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Death, Sanctity, and the Cross

Crucified Saints in Image and Text

edited by
Barbara Crostini and Anthony John Lappin

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Contents

BARBARA CROSTINI and ANTHONY JOHN LAPPIN	
Background and Chapter Summary	7
BARBARA CROSTINI	
Assembling Crucified Saints: From Gnostic Doubles to Affirmations of the Incarnation	15
FABRIZIO PETORELLA	
Debating about the Cross: The Rhetoric of Crucifixion in the <i>Passio Sancti Andreae Apostoli</i> (BHL 428)	53
MARCO PAPASIDERO	
The Torture of the Cross and the Crucifixion in Latin Hagiography from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages	75
NUNZIO BIANCHI	
Cross and Crucifixion in Iamblichus' Novel	107
GIANNI BERGAMASCHI	
"Christus eam thalamo crucis dotavit": Julia, the Crucified Saint	123
ADRIANO DUQUE	
Modelling Crucifixion from Peter of Capitolias to Furtūn ibn Muḥammad (d. 939 CE)	171
STEFFEN HOPE	
Symbolic Crucifixion and Royal Sainthood: Two Examples from Benedictine Saints' Lives (c. 985-c. 1120)	197
ANDREW M. BERESFORD	
Crucifixion in the Legend of Saint Bartholomew	227

CORINNA TANIA GALLORI	
“‘Our Way of Life’: The Crucifixion of the Regular Clergy and Its Tools	261
MARCOS NIETO JIMÉNEZ	
Wilgefortis as a Portuguese Ambassador: How Portugal Took Hold of the Spanish Liberata	295
PABLO JESÚS LORITE CRUZ	
Saint Dismas: The Good Thief in Holy Week Processions	335
IRINA BRÄNDÉN	
Vita Icons of Saint Paraskeva: Allusions to the Crucifixion in the Torture Scenes of the Saint	357
FELIPE E. ROJAS	
“Más a Cristo has de imitar”: Francisquito’s Queer Role in Cervantes’ <i>Los baños de Argel</i>	379
MARGHERITA BELLÌ (†)	
The Martyrdom of Agnes Takeda and Companions	397
CARLO PELLICCIA	
Italian Hagiographic Literature on the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan (17th-19th Centuries)	427
ANTHONY JOHN LAPPIN	
Re-framing the Crucifixion: Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Poetry and the Cross	469
Contributors	505

NUNZIO BIANCHI

Cross and Crucifixion in Iamblichus' Novel

1. *Iamblichus' novel: fragments, excerpts and epitome*

Iamblichus' novel (dated to the second half of second century AD), the *Babylonian Tales* (Βαβυλωνιακά, *Babyloniaka*), unfortunately has been lost and is known only through scattered fragments of various extent that survive in manuscript excerpts within the corpus of the so-called Greek epistolographs; the historical anthologies compiled for/by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (reigning from 913 to 959), the so-called *Excerpta Constantiniana*; some one hundred short quotations in the massive tenth-century dictionary-encyclopaedia known as the *Suda*; and mainly the extended epitome by Photius, patriarch of Constantinople, in chap. 94 of his *Library* (last decades of the 9th century), from which comes our chief knowledge of the extraordinary and complex plot of this novel.¹

The *Babylonian Tales* follow the usual novelistic pattern but they have a sharp inclination towards the fantastic and a tendency towards the extravagant, the magic, and the horrible. It is the story filled with adventure and hazard of a handsome couple, Rhodanes and Sinonis, who are joined by the mutual ties of love and marriage. They do as much as they can to escape persecution and capture by the cruel king of Babylon

1. Editions of the *Babyloniaka* are by Habrich, *Iamblichi Babyloniacorum reliquiae* (synoptic edition), and now by Barbero, *I Babyloniaca* (with Italian translation); the numbering of fragments here follows Barbero's edition with corresponding number to Habrich. Greek text of the main fragments and English translation of Photius' chapter are also available in Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 179-245. In this paper, translation mostly follows that of Stephens and Winkler; the Greek text of Photius chap. 94 is by Bianchi, "Fozio" (with Italian translation and commentary).

Garmus: having lost his wife he falls in love with Sinonis and is eager to marry her. Sinonis refuses his pretension, and together the lovers flee his wrath. The novel is full of wandering, hardship, separation, of robbery and captivity, of crucifixions, deceptions and twists, of murders real and supposed, of apparent deaths and resurrections, of jealousy, and blood copiously flowing,² all crowding fast one upon another until at last the happy ending is reached. Rhodanes eventually manages to defeat Garmus in war, recovers Sinonis and he is established in Babylon upon the throne of his persecutor, with Sinonis by his side.

