STUDIES IN
LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY ISLAM

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# THE BYZANTINE AND EARLY ISLAMIC NEAR EAST

## I

## PROBLEMS IN THE LITERARY SOURCE MATERIAL

EDITED BY
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(*Papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*)

THE DARWIN PRESS, INC.
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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# The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief*

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## Introduction

I HAVE ARGUED ELSEWHERE that the seventh century marks a moment of cultural transformation for the East Roman or Byzantine world, not just in terms of the obvious political changes which took place, nor simply with respect to the changes in social, economic, and administrative patterns of life within the Empire or outside it, in those territories which were firmly in Muslim hands by the late 640s, but also in respect of patterns of belief and, more significantly, the ways in which people perceived their world and expressed their attitudes to what had happened. This process was not sudden, of course, nor was it simply "caused" by the Muslim conquests: much of it represented the last stages of a series of longer-term developments which reflect the evolution of late Roman

*I should like to express my thanks to Dr. Joseph Munitiz, currently completing a new edition of the *Quaestiones et Responsiones* of Anastasius for the *CCSG*, for much valuable discussion on the textual tradition of the works ascribed to Anastasius and on Anastasius himself.

Christian society and culture from the third century on. In the Monophysite East, change was clearly perceived by contemporaries in the sixth century. But it was the Muslim conquests which set the seal on these developments and made them irrevocable. Henceforth, Christian society in the East Mediterranean region, whether within the Empire or not, had to come to terms with the existence of a new and intellectually dynamic religious system and new political forms, within which new modes of domination and subordination were particularly significant. This is all well known, of course; the ways in which Christian culture responded to the arrival of the Arabs have been discussed, albeit usually very partially and from an understandably limited perspective (given the nature of the sources), by several scholars.[1] In particular, the emphasis that apocalyptic writings received in the second half of the seventh century has been highlighted—quite rightly—as a significant indication of a change in Christian attitudes, which were obliged to begin to reconcile the probable permanence of the new state of affairs with traditional political ideologies and millenarian assumptions.[2] I should like here to consider some of the writings attributed to one seventh-century Christian thinker and ascetic, Anastasius of Sinai. In doing so, I wish not only to relate these writings to the context in which they were compiled, both in respect of literary and theological antecedents and of specific historical events, but also to illustrate several features

[1]See, for example, Walter E. Kaegi, Jr., "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest", *Church History* 38 (1969), 139–49; S.P. Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam", in G.H.A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale, 1982), 9–21; and for a survey of later Syriac/Monophysite views, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Remembering Pain: Syriac Historiography and the Separation of the Churches", *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 295–308, esp. 298–302.

[2]See my remarks in "Ideology and Social Change in the Seventh Century: Military Discontent as a Barometer", *Klio* 68 (1986), 139–90, esp. 167–69; and more particularly G.J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser", in W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen, eds., *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), 82–111. On apocalyptic in general, see Wolfram Brandes, "Die apokalyptische Literatur", in F. Winkelmann, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der frühen Byzanz* (Berlin, 1989; *BAA* 57), 305–22; and note Francisco Javier Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius*, Ph.D. dissertation: Catholic University of America, 1985; and especially the contributions of Drijvers and Reinink in this volume.



of this period of transformation common to all the cultures of the East Mediterranean zone, both in its Christian and its Muslim aspects.

## Anastasius and His Cultural Milieu

I must begin by making it clear that I approach the works of Anastasius from the perspective of a cultural historian. I am not particularly concerned that the attribution to Anastasius of some of the *narrationes* I shall mention remains uncertain, nor that there is still some lingering doubt concerning the *Questions and Answers* usually ascribed to him. I am concerned that the material I use belongs with little or no doubt to the seventh century, primarily the second half of that century. Nor am I overly concerned by the possibility that there may in fact have been at least two figures in the East at this period, both seemingly well known in their own lands, with the name Anastasius: Anastasius of Sinai, and Anastasius the humble monk—the textual tradition makes it almost impossible in certain cases to distinguish which texts belong to which author. My own preference is to see no distinction, and to regard them as being one and the same individual; but this is difficult to prove, and such an endeavor would require a much more exacting philological and textual analysis of the key texts than space permits here. In addition, there remains some debate as to whether the Anastasius to whom a number of texts are traditionally ascribed is actually Anastasius of Sinai, or Anastasius, patriarch of Antioch (559–70, 593–99), although it is reasonably clear, both on the basis of internal coherence and style, and on that of internal historical references, that the texts with which we are concerned here do belong to the last 50 or so years of the seventh century, and not earlier.

The situation is further complicated, potentially more seriously for our concerns, by the fact that the corpus of stories and *apophthegmata* of the eastern monastic world has a continuous tradition, both in narrative style and subject matter as well as in geographical extent, from the fifth century to the later seventh. A number of themes were regularly borrowed or reused, and sometimes whole stories were simply taken from earlier collections by later writers. It is therefore difficult in many instances to provide a date for a particular tale, or to tie it to any specific historical moment. Some stories in the *Pratum Spirituale* of John

Moschus, for example, appear also in the *narrationes* ascribed to Anastasius; and it is not always possible to say whether we are dealing with an Anastasian borrowing from an earlier collection, or a later interpolation from the Anastasian collection into the *Pratum*. Other stories, in contrast, were already firmly ascribed to Anastasius by the middle of the eighth century: John of Damascus refers to a story concerning an icon of S. Theodore, for example, which belongs to the so-called "second collection" of tales more or less firmly ascribed to Anastasius. Similarly, a number of themes taken up in the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius pursue topics dealt with in the sayings of the desert fathers, the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus or, indeed, the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* of John Climacus—among them the whole question of the rôle of tears as a symbol of repentance and as an expression of the transformation of the sensual fluids of the body into cleansing spirituality. Finally, key issues relating to the universal problem of divine foresight and foreknowledge, on the one hand, and the determinist or fatalist roots of predestinarianism, on the other, occur in Anastasius as well as in much earlier collections, and represent aspects of the typical content of Christian apologetic and exegetical literature.[3]

[3]See the remarks of François Nau, "Le texte grec des récits utiles à l'âme d'Anastase (le Sinaïte)", *OC* 3 (1903), 56–75, at 59–60. For Anastasius of Antioch, see Beck, 380–81; *CPG*, III, nos. 6944–69; Günter Weiss, *Studia Anastasiana I. Studien zum Leben, zu den Schriften und zur Theologie des Patriarchen Anastasius I. von Antiochien* (Munich, 1965); and the review by Weiss in *BZ* 60 (1967), 339–42, of S.N. Sakkos, Περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναϊτῶν (Thessaloniki, 1964), who believes he can distinguish seven different Anastasii ranging from Anastasius I of Antioch (second half of the sixth century) to an otherwise unknown Anastasius of the ninth-tenth centuries. See also the critical remarks of Evangelos Chrysos, "Νεώτεραι ἔρευναι περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναϊτῶν", Κληρονομία 1 (1969), 121–44.

Moschus' collection is especially important, representing some 50 years of personal eyewitness experience of the monastic and ascetic world, ranging across Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to the Aegean isles and Italy. For a brief survey, see Elpidio Mioni, art. "Jean Moschus" in *Dict. spirit.*, VIII (Paris, 1972), 632–40; and on the *apophthegmata*, Th. Klauser and P. de Labriolle, art. "Apophthegma" in *RAC*, I (Stuttgart, 1950), 545–50. For the story of the Saracens and the icon of S. Theodore, see Nau, "Récits utiles à l'âme", no. 44, 64–65; John of Damascus, *De imaginibus*, III, *PG* 94, 1393; and Paul Canart, "Une nouvelle anthologie monastique: le vaticanus graecus 2592", *Le Muséon* 75 (1962), 109–29. Note also the story of the monk and the icon of the Virgin in Jerusalem, incorporated into the ps.-Athanasius



A second point concerns the textual history and tradition of this material. The works of Anastasius have only recently begun to appear in modern editions: the *Hodēgos* or *Viae dux*, the two *Sermones in constitutionem hominis secundum imaginem Dei*, a third *Sermo adversus Monotheletas*, the florilegium *adversus Monotheletas*, and five *Capita adversus Monotheletas* have now been critically edited, with a detailed analysis of their textual history, by Karl-Heinz Uthemann.[4] This extremely important work has gone a long way towards solving some of the problems associated with Anastasius' writings. In addition, the work of Paul Canart has contributed to the resolution of many of the difficulties and contradictions connected with the various collections of *narrationes* associated with the name of Anastasius of Sinai. It is now possible to reconstruct a reasonably homogeneous corpus of such tales dated to the middle and later seventh century, although it must be emphasized that this corpus is still far from complete. There is still a substantial body of such material in Arabic and Ethiopic, for example, which needs to be studied and made accessible before the real scale of any corpus of stories by Anastasius can be appreciated.[5]

as part of Qu. 39, but present also in the *Pratum Spirituale*, *cap.* 45 (*PG* 87, 2900B); and see Wolfgang Lackner, "Zwei Membra disiecta aus dem *Pratum Spirituale* des Ioannes Moschos", *AB* 100 (1982), 341–50; J.A. Munitiz, "The Link Between some Membra Disiecta of John Moschus", *AB* 101 (1983), 295–96; and especially Robert J. Penella, "An Overlooked Story about Apollonius of Tyana in Anastasius Sinaita", *Traditio* 34 (1978), 414–15.

Questions of predestination and determinism had been addressed by earlier Christian thinkers, such as the (probably) fifth-century bishop Nemesius of Emesa (see n. 62 below) and even the historian Theophylact Simocatta in the early seventh century. On the latter, see Leendert G. Westerink, "Theophylactus Simocattes on Predestination", in *Studi in onore di Vittorio de Falco* (Naples, 1971), 535–51; cf. also now Theophylact, *On Predestined Terms of Life*, ed. and trans. Charles Garton and Leendert G. Westerlink (Buffalo, 1978). On the nature of the debate and its development into the seventh century, see esp. David Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque* (Leuven, 1945).

[4]Anastasius of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, ed. K.-H. Uthemann (Leuven, 1981; *CCSG* 8); *idem*, *Sermones duo in constitutionem hominis secundum imaginem Dei necnon opuscula adversus Monotheletas*, ed. K.-H. Uthemann (Brepols, 1985; *CCSG* 12). See *CPG*, III, nos. 7745, 7747–49, 7756.

