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THEMISTIOS

Themistios and the origin of Iamblichos.

Hermes. 1988, 116, p 125-128.

• Die Kombination verschiedener Zeugnisse, darunter die bisher missverstandene Stelle Themistios, Or. 24.301b, ergibt, dass Iamblich aus Chalkis ad Libanum stammt.

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THEMISTIOS AND THE ORIGIN OF IAMBlichOS

According to his biographer Eunapios, Iamblichos was born at Chalkis in Coele (VS, 5.1.1; p. 457: πατρις δὲ ἦν αὐτῷ Χαλκίς · κατὰ τὴν Κοίλην [Συρίαν]¹ προσαγορευομένην ἔστιν ἡ πόλις). This has often been thought to indicate Chalkis ad Belum, on the road from Beroea to Apamea, in northern Syria. Eunapios, it has been argued, can only mean Chalkis ad Belum, because the city is situated within the boundaries of the fourth century Roman province called Coele Syria². Another city also named Chalkis, on the Lebanon River and situated in the Lebanon valley between Berytos and Damaskos, deserves serious consideration as the birthplace of the philosopher³. A remark of Themistios previously unnoticed in this context suggests that Iamblichos was born in Lebanon, which necessarily indicates Chalkis ad Libanum as the place of his birth.

It need not be thought that Eunapios is administratively, rather than geographically, precise with his description of Iamblichos' birthplace. In fact, a precise definition of what constituted Coele Syria is difficult to obtain, as administrative and geographic divisions do not always coincide. In Hellenistic times, Coele Syria occasionally was thought to extend as far south as Gaza. Later, Palestine became a separate entity, and Coele Syria was the territory to the north of the new province⁴. In A.D. 194 or 195, Septimius Severus divided Syria into Coele Syria to the north and Syria Phoenicia between Coele and Palestine⁵. The redistribution of provinces under Diocletian resulted in the division of Phoenicia into Phoenicia on the coast and Phoenicia Libanensis or Augusta Libanensis inland, including the Lebanon valley and Anti-Lebanon⁶. In spite of this, Coele Syria was also a geographic area, whose boundaries were not fixed by administrative policy. For example, even after Coele Syria no longer represented the Palestine area administratively, Philadelphia in Dekapolis advertised itself on coins as Φιλαδελφῶν Κοίλης

¹ The word Syria does not appear in the manuscripts, but was added by C. G. COBET, *De locis nonnullis apud Eunapium*, *Mnemosyne* 6, 1878, 328; I. & M. M. AVOTINS, *Index in Eunapii vitas sophistarum*, Hildesheim 1983, 222, credit Arcerius, whose view was accepted by J. C. VOLLEBREGT; cf. the apparatus of G. GIANGRANDE.

² So J. DILLON, *Iamblichii Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta*, Leiden 1973, 4.

³ Most scholars simply refer to Chalkis in Coele Syria and do not address the present question. W. C. WRIGHT, the Loeb editor of Eunapios, offers the view (p. 363, n. 2) that »Syria in the Hollow« represents the area between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, apparently favouring Chalkis ad Libanum.

⁴ Cf. A. B. BOSWORTH, *The Government of Syria under Alexander the Great*, CQ 24, 1974, 48–50, for discussion of terminology in the Hellenistic and early Roman imperial periods. I owe this reference to WALDEMAR HECKEL.

⁵ Cf. DILLON (above, n. 2) 4, for discussion.

⁶ Cf. T. D. BARNES, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 1982, 213, 223.

Συρίας, as late as the early third century A.D.⁷ Geographically speaking, the area defined by Coele Syria is thus very imprecise⁸.

Eunapios' use of the term Syria is equally imprecise, and he uses it to describe a large area. He places the hot springs of Gadara in Dekapolis in Syria (5.2.2; p. 459: μετὰ δὲ χρόνον τινὰ δόξαν αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ τὰ Γάδαρα· θερμὰ δὲ ἐστὶ λουτρὰ τῆς Συρίας), though the city belonged to the Roman province of Arabia. He remarks that Porphyrios was called Malchos at Tyre, τὴν Σύρων πόλιν (4.1.4; p. 456), and that the elder Sopatros, born at Apamea, was a Syrian (5.1.5; p. 458: Σώπατρος γὰρ ἦν ὁ ἐκ Συρίας). Twice he states that Eriphianos originated in Syria (9.1.3; p. 483: Ἐπιφάνιος τε ὁ ἐκ Συρίας, and 11.1; p. 493: Ἐπιφάνιος· οὗτος ἦν μὲν ἐκ Συρίας), though this sophist was born at Petra (Suda, E 2741: Πετραῖος) in Arabia. Andromachos is also called a Syrian (4.3.1; p. 457: Ἀνδρόμαχος ἐκ Συρίας), but other evidence indicates that he was born at Neapolis (Suda, A 2185: Νεαπολίτης ἐκ Συρίας), placed geographically in Syria and administratively in Palestine by Ammianus Marcellinus (14.8.11). Finally, Libanios was born at Antioch, the chief city of what was called Coele Syria (16.1.1; p. 495: ἡ τῆς Κοίλης καλουμένης Συρίας πρώτη πόλεων). Only this last reference is to an administrative region, but with words that imply a mismatch between geographical and administrative terminology, in the view of Eunapios. As such, the statement differs considerably from the view that Iamblichos was born at Chalkis in what was known as Coele [Syria]⁹.