Our information about Iamblichus and his context comes from Photius' own account (based on the authority of an autobiographical statement in Iamblichus' novel itself, assuming that this was not fiction)³ and from a more articulated scholium in the margin of the major manuscript of Photius' *Library* (*Bibliotheca*), which brings new details and small contradictions to Photius' account.⁴ But, ultimately, both must derive from the novel itself. Differences in detail aside, they place the author and his novel within specific historical and Roman contexts: Iamblichus composes his novel under the reigns of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius, between 165 and 180 AD; he identifies himself as a Syrian by birth and says he received his education from a Babylonian who adopted him and that he acquired his Greek as a second language; historical, religious and cultural background of the *Babylonian Tales* are the Syrian and the Babylonian ones.⁵

Even though our understanding of this novel is hampered by fragmentary information, and Photius' epitome is naturally and necessarily selective and also probably incomplete,⁶ it is a most striking fact in this fictional narrative that the crucifixion, which strongly drew

2. On this specific aspect of the novel, cf. below and Braccini, "Le Storie babilonesi", pp. XIV-XV.

3. On this perspective cf. Braccini, "Le Storie babilonesi", p. XXI n. 42.

4. In the right margin of fol. 72r (where Photius summarizes Iamblichus' autobiographical digression) of the earliest and most important extant manuscript of the *Library*, the Marcianus gr. 450, the scribe added an extensive scholium containing a biographical sketch on Iamblichus in some points at odds with Photius: cf. Bianchi, "Fozio", p. 502 n. 19.

5. Cf. Beck, "Soteriology", and Ramelli, "I *Babyloniakà*".

6. Chap. 94 of Photius' *Library* is probably not complete as I argued: Bianchi, "The Number of Books".

Photius' attention, repeatedly appears on the scene: Rhodanes must twice face the cross.⁷

2. *Scenes of crucifixion*

Photius holds a keen interest for the wonder and the amazing features of the novel plots, but not to the extent of also fully describing the context as a whole. Despite the economy of his descriptions, Photius briefly mentions three scenes of crucifixion in Iamblichus' novel. The first occurs when the lovers are caught by Garmus: Sinonis is bound in gold chains and Rhodanes is punished by crucifixion. They will both manage to escape from their own tortures (Photius, *Bibl.* 94, 74a 9-17):

Ἀνάνευσις Σινωνίδος καὶ δεσμὰ χρυσῷ τῆς ἀλύσεως διαπεπλεγμένης, καὶ Ῥοδάνης διὰ τοῦτο, Δάμα καὶ Σάκα τῶν βασιλικῶν εὐνούχων τὴν πρᾶξιν ἐπιτραπέντων, ἐπὶ σταυροῦ ἀναρτῶμενος. Ἀλλ' ἐκεῖθεν καθαιρεῖται σπουδῇ Σινωνίδος, καὶ φεύγουσιν ἄμφω, ὁ μὲν τὸν σταυρόν, ἡ δὲ τὸν γάμον. Καὶ περιτέμνεται διὰ τοῦτο Σάκας καὶ Δάμας τὰ ὄτα καὶ τὰς ῥῖνας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν τούτων ἀποστέλλονται ζήτησιν, καὶ δίχα μερισθέντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἔρευναν τρέπονται.

Sinonis refuses and is thrown into bondage, her chain being plaited with gold. Rhodanes on this account is tied onto a cross, with the royal eunuchs Damas and Sakas assigned to oversee the operation. But he is taken down from it thanks to Sinonis's intervention, and both manage to escape – he the cross, she the marriage. Sakas and Damas for this get their ears and noses cut off and are then sent in pursuit of the couple. They split up and go their separate ways on the trail.⁸

Exotic setting and details may be recognized in this scene: the gold chain binding Sinonis (it will be decisive in the subsequent developments of the story), the presence of eunuchs, the crucifixion and the punishment inflicted on Sakas and Damas. For instance, these details are clearly recognizable in the story of Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia:

7. As for the punishment of the cross in the ancient novel see Cook, *Crucifixion*, pp. 260-268 (esp. 265-266 for Iamblichus).

8. Transl. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, p. 190.

the satrap Bessus had Darius imprisoned bound in golden chains,⁹ and then Alexander attached Bessus to a cross after slicing off his ears and nose.¹⁰ From what we can gather from the fragmentary framework of Iamblichus' novel, it should be safe to assume that he also borrowed from Eastern historical and ethnographic accounts, from Mesopotamian literary traditions, assembling and reworking materials that circulated through different cultures.¹¹

The interpretation of the *Babylonian Tales* is far from easy due to the fragmentary and precarious state of preservation, and although Photius' epitome does offer a privileged status, yet conclusions on this matter are not beyond any reasonable doubt. There are many questions in fact that weigh heavily on this epitome: did Photius modify/rework the framework of Iamblichus' novel? Did he sum up the novel word-for-word or not? How many words did he borrow in his epitome directly from the *Babylonian Tales*? (These are issues that affect other chapters of Photius too). And as far as the scenes of crucifixion are concerned, what about the lexicon used for this narrative? Comparison with other ancient novels and their vocabulary can allow us to look back at some idiomatic expressions and Greek technical language and may be helpful in recontextualizing Iamblichus' fragments and epitome.¹²