[5]Canart, "Nouvelle anthologie monastique"; *idem*, "Nouveaux récits du moine Anastase", in *Actes du XIIe Congrès International d'Études Byzantines* (Belgrade, 1964), II, 263–71. The *Narrationes* have been partially published by Nau: "Récits

Anastasius of Sinai was a prolific writer. Apart from the works to which reference has already been made above, he apparently also wrote a two-volume treatise against the Jews and an apologetic tract for lay people (neither of these has survived),[6] a short tract on heresies and synods,[7] a confession of faith comprising also an anti-heretical defense of neo-Chalcedonian orthodoxy,[8] a series of sermons on diverse themes,[9] a series of homilies,[10] and a dogmatic *tomos* of patristic extracts intended as an intellectual tool in his life-long struggle against Monophysitism.[11] In addition, he has traditionally been credited with the authorship of a number of other much later texts—the inevitable fate of many writers whose works were widely disseminated during or after their lifetimes.[12] Finally, and for our purposes most importantly, he has been credited with the compilation of one of the most important medieval collections of *Questions and Answers*—*erōtapokriseis*—written down some time

utiles à l'âme d'Anastase"; "Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints Pères du Sinai", *OC* 2 (1902), 58–87; and *Les récits inédits du moine Anastase* (Paris, 1902), which includes a number of tales not included in the *OC* articles. See also G. Levi della Vida, "Sulla versione araba di Giovanni Mosco e di Pseudo-Anastasio Sinaita secondo alcuni codici Vaticani", *Miscellanea G. Mercati* (Rome, 1946), 104–15; and Victor Arras, trans., *Quadraginta historiae monachorum* (Leuven, 1988; *CSCO* 506, *Scr. Aethiopici* 86), 138–51., for tales attributed to an Anastasius relating to Egypt and Sinai. For a list of the *Narrationes* and bibliography, see *CPG*, III, no. 7758 (pp. 458-62).

[6] See *PG* 89, 933; and for the τόμος δογματικὸς πρὸς τὸν λαόν, *ibid.*, 97, 124.

[7] In J.B. Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici Graecorum historia et monumenta*, II (Rome, 1868), 257–71 (although its ascription to Anastasius is not certain). See Sakkos, Περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναϊτῶν, 171–74; K.-H. Uthemann, "Die dem Anastasios Sinaites zugeschriebene Synopsis de haeresibus et synodis", *Annuarium historiae conciliorum*, 14 (1982), 58–95.

[8] In Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici graecorum*, 271–74, also of uncertain authorship. Sakkos (Περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναϊτῶν, 174) ascribes it to Anastasius of Sinai.

[9] See *CPG*, III, nos. 7752 (on the deceased), 7753 (on the transfiguration); and Beck, 443.

[10] *CPG*, III, nos. 7750–51, 7754–55.

[11] *CPG*, III, no. 7771. See Ferdinand Cavallera, "Les fragments de S. Amphiloque dans l'Hodegos et le tome dogmatique d'Anastase le Sinaite", *RHE* 8 (1907), 473–97.

[12] Including, for example, a treatise on the Creation, the *Hexaemeron*: see Beck, 444; *CPG*, III, no. 7770; and Uthemann, introduction to his edition of the *Sermones duo*, cxxxix, where he dates it to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. For other dubia, see *CPG*, III, nos. 7771–81, with literature cited.



during the later seventh century.[13] I will discuss this collection in detail in a moment.

In many ways, Anastasius is a most appropriate figure for those interested in the seventh century, since his life coincided almost exactly with it. Born probably in the early years of the century, he was still writing in about the year 700–701. Thanks to the work of Marcel Richard and Karl-Heinz Uthemann in particular, it is possible to date some of his most important works: the *Hodēgos* to the period after 641–42 and before 680–81 (and probably well before, although both dates are approximate), with a revised version equipped with scholia by Anastasius himself, and produced *ca.* 686–89;[14] the tract on heresies and synods to the years 692–95; the *Sermo adversus Monotheletas* to about 701; and the *Oratio de sacra synaxi* to approximately the same period as the *Quaestiones et responsiones*, the last few years of the seventh century.[15]

In spite of his wide-ranging theological interests, his actual knowledge of and access to the secular and ecclesiastical history of his own time seems to have been very limited. It was colored by his travels in Egypt, the Sinai area, and Palestine, but reflects little of the turbulent history of the East Roman state at this time. He may have travelled to or come from Cyprus, although this is uncertain. But when he recounts the history of the beginnings of Monotheletism, he seems to be basing his account on garbled and inaccurate oral traditions and his

[13] See *CPG*, III, no. 7746; and below.

[14] Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, ccvi-ccxvii, ccxviii n. 72; Marcel Richard, "Anastase le Sinaite, l'Hodegos et le Monothélisme", *REB* 16 (1958), 29–42, reprinted in Richard's *Opera Minora*, III (Leuven, 1976–77), 29–34, no. 63.

[15] Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, ccxviii n. 72; Richard, "Anastase le Sinaite". The *Quaestiones et responsiones* refer to a period of 700 years as having elapsed since the time of Christ (*PG* 89, 769B14–C1, Qu. 117/*69); the *Oratio de sacra synaxi* refers in detail to two issues in particular which occur in the *Quaestiones*: the cleansing and purifying value of tears, and the virtue of not judging one's fellow men. The former was an old subject: see the relevant entry in G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), s.v. δάκρυον, 331–32, for the long list of Christian authorities from the third century on who deal with this matter; and note in particular John Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, *PG* 88, 805C–808D. On the latter, see *Quaestiones et responsiones*, *PG* 89, 757C4–760A8 (Qu. 105/*49), and 432A5–B12 (Qu. 10/*73); together with 832D1–833A14, 837A3–11, 848B8–849A2, where both of these issues are developed.

own memory, rather than on any written records. As one commentator has noted, he makes no mention of either Maximus Confessor or the patriarch Sophronius, two of the key protagonists in the opening stages of Monothelite discussion; he makes Athanasius of Antioch, a Monophysite, responsible for suggesting Monotheletism to Heraclius, who then proposes it to the patriarch Sergius of Constantinople and Pope Martin. The Lateran Synod of 649 is presented as the response to Heraclius' *Ekthesis* of 638 (rather than to the *Typos* of Constans II); and Pope Martin's exile occurs before the Muslim conquest of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt. On the other hand, one of the *narrationes* ascribed to Anastasius mentions Thalassius, friend and correspondent of Maximus and abbot of a monastery in Libya, for the time of Niketas, *augustalis* of Egypt.[16] It is perhaps indicative of the time in which Anastasius did most of his writing—the 630s and after—that he appears to have no accurate records at his disposal: even a deliberate falsification of some of the history of the origins of Monotheletism, undertaken in order to demonstrate the culpability of Sergius or Heraclius, would not require quite such a distortion of the chain of events. It may also reflect the fact that after the death of Sophronius in 638 there was an interregnum in Jerusalem of some 29 years, a result partly of the Monothelite politics of the Constantinopolitan church and the state, and partly of the Muslim conquests and their consolidation, the neo-Chalcedonian communities of Palestine and Arabia being fiercely hostile to the new doctrine. Only in northern Syria does there seem to have been any real support for the imperial policy, as demonstrated by the case of the patriarch of Antioch, Makarios, and his followers during and after the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680–81, held in Constantinople. All this may well suggest that Alexandria is the most likely base from which Anastasius conducted much of his business and where his numerous writings were set down. Since there is, indeed, little real evidence to connect him with Sinai apart from the ascription in the manuscript tradition, his ignorance of imperial politics might the more readily be understood. But his overriding concern with defending Chalcedonian

[16] *Sermones duo*, iii, i.18–112. See Richard, "Anastase le Sinaite", 33–34, 41–42. For Thalassius, see Nau's edition of the *Narrationes* in *OC* 2 (1902), 84:10–15, 87:4. He was one of the leading theologians of his time and can be ranked alongside Maximus and Sophronius; see Beck, 450–51.



orthodoxy against heresy (from which I think it reasonable to infer an overriding concern to protect the interests and further existence of a minority community among the Christian populations of the Near East) seems to me an adequate justification for his lack of interest in imperial affairs. His concern was the Christian community of Egypt and Syria and its struggle against the majority Monophysite tradition.[17]

Apart from what can be gleaned from his own writings, little else is known of Anastasius.[18] As we have said, as a neo-Chalcedonian living in an area in which the Church to which he belonged was, from the 640s on, only one of several competing congregations, he devoted much of his life to polemicizing against Monophysitism in particular. In the *Hodēgos* he invoked his knowledge of Islamic writings to demonstrate that Muslim christology evolved as a reaction to the Monophysite dogma of the followers of Severus of Antioch, rather than as a development from it.[19] Like others of his generation, he accepted the popular assumption that the Muslim invasions were a punishment visited upon the Chosen People—the Romans—by God for their sins, specifically,

[17] See Julius Assfalg, ed., *Kleines Wörterbuch des christlichen Orients* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 255–56; John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: the Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), 286–89, 299–313. See also the useful survey by Hugh Kennedy, "The Melkite Church from the Islamic Conquest to the Crusades: Continuity and Adaptation in the Byzantine Legacy", in *Seventeenth International Byzantine Congress, Major Papers* (New York, 1986), 325–42.

[18] For further discussion on Anastasius, see J.-B. Kumpfmüller, *De Anastasio Sinaita* (Würzburg, 1865); and Nau, "Récits utiles à l'âme", 57; Sakkos, Περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναϊτῶν; Canart, "Nouveaux récits", 267–71.

[19] If, as Nau has argued, he is also the author of the *Narrationes*, he seems to have travelled as far afield as Cyprus, and moved frequently between Damascus, Jerusalem, Sinai, and Alexandria/lower Egypt. See Nau, "Récits utiles à l'âme", 57–58; Canart, "Nouveaux récits", 265–67; and Marcel Richard, art. "Anastase le Sinaite" in *Dict. spirit.*, I (Paris, 1937), 546–47. Note also K.-H. Uthemann, "Anti-monophysitische Aporien des Anastasios Sinaites", *BZ* 74 (1981), 11–26. On Anastasius' view of Islam, see Sidney H. Griffith and Robin Darling, "Anastasius of Sinai, the Monophysites and the Qur'ān", *Eighth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts of Papers* (Chicago, 1982), 13. At *Viae Dux* (ed. Uthemann), I.1.44–49 and X.2.4.1–3, he refers explicitly to the views of the "Arabs" and the "Saracens" on christological issues. This seems to be among the earliest Christian references to Islamic theology. For the tradition which develops from the eighth century on, see Adel-Théodore Khoury, "Apologétique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIIIe-XIIIe siècles)", *POC* 29 (1979), 242–300; 30 (1980), 132–74; 32 (1982), 14–49.

the heresy of Monotheletism. He represented also, however, the ordinary people, as is clear from many of the answers ascribed to him in the collection of *Questions and Answers*: he demonstrates a sympathy and understanding for the humdrum, day-to-day existence of ordinary folk which was no doubt common to many holy men and churchmen, but which is—as one might expect—not so readily found in the theological works of a Maximus or the polemical writings of a Sophronius. And it is in this context that the collection of *Questions and Answers* is so important.

