασιν) that Odysseus...".<sup>22</sup> Further on, he will specify that he has "heard" further details,<sup>23</sup> and that he has learned that the town of Temesa still exists "from the lips of a man who sailed there on business".<sup>24</sup> Strabo is even less forthcoming: "they tell a story that Euthymus...";<sup>25</sup> and so is Aelian: "They say that that same Euthymus...";<sup>26</sup> virtually nothing in the other extant sources, which are themselves a part of an originally larger set. All in all, we can only grasp the old legend in a very fluid shape through a formidable complex of intermediaries;<sup>27</sup> yet things could have been much worse, for our knowledge of the story does have a number of quite detailed accounts to rely on.

Further instances of yet different origin could be adduced, but they would not affect the main picture. One can doubt whether the scant remains surveyed so far should be labelled as 'oral literature', or rather as 'folkloric' or 'pre-literary' fantastic fiction; but definitions apart, the main point remains: in all likelihood, a prominent part of Greek and Roman fantastic fiction never even started to have a written textual tradition; or, by the time such a tradition had begun, the original core would already have been altered through a complex texture of mediations. Fantastic stories thus turned into pieces of (more or less) developed literary works;<sup>28</sup> and it is to such works that I will now turn my attention.

<sup>21</sup> All sources (and bibliography to that date) are collected and thoroughly discussed by VISINTIN 1992; subsequently fundamental CURRIE 2002 (who argues that the Hero was in fact a river god).

<sup>22</sup> Pausanias 6, 6, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Pausanias 6, 6, 10; 11: ἤκουσα.

<sup>24</sup> Pausanias 6, 6, 10: ἀνδρὸς ἤκουσα πλεύσαντος κατὰ ἐμπορίαν.

<sup>25</sup> Strabo 6, 1, 5: Εὐθυμον μυθεύουσι κτλ.

<sup>26</sup> Aelian, *Varia historia* 8, 18: Λέγουσι δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν Εὐθυμον κτλ.

<sup>27</sup> CURRIE 2002, 27 now summarizes: "The literary evidence for Euthymos' legend is scattered across several authors. It is unclear whether all depend on a single source, and if so what that was. All may ultimately depend on local oral tradition".

<sup>28</sup> I absolutely agree with the lucid remarks of MEIER 2003, 243: behind many of the Greek and Roman 'Gruselgeschichten' we can read there certainly were oral sources, but "was uns vorliegt, sind literarisch ausgeformte Kunstprodukte, die festen Gattungskonventionen folgen, spezifischen Intentionen der Autoren untergeordnet und auf ein jeweils besonderes Publikum hin zugeschnitten sind". For a recent survey on the subject see FELTON 2000, 1-21 and notes; also, within the broader perspective of the relationship between folkloric and literary narratives in classical antiquity, ANDERSON 2000a, esp. 9ff. and notes; HANSEN 2002, 6-19 and notes.

## 2. Trying hard to survive: Antonius Diogenes' Ἄπιστα (*Āpista*)

According to Massimo Fusillo's appropriate definition, Antonius Diogenes' twenty-four books of *Incredible Things beyond Thule* (Τὰ ὑπὲρ Θουλήν ἄπιστα, hereafter Ἄπιστα) were "a fantastic novel [...], and the only one we know about from antiquity".<sup>29</sup> As is well known, the latest traces of a complete copy of the work date from the mid-ninth century, when patriarch Photius summarized it in Constantinople (*Bibliotheca* 166); but although the Ἄπιστα as a whole has been lost, a considerable amount of surviving evidence, both from Photius and from other sources, renders this novel an invaluable test-case as to questions of textual circulation and transmission.<sup>30</sup> First of all, chronology and dedicatees. Thanks to persuasive onomastic connections, Glen W. Bowersock has made a strong case for Antonius' family (or at least one member of it) having acquired Roman citizenship under the Flavians, and for the novelist's *floruit* having fallen in the late decades of the first century A.D.<sup>31</sup> If we accept this chronology, special significance is acquired by the two dedicatees that Antonius mentioned in the two prefatory letters to his novel:<sup>32</sup> the former addressed to one "Faustinus", the latter to the author's own sister,<sup>33</sup> Isidora, "eager to learn" (φιλομαθῶς ἐχούση). Isidora bears early witness to the feminine readership which is currently regarded as one of the main targets of ancient 'Unterhaltungsliteratur';<sup>34</sup> as to Faustinus, he plays a crucial rôle in setting the Ἄπιστα in a precise socio-cultural context. He has been identified with the powerful dedicatee of Martial's books III and IV:<sup>35</sup> a foregrounded personality in the panorama of

<sup>29</sup> FUSILLO 1990, 30 (my translation).

<sup>30</sup> All surviving remains, with translation and commentary, are collected in FUSILLO 1990 and STEPHENS / WINKLER 1995, 101-172 (but here without the Greek text of Photius' summary); also indispensable is the critical survey by MORGAN 1998, 3303-3318.

<sup>31</sup> BOWERSOCK 1994, 35-40; and see BOWIE *ap.* STEPHENS / WINKLER 1995, 118 n. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 166, 111a, 30-34. It has been repeatedly claimed that there actually was only one prefatory letter, but in vain: cf. MORGAN 1998, 3313. A very similar case – Hirtius' book VIII of the *Commentarii de bello Gallico*, addressed to Balbus in a prefatory letter and dedicated to Pansa in another one – has been thoroughly reconstructed and explained by PECERE 2003, 208-212 (with due reference to the Ἄπιστα at 211-212). At most, one could take a completely different tack with DANA 1998-2000, 90 n. 40: Antonius' letter to Isidora would have been embedded in his letter to Faustinus, thus anticipating from the very beginning the 'Chinese boxes'-structure of the whole novel.

