



Athenagoras
Philosopher and Theologian

David Rankin

ATHENAGORAS

*To
Nicole Heather and Michael Luke,
my beloved children and cherished friends.*

Athenagoras

Philosopher and Theologian

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List of Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
A-NCL	Ante-Nicene Christian Library
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CPh	<i>Classical Philology</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MSR	<i>Mélanges des sciences religieuses</i>
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
REAug	<i>Revue des études Augustiniennes</i>
REG	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
RHE	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>

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Chapter One

Athenagoras: philosopher and theologian

By way of preface it would be appropriate to set Athenagoras both in the context of Greek apologetics of the second and early third centuries of the Common Era and in that of a more specific Christian engagement with the Greco-Roman philosophical discourse of the same period.

Christian Greek Apologetics

Robert Grant declared that '[a]pologetic literature emerges from minority groups that are trying to come to terms with the larger culture in which they live'.¹ Frances Young argues that the 'primary motive' of the Greek apologists of the second century

was justification, justification of their unpopular – indeed, potentially dangerous – decision to turn their backs on the classical literature inherited from antiquity and the customs of their forefathers, thus abandoning the comfortable ethos of the Graeco-Roman synthesis into which they had been born, nurtured, and educated.²

'What is increasingly clear', she continues, 'under the head of "apologetic" is that a group that regards itself as a people is fighting for social and political recognition' and that '[i]t is this common self-justificatory content that links the second-century Greek apologists, rather than a sharply defined literary form'.³ Among the Greek apologists of the second century – many of whom wrote works more protreptic than apologetic in nature – a number of key themes emerge. In their various defenses of the faith (and these were the defenses of a minority religious culture in the midst of a dominant culture which was either hostile or indifferent towards it), the apologists see a need to address accusations of atheism made against Christians; to explain why they choose not to participate in the worship of the Greco-Roman gods; to refute accusations of the most heinous immorality – often of cannibalism, incest and other forms of sexual deviance; and to explain their failing to accord the emperor his religious due. Other apologetic pieces –

¹ R.M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia, 1988), p. 9.

² F. Young, 'Greek apologists of the second century', in M. Edwards et al (eds), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire. Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Oxford, 1999), p. 81.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

for instance Irenaeus in the *Adversus haereses* and works such as the *Epistle to Barnabas* or Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, both belonging to the *Adversus Judaeos* genre of Christian writing – are not of particular concern here. Athenagoras, in the *Legatio* at least, writes neither of heretics nor of Jews.

Justin Martyr, in his *Apology*,⁴ appeals to the emperors against the prejudice (I.2) and rumour (I.3) which bedevil the Christian cause. He complains that Christians are unfairly targetted and condemned merely for the name they bear (I.4). He refutes the accusation of atheism levelled against them (I.5) – an accusation based on their refusal to worship the pagan deities; argues that Christians hold themselves to the highest standards of morality (I.7); and condemns the idolatry implicit in pagan worship (I.9). The *Apology* (or *Apologies*) was 'an apologetic piece, or set of pieces, intended to explicate the Christian faith and thus secure for Christians fair treatment before the law as a genuine philosophy'.⁵ Justin's pupil Tatian, whose approach is offensive more than defensive, attacks from the outset the immorality of pagan philosophers in his *Oration to the Greeks* (2f.), challenges (by implication) the accusation laid against Christians of atheism, affirms the Christian God as the Creator of all (5) and repudiates pagan worship as demonic (10f.). The author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* explains at the beginning of his treatise that he will address 'the mode of worship prevalent among Christians ... what God they trust in, and what form of religion they observe' (1), making clear that they neither honour the gods reckoned as such by the Greeks nor hold to the 'superstition' of the Jews. He attacks pagan idolatry (2) and implies that, in their relationship to the world, Christians are like resident aliens.⁶ In his three-volume *To Autolytus*, Theophilus of Antioch rises to the challenge of his friend, who 'boasts' of his own gods of wood and stone (I.1) and demands of him, Theophilus, that he in turn may explain (or 'show') his own God (I.2). In response, Theophilus speaks at length of the nature of the Christian God (I.3–4), of that God's invisibility (I.5) and of his role as Creator (I.6f.). He speaks of the Christian belief in resurrection (I.8), and condemns pagan idolatry (I.9 and II.2) and emperor worship (I.11). He declares Greek literature to be of little or no value (III.2), speaks of the inconsistency and immorality of Greek writers (III.3) and wonders how educated persons could possibly believe the accusations of atheism, sexual impropriety and cannibalism made against Christians (III.3f.). He, in response, accuses pagan philosophers of contravening to laws on sexual behaviour (III.6) and of contradicting themselves concerning the divine being (III.7ff.). He speaks of the Christian commitment to the Ten Commandments (III.9) and of the superior moral conduct of Christians (III.15). Good argues that the apologetic intent of the work is 'to secure the

⁴ This can be understood as two separate but related works or as one work in two parts. This is not a major issue here.

⁵ See my own *From Clement to Origen* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 95f.

⁶ This reflects what Grant has to say above about Christianity as a minority culture struggling to come to terms with the dominant culture of its time and place.

credibility of the Christian religion'.⁷ Clement of Alexandria, in his *Protrepticus* (which is, of course, protreptic more than it is apologetic), urges his would-be converts to abandon idolatry, speaks of the absurdity and impiety of the pagan mysteries (2.11.1f.), condemns sacrifices (3.43.1f.) and idolatry (4.49.1f.), but recognizes, however, that sometimes pagan philosophers and poets come near to the truth about God – although not quite (5.65.1ff.). He argues that true belief is found in the Prophets (8.77.1f.), and he responds to the criticism that Christians have abandoned the customs of their forebears, in particular the latter's gods (10.89.1f.). They say (in his words) that 'it is not to the credit of Christians to subvert the customs handed down to us from our fathers' (10.89.1); but he argues that 'custom, which has made you taste bondage and unreasonable care, is fostered by vain opinion' (10.99.1).