## The Textual Tradition and Genre

Collections of questions and answers originated in classical antiquity, and were generally the form through which specific questions in both the secular and the religious spheres were expressed as an educational and didactic exercise.[20] In the Christian tradition, this classical model was adapted to the purpose of Biblical exegesis and, more particularly, the clarification of key concepts in Christian dogma. Beginning in the later third and fourth centuries with compilations attributed to Eusebius of Caesarea, the best-known of these early collections is that of the so-called Ambrosiaster, spuriously attributed to Augustine, and compiled in Rome *ca.* 370–75. It deals with Biblical exegesis (both Old and New Testaments), Arianism and pagan beliefs, and questions of dogma and of Christian morality. Similar compilations followed: an exegetical series ascribed to Jerome, a series of questions and answers on dogma ascribed to Augustine, and others by Eucherius of Lyons and Salonius (son of the latter), which deal in addition with matters such as the origins of ethnic names, the months of the year, Hebrew technical terms and names in the Old Testament, and so on, dating to the fifth century. Similar collections exist for the sixth century, ascribed to a certain Junilius, an official in Justinian's bureaucracy who wrote in about 542,

[20] Hermann Dörries, art. "Erotapokriseis" in *RAC*, VI (Stuttgart, 1966), 342–70. For a less analytic but still valuable descriptive account, see Gustave Bardy, "La littérature patristique des *Quaestiones et responsiones* sur l'Ecriture Sainte", *RB* 41 (1932), 210–36, 341–69, 515–37; 42 (1933), 14–30, 211–29, 328–52; and for a less detailed account, Otto Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur* (Freiburg, 1913–32), IV, 12–13.



and to Isidore of Seville. All these collections can be related to classical *zētēmata*-forms; but other classical forms were also developed in a Christian guise, most importantly the *eisagōgai*, intended, as the name suggests, to introduce a field of learning or knowledge to a beginner, and therefore covering all the key principles of knowledge in the field in question. This was the form adopted by the earliest monastic *apophthegmata*, intended to provide confessional guidance and advice from those who were credited with the appropriate experience and divine inspiration.

Very quickly, however, the two forms were intermixed, so that from the original confessional compilations a hybrid form developed. The *Regulae brevis tractatae*, or *Askētikon*, of Basil, and a similarly constructed text of Symeon, dated to the fourth century, are followed by the ascetic *conlationes* of John Cassianus, in which the confessional aspect is widened to incorporate a more expansive and detailed series of questions on the eremitic life and its purpose and function within Christian society. The literary character of these last compilations contrasts with the originally oral character of the *apophthegmata*. But the compilation known as the *Four Dialogues* of ps.-Caesarius widens its scope to produce a version of both traditions, and is the first real hybrid. Its ascription to the brother of Gregory of Nazianzus may be doubted, although it contains material which may derive from several sources over a considerable period. In its final form it seems to belong to about the mid-sixth century.[21] Two similar compilations are to be ascribed to Theodoret, one certainly, one possibly—the former a polemical collection of *Quaestiones ad Judaeos*, the latter known as the ps.-Justin.[22]

[21] *Caesarii sapientissimi viri fratris Gregorii theologi Dialogi quattuor*, in *PG* 38, 852–1189. Bardy, "Littérature patristique", *RB* 42 (1933), 343, notes that this collection includes references to Maximus Confessor, and concludes that this consequently dates it to the eighth century or later. But the references seem clearly to be a later interpolation—similar instances can be found in the ps.-Anastasian collection of 88 questions (see below) and in the ps.-Athanasian *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*. For a full analysis of this text, see Rudolf Riedinger, *Pseudo-Kaisarios. Überlieferungsgeschichte und Verfasserfrage* (Munich, 1969).

[22] The genuine text is fragmentary: *Quaestiones in loca difficilia scripturae sacrae*, in *PG* 80, 77–858. For the ps.-Justin, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*, see *PG* 6, 1249–1400; and cf. Dörries, "Erotapokriseis", 356–58; Marcel Richard, art. "Florilèges spirituels grecs" in *Dict. spirit.*, V (Paris, 1964), 475–510.

And finally, if we leave to one side the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* and the 79 *Questions and Answers* on various problems of Maximus Confessor, which are restricted to the purely theological and exegetical field,[23] we come to the two collections with which I am most concerned here: the so-called ps.-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, and the *Quaestiones et responsiones* of Anastasius of Sinai.

These two collections, and especially that of Anastasius, are important for several reasons. They have a strongly oral element, although there is little doubt that both were originally compiled as more or less finished collections. Like some earlier collections (especially the ps.-Caesarius and the ps.-Justin), both reflect contemporary concerns and anxieties within an established exegetical-confessional framework. Both, but especially that of Anastasius, contain a great deal of contemporary material, in contrast to most earlier compilations. The ps.-Athanasian collection is clearly based in many respects on the Anastasian. But at the same time, both collections pose a number of difficulties for the historian, for the textual tradition of the Anastasian collection in particular has been heavily interpolated; and their widespread dissemination in medieval times has meant a proliferation of manuscript witnesses which poses particularly difficult problems for any editor. It will be best briefly to summarize these difficulties before looking at the *Questions and Answers* and their value as sources for the society, culture, and beliefs of the seventh-century East Roman world.

First, then, the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius. Briefly, these were first edited in the early seventeenth century by Johann Gretser; and Richard has shown that he in fact edited a text which was already the result of a combination of two earlier collections at some point during the eleventh or twelfth centuries. The older of the two collections, which the eleventh-century redactor emended and altered in many places, consisted of 103 questions attributed to the abbot Anastasius, with no florilegia. The original form of this collection is fortunately preserved in two ninth/tenth-century codices in Moscow and Wolfenbüttel. These two manuscripts complement each other in several

[23] Now edited by Karl Laga and Carlos Steel, *Maximi confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium I: Quaestiones I-LV* (Turnhout and Leuven, 1980; *CCSG* 7); Jóse H. Declerck, *Maximi confessoris Quaestiones et dubia* (Turnhout and Leuven, 1982; *CCSG* 10).



ways, and have permitted Richard both to reestablish the original text of the seventh-century *Questions and Answers*, and to fill one or two important gaps.

The second collection which the eleventh-century redactor employed is an exegetical and spiritual florilegium of the later ninth or tenth century, and comprises 88 questions and answers. The author of this work used the Anastasian collection for some 29 of his questions; and the eleventh-century redactor then put the two collections together, using the second and later collection as his base. He thus uses only 66 of the original *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius, so that the final collection of 154 questions represents only very partially the Anastasian corpus. This is the text edited by Gretser, as mentioned above. In addition, Gretser took a further 15 questions attributed to Anastasius in an appendix to one of the recensions of the florilegium of 88 questions, which are the *Quaestiones extra ordinem* of the Migne edition.

Most of the detective work on the Anastasian collection is the result of the research of Marcel Richard, who unfortunately died before he was able to produce an edition. This task has now been taken up by Father Joseph Munitiz, who has nearly finished the project (with some emendations to Richard's original conclusions) and intends to publish the text in the *Corpus Christianorum* series.[24] Richard gives a complete concordance of the relationship between a) the florilegium of 88 questions and answers, and the original 103 questions and answers of Anastasius; and b) between the Gretser edition republished in *PG* 89, and the original collection; together with the text of questions and answers omitted from the edition but belonging to the original Anastasian corpus.[25]

[24] Marcel Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et réponses' d'Anastase le Sinaïte", *Bulletin de l'Institut de recherches et d'histoire des textes* 15 (1967–68), 39–56; = his *Opera Minora*, III, no. 64, with App. IV-V; *idem*, "Les textes hagiographiques du Codex Athos Philotheou 52", *AB* 93 (1975), 147–56. His views are summarized in "Les fragments du commentaire de S. Hippolyte sur les proverbes de Salomon", *Le Muséon* 79 (1966), 61–94, see 61–62. The two key manuscript witnesses to the original Anastasian corpus are from the Historical Museum, Synodal Library, Ms. Mosqu. graec. 265 (Vlad. 197), fols. 241–298v; and Ms. Wolfenbüttel, Bibl. Herzog-August 4240 (Guden graec. 53), the former of the ninth-tenth centuries, the latter of the tenth.

[25] Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et réponses'", 42–50, 55–56.

The exact date at which these various questions and answers were first written down is not clear. But there is enough internal historical evidence to suggest a date some time in the second half of the seventh century, perhaps around the year 700, certainly after the Muslim conquest of Palestine, Egypt, and Syria. I will discuss this evidence in a moment.

Less can be said about the ps.-Athanasian *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*. The text is still in need of a critical edition and detailed analysis, and it is consequently difficult to reach any firm conclusions. There is no reference to the Arabs or Muslims, or to any of the traumatic developments of the later 630s and after. But this is in itself no evidence of an earlier date. The text of one of the answers refers to the fact that the Arians had held Palestine and the Holy Places for only a short time before they had been driven out, and that "barbarians" had often invaded the region in the past. This might refer to the Persian invasion and occupation of the period 614 to 626–27.[26] The collection is concluded by a long answer to Qu. 137 on how the Jews can be persuaded to accept the fact that Jesus was the Messiah and not simply another prophet.[27] This section is remarkable for two reasons. In the first place, it is not a polemic *adversus Judaeos* in the traditional sense, but an attempt to persuade by fairly rational argument, although it is not lacking entirely in the polemical and sometimes vituperative language of the genre. Second, although it is very much more concise and rigorously ordered, in its disposition it is not unlike the better-known *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, a text which purports to be the argument of a Jewish forced convert, intended to persuade his fellows of the need to embrace Christianity.[28] The *Doctrina* appears to have been written down in the middle years of the 630s, perhaps shortly after 634;[29] and it is a tempting possibility that the ps.-Athanasian text of

[26] Dörries, "Erotapokriseis", 358, thought this reference to Arians might apply rather to the "barbarians", and hence the Persians; *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, in *PG* 28, Qu. 44 (625B1-C16), see 625C7–16. See the description of the collection by Bardy, "Littérature patristique", *RB* 42 (1933), 328–32.

[27] *PG* 28, 684C6–700C5 (*CPG*, III, no. 7795).

[28] *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. N. Bonwetsch in *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, philologisch-historische Klasse*, Neue Folge, 12.8 (Berlin, 1910).

[29] See the comments of Bonwetsch, *Doctrina Jacobi*, xv-xvi; and the text at v.20;



the answer to Qu. 137, which is subdivided into thirteen carefully argued paragraphs (and which seems to have circulated independently of the rest of the ps.-Athanasius, at least after the seventh century, as the evidence of the manuscript tradition would suggest), was written at a time when the emperor Heraclius' edict ordering the compulsory baptism of Jews in the Empire was being carried out. Like the *Doctrina*, it provided a valuable weapon in the theological armory of those interested in winning over the Jews.[30] But the inexactness of the other historical references and the possibilities of interpolation and contamination in a manuscript tradition still in need of analysis, make dating this text to either the seventh century (where it might at first sight appear to belong) or a later period very hazardous. Richard always thought that the Anastasian collection was the source of the ps.-Athanasius; and Munitiz has found that in editing the text of Anastasius, this is a much more likely explanation for the abbreviations and omissions of the ps.-Athanasius. Until a critical edition has been prepared, therefore, the exact relationship of these two collections must remain unclear.[31]

The original form of the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius and that presented in the Felckmann edition of the *Questions* to Antiochus *dux* in *PG* 28 have much in common, both in their presentation and their content. These shared elements give them a particular character which sets them apart both from earlier collections and from the later, derivative collections of Photius and after. Both, it seems to me, demonstrate elements of great originality, although it is also clear that both draw very extensively on earlier collections or, at the very least, on the preexisting tradition. The original Anastasian collection, for example, shows a closeness to the ps.-Caesarius in at least seven questions, the ps.-Justin in two; the ps.-Athanasius has some 21 such

ed. Bonwetsch, 91:9.