Given Eunapios' lack of precision, other evidence is required. Photios (Bibl. Cod. 181) indicates that Iamblichos derived his descent from Sampsigeramos and Monimos. The first of these is almost certainly the founder of the dynasty of priest-kings of Emesa (Strabo, 16.2.10)¹⁰. He was the father of Iamblichos, phylarch of Arethusa and Emesa, put to death at Actium by Antony (Dio, 50.13.7), whose own son, also named Iamblichos (PIR² I 7), was restored to his ancestral kingdom by Augustus (Dio, 54.9.2)¹¹. Monimos offers greater difficulty, as it is a common Syrian name, of men and of a god,

⁷ Cf. G. W. BOWERSOCK, *Roman Arabia*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, 88, n. 44, citing A. SPIJKERMAN, *The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia*, Jerusalem 1978, 242–257, which I have not seen. BOWERSOCK (90–91) notes: »Philadelphia was at one and the same time a city of the province of Arabia and a city, in local terms, of Coele Syria. The affiliation to the local geographical unit is remarkably the one that is most conspicuous on the coinage of Philadelphia«, and, reviewing SPIJKERMAN's book, *JRS* 72, 1982, 198: »We seem to have here an intimation of a near eastern sense of geography rather different from Rome's provincial organization... Ptolemy the geographer lists Philadelphia among the cities of Coele Syria (5.15) but puts Bostra in Arabia Petraea (5.17) – which is just another way of ignoring Roman administrative divisions.«

⁸ For a full discussion of the term as an official and a geographical name, cf. E. BIKERMAN, *La Coelé-syrie. Notes de Géographie Historique*, *Revue Biblique* 54, 1947, 256–268.

⁹ Two further thoughts occur. In the first place, it is possible that Eunapios did not know which of the two cities he wanted or that he got it wrong. Secondly, and of greater importance, the biographer would less likely need to specify Chalkis ad Belum than Chalkis ad Libanum, because the former was more prominent.

¹⁰ So DILLON (above, n. 2) 4–5, followed by e.g. G. FOWDEN, *The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society*, *JHS* 102, 1982, 40, with n. 53. FOWDEN (49, n. 128) lists other interpretations that have been offered.

¹¹ Dio states that he became king of the Arabians; the kingdom seems to have been that of Emesa, where the younger Iamblichos' son Sampsigeramos later ruled (Jos. AJ 19.338).

and the Greek version of the Arabic Mon'eim or Mun'im¹². According to Stephanos of Byzantium, a city in Syria named Chalkis was founded ὑπὸ Μονικοῦ τοῦ Ἀραβος (s.v. Χάλας). Monikos appears nowhere else, and reasonable emendation to Monimos has been proposed¹³. It seems more likely, and has been suggested previously¹⁴, that Monikos (Monimos) founded Chalkis ad Libanum¹⁵ and not the city in northern Syria which was much nearer to the centre of Seleukid control and marked the boundary between the Seleukid Empire and the Arabs (Diod. 2.17). In addition, Appian states (Syr. 57) that Chalkis ad Belum was founded/reorganized by Seleukos Nikator, while Chalkis ad Libanum was the capital of the Ituraeans, an Arab people (Jos. AJ 14.126; BJ 1.185). The Ituraeans seem to have migrated to the Lebanon from TransJordan during the second century B.C., as Aristoboulos I of Judaea added part of their territory to his kingdom shortly before 100 B.C. (Jos. AJ 13.1f.)¹⁶. Iamblichos' lineage thus appears to derive from the founders of two royal lines, at Chalkis ad Libanum and Emesa, who probably ruled separate groups of Arab peoples. Indeed, Iamblichos may have derived his ancestry from Sampsigeramos precisely because this Emesene was the first of his house to rule after the elimination of the Seleukids by Pompey resulted in a series of legitimate and recognised kingdoms, a stature that Emesa perhaps did not have earlier¹⁷.