<sup>33</sup> For elucidation of this detail – misinterpreted by some critics – I refer to STRAMAGLIA 1999, 97 n. 311.

<sup>34</sup> Another more or less contemporary instance is the dedication by Ptolemy Chennus (late first century A.D.) of his whimsical, miscellaneous *New History* to a certain Tertulla, praised for her inclination to τὸ φιλόλογον [...] καὶ πολυμαθῆς (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 190, 146b, 9-12).

<sup>35</sup> *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*<sup>2</sup> (=PIR<sup>2</sup>) F 127; see now NAUTA 2002, 67-68. The identification was first suggested by HALLSTRÖM 1910, but met with little favour until BOWERSOCK 1994, 37-38 revived it on a sounder basis; it is now also accepted by BOWIE 2002, 59-

political and cultural relationships in Domitian's age.<sup>36</sup> Power and influence, however, had a short life in ancient Rome, and Faustinus' lucky star immediately eclipsed with Domitian's death, in 96 A.D.:<sup>37</sup> after that date he suddenly vanished from Martial's epigrams (where he had previously been mentioned no less than nineteen times),<sup>38</sup> and from the literary horizon as a whole. Plainly, he was too compromised with the Flavian régime. For us, however, this is an extremely important fact: Antonius Diogenes would never have chosen Faustinus as an influential dedicatee after his disgrace, so 96 A.D. has a good chance of being a (hitherto neglected) *terminus ante quem* for the publication of the Ἄπιστα.<sup>39</sup>

Be this as it may, it is clear that Antonius took great care to launch his novel into the highest cultural circles of his days, in an age when "much literature is primarily produced and received within the court, or – by way of homage – within high society relationships: literature for an occasion [...], but also for entertainment".<sup>40</sup> This authorial strategy certainly strengthened the Ἄπιστα's chances for circulation, which was indeed a remarkable and enduring one for a fictional work. Further reasons for a secure survival inhered in the work itself:<sup>41</sup> the fictionalization of geographical (or pseudo-geographical) facts, the down-playing of the erotic, and the philosophical (Pythagorizing) coating, were all factors that saved the Ἄπιστα from the Christian ban on fictional *eros*, and at the same time prompted its circulation within contexts otherwise unthinkable for an ancient novel. From this point of view, the large amount of space that Antonius devoted to Pythagoric lore proved especially fruitful: his long digression on Pythagoras' life<sup>42</sup> was already exploited by Hippolytus of Rome († little after 235)

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60 (see however *infra*, n. 39). NAUTA 2002, 67–68 n. 96 stresses that the proposal remains conjectural, but his scepticism is perhaps too radical.

<sup>36</sup> The further identification of this personage with the Faustinus who composed *Année Épigraphique* 1967, n° 85 = COURTNEY 1995, n° 49, a poem found on an inscription from the imperial villa in Sperlonga, is highly problematic. It has been forcefully argued for by esp. TANDOI 1988–92 (written in 1969), but there are strong reasons to think that the inscription is in fact much later than the Flavian age: see in particular LEPPERT 1978 and COURTNEY 1995, 272, then NAUTA 2002, 67 n. 96.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. TANDOI 1988–92, 754.

<sup>38</sup> See again *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 127; NAUTA 2002, 67.

<sup>39</sup> Pace BOWIE 2002, 59–60, who accepts the identification of Faustinus, but cautiously concludes for a dating "in the decade following A.D. 98", on the assumption that it was Tacitus' *Agricola*, published in 98, which prompted interest in Thule, with its account (10, 5–6) of "the Roman expedition while Agricola was governor of Britain that reached and reported back on Thule [...] in one of the years A.D. 80–8". It is certainly conceivable that the expedition called attention to Thule; but why should we then exclude the possibility that it was already the Flavians themselves who gave publicity to an enterprise undertaken during their reign? Hinting at this 'family glory' of the Flavians with the very title of his novel would have been further reason for Antonius to dedicate his Ἄπιστα to an influential friend of Domitian – but again, only before Domitian's death!

<sup>40</sup> CITRONI 1995, 481 (my translation).

<sup>41</sup> They are lucidly established by STEPHENS / WINKLER 1995, 101–114.

<sup>42</sup> See Photius, *Bibliotheca* 166, 109b, 13–15.

in his *Refutation of All Heresies*<sup>43</sup> (a usually forgotten testimony, by the way, but one of the oldest ones extant); and that same section was widely quoted later on<sup>44</sup> in Porphyrius' *Vita Pythagorae* and in Lydus' treatise *On the Months*.<sup>45</sup> In the West, the fifth-century grammarian Servius<sup>46</sup> once cites Diogenes as an authority on Thule. He might be relying on the learned Latin poet Serenus Sammonicus († 211), whom he cites immediately afterwards; in any case, it is significant that a novelist is being brought forward as an authoritative reference, in accordance with a trend that constitutes a remarkable feature of the higher cultural milieu in late pagan Rome.<sup>47</sup>

It would however be misleading to assume that scholars formed the only readership of the Ἀπλοτα. There certainly were other, more conventional readers, in search solely of entertainment from the amazing adventures that Antonius had amassed. We now know that this kind of readership – ancient consumers of 'letteratura di consumo' – was a socially transversal one,<sup>48</sup> and this is clearly indicated by the four papyrus fragments which can be attributed with reasonable certainty to the Ἀπλοτα: *Papiri greci e latini* (=PSI) 1177 (Pack<sup>2</sup> 95); *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (=POxy) 3012; and the newly published POxy 4760 and POxy 4761.<sup>49</sup> They are basically contemporary (PSI 1177 and POxy 4760 date from the II-III A.D., POxy 3012 dates from the early III A.D.; POxy 4761 can be