[30] On these events, see the documents listed in Franz Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453* (Munich and Berlin, 1924–32), nos. 196, 197, and esp. 206; Beck, 447; Robert Devreesse, "La fin inédite d'une lettre de S. Maxime: un baptême forcé de Juifs et de Samaritains à Carthage en 632", *RSR* 17 (1937), 25–35 (see *CPG*, III, no. 7699 [Ep. 8]).

[31] The problem of interpolations in the text of ps.-Athanasius has not yet received any detailed treatment. For Richard's views on the matter, see "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 55 n. 1; "Les fragments du commentaire de S. Hippolyte", 61 n. 1.

instances altogether; and both draw extensively on the writings of the Church Fathers of the third to the fifth centuries, with whom a wide range of themes and interests are shared.[32]

More importantly, the Anastasian collection and the ps.-Athanasius demonstrate a great number of mutual borrowings, although whether the ps.-Athanasius borrows from Anastasius, as Richard and Munitiz have argued, or whether Anastasius borrowed from an older ps.-Athanasius, remains unclear: I have identified at least 47 cases where there is a clear borrowing by the ps.-Anastasian text from other compilations, and many others where an indirect borrowing has occurred. This can be seen more easily in tabular form (where asterisked numbers denote the original order of the Anastasian collection of 103 questions):

| *Anastasius* | *ps.-Athanasius* |
|---|---|
| 5/*47 | 92 |
| 8/*25 | 95, 96, 107 |
| 10/*73 | 105 (?) |
| 12/*83 | 76 (parts) |
| 13/*55 | 90 |
| 14/*58 | 86 |
| 16/*65 | 121 |
| 18/*29–*30 | 71 (cf. ps.-Caes. Qu. 188) |
| 20/*62 | 111, 124, 125 (cf. ps.-Justin Qu. 5, 100) |
| 21/*17 | 36 |
| 23/*23 | 47–50 (cf. ps.-Caes. Qu. 141–48) |
| 75/*2 | 2 |

[32]See ps.-Athanasius, Qu. 1, 3–9, 12, 47–50, 53, 56, 69–71 (PG 28); and compare with the ps.-Caesarius, Qu. 2, 44–48, 49, 61–62, 86, 90, 119, 140, 149–53, 171, 188. Note also similarities between Anastasius, Qu. 1/*1, 18/*29–30, 23/*23, 60/*96, 87/*15, 96/*28, 109/*59 and ps.-Caesarius, Qu. 171, 188, 141–48, 190, 61–62, 86, 188, 189 respectively (where unmarked numbers = those in the *PG* edition, asterisked numbers represent the original order of the Anastasian collection of 103 questions and answers). For the patristic and other sources used by both the ps.-Athanasius and by Anastasius, see Bardy, "Littérature patristique", *RB* 42 (1933), 328–32, 339–43; Dörries, "Erotapokriseis", 362–64.



| *Anastasius* | *ps.-Athanasius* |
|---|---|
| 79/*7 | 101 |
| 81/*9 | 5 |
| 83/*11 | 84, 72–73, 94 |
| 87/*15 | 53 (cf. ps.-Caes. Qu. 61–62) |
| 88/*16 | 113 |
| 89/*19 | (cf. Qu. 16–26, 32–35) |
| 90/*20 | " " |
| 91/*21 | 17, 20, 21, 22 |
| 92/*22 | 114, 135 |
| 95/*27 | 119 |
| 96/*28 | 69, 105 (cf. ps.-Caes. Qu. 86, 188) |
| 98/*34 | 15 |
| 99/*37 | 98 |
| 100ter/*42 | 34 |
| 100quater/*47 | 92 |
| 101/*43 | 129 |
| 102/*44 | 87 |
| 105/*49 | 80 |
| 106/*50 | 78, 122 |
| 107/*56 | 122, 131–32 |
| 113/*64 | 112 |
| 114/*66 | 103, 104 |
| 116/*68 | 44, 137 |
| 117/*69 | 44 |
| 118/*70 | 42, 43 |
| 119/*71 | 11 |
| 120/*72 | 99, 100 |
| 124/*77 | 95 |
| 125/*79 | 100 |
| 126/*80 | 10 |
| 127/*81 (part) | 119, 47 (part) |
| 129/*83 | 76 |
| 135/*91 | 93 |
| 136/*92 | 88 |
| 139/*100 | 97 |

The Anastasian collection seldom merely copies an exemplar. On the contrary, it often expands the original question and its answer to fit the context or the audience or (monastic) readership for which the work was intended. Thus Qu. 14/*58 on whether one should give alms to the Church or the poor, 16/*15 on the divine sanctioning of leaders, 75/*2 on how one knows whether Christ has truly won one's soul, 96/*28 on why God permits some good men to die early and evil men to prosper, 113/*64 on whether and how one can take communion among the non-orthodox, 127/*81 (although only indirectly related to its ps.-Athanasian equivalent) on the character differences among human beings, 126/*80 on the reasons for Satan's being cast down from heaven, and 105/*49 on the purifying function of tears—all these questions produce somewhat different answers to questions which are essentially concerned with the same theme. It is these differences, together with the topical references to contemporary mores and anxieties, and the originality of the Anastasian collection, which impart to this work, as well as to other writings attributed to Anastasius, their particular interest and importance.

One could argue, of course, that the validity of this assumption is questionable—that Anastasius' collection represents merely a wide range of topoi, and that no "real" situation is described. But we must then ask two questions: what was the purpose of the collection, and what was the relevance of the questions themselves?

In answer to the first question, there seems little doubt, given the lack of literary pretensions, the sometimes confused order in which certain subjects are raised and then dropped, only to reappear under a slightly different guise later on, and the nature of the later florilegia to the collection (clearly intended to clarify some of Anastasius' more obscure positions and explanations), that the collection was no mere literary exercise, such as that compiled in the ninth century by the patriarch Photius. It would have been used by Christians in positions of authority—whether within the secular Church (i.e. external to the monastic establishment) or not—to elucidate and explain, to provide advice and suggest codes of conduct. That it had a practical function is clear enough from the insistence on maintaining a clearly neo-Chalcedonian position on a number of issues which must have affected the minority community which Anastasius represented. And it is



quite different from that other source of advice and rhetorical support, the "logical compendium", a genre which, while owing its origins and raison d'être to the late antique context of the years from the second half of the sixth century to the middle of the eighth century (and the need to set out clearly the basic terms of the debate between the different Christian churches), nevertheless represented a more learned and philosophically informed level of debate.[33]

In answer to the second question, the proportion of questions specific to the situation of neo-Chalcedonian Christians in the Egypt-Palestine-Syria region after the Muslim conquests makes it eminently clear that this was a collection which reflected both real conditions and problems as well as the experiences of many years travelling and advising members of these congregations. Of course, all the standard questions on cosmogony, the nature of the soul, and so forth, are present. But the topical element impresses the reader in its directness and its relevance to the situation as described in the historical record. And it seems highly unlikely that so many topical points of reference would have been falsified or invented. To what end? For the collection must have reflected an experienced reality to have had any value as a source of advice. And that is clearly what it was.

## The Historical Context

Having looked at the tradition in which the collections of *Questions and Answers* of the ps.-Athanasius and of Anastasius of Sinai are to be understood, I would like at this point to comment briefly on the historical context through which these collections and related texts can be interpreted and which they serve to illuminate. Since I have discussed this aspect of the evolution of late Roman society in greater detail elsewhere, where the justification for my general analysis is to be found, I will confine myself to a brief summary here.[34]

In the first place, I want to emphasize the significance of the collapse of antique municipal culture and civilization. Since at least the

[33] For the logical compendia, see Mossman Roueché, "Byzantine Philosophical Texts of the Seventh Century", *JÖB* 23 (1974), 61–76, esp. 61–67.

[34] See my "Ideology and Social Change in the Seventh Century", esp. 161–73; and *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 348–75, 425–35.

third century, the classical form of civic society had been evolving in a direction contradictory to that taken by the forms of state power and authority and the administrative (especially fiscal) apparatuses which dominated it. That is to say, and put somewhat crudely, civic autonomy, especially in the sphere of fiscal supervision of municipal resources, was no longer able to guarantee the state the income it needed. The result was increasingly central supervision of and intervention in municipal affairs, and a concomitant shift in patterns of investment by local élites away from their own cities to the sources of power: Constantinople in the East, senatorial latifundia in the West.[35] The Arab invasions and raids in Asia Minor, Slav, Avar, and later Bulgar occupation or devastation of much of the Balkan area, and the actual conquest and occupation of the Near East and North Africa, with the resulting replacement of the traditional élites from key loci of economic and political power—these were the events which sealed the fate of an already declining and weakened institution. Both inside and outside the eastern Empire, the literary and political culture of municipal life as it had existed was transformed. Within the Empire, and with the exception of Constantinople, it all but vanished entirely. Outside the Empire, the old élite certainly survived, up to a point, but in conditions which made the nurturing of traditional forms of literary culture more difficult. In both areas, however, the Church survived, and it was the Church which preserved and maintained its own version of the traditional culture.