Thus, in the above-mentioned context there is no certainty or reliability that Photius has directly drawn from Iamblichus' novel the phrase ἐπὶ σταυροῦ ἀναρτῶμενος describing Rhodanes being put up on the cross by Damas and Sakas or rather that these are his own words to briefly summarise the dramatic context. As far as concerns ἀναρτῶ, a lexical comparison with the language of Chariton, who wrote what is regarded as one of the earliest works of Greek prose fiction (middle of the first century AD),¹³ allows us to detect, in his novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe* IV, 3.5, the use of the same verb referring to the crucifixion. Even though this

9. Curtius Rufus V, 12.20 (*aureis compedibus*), and Iustinus XI, 15.1 (*aureis compedibus catenisque*).

10. Curtius Rufus VII, 5.40 (*Bessum ... cruci adfixum mutilatis auribus naribusque*).

11. For the intersecting worlds of Greeks, Romans and Parthians in Iamblichus' novel cf. Ramelli, "I *Babyloniakà*"; for an overview of Roman interventions in Mesopotamia, cf. Ball, *Rome in the East*, pp. 8-19, and Morales, "Marrying Mesopotamia".

12. On this matter see the useful discussion of Borgogno, "Sui *Babyloniaca*", esp. pp. 117-118.

13. On the dating of Chariton's novel see the overview by Tilg, *Chariton*, pp. 36-79.

verb in Chariton's novel is the result of a good conjecture,¹⁴ it is, however, worthy of consideration that Chariton seems to have provided inspiration to Iamblichus' *Babylonian Tales*.

Besides the Charitonian case, it must be admitted that for Iamblichus too ἀναρτάω is still hanging in the balance. In fact, the central question remains: did Iamblichus use this verb or did Photius provide it in his summing-up of Iamblichus? In this respect it can be noticed that ἀναρτάω with ἐπὶ + σταυροῦ is a rather uncommon verbal construction compared with the usual one with the dative alone σταυρῶ¹⁵ or with ἐν + σταυρῶ. Aside from the oldest and isolated attestation in Eusebius' work,¹⁶ ἀναρτάω with ἐπὶ + σταυροῦ seems, in fact, to be attested in the above-mentioned Photian passage and in other ninth-century works,¹⁷ as well as in some later ones. In sum, although this lexicographical survey has no probative value, it is reasonable for this verbal construction to be genuinely attributed to Photius' pen rather than Iamblichus'. The phrase ἐπὶ σταυροῦ ἀναρτώμενος has likely been used by the Patriarch to summarize a crucial novel scene, which Iamblichus perhaps had described with other words or using a different construction of ἀναρτάω.

An anonymous fragment preserved by the *Suda* (π 3095, vol. IV, p. 260, 17 Adler), most likely coming from Iamblichus' novel (fr. 3* Barbero; not in Habrich's edition),¹⁸ may be referred to the moment preceding Rhodanes' crucifixion by Damas and Sakas: "οὗς δὲ λάβοι Σάκας αἰχμαλώτους, ἀνεσκολόπιζε καὶ ἡκίζετο, καὶ αὐθις ποινὰς τοῦ πατρὸς φόνου πράξασθαι

14. In Chariton IV, 3.5 ἀνηρημένους (τοῦ σταυροῦ implied) is Naber's conjecture in place of ἀνηρημένων of the only extant manuscript (Laur. Conv. soppr. 627, dated to the late 13th or early 14th century): cf. the apparatus criticus in the edition by Reardon, *Chariton*, p. 69 *ad loc.*

15. For the dative alone in Photius' works, cf. *Bibl.* 222 [Job the monk], 194b 21, and *Amph.* 73, 50 Laourdas-Westerink.

16. *Demonstr. evang.* X, 8.50: τηνικαῦτα γοῦν θεωροῦντές με ἐπὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ ἀνηρημένον.

17. Cf., for instance, Nicephorus I, *Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni* 815, chap. 90, 22 Featherstone, and Nicholas I, *Opusc.* 203, 3 Westerink.

18. Di Gregorio, "Su alcuni frammenti", pp. 392-393, and Borgogno, "Sui *Babyloniaca*", p. 110, have argued convincingly that this fragment comes from the *Babylonian Tales* (not in Habrich, it is first identified by Hercher, "Zu Iamblichus"). It is included among the doubtful fragments by Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, p. 245, but is securely assigned to Iamblichus' novel by Barbero, *I Babyloniaca*, pp. 72-73, and 121-122 for its interpretation.

θέλων” (“whatever prisoners Sakas would capture, he would impale them and treat shamefully, wishing to exact revenge for his father’s murder”).¹⁹ If we actually consider this fragment as a part of Iamblichus’ novel (the only possible hindrance is that the proper name Σάκας might not necessarily refer to Iamblichus’ novel) it should be concluded that ἀνασκοποῖζω in the *Babylonian Tales* was used not so much with the meaning of ‘to impale’ (as commonly in the Greek texts) but rather of ‘to fix on the cross’, as required by the novel context and as it is in Chariton’s novel (III, 4.18). This fragment could reveal an elaborate and greater lexical variety in Iamblichus’ diction, which unfortunately has become discoloured in the economy of Photius’ epitome.

