CHAPTER 7

‘Barbarian Sages’ between Christianity and Paganism in Ammianus Marcellinus and the *Cosmographia Aethici*

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Abstract

The chapter compares the representation of ‘sages’, ‘philosophers’ or ‘wise men’ in Ammianus Marcellinus’ *Res Gestae* from the late 4th century and in the *Cosmographia Aethici* of ‘Pseudo-Jerome’ from the 8th century, with a particular focus on the ways in which these two widely differing texts engage with the idea of ‘pagan’ or ‘barbarian’ wisdom traditions and their carriers. In so doing, the chapter compares the two authors’ strategies and techniques in representing inherited, non-Greek (or non-Roman) wisdom among the peoples of the world. Despite the great differences between the two texts and the contexts of their creation, both surprising similarities and telling differences can

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be found between them. Both texts love to refer to secret letters and hidden information; another similarity is the way both authors tried to avoid locking themselves into either a 'Christian' or a 'pagan' way of writing. The resulting complications are in both cases part of the author's reflection on the difficulty of extracting truth from testimonies with various degrees of authority and age.

Keywords: Ammianus Marcellinus, Aethicus Ister, wisdom traditions, representation of barbarians and foreigners, Late Antiquity, Early Middle Ages, Egypt, druids, Magi, Christianity and paganism, apocalypticism, classical reception

'Ethnographicising' Literary Operations between Christianity and Paganism

This chapter is structured around two case studies from the late antique and early medieval Latin literary tradition: those of the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus and the *Cosmographia Aethici* attributed to 'Hieronymus presbyter' (henceforth denoted as 'Pseudo-Jerome'). Widely separated in time, at the first glimpse these texts have only very little in common beyond the fact that both are written in a Latin that is untypical to say the least, and that both seem to take delight in digressions on ethnographical and technical topics. Yet at least one further similarity can be pointed out: both texts choose idiosyncratic ways of operating between the polarities of Christianity and paganism when describing the wisdom traditions of out-groups or 'ethnically presented' groups – what Arnaldo Momigliano calls 'alien wisdom' (Momigliano 1975). My aim in this chapter is to compare the strategies and literary conceits of these two non-contemporary authors as they engage with the traditional theme of 'barbarian sages' among the various peoples of the world, and how the intervening centuries perhaps altered their preconceptions. Their own literary and epistemological aims were, naturally, heavily invested in the ways in which they situated the figure of the barbarian sage along the axis of Christianity and paganism. Their projected religious identities, too, complicate the picture. Overall, however, the barbarian sages seem a promising and little-explored element, from which one can expect some telling slippages between religious and 'ethnic' regimes of knowledge.

Any comparison between the two texts needs to consider their fundamental differences. Ammianus' historiographical text is not

only unambiguous in its generic choices and aims but also includes a remarkable amount of autoptic or autoptically presented information. Indeed, Ammianus' personality can – to a certain extent – be decoded from his prose, warts and all. Ammianus narrated a broad swathe of Roman history, but we are particularly fortunate in that the preserved parts of his work deal with contemporary history in both the East and the West. Ammianus' point of view is that of a native Greek-speaking member of the curial class, possibly from Antioch, who after an active military career seems to have settled down to write a digression-strewn, literarily ambitious and heavily moralising text imbued with Tacitean, Livian, Herodotean and Sallustian gestures. He must have completed his work in or shortly before 391,[1] but the history runs only until 378. It is a rich and complex text, partly because Ammianus, in his later years, so confidently reinvented himself as a learned and classicising writer, yet without being averse to satire and humour. In terms of values, he staunchly put his trust in traditional elite values and the resilience of the empire.[2] His own self-definition, *miles quondam et Graecus*, is an expression that already communicates a lot to the reader yet leaves some important questions – such as religious affiliation – open (Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.16.9).

In comparison, the *Cosmographia Aethici* is a much more intractable text. What we know for sure is that it is a literary forgery in *prosimetrum* from no earlier than the first half of the 8th century (possibly dating from soon after 727, as it uses the Latin translation of Pseudo-Methodius' *Apocalypse*). The language and the contents of the *Cosmography* show some ties to southern English monastic centres and the Irish learned tradition, although the most recent scholar to have devoted much attention to *Cosmography*, Michael Herren, suggests that nonetheless it was completed in northern Italy or Merovingian Francia (Herren 2011a, lxii–lxxiii). Its genre has been variously characterised.[3] The aims of its writer can be only vaguely suggested, though some type of parodic or ludic register would probably have been in the foreground at some stage of the no doubt multi-layered formation process of the text.[4] The *Cosmography* claims to be an expurgated rendition by Jerome the church father of a cosmographical text written centuries earlier – indeed before Christ – by a widely travelled pagan sophist called Aethicus Ister. Aethicus is called a 'Scythian', though whether his Histria/Istria is the one along the Black Sea or the Adriatic one seems to fluctuate within the text.[5] The author manipulates the 'found text'

paradigm of his forgery with aplomb[6] and creates three distinct voices. His piously sermonising 'Jerome' often intersperses his opinions into the text and uses many of the favourite expressions of the *presbyter*, while Aethicus' own voice when quoted *verbatim* is alternatingly bombastic and voluminous, or cryptic and sombre.[7] Between these two, there are the more neutral sections representing the supposedly abbreviated narrative of the original. Autoptic authority-building is present, but at one remove: 'Jerome' often points out Aethicus' unique source value as a personal witness to many marvels.

Despite their differences, the two texts have also some similarities. One important shared aspect is that both writers choose to inhabit complex positions in between paganism and Christianity. Ammianus' religious outlook is famously difficult to triangulate, and guesses have ranged from a lukewarm and elusively post-Julianic pagan to an unconvinced or opportunistic Christian.[8] Generally, Ammianus has good words to say about almost all suitably old wisdom traditions – Christianity included. Yet, he also seems ready to warn about the tendency of any religion to get corrupted by its entrenched elites. Examples of both of these positions will be presented shortly. The religious layers and pseudo-authorial masks in the *Cosmographia Aethici*, on the other hand, are even trickier to disentangle. While the writer obviously was a Christian and knew the writings of Jerome himself well enough to allude to them in some places, his formulaic warnings against the spiritual dangers of reading pagan authors do not preclude him from including plentiful references to non-Christian wisdom traditions. In addition to this, the text creates the admirable but fallible figure of a 'Scythian' Aethicus, whose eventual search for worldly wisdom seems to be frustrated. Aethicus' own authority is frequently buttressed by even earlier pagan sages, although with the almost-constant supervision of 'Jerome', who emerges as a dyspeptic and somewhat paranoid figure.

Druids, Magi and the Egyptian Wisdom in Ammianus Marcellinus

Ammianus' famous Gallic excursus in Book 15 includes several very positively evaluated references to the learned classes among the Gauls, who in his own time cannot have had anything more than a literary kind of existence.[9] At the beginning of the ethnographicising sec-

tion, Ammianus himself initiates his discussion of Gaul in the most elevated way possible by allusively likening himself to Virgil setting out to describe Aeneas' Italian adventures. The Aeneas of Ammianus' latter-day narrative was of course Julian, who laid the groundwork for his imperial rule while serving as a caesar in Gaul – an area that would also have foregrounded associations with Julius Caesar and his rise. Virgil in the guise of Mantuanus is for Ammianus an unambiguously authoritative figure, but what is more to the point is that the whole beginning section of the excursus brings together several other explicitly or implicitly high-quality authorities.

> Now, since – as the lofty bard (*uates*) of Mantua said – 'a greater work I undertake' and a greater train of events arises before me, I think it is timely to describe the Gallic regions and the lay of the land … The ancient writers, in doubt as to the earliest origin of the Gauls, have left the record half-completed about the matter, but later Timagenes, a Greek both in accuracy as well as language, collected out of various books these facts that had been long forgotten … The Druids say that a part of the people was in fact indigenous but that others also poured in from the remote islands and the regions across the Rhine, driven from their homes by continual wars and by the inundation of the stormy sea.[10]

The excursus is very conventionally flagged as a geographic-ethnographic digression, and its data is constantly underpinned with respectable authority figures, both Gallic and external. Timagenes, the Greek historian whom Ammianus used as a source for much of his Gallic section, is praised for his compilatory work in dredging up nigh-forgotten factoids and saving them from being lost. Ammianus compliments him exactly because he imagines himself along the same continuum of Hellenic enquiry. Timagenes' account of the Gallic origins is given next, and although the extent of the fragment is very hazy, it probably includes the explanation which Ammianus attributes to the authority of the Druids.[11] Thus, a Greek explanation is linked with the one from local sages, and neither one is given particular primacy by Ammianus: they are left to complement each other in a rather Herodotean fashion. This, in many ways, is also how Ammianus envisioned the role and place of Gaul in the history of both the Roman empire and civilisational processes alike. The assimilation of Greek and native learning is taken further in a later passage:

> Throughout these areas, men gradually grew civilised and the study of the laudable arts flourished, initiated by the Bards, the Euhages, and the Druids. The Bards sang to the sweet strains of the lyre the valorous deeds of famous men composed in heroic verse, whereas the Euhages investigated and sought to explain the sublimities of nature. The Druids, being loftier than the rest in intellect, and bound together in fraternal organisations, as the authority of Pythagoras determined, were elevated by their investigation of obscure and profound subjects, and scorning all things human, pronounced the soul immortal.[12]

Ammianus' view of the three Gallic learned groups is much more positive than anything preceding it in the literary tradition. Unlike so many of his predecessors, he does not mention the Gallic human sacrifices, and as the passage above shows, the doctrine of rebirth of the soul, which had raised eyebrows among many previous Greek and Latin writers, appears to Ammianus a wholly Pythagorean and elevated notion.[13] The language of lifting up is present here (*celsiores*, *erecti sunt*, *despectantes*), as it is in a later passage about the Brahmins (see below). The *euhages* – a rendition of the group name *uates* known from earlier lists of Gallic learned men – is perhaps best explainable as a garbled form resulting from textual transmission, but one that does at least avoid confusing them with the *uates Mantuanus excelsus* (another figure characterised by his elevated attribute), who initiated the excursus.[14] It becomes clear from Ammianus' estimation of the value of Gallic wise men that the progressive Christianisation and pagan monotheism of the later empire had almost certainly had an influence upon his epistemic field to begin with, even if as a writer Ammianus sought to keep his personal religious stance safely inscrutable. Through the mention of Pythagoras, the Greek model is brought as close as possible to the native Gallic learning, as was also the case in the previous passage initiating the excursus. Ammianus' perennial fascination with secret knowledge is also present; this will emerge in a much-heightened guise in his later description of Egypt.

Ammianus' attitude can be briefly compared with Decimus Magnus Ausonius' roughly contemporary *Professores* and the few references to the Druids contained in this text. Ausonius could use his colleague Attius Patera's alleged 'Druidic' pedigree as a praiseworthy topic: he 'reportedly' hails from the 'lineage of the Druids at Baiocassum [Bayeux], and draws his lineage from the sacred temple of Belenus'.[15]

The whole family's naming conventions are explicitly linked with the Greek cult of Apollo. Ausonius' sceptical but respectful tone about Patera's Druidic forefathers makes it quite likely that he is reporting Patera's own claims: indeed, Patera may well have just jumbled together anything suitably 'ethnic' and ancient. Thus, we may be dealing with an act of memory creation whereby a member of the Gallo-Roman intellectual elite constructed an identity that would have linked classical and regional antiquities into an erudite family lineage.[16] These late Roman aristocrats could, perhaps, opt to foreground a province-based 'Gallic' identity, which enabled them to reclaim some of the more laudable parts of their conventionally imagined pre-Roman past. The Druids are included in Patera's ancestry precisely because they are 'barbarian wise men', yet their relationship with the Greek mythology is presented in a way that harmonises a previously antagonistic relationship.[17]

For Ammianus, Ausonius and some of their contemporaries, too, the Druids had receded into a wholly literary and antiquarian register, and their epistemic mooring points within the actual perceptions of Gaul were becoming tenuous and malleable. Their 'barbarian' status was as immaterial as their 'paganism' – indeed, the latter aspect is never commented upon, except implicitly through their location in the listings of 'wise barbarians', already in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* (1.15.70.1–3). It can be noted in passing that Ammianus stands out among our sources as the last author who presents the Gallic learned classes of Druids and Bards together as a pair, the way they had been presented at least since Caesar, and possibly since Posidonius in the early 1st century BCE.[18] Ammianus' way of presenting them foreshadows – and may even have directly influenced – the similarly formulated idea of a progressively civilised 'chosen people among barbarians', with their ancestral songs performed to the sounds of a cithara, expressed by Jordanes when he narrates an elaborate version of the antiquities and civilised pedigree of the Goths.[19]

For Ammianus, Gaul was wholly assimilable into Graeco-Roman history and civilisation, and his Druids enjoy a curiously timeless existence within the text. In the case of Egypt too – yet much more vividly expressed and contextualised still within his own lifetime – Ammianus finds old wisdom and learning alive. As with the investigations of the Gallic sages, the unlocking of the mysteries of the world is celebrated in his passage about Alexandria:

> And although very many writers flourished in early times as well as these that I mentioned, nevertheless not even today is learning of various kinds silent in that same city; for the teachers of the arts show signs of life, and the geometrical measuring-rod brings to light whatever is concealed, the stream of music is not yet wholly dried up among them, harmony is not reduced to silence, the consideration of the motion of the universe and of the stars is still kept warm with some, few though they be, and there are others who are skilled in numbers; and a few besides are versed in the knowledge which reveals the course of the fates. Moreover, studies in the art of healing – so often required in this neither frugal nor sober life of ours – are so enriched from day to day that, although a physician's work itself indicates it, yet it is a commendation enough about his knowledge of the art if he has said that he was trained at Alexandria.[20]

The professions of the natural philosopher and the priest are, as Rike has noted, frequently assimilated within Ammianus' conception of wisdom (Rike 1987, 73). Overall, Ammianus emphasises the continuation and the primordial nature of Alexandrian scholarship; in this sense, broader ideas about 'Egyptian wisdom' had become directed, *pars pro toto*, at the metropolis of the region. Interestingly, Egypt's legendary reputation for fecundity and fertility may have directed the passage's language: several verbs are common to expressions of growth, the agricultural cycle and the natural world (*floruere*, *spirant*, *exaruit*, *recalet*, *augentur*). Yet Ammianus' tone also points to his recognition of a certain fragility within these ancient orders of knowledge in the face of the changes of his own time. Things are precarious: the land is fertile, but careful nurture is needed in these times.

Towards the end of the passage, after a moralising side remark about current lifestyles that necessitate the frequent intervention of doctors in people's lives, Ammianus notes the universal authority that Alexandria-educated physicians have – a theme which is widely attested in later imperial-era literature.[21] We can, for instance, compare this with the gushing appreciation of the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, the Greek original of which was possibly written in the late 4th or early 5th century by a merchant in the East Mediterranean.[22]

> Almost alone in the whole world, [Alexandria] has an abundance of philosophical truth, and you find most kinds of philosophers there.

> This is also why Aesculapius wished to grant to the city's possession the knowledge of medicine – it is agreed all over the world that this city has the best medics [to send] to all peoples.[23]

Alexandria's reputation for magical and religious practices permeates much of the late antique writing, and it forms a continuation with already well-established ideas about Egypt being famed for the same things.[24] Ammianus' love of arcane things – especially secret writings – is also present in his next passage on Alexandria (22.16.20), which refers approvingly to the crucial but, by his time, conventional and even proverbial role of Egypt as the point from which religion spread out into the world. In fact, both Ammianus and the anonymous author of the Greek original for *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* indicate that Egypt, in religious terms, was for the late Roman empire what India is for the modern Western conception of 'world spirituality': 'There, for the first time, long before other men, they discovered the cradles, so to speak, of the various religions, and now carefully guard the first beginnings of worship, stored up in secret writings.'[25]

Again, if we compare Ammianus' image of Alexandria with the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, we see striking similarities which may perhaps be explained by the shared Eastern Mediterranean background of the two texts – the doxic knowledge of the time. It could even be imagined that the raison-d'être of the *Expositio* could be to present a sort of 'conversation manual' on mostly commercial topics to aid in talking with people from any province: this seems to be supported by the author's short preface, addressed to someone called 'my son', who is said to derive many benefits from having absorbed the details of the text (*Expos. mundi* 1–2 (D)). Unlike in Ammianus, the *Expositio* does not betray any impression of Egypt's proverbial wisdom traditions hanging by a thread. In it, Egypt's primary export are *sapientes* and doctrines (besides papyrus); its specialists – for there are no generalists in Egypt – are the best in their fields. From these two apparently unconnected but intriguingly similar sources, vestiges of a popular image of the 'wisdom traditions' of late imperial Egypt seem to emerge.

> In any case, Egypt is overflowing with wise men more than any other place in the world. In Alexandria, the metropolis of the country, you can find all kinds of philosophers and all doctrines. And so, when once there was a competition between Egyptians and Greeks about which of

> them would receive the Musaeum, the Egyptians were found to be more eloquent and complete, and the Musaeum was assigned to them. And it is impossible to find in any matter whatsoever a sage like an Egyptian, and thus every philosopher or a scholar of literary studies who remained in that country were always the best. For there is no deception among them, but every single one knows with certainty whatever they are expounding – which is why no-one studies everything but each perfects their own study by being an adornment to their own field.[26]

The enthusiastic and – one might venture – even slightly fawning description of the skills and excellence of Egyptian philosophers and scholars sounds perhaps naïve in its advertisement-like pitch, but it resembles Ammianus' more measured references in treating wisdom and hidden knowledge as properties particular to Alexandrians. This harks back to earlier imperial-era thinking about population groups and their stable characteristics, which could be explained through climates, astral influences or combinations of all three. Claudius Ptolemy, in several passages of his *Tetrabiblos*, explains how the astrological influences over Egypt make its inhabitants particularly adept at 'all kinds of usages, customs, and rites in the service of all manner of gods'. They are also well versed in divine matters 'because their zenith is close to the zodiac and the planets revolving about it' and, in a somewhat self-advertising manner, supremely suited to mathematical and scientific pursuits (Ptol. *Tetr*. 2.2, 3).