This is particularly evident when one considers the sorts of literature which continued to be produced during the seventh century and into the eighth. For the second point that I would like to emphasize is the fact that there is, after the late 620s and early 630s, and up until the later eighth or early ninth century, a more or less complete disappearance of secular literary forms within the Empire, a phenomenon that has provoked much discussion. After the works of Theophylact Simocatta, for example, or the anonymous *Paschal Chronicle*, or that of John of Antioch; and with the exception of the supposed (and probably quite legendary) lost history of a certain Trajan *patricius* and a

[35] For the West, see C.J. Wickham, "The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism", *Past and Present* 103 (1984), 3–36; for the East, John F. Haldon, "Some Considerations on Byzantine Society and Economy in the Seventh Century", *BF* 10 (1985), 75–112, esp. 78–94.



hypothetical "great chronographer" on whom both Theophanes and the patriarch Nicephorus supposedly drew in the later eighth and early ninth centuries, there is a lacuna of almost 200 years until the next surviving historical work. Similarly, this period provides no examples of geographical, philosophical, or philological literature; there is no epic poetry after George of Pisidia, and only a trickle of legal literature and secular rhetoric. Apart from the letters of a few powerful persons and churchmen and the surviving documents of state and Church as institutions, the literary output of the seventh century appears to have been almost entirely theological in nature, or at the least, very closely related to such—matters of dogma, devotion, various aspects of liturgical practice, problems of day-to-day piety and observance, and so forth. Only outside the Empire, in particular in northern Syria and Iraq, does a secular tradition linger on into the eighth century, particularly in the case of the history or chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa.[36]

Some historiographical or annalistic activity may have continued in Constantinople, of course, just as we know that other forms of literature (such as a limited legal literary activity) continued. But the latter was at least relevant to the state and its survival, as well as to Constantinopolitan perceptions of state and imperial power and tradition. Other literary forms were less tied in to such "needs". Indeed, attitudes to even the immediately local environment and its past reflect a real caesura in the metropolitan cultural assumptions of the sixth century and before, as the so-called "Short Historical Notes" (*Parastaseis syntomai chronikai*) would suggest. And any literary activity which did take place had been quite forgotten by the time of Photius, whose *Bibliotheca* makes no reference to them. Even if we allow for some loss or destruction, the disappearance of the old forms of cultural organization seem to have had clear repercussions in the forms of literature and literary concerns which survived. And this lack of literature in the fields I have described—which cannot possibly be a reflection of some supposed (and remarkably selective!) failure of the secular literary out-

[36] See the relevant surveys in Hunger, on the secular literature referred to. On historiography, see the article of Whitby in this volume; and on Theophilus of Edessa, that of Conrad. Note most recently the comments of Cyril Mango, "The Tradition of Byzantine Chronography", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12–13 (1988–89), 360–72, esp. 364.

put of the seventh and eighth centuries to survive—along with the fact that theological writings, in the broadest sense, not only survive but flourish, is particularly important. For the Church was able to maintain its traditional organization and administration within the Empire and, to a great extent also, its sources of revenue. It needed to be able to educate its clergy, and it needed literate and cultured men for its highest offices. Even here, however, it was topical questions of the day, matters of ecclesiastical politics, the study of the writings of the Church Fathers, and the records of the general councils, along with scripture and Biblical exegesis, that provided the main fields of concern. Interest in the secular, pre-Constantinian, much less the pre-Christian, culture of the past was, for a century or so, a rarity.[37] It is difficult to generalize from the experience of the lands which remained within the Empire to those outside it. But the evidence with which I am familiar suggests that a pattern not dissimilar from that described above applied here also. Of course, there may well be exceptions to any general development; and the conflict of interests within the Christian community in the East, especially between neo-Chalcedonians and Monophysites, left more room for cultural maneuver among the educated clergy and monastic circles and within the secular élite, than was the case within the Empire. In particular, and as mentioned already, there seems to have flourished in the North Syrian cities of Edessa and Emesa (Ḥimṣ) in the last years of the seventh and first half of the eighth centuries both a Christian chronographical or historiographical tradition, represented by the lost work of Theophilus of Edessa, for example, and the sources underlying later Syriac annalistic writings; as well as the apocalyptic tradition represented in the ps.-Methodius *Apocalypse* and that of the Twelve Apostles. The cultural context—especially the survival of urban life, and indeed the importance of both Edessa and Emesa in the Umayyad military and civil administration of these regions—may partly account for this.

Nevertheless, Islam had to be confronted outside the Empire directly, both intellectually and spiritually, and at the level of community

[37] See Beck, 430–32. On the *Parastaseis*, see Averil Cameron, Judith Herrin, *et al*, *Constantinople in the Eighth Century: the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Leiden, 1984); and esp. Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: études sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris, 1984).



politics. The dangers of apostasy were always present, even though—remarkably—the final Islamization of Syria and Palestine does not seem to have had a great deal of success before the later ninth and tenth centuries.

The sources available for elucidating the ways in which East Mediterranean Christian society and culture changed, therefore, are limited, both for the imperial territories and for the areas which were conquered and which did not necessarily suffer the same fate as the Empire in respect of warfare and disruption of economic and social life. From the historiographical point of view, there are a number of Syriac sources, some near-contemporary Arab histories, the Armenian account of Sebēos, and the Coptic history of John of Nikiu. But the majority of these were themselves the products of either a Christian and monastic context, or of the ethos and perspective of the Muslim conquerors. As general accounts, they usually tell us little or nothing about ordinary, day-to-day attitudes and beliefs.[38] In the context of the seventh century, in which the cultural pluralism of the late ancient past was replaced by an introversion within Christian society, both within and without the Empire, the attitudes and practices revealed in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai, among others, are especially important.[39]

## Anastasius and the Concerns of Seventh-Century Society

The *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius of Sinai cover a wide range of concerns. In the following, I will single out those where a clearly context-bound response from Anastasius either substantially emends an answer given in the older collection of ps.-Athanasius, or where the Anastasian Question and Answer is not found in any other collection

[38] For the Syriac tradition, see S.P. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning", in Nina G. Garsoian, Thomas F. Mathews, Robert W. Thomson, eds., *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington D.C., 1982), 17–34; *idem*, "Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History", *BMGS* 2 (1976), 17–36; and Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser". For the North Syrian tradition, see in particular the contributions of Reinink, Drijvers, and Conrad in this volume.

[39] See Haldon, "Ideology and Social Change", 165–70.

in the form in which it is presented in his collection.[40]

Dagron has already noted the originality of many of the questions in the Anastasian collection, and has pointed in particular to the ambiguous position occupied in both the ps.-Athanasius and the Anastasian collection by quasi-occultic concerns, predictions, astrology, and the pre-Christian medical and physiological tradition.[41] These, and several other themes, represent central elements in the text. Most important seem to me to be those that deal with matters of day-to-day observance; with the implicit relationships between Christian ideas and traditional practices; current understandings of the relationship between God and mankind, on the one hand, and the political situation of Christians, especially those outside the Empire; the difficulties experienced by the latter; the rôle and function of monks and holy men (often compared with that of ordinary people); and the problem of the redemption of sins.

Within these themes are to be found a great diversity of important sub-themes—medicine, the body, sexuality, the relationship between wonders wrought by divine power and those wrought by Satan, and so on. Noticeable throughout is an element of uncertainty, perhaps not out of place in a collection of questions and answers. But there is a difference in tone between Anastasius' collection and earlier, usually more formalistic collections. This is especially true where the questions concern what is clearly a novel situation—Christians under Muslim rule, Christian slaves of Muslims, and Christians outside the Empire, whatever their creed. Perhaps most interesting of all, however, is the fact that the daily observances of belief and Christian ritual can be shown to be much less rigorously and uniformly observed within the neo-Chalcedonian community than the "official line" represented in the canons of the Quinisext, for example, would suggest. So much

[40]The wide range of topics covered by the collection has been summarized by Dörries, "Erotapokriseis", 362–64, and by Richard, "Florilèges spirituels grecs", 500–501.

[41]Gilbert Dagron, "Le saint, le savant, l'astrologue: étude de thèmes hagiographiques à travers quelques recueils de 'Questions et réponses' des Ve-VIIe siècles", in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés (IVe-VIIe siècles): études augustiniennes* (Paris, 1981), 143–55, reprinted in G. Dagron, *La romanité chrétienne en Orient* (London, 1984), IV.



is clear, of course, both from the references to popular and traditional practices in the latter, as well as from the commentary to those canons of later writers such as Balsamon, whose remarks illustrate the continuous existence of these pre-Christian (but not necessarily un-Christian) customs.[42] But the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius provide valuable corroborative evidence for the pluralism of practice within neo-Chalcedonian Christianity, as well as the lack of any clear directives on many matters touching upon everyday life. They also demonstrate the divergences in practice which may have developed as the Imperial Church within the Empire lost its more immediate hold on the affairs of the churches henceforth under Muslim rule.

Such day-to-day matters of Christian life under Muslim rule are expressed in many ways. In Qu. 132/*87[43] the questioner asks how he can redeem his sins if, having been reduced to servitude or captured in war, he can no longer go to church when he so wishes, or fast, or observe a vigil. The answer points out that it is not necessarily in physical acts that true faith is to be shown; keeping one's faith with God and showing true humility of spirit are just as important, the more so in the conditions described by the questioner, which represent also a form of redemption of sins, since these trials and tribulations were sent as a test of faith. Qu. *88 follows this up with a request for advice on how to obtain forgiveness for one's sins if one lives in the "world" and possesses adequate wealth and property (perhaps also being married and with children). The answer, which is quite extensive and detailed, is interesting: nearly all those who have shown themselves pleasing and acceptable to God in Scripture—Abraham, Joseph and others, Moses, David, and many tens of thousands of others (!)—were also men of the world, possessing both wealth and families. Indeed, it is one of Satan's tricks to convince men that it is impossible to obtain redemption unless one gives up the secular world and becomes a monk or hermit, dwelling in the wilderness. For many have been thus deceived and, carrying on with their sinful ways, confidently assume that they will eventually be able to drop their secular life-style and redeem their

[42]See Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 371–75.

[43]For the text of the question, see PG 89, 784C1–5; the answer is in Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 48, with n. 5 (a reference to a story concerning S. Antony).

sins. But in the end they find the ascetic life too hard, and thus face eternal damnation.

Equally interesting is Qu. 5 (with 100)/*47, on how one can be saved if one is unable to pursue the monastic vocation. The answer is straightforward and honest: God did not ordain celibacy or *anachoresis* as the only means of salvation—true humility and faith are just as important.[44]

Such answers throw an interesting light on attitudes both to the monastic and eremitic life and to the degree to which the popular piety of the official prescriptions on Christian practice were or were not observed. It is important to note that Anastasius is keen to present the Christian way of life as not incompatible with an ordinary secular existence. Implicit also is a reflection of a popular assumption that only the monks and holy men can attain salvation, a viewpoint which may represent the over-successful propaganda of such men and women since the fourth century,[45] and which surely must have presented a threat to the solidarity of Christian communities in the face of the new religious force of Islam. In the context of the second part of his answer, he notes that the "present generation" finds itself in a period of spiritual crisis, not dissimilar to that experienced by the Children of Israel during the Babylonian captivity.[46]

Many other questions deal with matters of everyday concern which were clearly relevant to Christians everywhere. Can one go straight

[44] Qu. *88 is to be found in Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 48; the answer = resp. 132 and 133 of the *PG* text (*PG* 89, 784C7–785C13). Qu. 5 + 100/*47 appears also in the ps.-Athanasian collection, but is less specific and makes no mention of the monastic life as such. See *PG* 89, 361B6–C1, C5–10; *PG* 28, 653C–D6. Cf. also Anastasius, Qu. 93/*23 on the same theme. For a closer parallel to Anastasius' text, see, for example, John Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, 1, 636B.

[45] The gulf separating the "ordinary" Christian from the holy man and ascetic, perhaps more clearly discernible in Syria than elsewhere, but nevertheless a common element of Christian culture from the fourth and fifth centuries in the East in particular, has been well described by Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London and Boston, 1988), see 305–38; also Norman H. Baynes, "The Thought-World of East Rome", in his *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1960), 24–46, esp. 26–27, with Brown's discussion in *The Body and Society*, 205–207.