It should be noticed, too, that the phrasing ‘to escape the cross’, concluding in Photius’ text the crucifixion scene with a deliberately symmetrical sequence (φεύγουσιν ἄμφω, ὁ μὲν τὸν σταυρόν, ἡ δὲ τὸν γάμον), may be recognized as Photius’ own vocabulary rather than Iamblichus’ original.²⁰

Be that as it may, the fact remains that Iamblichus surely dwelt upon this crucial scene, much more than it appears in Photius’ epitome, just as Chariton did. In *Chaereas and Callirhoe* IV, 2.5-6, in fact, the male protagonist, Chaereas, is crucified and saved from the cross. And thus the following scene in Iamblichus’ novel, in which it was referred to the escape plan implemented by Sinonis, is also decisive. Although this scene is so relevant to Iamblichus’ plot, it is but touched upon by Photius: nothing but a word, σπουδῇ, concerns Rhodanes’ escape! No hypothesis can be made on the context, yet it can at least be said that σπουδῇ allows to shed some light on this scene: this adverb in fact includes the idea of a scrupulous planning and an effective and speedy achievement, and at the same time it unveils how Sinonis struggled bravely.²¹

19. Transl. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, p. 245.

20. Comparing some other works epitomized by Photius with their extant text, a method can be recognized in his summaries: for instance, Photius does borrow words from the ending scenes to sum up entire episodes: see Bianchi, “Un manoscritto di Eliodoro” (on Photius’ epitome of Heliodorus’ novel).

21. On Sinonis, and her strong and combative character, cf. Borgogno, “Sui *Babyloniaca*”, pp. 111-112, who recalls in this regard fr. *5 e *6 Habrich (respectively fr. 93* e 94* Barbero), in which references would be made to the escape of Rhodanes and Sinonis. Yet, Barbero, *I Babyloniaca*, pp. 133-134, who includes these fragments among the ones *incertae sedis*, questioned their relevance to this novel scene.

3. *Iamblichus' lexicon of crucifixion*

Another reference to the cross in the *Babylonian Tales* –once more again a failed crucifixion– can shed light on some of the aspects of this punishment and on Iamblichus' language. In spite of the uncertainties that arise from Photius' epitome and its conciseness, the last few lines of chap. 94 clearly report that Rhodanes is again being crucified, but this time together with Soraichos, "the son of the tax-collector" (*Bibl.* 94, 75a 21), who had been accused of helping our heroes to manage their escape plan.²² Consequently, a double crucifixion takes place in this case, summed up as follows by Photius (*Bibl.* 94, 78a 11-29):

... παραδίδοται δὲ καὶ Σόραιχος ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνασταυρωθῆναι· ὁ δὲ τόπος ὥριστο ἐνθα Ῥοδάνης καὶ Σινωνὶς τὰ πρῶτα ἠϋλίσαντο, ἐν τῷ λειμῶνι καὶ ἐν τῇ πηγῇ, ἐν οἷς καὶ τῷ Ῥοδάνῃ τὸ κεκρυμμένον ἐπεφώρατο χρυσίον, ὃ καὶ ἀπαγομένῳ ἐπὶ τὸν σταυρὸν Σοραίχῳ μὲνυει. Καὶ Ἀλανῶν στρατὸς ἀπόμισθος Γάρμῳ γεγυνώς καὶ ἀπεχθανόμενοι περὶ τὸν χῶρον, ἐν ᾧ Σόραιχος ἐμελλεν ἀνασταυροῦσθαι, διατρίβουσιν, οἱ καὶ ἀπελάσαντες τοὺς Σόραιχον ἄγοντας ἔλυσαν. Ὁ δὲ τὸ μὲνυθὲν χρυσίον εὕρων, καὶ τέχνην τινὶ καὶ σοφίᾳ ἐκ τοῦ ὀρύγματος ἀνιῶμενος, τοὺς Ἀλανοὺς ἐπειθεν ὥς ὑπὸ θεῶν ταῦτά τε καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐκδιδάσκοντο. Καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν ἐθίσας, εἵλκυσε ὥστε σφῶν ἡγεῖσθαι βασιλέα, καὶ πολεμεῖ στρατὸν Γάρμου, καὶ νικᾷ. Ἄλλ' ὕστερον ταῦτα. Ὅτε δὲ Σόραιχος ἐπὶ τὸν σταυρὸν ἐπέμπετο, τότε καὶ Ῥοδάνης ὑπ' αὐτοῦ Γάρμου ἐστεφανωμένου καὶ χορεύοντος ἐπὶ τὸν πρότερον σταυρὸν πάλιν ἦγετο καὶ ἀνεσταυροῦτο, καὶ Γάρμος μεθύων ἅμα καὶ χορεύων περὶ τὸν σταυρὸν σὺν ταῖς ἀλητρίσιν ἔχαίρε τε καὶ εὐφραίνετο.