The last group to whom Ammianus devotes an ethnographical description in his work are the Magi of Persia, who feature in several paragraphs within Ammianus' extensive Mesopotamian excursus. Their doctrines, glossed with the Greek term *hagistia*, are approvingly described through Plato's authority as the purest form of worship of the gods.[27] Thus, the Magian rituals become safely dissociated from the unambiguously negative associations that the term *magia* would have brought to mind among Ammianus' audiences (Den Boeft 1999, 184). This *scientia* is part of the distillation process of Brahminic wisdom to the west.

> In these parts are the fertile lands of the Magi, about whose sects and pursuits – since we have chanced on this point – it will be in place to give a few words of explanation. According to Plato, the most eminent author of lofty ideas, magic, under the mystic name of *hagistia*, is the

> purest worship of the gods. To the science of this, derived from the secret lore of the Chaldaeans, in ages long past, the Bactrian Zoroaster made many contributions, and after him the wise king Hystaspes, the father of Darius. When Zoroaster had boldly made his way into the unknown regions of Upper India, he reached a wooded wilderness, whose calm silence the lofty intellects of the Brahmins control. From their teaching, he learned as much as he could grasp of the laws regulating the movements of the earth and the stars, and of the pure sacrificial rites. Of what he had learned he communicated something to the understanding of the Magi, which they, along with the art of divining the future, hand on from generation to generation to later times.[28]

The origins of the Magian doctrines are in the immemorially old Chaldaean art, to which the two proverbially wise Easterners, Zoroaster and Hystaspes, added their own. Zoroaster, in particular, appears in Ammianus' telling as some sort of sacral Alexander figure (or perhaps a prefiguration of Apollonius of Tyana). He braves the Indian jungles in pursuit of the 'lofty intelligences' of the Brahmins – here, just like in the Druidic section, we can see the language of elevation being put into use. The purity of the rites and the genealogically unbroken connection of this primal wisdom is emphasised (23.6.33–34); the latter aspect is also present in less positive presentations of the Magian arts, such as in the Syriac *The Book of the Laws of the Countries*, attributed to the late-2nd-century monotheist Bardaişan of Edessa: 'Then I have told you of the Persians and the Magians, who not only marry their daughters and sisters in the climate of Persia, but in every place they came to, they have kept to the law of their fathers and observed the secret practices they transmitted to them.'[29]

In the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, the Magi show up very early indeed – even before the outset of the geographical progression from India towards the lands of the Romans. They are explicitly marked out for being a suitable starting point – apparently just as much from an epistemological as from a geographical point of view. The Magian art, for this anonymous contemporary of Ammianus, appeared the earliest pagan source of wisdom, but within the same paragraph he – or his later, undoubtedly Christian redactor into Latin – already gestures towards Judeo-Christian sources of authority:

> Where else should we begin but with the Magi? For our predecessors, trying to discuss these matters, were able to say something, [but only Moses, the prophet of the Jews who was full of divine spirit, wrote things that are certain. After him,] the sequences of provinces and times were described by Berossus, the philosopher of Chaldaeans, whose writings were followed by Manetho, the Egyptian prophet, and Apollonius, likewise a philosopher of Egyptians [as well as the sage Josephus, teacher of the Jews, who wrote about the war of the Jews when he was captured by the Romans]. After them, Menander of Ephesus and Herodotus and Thucydides wrote similar things but not better than the oldest ones.[30]

The disparate wisdom traditions of 'ethnic sages' is here, too, collated and confirmed by their juxtaposition with each other: the technique itself could be applied with equal efficiency irrespective of the writer's own religious stance. The possibly later additions to the text go on to single Moses out for compliments; it can be doubted whether this comment and the following one about Josephus are able to provide any hints about the religious identity of the writer. More probably, they pertain to his early redactors or translators (Grüll 2014, 638–39; Rougé 1966, 121–23; see also Lampinen 2021, 20–36). The list form, often interacting with the idea of 'pedigree of wisdom' and its ever-branching derivation among the peoples of the world, is among the most fundamental structures of the late antique understanding of 'alien wisdom', as many scholars have noted (Buell 2005, esp. 29–33, 76–80; see also Broze, Busine and Inowlocki 2006; Clark 1999; Stroumsa 1999). Also notable is the reverence that the oldest age of any given wisdom tradition was automatically thought to command (Pilhofer 1990).

To return to Ammianus: just as in the case of the Druids of Gaul, he also approves of the Magi's account of Persian religious customs (23.6.34). Moreover, he avoids any negative characterisation of their doctrines. Plato serves in the Persian excursus the same purpose for Ammianus as Timagenes and Virgil do in the Gallic digression. But, as perhaps befits such a proverbially influential group of sages situated among an out-group famous for its autocracy, Ammianus does not entirely avoid the more negative implications of their power. In paragraph 35, he notes that the numbers of Magi have grown along with their wealth and power, and that they are accountable only to themselves. Finally, he goes on to paraphrase the Herodotean story of the Magian takeover after Cambyses' death.

> From that time on for many ages down to the present, a large class of men of one and the same descent have devoted themselves to the service of the gods. The Magi also say (for it is right to believe them) that they guard on ever-burning braziers a fire sent down from heaven in their country, and that a small portion of it, as a good omen, used to be carried before the Asiatic kings. The number of Magi of this origin in old times was very small, and the Persian potentates made regular use of their services in the worship of their gods. And it was sin to approach an altar or touch a sacrificial victim before one of the Magi, with a set form of prayer, poured the preliminary libations. But they gradually increased in number and became a strong clan, with a name of their own; they possessed country residences, which were protected by no great walls, and they were allowed to live in accordance with their own laws, and through respect for religion were held in high esteem. From this seed of the Magi, as the ancient records relate, seven men after the death of Cambyses mounted the Persian throne, but (we are told), they were overthrown by the party of Darius, who made himself king by the neighing of a horse.[31]

As a writer, Ammianus tended to be very circumspect in ambiguating his attitude towards Christianity and its role within the Roman state. Thus, it could be ventured that his comments on the privileges and growing influence of the Magi, as well as their subsequent involvement in the politics of choosing the King of Kings, could be read beyond their ethnographical pose as a possible cautionary tale against a comparable development taking place within the Christian Roman empire. Despite the overall confidence of his relationship with the past and his implicit trust in the eternity of Rome, Ammianus remains throughout his historical work strongly aware and concerned about potential sources of Roman weaknesses and strengths. It could be that through his emphasis on the encroachment of the Magi's privileges, he hoped to caution against religious elites turning into a future source of Roman weakness. This would be broadly similar to how, in book 31, he earmarks the sizeable Gothic contingents in army units as a potential handicap or challenge to Roman military success (Amm. 31.16.8).

The Pagan Sages and 'Alien Wisdom' in the *Cosmographia Aethici*

The contents of Pseudo-Jerome's *Cosmographia* do not match its title particularly well. Only the sections 1–23 form a proper cosmography, with 'Jerome' introducing 'Aethicus the Istrian' and proceeding to discuss the structure of heaven, hell, earth and sky; the views of Aethicus, *vis-à-vis* other philosophers, on the parts of the cosmos are also explained.[32] Sections 22–23 form a transfer passage to the largest internal division, the 'travel novel' of Aethicus' first journey (24–104). This is interspersed with Jerome's repeated editorial warnings and procedural notes, excursus on the ship types of different nations, Jerome's rants about heresies, and metric sections quoted in Aethicus' own voice. Towards the end of the 'travel novel', Aethicus' praise of Mount Olympus morphs into an allegory about Alexander the Great, and an oracular exhortation for him to return to do battle with the Muslims who are ravaging Cyprus. Sections 105–11 describe a much shorter second journey, and the whole is concluded (112–13) with an excursus on winds and the supposed new type of alphabet which Aethicus is said to have devised.

In *Cosmography* 1, 'Jerome' introduces 'Aethicus', whom he has reportedly selected because he wrote about things which 'Moses and the Old Testament' did not mention and thus has some value in filling in gaps in the Christian knowledge:

> While investigating the pages of the philosophers in keen study, I assigned to myself a task proportionate to my enthusiasm to investigate learned writers, the deeper places to a significant degree, and cursorily <to explain> astronomical matters and the excelling heights, which no one yet is able to perceive. Those [writers] attempted to speak about such great matters, which we with trepidation and hesitation have begun to transcribe and select for use <and> boldly to discuss. I have reproduced here in selection the very difficult matters which the cosmographer Aethicus learned to pursue, and also the matters which Moses and the Old Testament omitted in their narrative. Hence, I implore my readers not to think me imprudent, when they discover that certain very great [achievements] owed to the daring of others are harmonised by my investigation.[33]

In section 17, the figure of the exotic philosopher king Hiarcas is rather cleverly taken from Jerome's own genuine letter (*Ep.* 53.1.4). Originally, he stems from Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* 3.16, where he is the ruler of the Brahmins. The Hiarcas of *Cosmography* is more hazily located, sitting by the southern desert edge of the ocean. The 'table of the sun', which Pseudo-Jerome takes to be an astral phenomenon, is in fact a misunderstanding of the Philostratean altar that is lit with the sun's rays (Herren 2011a, xxi and 69 *ad loc.*).