[46] *PG* 89, 785B1–5.



from the marital bed or from a dream into church after having bathed (Qu. 98bis/*38)? Can one take communion in the same state (Qu. 98ter/*39)? Can one take communion having accidentally swallowed bathwater (Qu. 100/*40)? How often should one take communion—daily, at intervals, on Sundays only (Qu. 100bis/*41)? Many of these are, of course, ancient subjects closely related to the Judaic traditions of physical and spiritual purity (to which I will return), and form a continuous thread of concern from the earliest Christian times. And even though many of the taboos of which they are symptomatic had been reformulated and modified by centuries of Christian debate, Anastasius' *Questions and Answers* suggest that they still provoked some degree of confusion and uncertainty.[47]

The answers provide the faithful with several options, depending upon one's commitments; but no firm denial of access is pronounced—physical purity does not interest God, only spiritual purity. The answer to Qu. *41 is interesting. Anastasius divides up those who take communion into several groups: there are those who should take communion daily, those for whom this is unsuitable, and those who should not take communion at all. Then again, there are those who have distanced themselves from the holy mysteries and have fallen into sinful ways, such as the race of the Armenians; others partake hypocritically as a means of insuring themselves against sin; others again partake frivolously and without due thought, thereby opening their souls to Satan; while others still merely intend at some time to take communion, and carry on in their sinful ways; and so on. These concerns are very similar to those expressed by Anastasius in a brief sermon on the liturgy, in which he bewails the sloppy, ignorant, and disrespectful way in which many of his contemporaries behave during church services. Such matters were clearly dear to his heart.[48]

[47] The printed edition contains only a fraction of a much longer text: see *PG* 89, 753B13–C7; with Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 44–45, for the bulk of the answer. The question of the polluting nature of the sexual and the consequent trajectory of development of relations between men and women in the Christian world is discussed at length by Brown, *The Body and Society*; see esp. 140–42, 230–32.

[48] See *S. Anastasii Sinaitae oratio de sacra synaxi*, in *PG* 89, 825A–849C. Note especially 829A–832A9 for a damning description of how congregations treat the

The difficulties posed by life in a heterodox world were also problems of concern to Anastasius and his questioners. Should you carry the Eucharist with you in a *skevophorion* while travelling away from home, or take communion wherever you find it? The answer is yes, take the Eucharist with you, for you should never take communion with heretics—a reflection of Anastasius' fierce opposition to Monophysitism.[49] How it is that even heretics can work miracles (an old concern, appearing in the ps.-Justin, Qu. 5 and 100, and ps.-Athanasius, Qu. 111) is the subject of Qu. 20/*62. Why are heretics who return to the fold of orthodoxy not rebaptized (Qu. 86/*14)? This is again an older question, but one reflected also in the canons of the Quinisext.[50] Is it good to confess

liturgy and service cynically, yawning and falling asleep when the priest preaches too long, rushing from the church and fleeing prayer "as though from the courthouse" (an interesting metaphor for legal historians!). Some leave before the service is finished; others go only when their friends tell them that communion is about to take place, whereupon they rush into church "like dogs" and, grabbing the sacred bread, rush out again; others gather to chatter and gossip, ignoring the service entirely; while others, having taken communion, cannot wait to get back to the pleasures of the flesh. Anastasius adds that many stand around in the church ogling the women in the congregation, while others discuss matters of business and money. No doubt the picture is exaggerated; but it gives us again some idea of the concerns of this seventh-century monk and holy man, and of the attitudes of ordinary people to the formal elements of faith.

[49] *PG* 89, 765A–B (Qu. 113/*64). The same question is found in ps.-Athanasius, Qu. 112 (*PG* 28, 665C–668A). But whereas in the latter the question revolves around whether one should forego communion altogether as an alternative to taking it with heretics, in the former one is permitted to carry the Eucharist with one—suggestive, perhaps, of the isolation of some neo-Chalcedonian communities in the areas with which Anastasius was familiar. Monophysitism and the struggle against heresy figure prominently in the collection: Qu. 116/*68 asks for advice on what to do when a heretic asks for an exposition of orthodox dogma; Qu. 117/*69 provides a complex historico-theological apologia for the orthodox in such situations; both questions are also echoed in ps.-Athanasius, Qu. 44 and 137, but the Anastasian versions reflect their own times (e.g. the comment that the barbarians currently hold the Holy Places, and that 700 years have elapsed since the birth of Christ): see *PG* 89, 768B2–769C2; *PG* 28, 625A13–C16. Similarly, Qu. 118/*70 wonders why Satan did not cause divisions and schisms in other faiths such as those he has caused to erupt among the Christians—again, echoed in ps.-Athanasius, Qu. 42 & 43 (*PG* 89, 769C3–772A4; *PG* 28, 624B8–625A12).

[50] On Qu. 20/*62 see also Dagron, "Le saint, le savant, l'astrologue", 146–47; for Qu. 86/*14: *PG* 89, 712B13–C8; Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'",



one's sins (Qu. 105bis/*52, repeated in Qu. 6/*52)? The answer is, of course, in the affirmative—but only to a recognized and tried *anēr pneumatikos*: the assumption implicit in the reply is that there are a number of less competent "holy men" about, dubious figures by whom the believer might unknowingly be misled or deceived. This is again a concern reflected in other texts—in both the canons of the Quinisext, and in the probably (in parts) late-seventh-century fictional *Life* of S. Andrew Salos.[51]

Questions which reflect more directly the new political and religious order represent an important innovation in the genre. Thus Qu. 110/*60 wonders whether one should pray for political leaders if they are pagans, Jews, or heretics; Qu. 16/*65 asks whether every leader, or king, or bishop is appointed by God (the answer to both questions is "yes");[52] Qu. 17/*101 asks whether all the evils which the Arabs have

43; but cf. ps.-Justin, Qu. 14. For the Quinisext, see Canon 95 in Mansi, XI, 984B–E. This is itself based on Canon 7 of Constantinople I (AD 381); see Mansi, II, 676–77; Karl Hefele and Henri Leclerq, *Histoire des conciles* (Paris, 1907–52), II, 1.

[51] *PG* 89, 369D-372A7, 760A9–B2. Quinisext: Canons 41 and 42—Mansi, XI, 964A–C, 964D. For a warning tale of a woman who was taken in by a "false" holy man, *Vita Andreae Sali* (*PG* 111, 621–888), 777C–781A; and cf. François Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca* (Brussels, 1957), no. 117. The *Life* is fictional, but may be of late seventh-century date: see Cyril Mango, "The Life of St. Andrew the Fool Reconsidered", *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi* (Bologna, 1982; *Miscellanea A. Pertusi*), II, 297–313, reprinted in his *Byzantium and its Image* (London 1984), VIII. Against this, and arguing a later ninth or tenth-century date, see Lennart Rydén, "The *Life* of St. Basil the Younger and the *Life* of St. Andrew Salos", in *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983; *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7), 568–86. In fact, the *Life* seems to be of seventh-century origin, but with numerous ninth-century interpolations (similar, therefore, to the *Miracula S. Artemii*, also set in Constantinople, albeit with fewer obviously interpolated passages).

[52] *PG* 89, 476B–477A15, with a previously unpublished section, in Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 47. The answer is interesting. Anastasius relates two tales (and the similarity of style with the *Narrationes* is clear), one concerning God's reason for inflicting the wicked tyrant Phocas upon the Christian world ("I could find no one worse"), the other concerning a wicked town in the Thebaid. The final section of the answer remarks that even when Man has received the leaders and rulers he has deserved for his sins, still in the midst of his afflictions he continues in his wickedness; and Anastasius continues: "Believe me when I say

perpetrated on the lands and peoples of the Christians are invariably a result of God's will.[53] Qu. 121/*74 deals with the possibility of a Christian taking a pagan or barbarian wife; and Qu. 123/*76 concerns the problem of Christian women who, as slaves and captives, commit certain transgressions.[54]

Two questions in particular seem to relate to persecution and oppression: Qu. 122/*75 asks whether the person who flees in time of persecution commits a sin, to which the answer is (as with so many of Anastasius' replies): it depends. If persecution will lead to the extinction of a Christian soul, flight is in order. If, on the other hand, mere physical chastisement and suffering are all that is at stake, then it is not (and there is an echo, here also, of Canon 37 of the Quinisext dealing with the provincial clergy's abandonment of their congregations in devastated or threatened areas.[55] Qu. 134/*89, in contrast, wonders why it is that so many can be seen "nowadays" rushing to their death on account of their faith, but upon reaching the very threshhold of death, are suddenly set free, either by the prayers of men or by the change of

today that even if the race of the Saracens were to depart from us, straightway tomorrow the Blues and Greens would rise up again and the East, and Arabia, and Palestine, and many other lands would bring slaughter upon themselves". Not only the Arabs, but also the Blues and Greens, were seen as elements in this picture of heavenly punishment. Note that this question occurs in the ps.-Athanasius (Qu. 121, *PG* 28, 676A), but with a very much shorter answer and without the contemporary detail furnished by Anastasius.

[53] Fragments of the text: *PG* 89, 484B4–13; for the question, see Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 50.

[54] *PG* 89, 773A10–C1. Again, the answer is interesting, and deals with the relative merits of those who are forced into sin through sheer need—hunger, for example—and those who sin through wantonness and love of pleasure. The latter are to be condemned; and the example given picks out the Christian courtesans of the cities who gain wealth and jewels through betraying their own sisters, whom they see in chains.

[55] *PG* 89, 773A1–9; and see Mansi, XI, 960C–E. Note also Qu. 114/*66 (*PG* 89, 765A–B, extended by ps.-Athanasius, Qu. 112, *PG* 28, 665C–668A) on whether it is possible to flee the plague—a topical question given the terrible epidemic which struck Syria and the surrounding districts in the 680s. See Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Karl de Boor (Leipzig, 1883–85), 364:3–4; S.P. Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the late Seventh Century. Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's *Rīš Mellē*", *JSAI* 9 (1987), 51–75, see 68, *s.a.* 686–87. Note also *Narratio* 40 (ed. Nau, *OC* 2, 83:17–26) on the problem of sinners vainly attempting to escape the plague.



mind of tyrants. The answer is noncommittal; essentially, God works in mysterious ways. But the question then begs itself, to what events is this text referring? Is this a faint echo of the vagaries in the policy of the various Islamic authorities to Christian resentment of their rule, or does it perhaps refer to the question of conversion?[56]

Other questions relate the fate that has befallen the Empire and the Christian communities to the traditional explanation of punishment for transgressions. But Anastasius gives them an unusual twist. For example, in Qu. 94/*26 he is asked why there are more people suffering from various physical afflictions— maimed, arthritic, gouty, leprous, epileptic—among the Christians than among the infidels. His answer produces an interesting and significant compromise: on the one hand, there is an explanation which relates such afflictions to the fact that God has sent them as a trial of the Christians' faith and love for Him. On the other hand, certain persons believe that it is a question of climate, habitat, racial character, and diet, so that the Jews, for example, who are given to excessive eating and drinking, nevertheless escape the illnesses they should thereby contract by virtue of living in a dry climate and having the corresponding racial characteristics. Anastasius gives an interesting example: in Cyprus, shortly before 647, a *philosophos* and *iatrosophos* observed a crowd of people suffering from a variety of afflictions at the sanctuary of S. Epiphanius, hoping for a miraculous cure. The *philosophos* suggested that they might be helped by the application of a certain dietary régime, purgatives, and bleeding; undertaking to effect this on the orders of the bishop, he succeeded in curing many.[57]

This text has been commented upon by Dagron, as have Qu. 95/*27 and 96/*28 on the differences between the variety of human personality types, and on the reasons why certain virtuous Christians die young, whereas many evil men enjoy long and successful lives. Dagron has noted in particular the strong antithesis which emerges in these questions between the simple notion of divine will, on the one hand, and more complex ideas rooted in ancient medical and astrological theory on the nature of man. The key question for Anastasius was how to

[56] *PG* 89, 785D1–788A10.