...Soraichos, too, was handed over for crucifixion. The place selected for the execution is the very one where Rhodanes and Sinonis first encamped, in the meadow and at the spring where the hidden treasure was discovered by Rhodanes, who tells Soraichos about it as he is being led away to crucifixion. And it so happens that an army of unpaid and disgruntled Alanoi, mercenaries for King Garmus, are encamped in the region where Soraichos is about to be crucified. They drive off Soraichos's captors and liberate him. He finds the treasure, drawing it up from the pit by a certain clever trick, and convinces the Alanoi that he knows this and other things from the gods. Little by little

22. In this passage Soraichos's statement on the fates of the poor Rhodanes appears to take on a somewhat Stoic tone (fr. 65 Barbero = fr. 86 Habrich): θανάτου καταφρονήσας ἄνθρωπος δεσπότην οὐκ ἔχει, "The person who despises death has no master". Cf. Ramelli, *I romanzi antichi*, p. 75.

he maneuvers them into the habit of treating him as their king. Then he makes war on Garmus and wins. But all this happened later. When Soraichos was being led to the cross, at the very same time Rhodanes was being brought again to the same cross he had been tied to before, and Garmus is garlanded and dancing, drunk and delirious with joy, dancing around the cross with his flutegirls.²³

It should therefore be noted that Photius' epitome records a total of three crucifixions in Iamblichus' novel, but we cannot be taken for sure that there were not more of them. In the quoted passage, for instance, Photius seems to dwell longer on this subject, even at the risk of anticipating events that will take place in another narrative moment: "but all this happened later", he states in the middle of his account.

There can be no question that some kinds of expression, which we have already encountered, significantly recur in this passage (e.g. ἐπὶ τὸν σταυρόν three times in the text) and may be recognized as Photius' words rather than Iamblichus' ones. In particular for περὶ τὸν σταυρόν (in the few lines of this passage) a comparison can be established with another fragment (fr. 90* Barbero = fr. *87 Habrich), coming from the *Suda* (ε 2667, vol. II, p. 386, 10 Adler), which reports Rhodanes' words begging Garmus from the cross to speed up the torture: "Κέλευσόν με ἀποθνήσκειν ἐπιτεμόμενος τοῦ σταυροῦ τὴν περίοδον" ("Bid me die, cutting short the slow cycle of the cross").²⁴

So, it is fairly safe to assume, if really these words do refer to the corresponding scene of the *Babylonian Tales* in Photius' epitome (Garmus, who is drunk, indulges in an euphoric dance around the cross together with his flute players), that περὶ τὸν σταυρόν are the words of Photius in summarizing a much broader scene, as he does in other chapters of his *Library*.²⁵

Given that many expressions in the quoted passage pertain to Photius' lexicon, it is worth considering also ἀνασταυρώ: this verb in fact is a technical one to describe the punishment of the cross and occurs several times in the context under examination, and is also well attested in novelistic literature. It recurs several times in Chariton's *Chaereas and*

23. Transl. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 198-199.

24. Transl. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, p. 221 (with adaptation).

25. Remaining in the novelistic genre, see, for instance, Photius' *Library*, chap. 73 on Heliodorus' novel: Bianchi, "Un manoscritto di Eliodoro".

Callirhoe (IV, 2.6; 4.2; 6.2; VIII, 8.2),²⁶ and in the *Babylonian Tales* it refers both to Soraichos and Rhodanes. The verb ἀνασταυρόω appears as genuinely Iamblichus' own, as Chariton's lexicon and, especially, its occurrence in an extended fragment of the *Babylonian Tales* provided by the *Excerpta Constantiniana* would confirm.

4. Women and crosses

The last lines of this fragment (fr. 69 Barbero = fr. 61 Habrich), preserved in the section *de sententiis* of the *Excerpta Constantiniana* (Vat. gr. 73, sec. X),²⁷ the tenth-century historic encyclopaedia initiated under the sponsorship and supervision of Emperor Constantine VII (945-959), allows us to ascertain Iamblichus' manner of writing and his style more closely:

...καὶ Ῥοδάνης μὲν ἀνεσταυρώθη μόνον, ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ ἡψάμην τοῦ θανάτου καὶ πείραν ἔλαβον, ὅτι ἀποθνήσκοντες οὐκ ἀλγοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι, οὐδὲ ἐστὶν ἀηδὴς ὁ θάνατος· τοῖς δὲ ἐρῶσι καὶ ἡδὺς ἐστὶν. τί μου λαμβάνη, Σόραιχε; μαρτύρομαι, Ῥοδάνει τὴν ἐρωμένην σῶσαι θέλεις; μὴδὲ μοι κινδύνους ἀπειλεῖ μὴδὲ συλλήψεις μὴδὲ τιμωρίαν· οὐδένα φοβοῦμαι ἢ μὴ φοβηθεῖσα νύκτας μὴδὲ σταυρούς ***