<sup>43</sup> *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 1, 2, 14-15. Hippolytus does not mention Antonius explicitly, but a comparison with Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagorae* 44 and Lydus, *De mensibus* 4, 42 (see below) proves beyond doubt that he is summarizing him. Cf. MARCOVICH 1964, 29-36, with a synopsis and a detailed study of the three passages (then MARCOVICH 1986, 18; 51); his conclusions are accepted by DANA 1998-2000, 80; 105; 112 (who remains very cautious, but envisages the possibility that some other sections of *Ref.* 1 also depend on Antonius).

<sup>44</sup> Possibly through a common intermediate source (MARCOVICH 1964, 30).

<sup>45</sup> Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagorae* 10-17; 32-45; 54-55 (though it is hard to trace definite borders to what is quoted from – or at least indebted to – Antonius Diogenes; nor can we rule out the possibility that Porphyrius drew from the Ἀπλοτα even elsewhere in his book); Lydus, *De mensibus* 3, 5; 4, 42. All passages are reproduced and translated (with notes) in STEPHENS / WINKLER 1995, 130-147; the most important of the Porphyrian ones are also in FUSILLO 1990, 70-79 and notes; see further MORGAN 1998, 3305-3306; DANA 1998-2000, 99-102.

<sup>46</sup> *Servius auctus*, more precisely (*Ad Georgica* 1, 30): *In hac Thyle, cum sol in Cancro est, dies continuus sine noctibus esse dicitur. Multa praeterea miracula de hac insula feruntur, sicut apud Graecos Ctesias et Diogenes, apud Latinos Sammonicus dicit.*

<sup>47</sup> Cf. STRAMAGLIA 1996-2003, 134-135 and nn. 62-64.

<sup>48</sup> This key concept has been formalized and developed by G. Cavallo on various occasions: see esp. CAVALLO 1986-2002, 140-145; 1994, 639-647; 2001; and most of all 1996-2005, esp. 230-232. Add STRAMAGLIA 1999, 92-93 (where I suggest that we should speak more precisely of "eterogeneità trasversale").

<sup>49</sup> Attribution to the Ἀπλοτα has been claimed for no less than three other papyri, but this is at best highly speculative (and I am personally convinced that none of these fragments has anything to do with Antonius Diogenes); for detailed references see STRAMAGLIA (ed.) 2000, 14-15; 37.

assigned more broadly to the same century),<sup>50</sup> and three of them share very similar palaeographic features (PSI 1177, POxy 3012 and POxy 4761 are written in a so-called 'Severe style'). But these four relics survive from manuscripts of remarkably different level. POxy 3012 is the remnant of a copy belonging to someone who could allow himself "a very handsomely set out book roll", written in an elegant 'Severe style', with filler marks for shorter lines;<sup>51</sup> POxy 4761 is of a good standard, but without quite the luxury of the previous item; and still less pretentious is POxy 4760, whose fluid semi-cursive, informal hand suggests a copy to be quickly used and quickly neglected; finally, the owner of PSI 1177 had to read his Antonius in a cheap 'um-Buch', whose scribe had re-used a tax book, writing on its *verso* side.<sup>52</sup> As was often the case, different social strata read the same literary works, but in copies of different standard: everyone resorted to what they could afford.

All in all, thanks – in a large measure – to the strategies deployed by the author himself, *The Incredible Things beyond Thule* experienced a variety and transversality of readers probably unparalleled in ancient fiction, whether fantastic or not. From the close of the first century A.D. down to the mid-ninth century, we can trace Antonius' novel in highly diverse socio-cultural and geographic contexts: the Flavian court circles, the private readership of Graeco-Roman Egypt, some severe Christian Fathers,<sup>53</sup> the Neoplatonic school (Porphyrius), learned scholars (both in the West<sup>54</sup> and in the East, down to Byzantium)<sup>55</sup>...; not to mention the possible echoes in Lucian's *True Stories*,<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> For the datings of PSI 1177 and POxy 3012 I follow CAVALLO 1996-2005, 216; 222; for POxy 4760 and 4761 I follow the *editor princeps*, P.J. Parsons. It should however be noticed that a dating in the early IV A.D., which Parsons also considers possible for POxy 4761, has to be excluded (CRISCI *per litteras*).

<sup>51</sup> See the palaeographical description in STEPHENS / WINKLER 1995, 155.

<sup>52</sup> On POxy 4761 and 4760 cf. CRISCI *per litteras*: 4761 "si può attribuire ad una mano professionale, di scriba avvezzo alla pratica libraria, impegnato a soddisfare le esigenze di un mercato e di una committenza non insensibile alla qualità del prodotto librario, pur senza raggiungere il livello della produzione di lusso vera e propria"; for 4760 è difficile pronunciarsi sul destinatario di un simile prodotto librario; sicuramente lo scriba doveva essere avvezzo a usi documentari, non specificamente librari della scrittura, e il prodotto che egli realizza poteva avere come riferimento una committenza interessata a prodotti di letteratura di consumo di non altissime pretese bibliologiche, da fruire nelle forme di rotoli non espressamente concepiti per la conservazione bibliotecaria". On PSI 1177 see STEPHENS / WINKLER 1995, 149.