[57] *PG* 89, 732B9–733A7.

reconcile these divergent approaches within a Christian framework of divine providence; for by admitting that a natural mediation of the divine *pronoia* could play a fundamental rôle, he implicitly challenged the more reductionist interpretations of divine order upon which the hagiographic tradition, for example, was based.[58] I will not repeat Dagron's analysis and conclusions here, since this particular problem is not my concern; but I would like to emphasize this decidedly pre-Christian tradition—the more so, since Anastasius himself remarks that it may no longer be acceptable.

In Qu. 127/*81 the same theme is taken up once more, and presents a very different explanation. The questioner asks why, given that there is a physiological explanation for the differences between men and women, some women cannot bear children, while others bear many and yet others only a few?[59] The answer once again returns to a pre-Christian medical and physiological tradition, while in the process casting some light on attitudes to poverty and deprivation. For Anastasius notes that the causes of childlessness are many and varied, depending equally on climatic and physiological traits: prostitutes, for example, who are wont to cast aside the seed, conceive with difficulty. Similarly, many wealthy persons who live lives of affluence and who desire children are unable to have them; whereas the poor often have very many. Their bodies are parched through need, like thirsting soil, and immediately seize upon the moisture of the seed which

[58] See Dagron, "Le saint, le savant, l'astrologue", 144–46. For Qu. 95/*27: *PG* 89, 733A9–736A3; Qu. 96/*28: *PG* 89, 736A5–749D2. Both questions are repeated in the ps.-Athanasius, however, unlike the previous one: see *PG* 28, 673B6–C14 (Qu. 119), and 636B1–637A9 (Qu. 69) with 661D2–664A8; but in the case of Anastasius' Qu. 96/*28, he offers a much extended discussion, referring, incidentally, to settlements of Cypriot prisoners on the shores of the Dead Sea at Zoera and Tetrapyr(g)ia who, once again because of their "dry" homeland, can withstand the rigors of their new habitat (*PG* 89, 745A6–B4). There appear to have been mines (for salt?) in this district, for Eusebius refers to the fact that Christians used to be condemned to serve out their sentences there under the pagan emperors. See Eusebius' *Liber de martyribus palaestinae* (*Die palaestinischen Maertyres des Eusebius*), ed. Bruno Violet (Leipzig, 1896; *TU* 14.4), 105–106, 118. The climate does not appear to have affected them fatally. I thank Avshalom Laniado for this reference.

[59] Anastasius: *PG* 89, 776C10–780C8.



enters them—just like those "among us" who are destitute, poor, mendicant, or like the Arabs, who can scarcely afford bread, yet have many children.[60]

But Anastasius goes on to note that the physiological explanations are all part of the natural and physical worlds, and therefore a part of God's divine creation. And he continues with a discussion of the daily changes in the human physiology, which he likewise relates to natural-biological factors which are all part of the divine plan. What is particularly interesting, however, is his recognition that such arguments are no longer really acceptable. At one point, he notes that an antagonist might accuse one who gave such an explanation as casting doubt on God's creation of the universe.[61] And at the beginning of his answer, he makes an important remark: "If we wish to explain these and similar matters in detail, it will be necessary to go into certain medical enquiries into natural phenomena, not altogether in accordance with what is usually read out in church; but since the explanation given was vague (referring to a previous answer), I will try to clarify".[62] I will return to this theme at the end of the paper.

Anastasius' *Questions and Answers* take up many other subjects of interest. I will end this brief survey by looking at the problem of

[60] *PG* 89, 776D8–777A11. Compare John Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, 15, 889A.

[61] In spite of Anastasius' argument, there of course remains the problem of how to relate direct divine intervention on the hagiographical model to these longer-term, naturalistic-physiological explanations, as Dagron notes in connection with Qu. 94/*26, 95/*27 and 96/*28.

[62] *PG* 89, 777A15–B2, and especially 776D2–6. Munitiz notes that the Gretser text is incorrect: τῇ κοινῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἀκροάσει should read, according to the Mss.: τῇ κοινῇ ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀκροάσει. Contrary to what might be expected, Anastasius rarely appears to invoke a classic text in connection with such matters, Nemesius of Emesa's *De natura hominis*. John of Damascus, on the other hand, draws on Nemesius very frequently, as do many later commentators. See K. Burkhard, "Iohannes' Damascenus Auszüge aus Nemesius", in *Wiener Eranos zur 50. Versammlung deutscher Philologen* (Vienna, 1909), 89–101. Although the later florilegia on the Anastasian text contain two specific extracts from Nemesius, only a short section seems to have been used by Anastasius in his original compilation. See 100ter/*42 (*PG* 89, 545C11–D5). On the other hand, Anastasius' account of the theory of the four elements—for example, at Qu. 96/*28 (*PG* 89, 736A5-749D2)—is very explicit and may well draw on an account such as that of Nemesius. See Nemesius' *De natura hominis*, IV, V; ed. Moreno Morani (Leipzig, 1987), 44:22–55:7.

prediction and soothsaying. While this has also been examined briefly by Dagron, one aspect which he did not take up is worthy of attention here. In Qu. 108/*57, Anastasius is asked whether Christians are permitted to seek an answer to their questions through *lachnistērion*, that is to say, by the random opening of the Scriptures and the interpretation of the text thus revealed. His answer is, once more, equivocal: the Fathers make no mention of permitting it, but imply that it is to be counted among the practices of soothsayers and sorcerers. If one does wish to employ this device, one should first pray to God and ask permission, and then, upon opening (the Bible), ask Him if He calls the supplicant to open with reference to the matter in hand. If God permits this, then the Scriptures should be opened, but *only* if God permits it.[63]

While there is a tradition of the invocation of (apparent) "chance" in the Acts of the Apostles, this is not a particularly satisfactory answer in the context of the seventh century; and so in Qu. 109bis/*97 the question is raised again: "In what way should we understand: 'if two or three of you should agree on every request which is made [to God], it will be granted them'"? The answer explains that God wishes us to trust not in ourselves alone, unless we lead an especially virtuous and holy life, but rather to obtain the agreement and advice of fellow Christians in prayer in respect of our questions. He who makes such requests alone often falls into vanity, whereas many praying together retain humility. Anastasius himself had often prayed thus with others, he says, and had success. He therefore recommends the practice to his questioner. For frequently, if two or three pray or fast together, their prayer is answered. Once more, this is a motif familiar from the *apophthegmata* and from Moschus.

So much for the first part of his reply. But he then goes on to suggest using the *lachnistērion* method in order to obtain a true answer; and he suggests further that on account of this the Christian should have a spiritual *ephod*, that is, the Holy Spirit should shine upon him and show him what is fitting and what is not. "For those who possess this have told us that, when they make a request to God concerning any matter, if the request is pleasing to Him, the grace of the Holy Spirit covers

[63] *PG* 89, 761A5–B1.



them".[64] Here we have once again recourse to methods of which the Church undoubtedly disapproved, at least at the formal level: witness the relevant canons of the Quinisext condemning and prohibiting a variety of methods of prediction and soothsaying.[65] But Anastasius' value as a reflection of ordinary people's beliefs and attitudes and of the practices of day-to-day life is borne out by later hagiography, among other sources, and provides also an important check on the weight often given to the formal and official sources, such as the canons.[66]

The quasi-magical efficacy of the original Biblical *ephod* is explained in Qu. 40/*98, where a somewhat garbled description of this garment (described in detail in Exodus 28:6–13, 39:1–26) is given, together with how it functioned. Its scriptural pedigree was impeccable, of course, but it nevertheless represented a tradition with which the Church was clearly not happy, as the prohibition (however ineffectual it might ac-

[64] For the Scriptural tradition, see Acts 1:26, Colossians 1:12. The Church seems never to have reached a formal ruling on *lachnistērion*. This and related practices were condemned by Augustine, by several Western synods in the fifth and sixth centuries, and by Gregory the Great. Thomas Aquinas regarded the example of Matthew in Acts 1:23–26 as an exception and was otherwise suspicious of the use of lots and chance selection by Christians. See A. Michel, art. "Sort" in Alfred Vacant, Eugène Mangenot, and Émile Amann, eds., *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, XIV.2 (Paris, 1941); 2420–21; Ernst von Dobschütz, art. "Sortes apostolorum or sanctorum" in Samuel Macauley Jackson *et al.*, eds., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge* (London and New York, 1911), XI, 9. The way in which Anastasius formulates his answer reflects this situation, partly induced also by the fact that the use of lots and chance had an ancient and decidedly pre-Christian aspect to it. On the other hand, some Byzantines at least had no qualms about employing *lachnistērion*, as indicated by the examples of the emperor Heraclius (who reportedly took advice in this way while on campaign against the Persians) and the emperor Leo VI, to whom is attributed (although doubtfully) a short tract on the subject. See Phédon Koukoulès, Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμός, A/II (Athens, 1948), 158. It is still in use in the Orthodox world today. Only part of this question is published at *PG* 89, 761C1–764A9; the omitted section on the ephod is published by Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 49.

[65] See Canon 61, proscribing soothsayers, diviners, fortune-tellers, and others who deceive the ordinary people, for example; Mansi, XI, 969E–972A.