Rhodanes has only been hung from the cross, I have actually touched death and know from my own experience that people dying feel no pain, nor is death distressing. For lovers it may actually be sweet. Why do you hold onto me, Soraichos? I protest—you want to save Rhodanes' girlfriend for him. Threaten me with no dangers, no arrests, no punishment. I who did not fear stabbing or crosses fear no one!...²⁸

This context has to be related to the scene where Sinonis, flaring up in anger against Rhodanes who had kissed the farmer's daughter, comes to suspect he had done so repeatedly (*Bibl.* 94, 76b 23-28). Soraichos tries to persuade her otherwise and to bring her to her senses, but Sinonis gets violently mad: in a harsh and scornful burst, wounded and armed with a

26. Xenophon of Ephesus too (first or second century AD) does make use of ἀνασταυρόω in his novel (IV, 4.2 e 6, 2), and even of the (rather rare) noun ἀνασταύρωσις (IV, 2.3).

27. For all that concerns the *Excerpta Constantiniana* see Németh, *The Excerpta*.

28. Transl. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 239, 241.

sword, she claims her courage and firmness in facing plenty of hardship and suffering. Comparing herself to Rhodanes, she claims to have suffered more than others, as her words ἀνεσταυρώθη μόνον clearly show: if on the one hand ἀνασταυρόω confirms this verb in Iamblichus' novel, on the other the adverbial use of accusative neuter μόνον gives the monologue a sharply polemic tone with which Sinonis makes him feel the difference among them according to their respective sufferings. In addition, the adverbial neuter perhaps gives also a tone of bitter irony on the subject of the torture of the cross, or at least of that which Rhodanes suffered. In Sinonis' speech, it would even seem that Rhodanes' crucifixion does not necessarily involve death: the same word order (Ῥοδάνης μὲν ... ἐγὼ δὲ ...) seems to support this interpretation. Rhodanes did not risk death at all; he has *only* been crucified. But Sinonis really came close to death.²⁹

Perhaps Sinonis' speech might also be read as a metaliterary *divertissement*. Could there be a somewhat authorial irony about the practice of crucifixion or about the overused narrative pattern of the crucifixion? (Such as, for instance, the irony on the imaginary novel plots in the *True histories* by Lucian of Samosata, who was not only Iamblichus' direct contemporary, but his compatriot as well). Since a definitive interpretation is hard to come by, still we should not exclude any hypothesis.

The last few words of this fragment probably offer other interesting details about cross and crucifixion. At the end of the text –which abruptly stops at the same point where the leaf ends in the palimpsest manuscript Vat. gr. 73 of the *Excerpta Constantiniana*³⁰– Sinonis claims to have had something to do with the *crosses*: ...οὐδένα φοβοῦμαι ἢ μὴ φοβηθεῖσα νύκτας μηδὲ σταυρούς ***. The fragmentary state of the text does not allow us to understand whether σταυρούς is to be interpreted metaphorically or literally, even though the second (i.e. actual *crosses*) is much more likely on the strength of the context and the general tenor of this novel. It would not be surprising if in Iamblichus' novel also a woman faced crucifixion (or more crucifixions?): it would be an unusual interpretation of the recurring motif of the cross. Besides, another quite remarkable 'feminine' rewriting of novelistic patterns in the *Babylonian Tales*, as too briefly recorded in

29. In a few instances even a punishment that is possible to survive can be seen (Herodotus VII, 194.2; Josephus Flavius, *Vita* 420-421; Chariton VIII 8.4): see Samuels-son, *Crucifixion in Antiquity*, p. 144 n. 406.

30. Cf. Németh, *The Excerpta*, p. 112 n. 75.

Photius' epitome, is the passion of the queen of Egypt, Berenice, for the beautiful Mesopotamia (*Bibl.* 94, 77b 36-37).³¹

The last few lines of Photius' epitome (*Bibl.* 94, 78a 29-31) show that Rhodanes, as he hangs on the cross, learns that Sinonis has married the king of Syria. So, from the height of the cross (ἄνωθεν as Photius briefly notes: 78a 32), Rhodanes may still find joy hoping that at least his beloved Sinonis can finally live keeping herself away from risks. Garmus, by contrast, brings Rhodanes down from the cross against his will, for he preferred to die (ἐπισχῶν δὲ κατάγει Ῥοδάνην ἄκοντα τοῦ σταυροῦ: 78a 33);³² Garmus appoints him as a general and sends him to fight the king of Syria, so that –as Photius vividly notes– lover and his rival will fight each other (ὥς ἐραστὴν κατὰ τοῦ ἀντεραστοῦ: 78a 36). Rhodanes wins the battle, recovers Sinonis and becomes king of the Babylonians: so ends Photius' account.