<sup>53</sup> In addition to Hippolytus (n. 43), cf. the – albeit generic and dismissive – mentions in Epiphanius (*Panarium* 33, 8, 2 Holl) and Eusebius (*In Hieroclem* 17, 3-5 des Places); and the – not surprisingly less stern – reference in Synesius (*Epistulae* 148, pp. 261, 20-262, 3 Garzya). REITZENSTEIN 1914, 14-17; 31 and REYHL 1969, 135-138 also argued that some passages in Athanasius' *Life of Antonius* should ultimately go back to the Άπιστα, through an intermediate source: but this is extremely doubtful (*pace* DES PLACES 1982, 16).

<sup>54</sup> Servius / Sammonicus (nn. 46-47).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. again Lydus (n. 45) and Photius.

and even taking into account that some minor mentions might be second-hand references.

The textual tradition of the Ἄμιστα thus spanned at least eight centuries: a success which no other ancient fictional work enjoyed, apart from the few ones that did finally make it into preservation. After Photius, however, Antonius' novel was eventually lost: not even the most favourable conditions could unfailingly ensure survival for a work of fantastic fiction – and especially for such a long one, with its twenty-four books. In spite of its relative prominence, *The Incredible Things beyond Thule* remained in the end 'Unterhaltungsliteratur': a kind of product to be (more or less rapidly) consumed, and excluded from the long-term preservation plans reserved to other, 'nobler' types of text. Yet literary fashions, and special technical needs, could do something to improve the reputation of works of entertainment: from time to time even such works were deemed to yield something useful to men of learning, like the long digression that Antonius devoted to Pythagoras; and in such cases, for such parts, the privileged channels of higher literature were charitably opened, to afford durable – if excerpt-like – preservation.

### 3. Unsuitable for (complete) preservation: Julius Africanus' Κεστοί (*Kestoi*)

The above kind of selective rescue is pointedly exemplified by a peculiar work which, though not fictional, has every right to be regarded as fantastic literature: the Κεστοί of Julius Africanus.<sup>57</sup> Mysteries start from the title: *Quilts* or *Embroid-*

<sup>56</sup> The traditional view (first held by Photius, *Bibliotheca* 166, 111b, 32-37 and by the scholiast *ad* Lucian, *Verae historiae* 2, 12 [p. 21, 23 Rabe]) that Lucian knew and used Antonius in his *True Stories* was challenged with strong arguments by MORGAN 1985, but the question remains open: see the recent surveys by DANA 1998-2000, 82-83; BALDWIN 2000; VON MÖLLENDORFF 2000, 104-109; and also BOWIE 2002, 59. Those who believe that Lucian had read Antonius usually assert that the *True Stories* 'parodied' the Ἄμιστα, but VON MÖLLENDORFF *per litteras* remarks: "Of course, Lucian is the 'Spötter' and he is generally very able in parodying, but he is, in the first place, a *pepaideuménos* who imitates (perhaps sometimes tongue-in-cheek) the canonical (and lots of other) authors. If he takes over some points of Antonius Diogenes (*e.g.*: he surpasses him in hinting at but not naming his sources), this is – in my eyes – no parody, because he tries to recombine his material in a pleasing and intellectually provoking way, but not with the aim to poke fun at the whole tradition (why should he?)". On the other hand, on a broader perspective, only a *pepaideuménos* is able to understand/decode all the allusions Lucian is making, and thus possesses the tools to detect where Lucian is just alluding to the literary tradition and where he is using the technique of parody. With regard to the Greek romantic novel, BAUMBACH 2004 has convincingly shown that we can indeed assume parody of that genre in the *True Stories*.

<sup>57</sup> Standard edition, translation and commentary of all surviving remains, and complete study of the author, in the admirable book of VIELLEFOND 1970; subsequently important RAMPOLDI 1981 and 1997 for historical contextualization; and especially THEE 1984

*deries* would be a calque, rather than a translation; according to the latest editor of the fragments, Jean-René Vieillefond, one should rather speak of *Amulets* or *Talismans*<sup>58</sup> – but the issue is far from settled. The work itself was a bizarre product of multifarious erudition by an imperial official of oriental origin,<sup>59</sup> living in the late second to third century A.D. Africanus followed in the footsteps of the Hellenistic pseudo-Democritean tradition, which, under pretensions of philosophy, mingled magic, anecdotage and scientific popularization.<sup>60</sup> The space given to the marvellous in any form was so wide that the Byzantine *Geoponica* straightforwardly referred to the work as Ἀφρικανοῦ παράδοξα (“the marvels of Africanus”),<sup>61</sup> and Michael Psellus later drew from it a tour-de-force sequence of paradoxographic abstracts, concluding that “various further amazing things of this kind are expounded by this man in his Κεστοί”.<sup>62</sup> The imprint of the fantastic was so intrinsic to this work that it even affected its paratextual devices. Africanus equipped his exposition, especially when dealing with magical or paramagical practices, with a set of explanatory illustrations. They are no longer extant, but are often referred to in the surviving portions of the text, and thus we are told that each illustration was included in a so-called ‘starred’ pentagon or hexagon, the well-known magical symbols of cabalistic origin.<sup>63</sup> Every pentagon (we do not know about the hexagons), in its turn, was marked both by a number and by a pair of musical signs. These are each time the ‘vocal’ and ‘instrumental’ signs for the same note, but their musical value appears to bear no significance: the signs simply build up a sequence of notes in the so-called ‘Lydian mode’, so their meaning in the Κεστοί must be not a musical, but a symbolic one. The most plausible interpretation<sup>64</sup> is that they represent a far-fetched way of giving a second numbering to the illustrations: a kind of esoteric paratext, as it were.