> Now in comparison to other philosophers, Aethicus the cosmographer wrote both clearly and elegantly. We too in some of our letters mentioned the philosophers and their laborious studies, [for example], Hiarcas sitting on a golden throne in the sand at the southern edge of Ocean arguing with his disciples about the table of the sun [and] the difference between stars and astral bodies. Of all these I admire Aethicus the cosmographer for his painstaking and invaluable skill. He criticised these and other philosophers for saying and repeating much and explaining very little or only a few things in aid of scientific learning. He rebuked the philosophers Cluontes and Argyppus, the Scythian astrologers, and the Mantuan. He criticises them for publishing a lot of things to no purpose.[34]

The ancient philosophers Cluontes and Argyppus demonstrate the way in which Pseudo-Jerome went on inventing names for his sages: the first takes his name from Cleanthes the Stoic, while the second is apparently a demoted silvery counterpart of Chrysippus, as the previous editor Otto Prinz suggested (Prinz 1993, 104 n. 90 *ad loc.*). These apparently Greek or Roman philosophers are mentioned in the company of 'Scythian astrologers', but whether these 'Scythians' are meant to represent the natives of Aethicus' own country is left open. If this is the case, Aethicus emerges as a sort of Anacharsis-like figure, who sets out to seek foreign wisdom after having become disillusioned with the learning of his compatriots.[35] In any case, all these philosophers seem to 'Jerome' less worthy than Aethicus; Virgil as Mantuanus is repeatedly censored for his pointless learning that just confuses the reader (e.g. in *Cosmography* 43).[36] On the other hand, the Cosmographer has also hidden in the text a reference to illuminated manuscripts of Virgil (*Cosm.* 66b; see Herren 2011a, xli–xlii). The paganism of all of these wise men, whether Greek or barbarian, is equally suspicious, though

this futility is mostly cast into relief through a comparison with Aethicus, the plucky wisdom-seeker who pesters all of the impostors into submission whenever he meets them. Despite his own 'riddles', Aethicus' sage pronouncements also seem to be projected forward in time as a comment against sophistry and the overly rhetorical expounding of far-fetched theories.[37]

> When the seasons were suitable, with utmost care he sailed the Ocean with his disciples [to] other parts of the world, to islands great and small from South to West – from Taprobane to Syrtinice and Calaopa as far as the Adriatic, and from there as far as [a point] beyond Cadiz and the Pillars of Hercules. He sojourned there for a year debating with the philosopher Aurelius and with Arbocrates, and they were unable to explain any of his riddles … He called Spain, though replete with agriculture and excellent wines as well as brute beasts and fat calves, rich in delights, thin in wisdom. He hastened on to Ireland and remained there for some time poring over their books, and he called them *ideomochi* or *idiotistae*, that is, 'unskilled workers' and 'ignorant teachers'. Regarding them as worthless, he says: 'to come to the end of the world and arrive in Ireland is a burdensome task but without profit.' He lashed out against their great uncouthness, but this did not advance towards a benefit. Ireland has unskilled cultivators and instructors, it has destitute inhabitants. Then he sailed to Thyle and the British Isles, which he called the Brutish isles; the people there were wholly unskilled, and coarseness abounded.[38]

A multitude of imaginatively named 'philosophers' populate the world through which Aethicus travels. The same can be said of heretics. The names of the regions, likewise, form an evocative interplay of classical places and wholly invented ones. Aethicus also gives proverbial-sounding judgements on the lands he visits: Spain is thin in wisdom despite its delightful produce, while Ireland seems to have been a huge disappointment. Britain appears merely 'Brutain' to him – a pun that is lifted straight from Isidore's *Etymologies*.[39] It is particularly these two ethnicised slurs which would make very little sense in their emphasised form if the writer had not had some connection to Irish and English learning. Such ethnicisingly cast judgements about wise and foolish peoples – often in list form – went on to form a very familiar part of medieval scholarly/miscellanistic writing.[40] Some such

listings come quite close to the chronological context of the Cosmographer, and no doubt reflect a tradition that had earlier antecedents.[41] Indeed, it could even be suggested that in the case of *Cosmography*, such judgements could have been influenced by the actual Jerome's commentaries on the Pauline epistles, referring to discussions of the typical vices of different provincial populations.[42] We already saw such elements of doxic knowledge in the case of Ammianus and his contemporaries.

Aethicus' respect for biblical learning is demonstrated in *Cosm.* 30 by the fact that he omitted things which are already in the Old Testament: he is explicitly said to have praised the Mosaic Law and preserved much from Josephus. Thus 'Jerome' implies that the expurgated *Cosmography* can be read as a supplement to Josephus; this resembles the way in which the author of *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* locates the epistemological contribution of his own text.[43] In these points, Aethicus becomes one among the number of 'righteous pagans'. Even his silences confirm this; he does not write about ungodly peoples, as doing so could lead to their practices gaining repute – a consideration that heresiographers sometimes expressed (Berzon 2016, 120).

> The same philosopher does not describe but omits the origins of other peoples which the sacred writing of the Old Testament makes known because he calls all the Scriptures the living fountain of the laws and liberal letters and the mother of histories. He showers much praise on the Torah of Moses, and retains much of Josephus and his history, and did not wish to describe anew or repeat those matters which he found in their books. He also says that he did not write about [these] nomadic and stupid peoples on the ground that their unworthy and foolish deeds and actions were discovered in the gods of the pagans and their abominations and idolatry, and many other things in the magical arts, and nor refined by true knowledge of God through the mouth of the prophets. Truly, Holy Scripture fittingly illuminates this section of his own writing.[44]

Jerome's approval and Aethicus' supposed authorial intention become entangled at this point, but 'Jerome' does not dwell on this, stamping instead the final seal of authority – that of the *scriptura sancta* – onto his own version of Aethicus' text. Yet he needs to continue monitoring the dosage of unconventional (i.e. fictive, or rather 'marked as

potentially fictive') material, as later demonstrated in *Cosm.* 43, where expurgation is noted to be necessary to prevent moral damage to the reader.

Alexander the Great is a major figure in the *Cosmography*, as he is in most of the Eastern chronography tradition; close parallels can be found in the Pseudo-Methodian *Apocalypse*, which clearly had an influence on the writer of the *Cosmography*, as well as in the Γ-redaction of the Pseudo-Callisthenian *Alexander Romance* – though Pseudo-Jerome accessed the Alexander material mostly through Julius Valerius' *Res gestae Alexandri Magni* (Herren 2011a, lxxvii). The figure of the conqueror-king is subtly altered, however, and crops up in somewhat surprising places. It is not wholly unexpected that Alexander gets intimately tied in to the vision of the Last Days in the Cosmographer's presentation, but he also becomes quite extensively Christianised. He seems indeed to be a figure much like Aethicus, a pagan living before the arrival of Christ who nonetheless respects the Jewish religion (cf. Jos. *Ant.* 11.306–46). He is also in some personal connection with the only God, becoming a sage-like figure who convinces even 'Jerome'. In *Cosmography* 41a–b, for instance, Alexander acts upon a debilitatingly frightful vision of the damage that the Impure Nations might unleash upon the world. He sacrifices to the Christian God on Mount 'Chelion' (probably from Helicon) and receives via divine grace a stratagem, by which he traps the Impure Nations behind a mountain wall up in the north.

> [Alexander] groaned and built altars on Mount Chelion, and sacrificed victims to God, and for a whole day and night he prayed asking for God's guidance and mercy, and he found a great stratagem. Through God's power a heavy earthquake occurred on that mountain … But we believe that the providence of God was shown to this great prince. And not without good reason can [Alexander] be called 'the Great', who found such useful stratagems for checking the rage of these wild peoples, whose release we believe will occur in the times of the Antichrist as a persecution of the nations and the punishment of sinners.[45]

In *Cosm.* 66a, 'Jerome' interjects again, digressing on the value and challenges of editing 'Aethicus', and highlights his own pains to make sure that such obscure and philosophical style does not cloud or confuse the reader's understanding. Sections like this are interspersed here

and there in order to flesh out the 'Istrian philosopher', whose own style mixes Greek and Latin quite ingeniously. It all seems like a satire targeting overwrought pseudo-intellectualist styles, which might lend support to the idea that the beginnings of the *Cosmography* were meant as a satire on learned Greek texts, perhaps known in Britain through Eastern teachers such as Theodore of Tarsus – or indeed as a spoof on the teachers themselves, with their Greek-inflected neologisms (Herren 2009, 27, 2011a, lxix–lxx; Rix 2015, 53; cf. Bremmer 2010, 42–45, 47, 53). 'Jerome' himself seems very cynical about the heuristic value of such affectations.