5. Novelistic patterns and sources, evangelical references

Some episodes and narrative passages lead us to believe that Iamblichus was also able to rework Chariton's novel, or at least the complex of *topoi* that circulated into the realm of the novelistic genre in the second century AD and that is also well attested in Xenophon of Ephesus' novel, which seems to imitate Chariton's one.³³ It will never be possible to ascertain these features and the actual debt contracted by Iamblichus with Chariton, because of the absence of a complete text of the *Babylonian Tales* and the extended spreading and circulation of well-established *topoi* in this literary genre, even in elaborated and sophisticated narratives.

31. On the meaning and value of this passage (καὶ γάμους Μεσοποταμίας ἢ Βερενίκη ποιεῖται), which is really unclear, in Photius' epitome, cf. Cameron, "Love (and Marriage)", pp. 150-156, and Morales, "Marrying Mesopotamia", who gives an allegoric and politicised reading.

32. The protagonist's reluctance to descend from the cross resembles Chariton IV, 3.6, where "the executioner blocked (ἐπέσχε) the action" and Chareas "comes down irritated from the cross", which would have allowed him to abandon forever his "evil life and unfortunate love".

33. Analogies and concordances are noticed by Borgogno, "Antonio Diogene", pp. 147-150; cf. also Dowden, "The Plot", pp. 161-162.

In Chariton's novel two suspensions on the cross are narrated (III, 4.18, suspension of the tomb robber Theron; IV, 3.3-10, aborted execution of Chareas): the former account uses the verb ἀνασκοιοπίζω, and the latter ἀνασταυρόω. And there are many instances of σταυρός,³⁴ which in the quoted passages "constitutes the connection between the suspension of Chariton's text and crucifixion".³⁵ Furthermore, it has made reference twice to the cross-bearing, which could thus be considered as one of the few accounts of this practice.³⁶ It is therefore easily possible that Iamblichus tried to fit in with the novelistic genre challenging it, probably giving an exaggerated version of motifs and dynamics common to the other Greek novels, perhaps interpreting a few patterns in original or unusual ways and certainly increasing the level with pathetic and macabre tones, and voluptuous moods.

Even though it is not possible to fully shed light on Iamblichus' literary models and references, it might be useful to consider whether there is some connection between the *Babylonian Tales* and the texts for which at that time cross and crucifixion were more meaningful and relevant, i.e. the Gospels.

In the last decades scholars have increasingly and consciously brought to light the relationship between novelistic texts and evangelical ones in terms of both formal and thematic borrowings, if not veiled allusions and possible parodies too.³⁷ There is a sense that the torture of the cross, salvation from the cross, apparent deaths, and equally apparent resurrections, which constituted some of the most formidable and lively narrative expedients adopted to give reader's entertainment, could include a sort of veiled allusion to the two essential components of the Christian faith that more than anything could have been the object of curiosity, scepticism, irony, and controversy, i.e. crucifixion and resurrection.³⁸ A number of lexical

34. For ἀνασταυροῦν see Char. IV, 2.6; VIII, 8.2. For ἀνασκοιοπίζειν see III, 4.18; VIII, 7.8. For σταυρός see III, 3.12; 4.18; IV, 2.7 [bis]; 3.3; 3.5 [bis], 3.6; 3.8; 3.9; 3.10; 4.10; V, 10.6; VI, 2.10 [bis; once σταυρός is omitted in the *codex unicus* Laur. Conv. soppr. 627]; VIII, 8.4.

35. Samuelsson, *Crucifixion in Antiquity*, pp. 142.

36. Chariton IV, 2.7 (ἑκατος αὐτῶν τὸν σταυρὸν ἔφερε) e 3.10 (σταυρὸν ἐβάστασα). Cf. Samuelsson, *Crucifixion in Antiquity*, p. 142.

37. Ramelli, *I romanzi antichi*, and Ead., "The Ancient Novels". For a recent overview of opinions and authors cf. Perrino, "La spettacolare vita".

38. Ramelli, *I romanzi antichi*; Ead., "The Ancient Novels".

parallels, also including conceptual, stylistic, and other kinds of similarities between the ancient novel as a whole (especially Chariton and Petronius) and the New Testament “seem to suggest a common *Weltanschauung*”.³⁹

The same can be said for the *Babylonian Tales* even though the absence of the original text does not allow full confirmation. Furthermore, Iamblichus seems to have lived in the years in which Christianity had already assumed significant dimensions and diffusion, such as to present itself as a problem for the Roman Empire. In addition, Iamblichus constructs the novel's setting in Syria that had a consolidated and authoritative Christian tradition (it was in Syrian Antioch that the Greek word Χριστιανός was first applied to the followers of the new doctrine).⁴⁰