We are quite well informed about the instructive ‘Nachleben’ of this peculiar work. Many sections of it were devoted to (diverse oddities in) fields liable to arouse specialized interest – polemology, hippiatrics, metrology, dyeing... –, and

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(which includes a survey of previous scholarship and an English translation of all fragments of the Κεστοί) for magical and religious matters.

<sup>58</sup> VIEILLEFOND 1970, 37 (see his whole fundamental discussion, 29-39).

<sup>59</sup> A Jew, according to a common opinion (also authoritatively shared by VIEILLEFOND 1970, 17 and *passim*); but there are strong arguments against this (RAMPOLDI 1981, 74-75; THEE 1984, 96-97 n. 5; RAMPOLDI 1997, 2451-2452), and an Arabian or Syriac origin (see esp. Rampoldi) appear more likely.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. VIEILLEFOND 1970, 58-60.

<sup>61</sup> *Geoponica* 1, praef. (p. 3, 11 Beckh); cf. VIEILLEFOND 1970, 39 and 69.

<sup>62</sup> *Cesti* 9, 1, 50-51 Vieillefond: ἄλλ' ἅττα τοιαῦτα ὁ ἀνὴρ οὗτος ἐν τοῖς Κεστοῖς αὐτοῦ τερατολογεῖ καὶ διέξεισι.

<sup>63</sup> For these illustrations, and their relation to the relevant parts of the text, see the detailed discussions by VIEILLEFOND 1970, 42-49 and THEE 1984, 199-213 (the latter proposing [p. 190] a hypothetical reconstruction of the drawings and symbols on the pentagons).

<sup>64</sup> Given by H.-I. MARROU *ap.* VIEILLEFOND 1970, 48, who expresses approval (as later apparently does THEE 1984, 204).

those sections were singled out and preserved in excerpts. Not even this practice guaranteed final rescue to all abstracts, but at least some of them have come down to us, and form the great majority of what still survives of the *Κεστοί*.<sup>65</sup> The work as a whole, however, must have found few readers capable of appreciating – or at least understanding – it in its entirety. Africanus dedicated it to the emperor Severus Alexander,<sup>66</sup> a syncretist in religion, and a great lover of occult lore; but even this authoritative device was of little use: in its original bulk (twenty-four books), the *Κεστοί* was to live a short life. How short, and among what users, we can tell with unique precision thanks to a very special piece of evidence.

An Oxyrhynchus papyrus (POxy 412 [Pack<sup>2</sup> 53; van Haelst 674] = *Cest.* 5 Vieillefond)<sup>67</sup> has preserved two columns from book XVIII of the *Κεστοί*, as we know from the surviving colophon. The text in question is a disquisition on the necromantic ritual in Homer's *Νέκυια* (*Nékyia*): Africanus reports a long magical interpolation to the Homeric text (cf. *Od.* 11, 34ff.), claiming to have found it in three important libraries. We are thus lucky enough to have a part of the work directly pertaining to fantastic literature and sorcery; but that is not all. Thanks to a compelling reconstruction by Roger S. Bagnall,<sup>68</sup> we also know the story of this copy of the *Κεστοί*. It was the property of a certain Aurelius Hermogenes *alias* Eudaemon, a rich land-owner and a public personage of some prominence in Oxyrhynchus, who died in or after 276 A.D. The literary interests of this man were not banal: in addition to the *Κεστοί*, he owned not only two copies of the *Iliad* (POxy 1386 and 1392 [Pack<sup>2</sup> 718 and 921]), but also such a *recherché* work as a *History of Sicyon* (POxy 1365 [Pack<sup>2</sup> 2181]). When Aurelius Hermogenes died, his books were inherited, with much further property, by his daughter Aurelia Ptolemais. She too must have been quite educated (certainly, she could read and write without difficulty), but it is impossible for us to know if she ever read her Julius Africanus. And even if she did, she did not deem the *Κεστοί* worth preserving, though the copy itself was respectably written on quite good papyrus. The single leaf that has survived was in fact re-used on the *verso* to transcribe a copy of the will of Aurelia's father (POxy 907 = MITTEIS-WILCKEN 1912, II.2, n° 317). Let us turn to chronology: the *Κεστοί* was published around 230 A.D.;<sup>69</sup> the copy owned by Aurelius Hermogenes cannot have been manufactured later than 265 A.D., or a very short time afterwards;<sup>70</sup> the will of the

<sup>65</sup> They are sections 1-4 and 6-8 in the arrangement of the fragments given by VIEILLEFOND 1970. See further *infra*, n. 73 for Byzantine evidence on epitomized versions of the work.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Syncellus, *Eclogae chronographias* 676 (p. 439, 18-20 Mosshammer).

<sup>67</sup> For a stimulating study of the piece see now KAHANE 1997.