Yet, 'Jerome' also constantly praises 'Aethicus' for his unique information about 'pagans', even as he makes it clear that he is criticising and censoring other things (e.g. *Cosm.* 58). This device allows for the inclusion of novel and wonderful elements – indeed, arguably some of the most miraculous details in the entire Latin literature of the period – but grounds such ventures on the undeniable authority of Jerome, who is supposed to have already made the selection and done the fact-checking (with Bible firmly in mind). In 66b, 'Jerome' elaborates on the dangerous pagan authors: *Sammo* seems to refer to *Samius*, and thus Pythagoras, while *Leucius* could be either *Lucius* of Lucian of Samosata or perhaps the writer of novelistic apostle acts Leukios Kharinos, whom Augustine condemns as a Manichaean (Aug. *c. Fel.* 2.6; see Herren 2011a, 241 *ad loc.*). Cicero's two names have become interestingly severed from each other into *Tullius* and *Cicero* (as noted by Herren 2011a, 242 *ad loc.*). *Hebion* is undoubtedly based on Apion and explainable through the Cosmographer's occasional gestures towards Josephus. But there is a twist again: the pagan authors are accused of 'altering the letters of the alphabet' itself in their disputes, but this is also exactly what 'Jerome' reports that Aethicus himself did: these *characteres Aethiciani* and their names (which borrow elements from the tradition of *voces magicae*) are in many manuscripts given at the end of the text.

> And so with skilful investigation, our philosopher divided into chapters a narrative of those heathens and some of their strange and incredible doings in numerous statements, which we by degrees and with very painstaking caution affixed with two kinds of punctuation, cancellation marks and *obeli* (the pages of his books have not yet been fully annotated by us with our editorial pen), lest a blemish be obvious to readers

> when his [pages] on the same matter are published on the authority of the philosopher; because if all his assertions in all the books [were retained], who would dare to accept or believe those matters which we have published according to our alterations, or here and there according to his own words, in our epitome? He was content to explain the literature of the gentiles in part in his exceptionally enigmatic style, in part he drew out [their meaning] in Greek syllables, but more and more he employed Latin prosody; but no one should dare to accept the very obscure statements in their entirety, but only in part … Indeed, I discovered in the Samian, the Mantuan, and Leucius many incredible and obscure matters, which, [as it is] in no wise received truth to everyone, I judge should not be accepted by prudent investigators. I say that Tully and Cicero, Plato and Hebion will be the ruin of many and a stumbling block to the faithful because of their harsh and bitter disputes, the quarrelsome nature of their writings, and their heathen fables … They altered of their own accord not only their various treatises but also even the very letters of the alphabet.[46]

Christianity is somehow thought also to condition Aethicus' actions in describing the world, although at the same time it is clear that he is living in the pre-Christian era, perhaps under Augustus. 'Jerome' reminds the reader that there was a reason why 'Aethicus' did not give an ethnography of Greece: there would have been many vices and sins in evidence among the Greeks of Aethicus' lifetime, since they had not yet been cured by the medicine of 'the Samaritan' (Christ) and had suffered much from the influence of dialecticians.

> And so the same philosopher elegantly declaimed these things. He omitted and thus did not mention the people for the reason that they were filled with every kind of crime and shameful action: homicide, fornication, debauchery, and every sort of filth. They had not yet received the healing medicine, since the name of the Lord had not yet been preached there, and the Samaritan had not yet descended to cure by applying wine and oil to the wounds and sores from the dialecticians and the maledictions of foolish and ignorant men.[47]

Essentially, the Christian Church Fathers' editorial gaze extends into texts supposed to have been produced in the pre-Christian past: the moral failings of the admired Greeks of old were recognised already by

Aethicus, their contemporary. This is somewhat disingenuous, for the same sinful condition certainly has not prevented him from mentioning a huge number of peoples along the northern edges of the world; their gruesome practices have by this stage been much bemoaned yet meticulously detailed.[48] The tone, as in many places towards the end of the first travel narrative, is somewhat vague and allegorical; incidentally, among Aethicus' works invented by 'Jerome' is a text called *Aenigmata*, as well as *Sophogramii* and *Rus artium*.

The many tragic stories and myths located in Athens are all called up to confirm the view of 'Aethicus' that Athens is characterised by its historical evils. 'Aethicus' also proves to have been aptly named, since he gives the Greeks some credit only for their 'physical philosophy' – implying that he was not convinced by their ethics or moral philosophy.[49] He sounds again very much like Anacharsis the Scythian, criticising the Greeks as an outsider for their moral and cultural inconsistencies (cf. Herren 2011b, 47). The 'moralising Scythian' can also be turned into a commentary on the imperfection of even the most intellectual pre-Christian culture. Internally within the *Cosmography*, 'Aethicus' both self-advertises in his own voice and is also constantly recommended (at least in his bowdlerised form) by 'Jerome'. The Istrian philosopher does not come across at any stage as particularly wise or deep but is certainly cryptic, authoritative, argumentative and clever.

After a sojourn in Athens, called *philosophorum nutrix*,[50] where 'Aethicus' enjoys debating local philosophers in his already typical fashion, *Cosmography* 98 tells of the sophist arriving on Samos and becoming inspired by the memory of the Sibyl and Pythagoras there; he is said to have composed a hymn in their honour on the basis of the *sententiae* of their verses and expanding upon them.

> The Isle of Samos [belongs to] those (islands) in the Aegean Sea, where it is written that Juno was born. On it were born the Samian Sibyl and Samian Pythagoras, by whom philosophy was first discovered and disseminated; and the same Aethicus edited his pronouncements in a rhetorical, poetic and very obscure style; and very often he accepted him [sc., Pythagoras] exclusively to a very great extent, and [sometimes] he rejected [him] in some part. On this island he wrote a poem in praise of the Sibyl and Pythagoras, appropriating to himself the feeling of their verses [and] expanding upon it.[51]

'Jerome' does not appear to find much fault in this but on the contrary seems to cast the relationship of Aethicus, the editor of Pythagoras' obscure statements, and himself, the editor of Aethicus' similarly rhetorical and elaborate language, into a parallel of sorts. The passage may have a meaning beyond that of 'Aethicus' coming as close to the birth of philosophy as possible: him 'appropriating the feeling' of pagan verses and 'expanding upon it' (*adsumpta sibimet sententia uersuum suorum prolata*) can be interpreted as one possible guide to reading the *Cosmography* itself – namely, as an impressionistic take on how to read an ancient learned text in a Christian world.

Concluding Remarks

Parallels between the two authors examined in this chapter should not be over-emphasised: they are separated by several centuries, their authorial agendas are almost wholly dissimilar and they come from vastly different cultural contexts. And even where the two exhibit similarities, we must recognise that kinship is not causation. I have not sought to argue for any actual connection between the two texts, although it would be fascinating to try to find out if Ammianus' history was available in Northern Italian libraries at the time when Pseudo-Jerome was writing.[52] Both Ammianus and the author of *Cosmographia* have very unique ways of assessing and appreciating learnedness and communicating their views about the limits and transmission of human knowledge. Both writers also operate in highly individual ways in the religiously ambiguous authorial positions they have adopted within their texts: Ammianus through his choice of obfuscating his own religious stance and focusing on the past; the Cosmographer through the complex play of identities and layered ironies built into his text. If we think of writing about barbarian sages as a way of tracking the boundaries of the '*oikoumene* of morality' – or at least its epistemological shadow, the 'geography of knowledge' – it emerges as a literary device that could well be compared with heresiography and used for the same purposes in areas and times when heretics were not available.[53]

Ammianus holds very palpable and perhaps typically late antique ideas about the value of past traditions: often his evaluation highlights the principle of *presbyteron kreitton*, 'the older, the better' (on which see e.g. Pilhofer 1990). But this does not imply any epistemic insecurity; Ammianus' adopted authorial guise is in fact supremely confident. Just

as he at no point betrays any lack of trust in the ultimate survival of the Roman state and power, he likewise writes as a self-conscious product of centuries-long chains of utterance in each of the genres he touches, with no apparent worry over the durability of his old classics' value. He is even able to scoff at those Roman elites who instead of historiography read mostly biographies and Juvenal, who was experiencing something of a resurgence during his time.[54] Ammianus' world is epistemically unchanged and unchanging, but he himself is ready to engage creatively with its past. The figures of the Druids, Magi and Egyptian priests are all there to remind his audience that wisdom traditions are nothing new, that the real gold standard for judging the moral value of a philosophy or religion is its age, and that these terms apply to both Christian and non-Christian doctrines. These traditions can also be used to comment on each other. Ammianus showcases the theme of original, primordial wisdom throughout his treatment of out-groups of wise men; his take on them is generally very conventional but more reverential and positive than perhaps those of any non-sophist contemporary. But as for barbarian learning itself, though venerable old age could confer tremendous admirability on it, Ammianus frequently gestures towards Greek affirmation for 'alien wisdom' – whether by giving a Platonic gloss on Eastern wisdom or using Pythagoras to add lustre to the Druidic creed and organisation. His views about the wisdom of Egypt were clearly very conventional for his time and can be compared to other texts lacking a strong partisan stance, like *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*.