It is still worth noting that, not unlike the other novelists, Iamblichus does consistently rely also on the trope of *Scheintod*, the apparent death.⁴¹ At least three cases of the *Babylonian Tales* take inspiration from this motif: in the former case, Rhodanes and Sinonis lick up the poisoned honey of wild bees, collapse like corpses, then they rise (ἀναστάντες)⁴² from their apparent death and take advantage of their condition of physical deterioration (pale color, emaciated features, thin voice) to pass themselves

39. Ramelli, “The Ancient Novels”, p. 54. Cf. also Ramelli, “Alcune osservazioni” on the *crux* in first century AD Latin texts. As for the novels, Chariton presents scenes of crucifixion, tomb robberies, and resurrections (cf. van der Host, “Chariton”; Thiede, *Ein Fisch*, pp. 128-135; Ramelli, “Possibili allusioni”): just to give some examples, Chaereas is condemned to death by crucifixion and the exhortation shouted to him (“Come down!”) sounds exactly like the one to Jesus on the cross in the Gospel of Matthew; for the scene where Callirhoe appears to be dead and Chareas, who after the burial is going at dawn with libations and finds the stone rolled away and the body disappeared (some tomb robbers took her to be sold), it has been noticed a number of parallels with the Gospel of Matthew. In Xenophon of Ephesus' novel (see n. 26 above), Abrocome from the top of the cross invokes the gods, like Jesus turning to God on the cross before expiring. There are many uses of crucifixion in Petronius' novel: the description of the crucifixion in the episode of the Matron of Ephesus would be a reference, in parody form, to death and resurrection of Jesus (cf. Ramelli, “Petronio”; Thiede, *Ein Fisch*, pp. 98-123; Gamba, *Petronio Arbitro*, pp. 349-362; Ramelli, “Possibili allusioni”). It should also be noticed that Jesus' death and resurrection were perhaps parodied in the *Laureulus*, a famous mime attributed to a writer called Valerius Catullus (cf. Perrino, “La spettacolare vita”, pp. 32-36).

40. *Acta apost.* 11, 26. On the spread of Christianity in Syria cf. Leipoldt, “Frühes Christentum”, pp. 3-17 (*Syrien*) and the overview in Ramelli, *I romanzi antichi*, pp. 68-72, referring to Iamblichus.

41. Cf. Ramelli, *I romanzi antichi*, pp. 76-77.

42. Phot. *Bibl.*, 94, 74b 20.

off as dead for some time, indeed as shades of the dead (εἶδωλα).⁴³ In the second case, Rhodanes and Sinonis come across the funeral of a wealthy girl believed dead who is led to the grave by a long funeral procession: it will be said later that she is alive, the tomb will be left empty (κενός) and the soldiers stationed there will find “the door of the tomb not firmly closed”.⁴⁴ In the latter case, in despair they take some deadly poison, but Soraichos substituted a soporific drug, so they simply fall into a trance so profound that they cannot be wakened.⁴⁵

It is not that easy to identify and ascertain models, ideas and sources of these themes, but it would not be surprising if they were actually influenced by the Gospel account of the life of Jesus.⁴⁶ It needs to be mentioned, in this regard, that at the same time as Iamblichus wrote his novel, the pagan philosopher Celsus compiled a hard-hitting critique of Christian faith entitled *The True Doctrine* (Ἀληθῆς λόγος), a work that is extant only in Origen's third-century response entitled *Contra Celsum*, that ridiculed the Christian proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus as fictional. Celsus taunts the early Christian movement for its attempt to convince the world of Jesus' resurrection without providing credible eyewitnesses; he accuses it of credulity and worshipping a dead man, and that it had to be actually checked if Jesus was really dead or rather apparently dead.⁴⁷

Then, it would not be impossible if there was an echo of these anti-Christian polemics, even in simplified and fictionalized forms, in some highly successful patterns of the ancient novel and Iamblichus' lost *Babylonian Tales*.

43. Phot. *Bibl.*, 94, 74b 38.

44. Fr. 19* Barbero (= fr. *24 Habrich): εὔρον δὲ τὴν θύραν τοῦ μνήματος ἀραιῶς ἐπικειμένην.

45. Phot. *Bibl.*, 94, 75a 23 sgg.

46. Parallels with the Old Testament are detected too: for instance, the scene where Rhodanes and Sinonis take lodgings at the house of a rich man of dissolute character, Setapus, who falls in love with Sinonis and tries to seduce her (*Bibl.* 94, 76b 31-35); she initially pretends to return his love, but later, on the very first night, she kills him as he lies in a drunken state. This scene closely recalls the well-known story of Judith and Holofernes in the Old Testament (*Gdt* 12-13): in trying to rescue her people, Judith initially pretends to return the love of the Assyrian general Holofernes, sent by Nebuchadnezzar to punish those peoples who had refused to join up with Babylon, then, in the dead of night, when he collapsed completely drunk on his bed, she beheaded him with his own scimitar.

47. *Apud* Origenes, *Contra Celsum* II, 54-70. Cf. Ramelli, *I romanzi antichi*, pp. 79-80.

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