<sup>68</sup> BAGNALL 1992, whose analysis and conclusions are presupposed in what follows.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. VIEILLEFOND 1970, 60-64, who concludes for a date between 228 and 231; similarly RAMPOLDI 1997, 2455-2456, though shifting the *terminus ante quem* to 232/3.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. VIEILLEFOND 1970, 278, though the scholar appears to take for granted – wrongly, in all likelihood: see *infra* in the text – that the date of transcription of the will on the *verso*

same Hermogenes dates from 276 A.D.; the copy of the will preserved on the *verso* of the Κεστοί-sheet was made at an indeterminable date after 276,<sup>71</sup> but in all likelihood no more than a few years later. In the end, hardly half a century sufficed to dry out this channel of the transmission of the Κεστοί – whether it was an unabridged copy, which is more likely at such a high date and in the presence of a complete colophon, or just an excerpt of uncertain size. For non-specialist readers, a work like this was doomed to go out of fashion very soon; and the ancients themselves must have been conscious of how precariously these and many other kinds of literature were transmitted. Writing about the *Chronography* of the same Africanus (published about 220 A.D.), Eusebius says that “it has come down to us”;<sup>72</sup> this suggests a long and eventful route: but it was only around 320 A.D. that Eusebius was writing! Under these circumstances, the probable survival of at least one complete copy of the Κεστοί – the last traceable one – down to the time of Michael Psellus,<sup>73</sup> in eleventh-century Byzantium, may be considered as amazing as the work itself...

#### 4. How preserved, and why: the ‘Lindian ἀναγραφὴ’ (*Anagraphé*), Phlegon’s *Θαυμάσια* (*Thaumásia*), and others

It should be clear by now that fantastic fiction and related texts were mostly lost because they did not belong in those domains of literature that could rely on authoritative and/or durable plans for preservation. This is especially true when the fantastic is the predominant mode of a literary work, as opposed to texts with just single fantastic elements, which were in less danger of being forgotten or not transmitted as literature, because the fantastic was embedded in a (more or less) ‘noble’ mode of writing.<sup>74</sup> In special circumstances, however, textual preservation of markedly fantastic texts did indeed come about; we will try to see how and why by means of a few selected examples.

A Hellenistic testimony shows that a governmental act could play a decisive role both in generating and in preserving a collection of fantastic stories. In 99 B.C. the young Timachidas, later a grammarian of some renown, and a certain

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of POxy 412 coincided with the date of the drawing up of the will itself (dated in its closing to 276 A.D.).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. BAGNALL 1992, 139.

<sup>72</sup> Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6, 31, 2: ἦλθεν εἰς ἡμᾶς; see VIEILLEFOND 1970, 67 n. 102.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Cesti* 9, 1 Vieillefond. It must be taken into account, though, that Psellus might have had in front of him not a complete edition in twenty-four books, but an abridged one; such epitomized editions are already attested by Syncellus in the eighth/ninth century (see n. 66: nine books), and by Photius in the ninth (*Bibliotheca* 34, 7a, 8: fourteen books). See VIEILLEFOND 1970, 67-68; 311-312.

<sup>74</sup> I owe this important point to BAUMBACH / HÖMKE *per litteras*.

Tharsagoras<sup>75</sup> received an official appointment by the council of Lindos in Rhodes (admittedly, upon a proposal by Timachidas' father...). The two were charged to make up an inventory of the offerings presented to the temple of the Lindian Athana through the centuries, and – what concerns us most – to gather and (re)write down the stories of the apparitions (ἐπιφάνειαι) of the goddess, from the Persian Wars onwards. The result of this labour was inscribed on a great slab for future preservation, and has thus survived to our days as the 'Lindian ἀναγραφή'.<sup>76</sup> The story of this enterprise is highly instructive. First of all, it gives a precise idea of the complicated mediations that oral narration underwent, once it entered the channels of written transmission. Timachidas and Tharsagoras did not collect their stories directly from oral storytelling: they explicitly draw "from the letters, the public records and the other inquiries(?)",<sup>77</sup> and mention various names – mostly unknown chroniclers – as their sources for each epiphany. So when the two appointees compiled their official report, they already had to disentangle the three apparition stories<sup>78</sup> through a thick net of written intermediaries. Still more significant is the fact that this set of accounts, one of our oldest Greek collections of supernatural stories, owes its successful transmission to an official decision by a public authority. An exceptionally fortunate, but not an isolated circumstance: two centuries earlier, one Syriscus from Chersonese was honoured by his fellow-citizens with a public decree because "he had painstakingly written down and read (*sc.* in public) the epiphanies of the *Parthenos*", *i.e.* of the Taurian Artemis.<sup>79</sup> The flourishing of a 'literature of epiphanies' (divine apparitions in wartime, mostly) is in fact a well-attested feature of Hellenistic history and culture;<sup>80</sup> so the Lindian public effort to promote and immortalize the collection by Timachidas and Tharsagoras was prob-

<sup>75</sup> The role of Tharsagoras has been mostly underplayed by scholars, but the collegiality of the enterprise is expressly stated in the inscription (*Inscription Lindos (I. Lindos) 2 = Fragmente der griechischen Historiker (FGrHist) 532 F 1, A 12*), and is now duly reasserted by CHANIOTIS 1988, 127-128 and WIEMER 2001, 31-32.

<sup>76</sup> *I. Lindos 2 = FGrHist 532 F 1* (which latter I follow for the text); complete translation, commentary and interpretative essays now in HIGBIE 2003. The epiphanies alone have been republished – with technical commentary – by LONGO 1969, 127-131; recent critical surveys by CHANIOTIS 1988, T 13 (pp. 52-57; 126-128 and *passim*: see index, p. 421) and WIEMER 2001, 27-32 (innovative). Add LIPPOLIS 1988-9, esp. 116-118.

<sup>77</sup> *I. Lindos 2 = FGrHist 532 F 1, A 6-7*: ἔκ τε τῶν | ἐπιστολῶν καὶ τῶν χρηματισμῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων ιστοριῶν (for this restoration see CHANIOTIS 1988, 56-57).

<sup>78</sup> Not without striving, at the same time, for some literary embellishment: see the thorough stylistic analysis by KEIL 1916.