A statement of Themistios places Iamblichos firmly in the Lebanon. At the beginning of Oration 24, his protreptikos to philosophy for the citizens of Nikomedia, Themistios discusses the historical struggle between sophists and philosophers, placing himself squarely in that tradition¹⁸. He notes that many people have plotted against him, and describes their efforts metaphorically: ἀλλὰ τράπεζαν Σικελικὴν αἰεὶ προτιθέντες πολλὰς καὶ ποικίλας μηχανὰς ἡμῖν μηχανῶνται, καὶ οἱ μὲν τινες ἐπιχώριον ἄδοντες μέλος, οἱ δὲ Ἀσσύριον καὶ ἐκ Λιβάνου, κηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς τῇ τε οἰκοθεν ἁρμονίᾳ καὶ τῇ θύραθεν (24.301 b). Λιβάνου has been thought a negative reference to Libanios¹⁹; the passage has consequently been used to date the speech to the early 340s, before Libanios began teaching at Nikomedia²⁰. This is a misunderstanding of the passage. Themistios is stating that »native song«,

¹² DILLON (above n. 2) 5, offers Mon'eim, while e.g. H. J. W. DRIJVERS, *The Cult of Azizos and Monimos at Edessa, Ex orbe religionum. Studia Geo Widengren, I* (= *Studies in the History of Religions. Numen Supplement XXI*) Leiden 1972, 364, transliterates as Mun'im.

¹³ DILLON (above n. 2) 5.

¹⁴ I. BENZINGER, *RE* 3, 1899 s.v. Chalkis (14), (15); A. H. M. JONES, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*², Oxford 1971, 254, who identifies Monikos with Mennaïos, father of a Ptolemaios who is the earliest known ruler at Chalkis.

¹⁵ *Contra* DILLON (above, n. 2) 4–5.

¹⁶ Cf. G. BEER, *RE* 9, 1916, s.v. Ituraea.

¹⁷ On Sampsigeramos, cf. R. D. SULLIVAN, *The Dynasty of Emesa, ANRW* II.8, Berlin 1977, 199–205. DILLON (above, n. 2) 5, suggests that Sampsigeramos was the first to assert independence from the Seleukids.

¹⁸ Themistios' private speeches largely focus on this theme; cf. Orr. 23, 26, and 29 among others.

¹⁹ A. BRINKMANN, *Lückenbüsser, RhM* 64, 1909, 639, followed by H. F. BOUCHERY, *Contribution à l'étude de la Chronologie des Discours de Thémistius, AntClass* 5, 1936, 195.

²⁰ BOUCHERY (previous note) 195–196.

»Assyrian song« and the »song from Lebanon«²¹ all draw people away from the study of true philosophy and induce them to other pursuits²².

With Prodikos and Gorgias named as the opponents of Sokrates (300d), the first group refers to the normal pursuits of pagan education and to the popularity of rhetoric²³. Assyrian song is here a reference to Christianity, elsewhere also called Assyrian by Themistios (cf. e. g. Or. 19.229a and the notes of Petau and Harduin [p. 639 Dindorf]). Petau (p. 684 Dindorf) thought that the present passage refers to actual singing in churches; Themistios, however, merely means that Christianity, like oratory in the preceding clause, has an Orphic appeal²⁴. The song from Lebanon, cleverly and grammatically linked to, but not entirely equated with (irrational) Assyrian song, must represent a third category of occupation or preoccupation that drew people from rational philosophy. At this period and in this context, the only possibility is Iamblichan theurgy²⁵. For that interpretation to be valid, Iamblichos must either have been born or have taught in the Lebanon. The other evidence, discussed earlier, combined with this remark of Themistios, indicates quite clearly that Iamblichos was born at Chalkis ad Libanum, the single city of that name situated in the Lebanon²⁶.

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²¹ Cf. G. W. H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (1961) s. v. λίβανος, 2, for the meaning »Lebanon«, not in LSJ.

²² For »song« as a description of a pursuit, cf. also Them. Or. 23.295b, where a philosopher of Sikyon who had been a student of Iamblichos does not pursue τὴν νέαν ᾠδὴν, but the philosophy of the Academy and the Lyceum.

²³ Cf. also Libanios, Ep. 1477, advising Themistios on the proper response to detractors who preferred Asianic oratory: ἀλλ', ὦ μακάριε, ἔασον τὴν ἀγέλην τῶν χηνῶν καὶ σὲ καὶ αὐτοὺς ἀγνοεῖν, καὶ νομιζόντων σὲ μὲν χῆνα, κύνους δὲ αὐτούς.

²⁴ Eun. VS, 23.3.3; pp. 501–502, compares the eloquence of Chrysanthios to the songs of Orpheus.

²⁵ I hope to offer a more detailed discussion of Themistios' attitude to the Neoplatonists, particularly Porphyrios and Iamblichos, elsewhere in the near future.

²⁶ I am grateful to Professor T. D. BARNES, who read an earlier version and suggested structural changes to the argument here offered.