[66] See Balsamon's commentary to the relevant canons, in K. Rhalles and M. Potles, Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων (Athens, 1852–59), II, 442–47, for the continued survival of these traditions; and see the examples of popular faith cited in Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 333–37.

tually have been) on various forms of fortune-telling in Canon 61 of the Quinisext makes clear.[67] The metaphorical *ephod* which Anastasius mentions represents a state of mind, of course, perhaps the practice of "discernment of spirits", which was an accepted tradition; but it may equally imply the possibility that what was meant was an induced, trancelike state in those who pray—again, a feature of popular faith with which the ecclesiastical authorities were less than comfortable.[68]

In the end, the point is that there is no clearly delineated line to be drawn in the answers of Anastasius between the purely Christian (surely always a hypothetical level of praxis) and the pre- or sub-Christian. Anastasius is quite clear on heresy; he is also clear on the marginal status of some forms of knowledge and explanation he has to offer. He is clear that simple astrology and the belief in fate or chance are not Christian and endanger the soul.[69] His collection of *Questions and Answers*—like the *narrationes* also ascribed to his name—reflects the same world of malevolent demons, humans manipulated by the Devil, and good souls saved by true faith, which is mirrored in the stories of the Desert Fathers and the hagiography of the fifth and sixth centuries. But his answers also reflect the uncertainty and insecurity of the age, I believe, and it is this which has most drawn my attention in reading the works attributed to him. Collections of *Questions and Answers* are, by their very nature, bound to represent uncertainties. But this collection seems to represent a particular moment in East Mediterranean Christian cultural history, a moment of massive change in popular conceptions of the experienced, day-to-day world, as well as in relations of political power and authority. It also hints at a narrowing and limiting of horizons, at a closing in of perspectives on the relationship between the divine and the mortal, and at the closing off of discourses which

[67] *PG* 89, 585A6–B14; and cf. Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 49.

[68] See Canon 60 of the Quinisext; Mansi, XI, 969D. For *diakrisis*, or discernment of spirit, see the art. "Discernement des ésprits" in *Dict. spirit.*, VII, 1222–91, esp. 1252–54; and Joseph T. Lienhard, "On 'Discernment of Spirits' in the Early Church", *Theological Studies* 41 (1980), 505–29.

[69] As, for example, Qu. 19/*85 on Fate (and cf. Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses'", 48).



had been part of the common cultural heritage of the Hellenistic and Roman world. I am not suggesting that Anastasius was himself an exponent of this closing off. On the contrary, his breadth of vision and his intellectual pluralism make such a notion untenable. But his *Questions and Answers* represent the wider cultural context as well, and it is this with which I am concerned. Even outside the political boundaries and the reach of the Empire and the imperial Church which was finally consolidated during this period, the cultural introversion of eastern Christianity and imperial ideology had their effects upon the thinkable and the ways in which the world was to be understood. And those effects mark the real establishment of the medieval world.

This cultural and intellectual introversion, which was particularly marked within the Empire, also had consequences in the Christian world under Muslim rule. However, I would like to end this paper by stressing one or two elements of cultural continuity which existed between the Islamic and Christian worlds. The conflict between Hellenistic rationalism, if it can be called that, and Christian views on direct divine intervention—a conflict represented in the work of Anastasius, for example, by the juxtaposition of answers on natural-physiological causation, on the one hand, and by divine and miraculous intervention through icons and amulets, on the other—remains implicit in Christian culture throughout the following centuries. As Dagron has clearly noted, the pre-Christian tradition incorporated into Anastasius' work implies a physical influence which is not predetermined, in which doctors can manipulate the laws of nature, so to speak, and in which divine intervention is exceptional.[70] It contrasts with the sort of miraculous intervention brought about through prayer and faith alone,[71] and constitutes in effect its antithesis. Anastasius' efforts at compromise were theologically not entirely convincing, at least in respect of popular piety and belief. But in the history of Christian thinking thereafter,

[70] See esp. Qu. 94/*26, 95/*27, 96/*28, 98/*34, the last three all based on questions in the ps.-Athanasius (119, 69 and 105, and 15 respectively; see also ps.-Caesarius, Qu. 86 and 188 in respect of Anastasius' Qu. 96/*28). Note also Qu. 114/*66 (= ps.-Athanasius, Qu. 103, 104) on the causes of plagues.

[71] As exemplified in near-contemporary works of hagiography—e.g. the miracles of Artemius and of Therapon or those recounted in the *Life of Andrew the Fool*; or in the *Narrationes* ascribed to Anastasius himself.

the compromise was not forgotten. Indeed, the later textual history of his collection, the addition of lengthy florilegia detailing received opinion (or that favored by the Church authorities) which served to conceal his originality and his open-minded pragmatism, make it clear that Anastasius could not be ignored. Both the "rationalist" tradition of the Hellenistic world and the divinely ordained world order of heavenly *pronoia* coexisted at different social and intellectual levels and in different literary genres throughout the medieval period, occasionally brought together more explicitly in the writings of such men as John of Damascus, Photius, and Michael Psellus.

But it is worth recalling that the Christian tradition to which I have been referring was also heavily influenced by Judaic thought. This is especially so in the case of ideas about the body, attitudes to illness and its causes, and the remedies that apply thereto. Hellenistic medicine asserted that the essential condition for good health was internal bodily equilibrium, and that its remedies therefore involved the application of measures designed to alter the internal balance of the body's elements. Jewish medicine, in contrast, was designed to expel evil which polluted the sufferer from the outside. Illness was, in effect, the consequence of a healthy body being invaded by some external force.[72] And it is precisely the Christian version of this, also reflected, for example, in notions of demonic possession, which comes to dominate attitudes of people in the late Roman and Byzantine worlds—ideas which, importantly, are also paralleled in attitudes to political and cultural identity. The exclusivity expressed in the anti-pluralist and anti-heterodox tendencies of late Roman culture during the late sixth and especially the seventh century seems to represent a further aspect of this.

Internal purity thus became the hallmark of orthodoxy and of the imperial state; and however it may have worked in practice, it was certainly a leitmotif of the political orthodoxy of the later seventh century and afterwards. External pollution, however introduced, was perceived as the main threat. Chastisement from heaven was the remedy, de-

[72]See John Wilkinson, *Health and Healing: Studies in New Testament Principles and Practice* (Edinburgh, 1980); Darrel W. Amundsen, "Medicine and Faith in Early Christianity", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56 (1982), 326–50; Vivian Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander: Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity", *DOP* 38 (1984), 1–14.



signed to drive out the evils afflicting the body politic. As long as such evil could be held at bay, orthodoxy, and therefore God's support and approval, were assured—these are the fundamental premises of Byzantine political-religious ideology throughout its history, and are crucial to later debates on both heresy as well as, in the twelfth century and after, the relationship between eastern and western Churches. I would argue that it is in the seventh century that the two traditions, Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic, confronted each other most obviously, and when the Judeo-Christian model was the victor. The establishment of boundaries, the exclusion of groups perceived as marginal to the health of the state and society—groups which could henceforth be regarded as polluting evils and dealt with accordingly, just as evil spirits had to be driven out from the sick body—these are the obvious features of medieval popular political orthodoxy.[73] Hence also the regular use of epithets evoking precisely these external, and polluting, influences to designate and also explain the actions of those perceived as enemies of the orthodox order: "Saracen-minded", "Jewish-thinking", and so forth.

The parallel goes further. Pain and suffering as a means of cleansing and purifying applied as much to the physical body as to the "state".[74] Attitudes to punishment for sins and to remedies for malaise, real or metaphorical, are the same, and by the sixth century they had become part of the standard ideological vocabulary of Christian culture and political thinking. But the fact that Anastasius explicitly attempted a compromise is important. And although it failed—as the continued parallel existence of both traditions attests—it demonstrates the nature of the cultural changes which were taking place.

What is perhaps most important in this respect is the wider context within which the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius are to be

[73]See Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 348–75, 425–35; and especially Martin D. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: the Origins of the Jewish Revolt against Rome* AD *66–70* (Cambridge, 1987), 99–106, where the model of the body in notions about the structure and workings of society, on the one hand, and of the opposition between the poles of purity–pollution, purity–danger as developed in anthropology is usefully employed. See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (Harmondsworth, 1978), 93–112, based ultimately on Durkheim.

[74]See Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander", 8, arguing from, e.g., Cyprian, *De mortalitate* 9.

understood. For the key question of the nature and degree of human free will, and its relationship to divine providence and foresight, was of central importance to Christian thinkers throughout the Roman and late Roman periods, and was one of the major sources of debate among Muslim theologians in the eighth and ninth centuries. Just as Anastasius presents a middle road between determinism, whereby God's foreknowledge is equated effectively with the foreordained nature of human existence, and free will, so his contemporary, the Monophysite Jacob of Edessa, confronts and argues much the same position, albeit from a Monophysite perspective.[75] And it is clear from both Anastasius and Jacob that the views of those who defended the argument for free will were set in a context in which determinist attitudes dominated the agenda. This certainly fits with many of Anastasius' questions and the answers which he gives to them. And, as Michael Cook has suggested, it provides at least to a degree the background to the development of early Islamic dogma, however evolved and distanced a stage its first literary witnesses may represent from this original period of dialogue and confrontation. For it seems clear that the first generation of Islamic apologists and dialecticians had to contend on the basis of certain common features with both Christian and Zoroastrian or dualist philosophical challenges, as well as the internal debates between the different sects of early Islam which developed from the 660s in particular.[76]

[75] On Jacob of Edessa, see Baumstark, 248–56, esp. 249–50 on his letters: with the discussion on the letters and their content in Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: a Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1981), 145–58.

[76] Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 150–52, 153–58; C.H. Becker, "Christliche Polemik und islamische Dogmenbildung", in his *Islamstudien* (Leipzig, 1924–32), I, 432–49. See also George F. Hourani, "Islamic and Non-Islamic Origins of Mu'tazilite Ethical Rationalism", *IJMES* 7 (1976), 59–87. Hourani searches in vain for clear evidence of contacts between individual Christian and Zoroastrian thinkers, on the one hand, and Muslim thinkers or *mutakallimūn*, on the other. The latter are neatly described by Cook (*Early Muslim Dogma*, 157), as "the dialectical militias of the warring sects"; see also Cook's, "The Origins of *Kalām*", *BSOAS* 43 (1980), 32–43. Hourani argues for the influence of other pre-Islamic traditions on the first Muslim thinkers (72–75). Cook is more sceptical, but does not deny the original and formative context within which Islamic dogma evolved (see esp. *Early Muslim Dogma*, 153–58). On the other hand, Hourani looks to John of Damascus as a possible early intellectual stimulus which, as Cook has argued, is really rather too late. Thinkers such as Jacob of Edessa and Anastasius of Sinai, among others of their generation, might well be much more representative (even if there existed no direct contact between them, or others like them, and their Muslim counterparts) of the bearers of that non-Islamic cultural context and tradition. Anastasius certainly seems to have been familiar with some aspects of Muslim thought, as we have seen, as was Jacob of Edessa: see François Nau, "Lettre de Jacques d'Edesse sur la généalogie de la sainte Vierge", *ROC* 6 (1901), 522.



The point here, of course, is not a new one. The Hellenistic heritage of both seventh-century Christianity, split by internal conflicts over christological issues and confronted by a new and dynamic religious system, and of Islam itself, presented both religions with the same, or very similar, fundamental theological and political problems, drawn from familiar cultural contexts. Each dealt with this in different ways. The writings of Anastasius provide a fascinating insight into the attitudes and problems which confronted one side of this new political and religious equation during a period of major social and cultural transformation.