<sup>79</sup> *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae (IOSPE) I<sup>2</sup>, 344 = FGrHist 807 T 1 = CHANIOTIS 1988, E 7* (pp. 300-301 and *passim*: see index, p. 420), 2-4: ἐπειδὴ] Συρίσκος Ἡρακλείδα τὰς | ἐπιφανείας τὰς Πα[ρ]θένου φιλ[ο]πόπως γράψας ἀνέγνω; cf. 16-17: ὅτι τὰς ἐπιφανείας τὰς Π[α]ρ[θ]ένου ἔγραψε. See PRITCHETT 1979, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Fundamental survey in PRITCHETT 1979, 11-46; further references in STRAMAGLIA 1999, 345 and n. 22 (add DUNAND 2002, esp. 75ff.; HIGBIE 2003, 273-288).

ably just one of many analogous direct interventions aimed at the preservation of fantastic fiction (although of course, in the eyes of the promoting cities, what was being preserved was nothing but historical facts, with political – far more than religious – relevance).<sup>81</sup>

A public authority could thus take formal steps to promote the transmission of a work of fantastic literature for its own sake, that is, because of its fantastic content. This helps us to understand why, in the Roman age, Antonius Diogenes, Julius Africanus and many others were so eager to reach the emperor or his circle of friends through their well-aimed dedications. As we have seen, however, this kind of device was far from sufficient to safeguard preservation. Other factors proved more significant and successful, and I would call them indirect as they affected fantastic literature not because, but regardless (if not in spite) of its intrinsic nature. One such factor is obviously the preservation of a piece within a *corpus* of the writings of the same author. Lucian's *True Stories* or *Lovers of Lies* are typical examples in this respect. The most productive factor was however scholarly (or, more broadly, specialist) attention: something useful could be found in a work, even if the work did not attract interest for its own sake. The most frequent result of this 'selective care' was the making of excerpts, which I have repeatedly instanced earlier. Sometimes, though, this attitude could lead to the complete preservation of a literary work, and the process is best exemplified by our main surviving collection of ancient fantastic lore: Phlegon of Tralles' *On Marvellous Things* (Περὶ θαυμασίων, lat. *Mirabilia* [II A.D.]).<sup>82</sup>

In its present shape (the first part of the work is now lost),<sup>83</sup> Phlegon's work juxtaposes a first section, with three long and elaborate stories of revenants (*Mirabilia* 1-3), and a second one, with some dozens of concise reports on diverse anthropological *mirabilia* (*Mirabilia* 4-35). Phlegon was a freedman of Hadrian, and he is quite likely to have dedicated his booklet either to the emperor or to some member of the court, as we know he did with his major work

<sup>81</sup> For the 'Lindian ἀναγραφή' this is especially well stressed by LONGO 1969, 130-131; for parallels in the preservation of such materials see now HIGBIE 2003, *passim* across 258-288.

<sup>82</sup> All *testimonia* on Phlegon and the remains of his writings are collected in *FGrHist* 257. For the Περὶ θαυμασίων, the standard – but inadequate – edition is GIANNINI [1966], 169-219 (with Latin translation); revised text with German translation by BRODERSEN 2002; English translation and commentary by HANSEN 1996. I am preparing a new critical edition of Phlegon's booklet, together with his Περὶ μακροβίων (*Macrobii*; see STRAMAGLIA 1995 for the textual tradition); meanwhile, I have given a preliminary re-edition (with Italian translation and commentary) of *Mirabilia* 1; 2; 3, 3-7 in STRAMAGLIA 1999, 230-253; 360-382; 400-415, to which I refer for further bibliography.

<sup>83</sup> Because of the loss of a quire in the *codex unicus* of the work (see *infra* in the text); cf. STRAMAGLIA 1995, 191-198, where I have argued that the lost part of the Περὶ θαυμασίων amounts to over one third of the original bulk of the work.

*On the Olympiads* (Ὀλυμπιάδες, *Olympiádes*).<sup>84</sup> But this practice – let it be stressed once more – did not entail safe preservation; not surprisingly, the survival of Phlegon's *Περὶ θαυμασίων* seems due to quite different reasons. Our sole textual witness is the famous Heidelberg *codex Palatinus graecus* 398, to which we owe most of what is extant of ancient paradoxography and mythography, as well as the minor geographers and much else. The manuscript belongs to the so-called 'philosophical collection', *i.e.* a well-known group of codices, remarkably homogeneous both in their contents (mostly Platonic and Neoplatonic texts) and in their palaeographic and material features. The manuscripts (seventeen extant ones have been identified so far) can be precisely dated to 850-880, were laid out in Constantinople, and are the result of a keen editorial project of collection and reproduction of philosophical – or broadly such – materials.<sup>85</sup>

Now what did Phlegon's booklet have to do with all this? For its second part, as well as for the other works of Phlegon that follow in the Palatine manuscript – a *Περὶ μακροβίων* and a fragment of the *Ὀλυμπιάδες* – the answer is easy: these rough collections of materials are the heirs of the Aristotelian tradition of collecting all possible peculiarities from the physical world, *thauma* being the impulse to knowledge.<sup>86</sup> But what about the long and literarily developed ghost stories in *Mirabilia* 1-3? They too were exposed to specialist philosophical interest, but mostly for a different reason. For their speculations on the nature and destiny of the soul, philosophers exploited cases of people come back to life *vel similia*. The revival of soldier Er in Plato's *Republic*<sup>87</sup> was paradigmatic throughout antiquity, and its exegesis gave a special stimulus to the collection and investigation of further cases of 'returns from death'. As a result, philosophers, and especially Neoplatonists, came to compile anthologies of stories about ghosts, revenants and the like.<sup>88</sup> Not by chance, the most important surviving collection of such stories after Phlegon's is embedded in Proclus' *Essays on Plato's Republic*;<sup>89</sup> and we know from Photius that Damascius, the last scholar of the

<sup>84</sup> Dedicated to one Alcibiades, a member of the emperor's guard (Photius, *Bibliotheca* 97, 83b, 25-27 = *FGrHist* 257 T 3, 2; cf. *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 134; FEIN 1994, 198). On the relationship between Phlegon's production and Hadrian's interests, and on the possible dedication of the *Περὶ θαυμασίων* to the emperor, see now SCHEPENS / DELCROIX 1996, 450-451; also FEIN 1994, 193-199.