Pseudo-Jerome, on the other hand, is an edifying case of *nova ex veteribus* – using the received elements to play games of signification in the pursuit of something almost unprecedented; he is engaged in creating a plausible-sounding pastiche of 'what was it like to read pagan philosophers', but he sculpts it out of Isidorean, biblical and other materials.[55] He reaches over the temporal and cultural divide with the help of his literary conceit, whereby the reader was able to hear a Christian Church Father of the highest imaginable learning comment on the merits and factuality of a virtuous pagan's pursuit for wisdom. 'Jerome' is never far beyond the reader's attention and makes frequent sallies to worry about what he is doing in abbreviating a pagan work, or to rail about heresies, or to comment on his own editorial methods: an authorial display that must by the Cosmographer's time have felt enchantingly 'early Christian'. Aethicus' meetings and apparently

very significant debates with strange and foreign-sounding pagan philosophers and sage kings weave another and perhaps more fascinating pattern. In short, Pseudo-Jerome does what he claims Aethicus did on Samos: 'appropriating to himself the feeling of their verses [and] expanding upon it'.

In conjuring up the tone and feeling of late antique texts like the *Topographia Christiana* of Cosmas Indicopleustes (a copy of which was in fact present in the School of Theodore of Tarsus in Canterbury) (Bremmer 2010, 46–47) or other – sometimes earlier – geographical, antiquarian or ethnographicising narratives such as that of Solinus' *Collectanea*, the *Cosmographia* does a wonderful job. Its mixture of exotic-sounding population names, digressions on natural phenomena, running scriptural commentary on the received classical traditions, and euhemeristic treatment of classical myths and legendary figures is all part of the message. The confused and overlapping religious scene, with plenty of gentiles, righteous pagans, idolaters, euhemerised ancient heroes and Christian Church Fathers, contributes towards the general feeling of antiquity when reading the text.[56] Aethicus moves through interlinked and exotically named regions in pursuit of wisdom just like his earlier 'Scythian' forebear Anacharsis, confronts 'philosophers' in rhetorical sparring matches and engages with earlier figures of authority – both pagan and Christian. In some ways, the *Cosmographia* is trying to conjure up the very same world that Ammianus operated in, but from an early medieval point of view and with largely Isidoran components. Alternatively, one could perhaps also suggest that there is in fact very little heuristic value in thinking about the *Cosmography* as an 'early medieval' piece at all: such a forward-gazing nomenclature twists our expectations, when in fact we could just as well think about the work as 'Late late antique' or perhaps just 'post-Isidoran'.

Pseudo-Jerome (or the Cosmographer) is, culturally speaking, a conservative and typically Graecocentric anti-relativist. As noted above, he even may be echoing or emulating the deprecating comments directed at home-baked British and Irish learning in the School of Theodore at Canterbury – if that is indeed where he began his literary exercise (cf. Herren 2011a, lxix, lxxiv, lxxvi–lxxvii). In other words, the Graecocentricism of the text, whether sincere or not, may be either so conventional as to be second hand or part of the literary display. In terms of religion, the Cosmographer's view is simultaneously directed

at the 'great Rome' and the Christian worldview. Despite this, the ethnicising gestures and religious sentiments become strongly interlinked in the apocalyptic passages. Strikingly, not even the Arabs and Slavs are foregrounded as religious enemies, even though the rhetoric around them tends towards the apocalyptic. The true religious Other seems to reside with the Enclosed Nations of the North, who represent all that is repulsive, impious and depraved – thankfully confined to the furthest north by Alexander himself in accordance with the divine plan. Their presence in the text is that of a classical edge-of-the-world curiosity, invited and enabled by the biblical silences on the northern stretches of the world.

In spite of the sections where Alexander is invoked to 'return to Mount Zion' and the barbarian depredations are bemoaned, the *Cosmographia Aethici* is difficult to see as a product of an age of anxiety or epistemic insecurity. On the contrary, the Cosmographer acts with a clear sense of purpose and a certain subversiveness in a literary world where not even such eminent writers as Jerome or Augustine, nor apocalyptic texts, nor those of god-fearing pagans were beyond pastiche, irony and certainly some elaborate reordering. In a way, Pseudo-Jerome's reader becomes a bit like Alexander (or Aethicus) himself: seeing many things and wondrous peoples, trying stratagems against them, but in the end relying on superior sources of wisdom (Aristotle for one, Jerome for the other) to confirm their impressions on these matters. Ammianus, likewise, travelled the world as a soldier on active duty before settling down in Rome – all the book knowledge of the world at hand – in order to produce a work that frequently reflects on the multitude of ways in which different peoples relate to their wisdom traditions.

I have intended this chapter to serve as an exercise in 'reading Aethicus *after* Ammianus' rather than 'reading Aethicus *with* Ammianus'. I hope that this has enabled some new alignments and dynamics to be detected not only in *Cosmography* but also in Ammianus' *Res gestae*. Both texts have many references to secret letters and hidden information in a variety of contexts and for different moralising purposes. Both, moreover, seem to go to some lengths in trying to avoid locking themselves into either a 'Christian' or a 'pagan' way of writing: the resulting complications are – I would argue – in both cases part of the author's reflection on the difficulty of extracting truth from testimonies with various degrees of authority and age. And even though

both authors show tremendous self-confidence in the middle of their knowledge-ordering operations, the reader is in two very different ways invited to participate in the excavation process of our authors: they are asked to work for their truth.

Notes

1 Amm. Marc. 22.16 refers to Serapeum without mentioning its destruction in 391.
2 On Ammianus, especially his religious attitude, see e.g. Barnes (1998); Den Boeft (1999); Harrison (1999); Hunt (1985); Rike (1987). For a summary of the scholarly views on Ammianus, see Blockley (1996).
3 It has elements of a *Reiseroman* (Shanzer 2006; Herren 2009), aretalogy, novel (Herren 2011b), apocalypse (Berg 2013), encyclopaedic text, periplous, geography and history. See also Lampinen (2018) (where especially the Cosmographer's imitation of the 'feel' of ancient ethnographical register is examined); Tristram (1982); Wood (2000). Cf. Bremmer (2010, esp. 24) on a miscellanistic manuscript from roughly the same context and with similar topics.
4 Previously (e.g. Hillkowitz 1934; Löwe 1952) the target of satire was often thought to be ecclesiastical or theological, whereas recent interpretations prefer to see it as a parody of Cosmas Indicopleustes' flat-earth cosmology or Theodore of Tarsus' Graecocentricism (Herren 2009, 27, 2011a, lxix–lxx, lxii, on the author's travels and the layers of the *Cosmography*'s formation; Rix 2015, 53).
5 The figure of 'Aethicus Ister' himself, as suggested by Herren (2011a, liii), may well have been 'found' in Virgil the Grammarian, who wrote about a character called Estrius or Istrius, described as a historian and a moralist. It would be very much like the Cosmographer to pick the Greek word as the basis for forming his 'Aethicus'. *Aethicus* might also be understood rather as a title than as a name.
6 The inspiration may derive partly from the texts attributed to 'Dictys of Crete' and 'Dares Phrygius'.
7 Tristram (1982, 158) on the author's stylistic variations.
8 Summed up in Rike (1987, 1–2).
9 It is fairly certain that from Tacitus' time onwards the Druids in Gaul are an 'ethnicising' gesture, though the references continue sporadically until Ammianus: cf. Mela 3.18–19; Plin. *NH* 30.4(13); Luc. 1.444–51; Tac. *Hist.* 4.54; *Ann.* 14.30; SHA *Alex.* 60.6, *Aurel.* 44.4, *Car. Carin. Num.* 14.2–3.
10 Amm. Marc. (15.9.1–4) (ed. Seyfarth): Proinde quoniam – ut Mantuanus uates praedixit excelsus – 'maius opus moueo' maiorque mihi rerum nascitur ordo, Galliarum tractus et situm ostendere puto nunc tempestiuum … 2 Ambigentes super origine prima Gallorum scriptores ueteres notitiam reliquere negotii semiplenam, sed postea Timagenes et diligentia Graecus et lingua haec quae diu sunt ignorata collegit ex multiplicibus libris. … 4 Drasidae memorant re uera fuisse populi partem indigenam, sed alios quoque ab insulis extimis confluxisse et tractibus transrhenanis, crebritate bellorum et adluvione fervidi maris sedibus suis expulsos.