<sup>85</sup> For the history and features of the 'philosophical collection' see in general the very rich survey by PERRIA 1991, with detailed bibliographies. In the following notes I will only add some specifically pertinent studies (which also bring Perria's references up to date).

<sup>86</sup> See now SCHEPENS / DELCROIX 1996, 380-381; 390-392.

<sup>87</sup> 10, 614b-616a.

<sup>88</sup> On this neglected but crucial domain of the ancient ghost story, see STRAMAGLIA 1999, 63-70; 90-91; 107-108.

<sup>89</sup> *In Platonis Rempublicam commentarii* II, pp. 113, 6-116, 18 Kroll. The section opens with a revealing statement: "Many of the ancients collected reports about people who seemingly died, but later came back to life" (II, p. 113, 6-9 Kr.). The stories that Proclus relates show that the cases usually involved more than apparent death, and some protagonists were sheer revenants (see esp. II, pp. 115, 7-15; 116, 2-17 Kr.)!

Academy in Athens (closed 529 A.D.), compiled four λόγοι (*lógoi*) of Παράδοξα (*Parádoxa*), gathering in the third one “sixty-three chapters of extraordinary stories concerning souls appearing after death” – that is, over sixty ghost stories!<sup>90</sup> No surprise that, according to Origenes, it was often respectable philosophers who recounted how “extraordinary things sometimes appear to men”...<sup>91</sup>

In all likelihood, then, within the diverse materials that merged into the ‘philosophical collection’, Phlegon’s ghost stories were meant as a quarry of *exempla* for philosophical scholarship on the soul and related subjects; any literary merits and purposes of the stories themselves must have been of little or no importance to the learned reader(s) who helped to preserve them. It should be noted that two further codices of the ‘collection’ are our sole witnesses, one to Proclus’ just mentioned *Essays on Plato’s Republic*,<sup>92</sup> the other to the main surviving treatises of Damascius, the author of the last, great systematization of the pagan supernatural.<sup>93</sup> The origin of the ‘philosophical collection’ is disputed: Leendert G. Westerink argued that it was put together in late antiquity, in the Platonic school in Alexandria, and later recovered *en bloc* and copied in ninth-century Byzantium;<sup>94</sup> Guglielmo Cavallo, on the contrary, believes that the manuscripts were collected from different sources and transcribed on the initiative of the same learned group that brought the ‘collection’ to life.<sup>95</sup> Whatever the truth, a single editorial project (whether late antique or Byzantine) has salvaged nearly all the most important remains of ancient collections of ghost stories that we still possess. These remains have been preserved as ‘accessories’ to a completely different, highly specialized intellectual domain; in other words, for what I called above indirect reasons. The basic rule thus applies once more: bits of fantastic fiction have survived because they were subsumed into the channels of preservation and reproduction of ‘upper’ literature.<sup>96</sup> A benevolent fate in this case, we should think; but maybe not entirely so. In the light of what we have seen, it is clear that Damascius’ Παράδοξα would have been perfectly fitting for the ‘philosophical collection’; and in fact in Constantinople, in those same

<sup>90</sup> Photius, *Bibliotheca* 130, esp. 96b, 40-42 (cf. 166, 111b, 32-35). For a reconstruction of the arguable structure and features of the work – a veritable *summa* of the supernatural as conceived by Neoplatonic doctrine – see now STRAMAGLIA 1999, 67-70.

<sup>91</sup> *Contra Celsum* 5, 57: Παράδοξα δὲ πράγματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐπιφαίνεσθαι ποτε καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἱστόρησαν οὐ μόνον οἱ ὑπονοηθέντες ἀν’ ὧς μυθοποιούντες ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἀνά πολὺ ἐπιδειξάμενοι γνησίως φιλοσοφεῖν κτλ.

<sup>92</sup> Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 80, 9 + Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, gr. 2197; see PERRIA 1991, 68-70.

<sup>93</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Marciana, gr. 246 (shelfm. 756); see PERRIA 1991, 66-68.

<sup>94</sup> WESTERINK / COMBÈS 1986, LXXIII-LXXX and WESTERINK 1990, esp. 122-123; RASHED 2002, 713-717 has tried to add further evidence for an Alexandrian provenance, but his arguments are very frail.

<sup>95</sup> CAVALLO 2005, 259-263.

<sup>96</sup> In addition to the ones reviewed so far, further reasons and instances for the loss or survival of fantastic literature are scrutinized in STRAMAGLIA 1999, 87-108.

years of the ninth century, Photius could still read that work.<sup>97</sup> So if the 'collection' has preserved of Damascius some unreadable specialist treatises, instead of his amazing stories of ghosts, demons and the like, this surely ranks as the most perverse loss in the whole textual transmission of ancient fantastic fiction.\*

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<sup>97</sup> See n. 90.

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