11 Timag. *BNJ* 88 F 2 *ap.* Amm. Marc. 15.9. *Brill's New Jacoby* identifies the fragment more narrowly as 15.9.2–8.
12 Amm. Marc. 15.9.8: Per haec loca hominibus paulatim excultis uiguere studia laudabilium doctrinarum, inchoata per bordos et euhagis et drasidas. Et bardi quidem fortia uirorum illustrium facta heroicis conposita uersibus cum dulcibus lyrae modulis cantitarunt, euhages uero scrutantes †seruiani† et sublimia naturae pandere conabantur. Inter eos drasidae ingeniis celsiores, ut auctoritas Pythagorae decreuit, sodaliciis adstricti consortiis, quaestionibus occultarum rerum altarumque erecti sunt et despectantes humana pronuntiarunt animas inmortales. The idea of heroic deed being sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments also appears in Timag. *BNJ* 88 F 10 *ap.* Quint. *Inst.* 1.10.10.
13 Compare this with Lucan's far less accommodating construction of an oppositional relationship between the Druidic teachings and what all the other peoples believe: 1.450–53.
14 Earlier listings or descriptions of Gallic sages: Caes. *BGall.* 6.14; Cic. *Div.* 1.90; Str. 4.4.4; Mela 3.19; Luc. 1.447–56; Diog. Laert. *VP* 1.1; Hipp. Rom. *Haer.* 1.25.1–2.
15 Auson. *Prof. Burd.* 4.7–15: tu Baiocassi stirpe Druidarum satus, si fama nos fallit fidem, Beleni sacratum ducis e templo genus et inde vobis nomina: tibi Paterae: sic ministros nuncupant Apollinares mystici. fratri patrique nomen a Phoebo datum natoque de Delphis tuo.
16 Prudentius, roughly coeval with Ausonius and Ammianus, saw it worthwhile to rebut and ridicule such family traditions, using as examples a *bardus pater* or an *auus augur* (*Apoth.* 294–301, ed. Bergman).
17 For the earlier oppositional arrangement of the ritual traditions, cf. Luc. 1.452–58.
18 On this latter, see Lampinen (2014, esp. 242–45); I would still prefer a Caesarian horizon.
19 Jord. *Get.* 42–43: iam humaniores et, ut superius diximus, prudentiores effecti … ante quos etiam cantu maiorum facta modulationibus citharisque canebant. On Jordanes' conception of civilisation and barbarism, see Gillett (2009).
20 Amm. Marc. 22.16.17–18: et quamquam ueteres cum his quorum memini floruere conplures, tamen ne nunc quidem in eadem urbe doctrinae uariae silent; nam et disciplinarum magistri quodam modo spirant et nudatur ibi geometrico radio quicquid reconditum latet, nondumque apud eos penitus exaruit musica, nec harmonica conticuit, et recalet apud quosdam adhuc licet raros consideratio mundani motus et siderum, doctique sunt numeros haut pauci, super his scientiam callent quae fatorum uias ostendit. medicinae autem, cuius in hac uita nostra nec parca nec sobria desiderantur adminicula crebra, ita studia augentur in dies ut, licet opus ipsum redoleat, pro omni tamen experimento sufficiat medico ad commendandam artis auctoritatem, si Alexandriae se dixerit eruditum.
21 Cf. Nutton (1972) on the theme especially in Ammianus.
22 Grüll (2015). The edition used is Rougé, 1966.
23 *Expos. mundi* 37: Et totius orbis paene de veritate philosophiae ipsa sola abundat, in qua invenitur plurima genera philosophorum. Itaque et Aesculapius

dare ei voluit medicinae peritiam et ut habeat: in toto mundo medicos optimos omnibus hominibus illa civitas constat.

24 Dickie (2001, 114, 203–04); Luck (1985, 18, 440). Cf. Haas (1997, 151 and 286) in connection with the *Expositio*.

25 Amm. Marc. 22.16.20: hic primum homines longe ante alios ad uaria religionum incunabula, ut dicitur, peruenerunt et initia prima sacrorum caute tuentur condita scriptis arcanis.

26 *Expos. mundi* 34: tamen uiros sapientes prae omnem mundum Aegyptus abundat. in metropoli enim eius Alexandria omnem gentem inuenies philosophorum et omnem doctrinam. itaque aliquando certamine facto Aegyptiorum et Graecorum, quis eorum Musium accipiat, argutiores et perfectiores inuenti Aegyptii et uicerunt, et Musium ad eos iudicatum est. et impossibile est in quacumque re inuenire uolueris sapientem quomodo Aegyptium; et ideo omnes philosophi et qui sapientiam litterarum scientes ibi semper morati sunt, meliores fuerunt: non enim est ad eos ulla impostura, sed singuli eorum quod pollicentur certe sciunt, propter quod non omnes omnium, sed quisque sua per suam disciplinam ornans perficit negotia.

27 On Neoplatonic philosophers considered as magicians, see Hadot (2015, 9–10, 21, 87 n. 94).

28 Amm. Marc. 23.6.32–33: In his tractibus Magorum agri sunt fertiles, super quorum secta studiisque, quoniam huc incidimus, pauca conueniet expediri. magiam opinionum insignium auctor amplissimus Plato machagistiam esse uerbo mystico docet, diuinorum incorruptissimum cultum, cuius scientiae saeculis priscis multa ex Chaldaeorum arcanis Bactrianus addidit Zoroastres, deinde Hystaspes rex prudentissimus Darei pater. qui cum superioris Indiae secreta fidentius penetraret, ad nemorosam quandam uenerat solitudinem, cuius tranquillis silentiis praecelsa Brachmanorum ingenia potiuntur, eorumque monitu rationes mundani motus et siderum purosque sacrorum ritus quantum colligere potuit eruditus, ex his, quae didicit, aliqua sensibus magorum infudit, quae illi cum disciplinis praesentiendi futura per suam quisque progeniem posteris aetatibus tradunt.

29 Bard. Ed. *LLR* 42 (Drijvers 1965); cf. Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.10.38: καὶ ὅτι οἱ Μαγουσαῖοι οὐκ ἐν Περσίδι μόνηι τὰς θυγατέρας γαμοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει, ὅπου ἂν οἰκήσωσι, τοὺς τῶν προγόνων φυλάσσοντες νόμους καὶ τῶν μυστηρίων αὐτῶν τὰς τελετάς.

30 Preserved in the second, slightly later redaction of the *Expositio* text, known as *Descriptio* (Rougé 1966, 7): *Descr. mundi* 3: Vnde ergo nos oportet incipere nisi primum a magis? Nam priores nostri qui de his rebus scribere conati sunt, aliquanta dicere potuerunt, [solus autem Moyses, diuino spiritu plenus Iudaeorum propheta, quod est certum scripsit. Post hunc] de prouinciis et temporibus sequentia dixit Berosus, Chaldaeorum philosophus, cuius litteras secuti sunt Manethon, Aegyptius propheta, et Apollonius, similiter Aegyptiorum philosophus, [Josephus quoque, uir sapiens, Iudaeorum praeceptor, qui captus a Romanis scripsit iudaïcum bellum.] Post istos uero Menander Ephesius et Herodotus ac Thucydides similia conscripserunt, sed non ualde de antiquis.

31 Amm. Marc. 23.6.34–36: ex eo per saecula multa ad praesens una eademque prosapia multitudo creata deorum cultibus dedicatur. feruntque, si iustum est credi, etiam ignem caelitus lapsum apud se sempiternis foculis custodiri, cuius

portionem exiguam ut faustam praeisse quondam Asiaticis regibus dicunt. huius originis apud ueteres numerus erat exilis eiusque ministeriis Persicae potestates in faciendis rebus diuinis sollemniter utebantur. eratque piaculum aras adire uel hostiam contrectare antequam magus conceptis precationibus libamenta diffunderet praecursoria. uerum aucti paulatim in amplitudinem gentis solidae concesserunt et nomen uillasque inhabitantes nulla murorum firmitudine conmunitas et legibus suis uti permissi religionis respectu sunt honorati. ex hoc magorum semine septem post mortem Cambysis regnum inisse Persidos antiqui memorant libri docentes eos Darei factione oppressos, imperitandi initium equino hinnitu sortiti.

32 Lozovsky (2000, 32) notes that the first section of *Cosmography* participates wholly in the tradition of the *On the Nature of Things*-treatises (like those of Isidore, Bede, or Hrabanus Maurus).

33 *Cosm.* 1: Philosophorum scidolas sagace indagatione inuestigans, mihi laborem tantundem apposui achademicus tanto studio indagare, et altiora magnatimque ac cursim autem astrologia fastigiaque excellentia <explanare>, quae necdum cerni quis possit. Illi conati sunt tam magna dixisse, quae nos metuendo ac dubitando scribere uel legere in usum coepimus <et> temeranter adtrectare. Quae Aethicus iste chosmografus tam difficilia appetisse didicerit, quaeque et Moyses et uetus historia in enarrando distulerint hic secerpens protuli. Vnde legentibus obsecro ne me temerarium aestiment, cum tanta ob aliorum audacia mea indagatione concurrisse [quae] conpererint. All translations are those of Herren (2011a).

34 *Cosm.* 17 (ed. Herren): Iam inter reliquos philosophos Aethicus chosmografus et plane et pulchre scripsit. Nos itaque in aliquas epistolas mentionem philosophorum et eorum laborum studiorumque fecimus: Hiarcam sablo cathedram sedentem auream ad meridiem maris oceani disputantem cum discipulis de mensa solis, astrorum siderumque differentia. Inter hos omnes Aethicum chosmografum miror tam inaestimabile arte curiosum. Et eorum aliorumque ille reprehendit multa dixisse et multiplicasse, et ad scientiam eruditionum minima uel pauca explicasse. Reprehendit Cluontem et Argypphum philosophos, Scitharum astrolocus, et Mantuanum. In uanum multa edidisse reprehendit.

35 Cf. Hdt. 4.46, 76–80. Apollonius of Tyana is another possible inspiration (Shanzer 2006, 78–81), though the knowledge of both him and Anacharsis in the West at the time is difficult to demonstrate conclusively.

36 *Cosm.* 43: Reliqua uero legere uel scribere ambiguum est, a nobis uel reliquis scriptoribus historiografis cura legentium magno studio indaganda, ne scisma indagationum inducat cicatricem errorum inter <fideles> philosophorum astutia. Quicumque aut quilibet sapiens Aethicum aut Mantuanum legerit ad plenum spiritalem <se> adlidat petram, et sapientiam huius mundi animarum stultitiam autumet.

37 Herren (2011a, xxiii, 71) suggests that Cosmas Indicopleustes' flat-earth cosmography, in particular, is targeted. On extracts of Cosmas' *Topographia Christiana* in 7th-century England, Bremmer (2010, 46–47).

38 *Cosm.* 24–26: 24 Alias mundi partes mare oceanum cum discipulis suis scrupolissimo labore nauigasse oportuna tempora in insolas tam in magnas quam et in modicas a meridie ad occidentem, a Taprobane ad Sirtinicem et Calaopa usque Adriakeon, abhinc usque ultra Gades et Hercoleas columnas.

Illinc enim per annum stationem fecisse et disputasse cum Aurilio philosopho et Arbocraten, et non ualuerunt aliqua enigmata ipsius deserere. … Hispaniam appellauit, agriculturam et confersa falerna, brutis animalibus et pingues uitulos, in diliciis uberes, sapientia tenues. 25 Hiberniam properauit et in eam aliquandiu commoratus est, eorum uolumina uoluens, appellauitque eos ideomochos uel ideothistas, id est inperitos uel incultos doctores. Pro nihilo eos ducens ait: 'Mundi finibus terminare et Hiberniam peruenire onerosus est labor, sed nulla facultas.' Horrorem nimium incutit, sed utilitatem ad non profecit. Inperitos habet cultores et instructores, habet distitutos habitatores. 26 Dein insolas Brittanicas et Tylen nauigauit, quas ille 'Brutanicas' appellauit: inperitissimam gentem, horrorem nimium.

39 Isid. *Etym.* 9.2.102, though also known to Nennius (which is the less plausible source). Bede, too, may have inspired the Cosmographer in other ethnicised constructions; Rix (2015, 99).

40 Medieval examples: Weeda (2014); see also Bremmer (2010, 39–41) for a slightly earlier context.

41 E.g. the 9th-century BL Cotton Calig. A. xv. fol. 126v. Cf. Harley 3271 fol. 6v. Victoria Aegiptiorum. Invidia Iudaeorum. Sapientia Graecorum. Crudelitas Pictorum. Fortitudo Romanorum. Largitas Longobardorum. Gulla Gallorum. Superbia vel Ferocitas Francorum. Ira Britanorum. Stultitia Saxonum vel Anglorum. Libido Hibernorum. Such lists were included in miscellanistic manuscripts, too: see the example discussed in Bremmer (2010, 39–41), with an attribution to Salvian (dicta Salviani) in Voss. lat. Q 69, 7 j (37v/5b–38r/2a).

42 Hieron. *Comm. in Ep. ad Tit.* 1.709 (*PL* 26, 574C); cf. Becker (1885), no. 32.485 among Jerome's works.

43 See above. On *Cosmography* as a *Supplementband* to Josephus and the Old Testament, see Herren (2011a, xvi).

44 *Cosm.* 30: Aliarum gentium originem obmissam, quae agiografia ueteris testamenti concelebrat, idem philosophus non scribit, quia omnes scripturas et legum et liberalium <litterarum> fontem uium et matrem historiarum appellat. Legem Moysi plurimum conlaudat; Iosephum affatim ac celebre eius historiam retenit, et ea quae in eorum codicibus inuenit denuo scribere et retexere noluit. Dicit enim ob hoc uagas et stultas gentes non scripsisse, quia indigna et uana eorum facta et gesta fuerunt in diis gentium et abominationibus, idolis simulacrorum, et alia multa magicis artibus inuenta, et non scientia Dei ore prophetico elimata. Pulchre enim huic loco scripturae suae historia sancta inlustrat.

45 *Cosm.* 41a–b: Ingemuitque aedificauitque aras in monte Chelion, immolatisque hostiis Deo, depraecatusque est tota die ac nocte, dei consilium et misericordiam quaerens, inuenitque artem magnam. Praecurrente potentiam Dei, adfuit terrae motus magnus in montana illa … Tamen Dei prouidentiam huic magno principe credimus fuisse ostensam. Et non inmerito magnus dici potest qui tam utilia argumenta agrestium hominum uesaniam retrudentam adinuenit, quorum solutionem temporibus Antechristi in persecutionem gentium uel ultionem peccatorum credimus adfuturam.

46 *Cosm.* 66a–b: Philosophus itaque ordinem illarum gentium diligente indagatione et nonnulla quaedam peregrina et incredibilia in multis assertionibus titulauit, quae nobis nimis laboriosa curiositate cursim ad duo puncta posuimus, caraxaturas et uirgulas (necdum plene suorum librorum scidolas prae-

notatas a nobis redarguendo stilo), ne neuum lectoribus pateatur, suas ibidem philosopho auctoritate prolata, quia, si omnes adsertiones eius in cunctis codicibus <retineretur>, quis audeat aut retenere aut credere ista quae a nobis in momento uel passim eius litteris in breuiarium diuulgauimus? Ille ex parte gentilium litteras explanare nimio enigmate contentus, ex parte Grecas syllabas elicuit, magis immo ac magis Latina prosodia posuit, nullusque tam obscura illius ualde audeat non a toto, sed a parte retenere … Equidem in Sammonem et Mantuanum Leuciumque multa incredibilia et ualde obscura inueni, quod nequaquam cuicumque ueritatem receptam, a prudentibus indagatoribus non retenendam decerno. Tullium et Ciceronem, Platonem et Hebionem duris et acrioribus disputationibus, contumiliis conpositionum, gentilium argumentis, fidelium obstaculis dico ruinam fore multorum … A semetipsis uariis non tam disputationibus quam etiam et ipsos apicum caracteres mutauerunt.

47 *Cosm.* 72b: Haec itaque pulchre idem sapiens praefatus est. Populum obmisit et ideo non detulit mentionem, quia omnia scelera et ignominia repletus erat: homicidia, fornications, luxoria et omnia spurcitia. Necdum curationum medicamenta receperat, quia nomen Domini non fuerat inibi praedicatum et Samaritanus nondum discenderat, ut plagis uel ulceribus, uino et oleo imposito, a dialecticis uel maledictis stultissimorum et insipientium hominum curaretur.

48 On the religiously inflected ethnographies of the north in the Middle Ages, cf. Molina Moreno (2001, 52–65); Rix (2015, *passim*).

49 *Cosm.* 79: Cum in taedio recolentes magno quanta ab aeuo mala ibidem perpessa sunt, uix se philosophus gesta audita a narrantibus publicis scriptoribus in uno uolumine contenere posse cuncta mala quae illuc perpessa sunt … Quam plurimas difficillimas quaestiones et nonnulla interpretare nequiverunt aut nescientes aut nolentes. Sed ille reprehendit ignorantes, nisi tantomodo in fisica directa discernentes.

50 Just like Isid. *Etym.* 14.4.10.

51 *Cosm.* 98: Samo insola ex ipsis in mare Aegeo, ubi Iuno nata scribitur. Ex qua orta fuit Sibilla Samia et Pithagoras Samius, a quo philosophia primum inuenta uel dilatata est, eiusque adsertiones idem Aethicus rethorico more stiloque prosodico ualde obscure digessit, et ipsum solum tantociens ex maxima parte recepit et ex aliqua parte reppulit. Hac insola in laude carminis Sibilla et Phithagora edidit inquiens, adsumpta sibimet sententia uersuum suorum prolata.

52 The Bobbio catalogue in Becker (1885, 64–73 no. 32) has neither 'Ammianus' nor 'Marcellinus'. Fulda, where Ammianus' work was preserved (McKitterick 2004, 42), belonged to the network of monasteries with insular founders, and the existence of an Ammianus archetype in *scriptura Scottica* is well recognised (McKitterick 2004, 202). For a recent contribution, see Kelly and Stover (2016). For Bobbio as an attractive option for place of composition, see Herren (2011a, lxii–lxix, lxxi–lxxiii).

53 *Cosm.* 58c does refer to a schism originating from Istria—probably the 'Three Chapters Controversy'—and takes advantage of this in order to rattle off a nice list of heresiarchs (the made-up Arculius, Anfianus and Hircanus, as well as more historically based Macedonius: Isid. *Etym.* 8.5.55). Cf. Herren (2011a, 221–24 *ad loc.*). The role of heresiography as 'Christian ethnography' is one of the main points of Berzon (2016).

54 Amm. Marc. 28.4.14, in a withering ethnography of the Roman elite.

55 Isidore's own treatment of earlier material was very creative, too: Henderson (2007, 1–9 and *passim*).
56 See Lampinen (2018, 242). Cf. Naismith (2008, 78–79) on the religious position constructed within the texts of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus for his persona as 'Virgil'.

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