It was, then, in this context of second century Greek apologetics – a context of defending their co-religionists against charges of atheism, of immorality of all kinds, and of disloyalty to the state – that Athenagoras mounts his own defence and explication of the faith.

Christian Engagement with Philosophical Discourse

As I pointed out in the conclusion to my book *From Clement from Origen*,⁸ the pre-Nicene Fathers, particularly Athenagoras' predecessors and contemporaries, differ considerably in their attitudes towards Greco-Roman philosophy and in the uses they made of it. Both Tatian and Theophilus of Antioch display a great deal of antipathy towards pagan learning, fearing that it might compromise Christian truth, while Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen are 'clearly immersed in philosophical enquiry'.⁹ Both Justin and Clement indeed begin to see philosophy even as a kind of preparation, for the Greeks, of the coming Gospel – much as the Law and the Prophets were for the Jews. Justin saw Christianity simply as a superior form of philosophy. Origen speaks of the 'auxiliary' value of the study of philosophy – auxiliary to that of the Scriptures. Irenaeus displays the marks of some philosophical enquiry but finds it difficult to see beyond the notion of philosophy as the source of heresy. Tertullian likewise seems to have regarded philosophy as the 'fount' of heresy and philosophers as the 'patriarchs of heretics', and to have repudiated speculative forms of philosophical enquiry; but his indebtedness to Stoicism and his obvious respect for Plato are too well documented to be ignored. In the West in particular – although eastern Christianity is not untouched by it – Stoicism influences the thought of Clement of Rome, Hermas, Minucius Felix and Cyprian, as well as that of Tertullian.

⁷ D. Good, 'Rhetoric and wisdom in Theophilus of Antioch', *Anglican Theological Review* 73 (1991): 323.

⁸ Rankin, *From Clement to Origen* (above, n5), pp. 144f.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

It is generally understood that the cosmology of *1 Clement* is influenced by Stoicism,¹⁰ though some would suggest that a Jewish provenance is just as likely.¹¹ The Stoic virtues of healthy living and self-reliance are evident in the *Pastor* of Hermas of Rome;¹² and Minucius Felix, the North African advocate practising his craft in Rome, evidences both a Ciceronian Academic Scepticism and, like Clement above, a Stoic-like concern for an ordered universe and physical world.¹³ Minucius Felix also makes use of Plato's famous words at *Timaeus* 28c3–4 – a passage on the difficulty of finding the creator and father of the Universe, and a favourite text among the Christian writers of the time – in order to support his own argument concerning the oneness of God.¹⁴

Although Justin is at times profoundly critical of Greek philosophy, its influence on his thought is undeniable. Apparently he wore the philosopher's *pallium* (*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 1) – even Tertullian eulogizes this garb in the *De pallio* – and he regarded Christianity as the perfect philosophy, as he himself had progressed from Stoicism to Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism and then Platonism (*Dialogue 2*), then came finally to Christian teaching. He had some regard for Plato, whom he believed to come near to the truth at times, though not near enough. His reflections on the Logos are clearly influenced by Stoic thought (*1 Apology* 46); his thinking on the matter of the soul shows some engagement (though ultimate disagreement) with Plato; he regards Socrates with approval (*1 Apology* 5); he alludes positively to Plato's words at *Timaeus* 28c3–4 on the Creator and Father of the Universe (*2 Apology* 10.6; see above); his understanding of free will at *1 Apology* 28.3–4 is consistent with that of Plato at *Republic* 617e; and he chooses to see a doctrine of the Trinity at *Epistle* 2.312e (*1 Apology* 60.6–7).

Tertullian, despite his infamous question at *De praescriptionibus* 7.9 – what has Athens to do with Jerusalem? – and despite his comparison at *Adversus Marcionem* 2.27.6 of the Marcionite God, 'invisible and unapproachable and inactive', with the God of the philosophers, makes extensive use of philosophy and is profoundly influenced by it. Like Justin, he can speak of Christianity as a sort of philosophy (*De pallio* 6.2). While at *De anima* 3.1 he speaks of philosophers as the 'patriarchs of heretics' and the treatise is in some ways anti-Platonist, its reflections on the soul and its corporeality, for example, are markedly Stoic in origin. His *De patientia* is Stoic in outlook, and his reflections on the relationship between nature and reason and on the ideal of living in accordance with nature at *Adversus Praxean* 5 and *De spectaculis* 2f. display the clear marks of that school. Theophilus of Antioch

¹⁰ W. Ullmann, 'The cosmic theme of the *Prima Clementis* and its significance for the concept of Roman rulership', *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 87.

¹¹ W.C. van Unnik, 'Is 1 Clement 20 purely Stoic?', *Vigiliae Christianae* 4 (1950): 185.

¹² Rankin, *From Clement to Origen* (above, n5), p. 38; see also Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.40.1, 81-2 on the Stoic notion of self-sufficiency.

¹³ Rankin, *From Clement to Origen* (above, n5), p.44f.

¹⁴ *Octavius*, 19.14 and (by allusion) 26.12.

demonstrates a wide knowledge of philosophical thought and is profoundly critical of the Stoics. He believes that Plato and his followers – he alludes to *Timaeus* 28c3–4 – have got it right in claiming that God is both uncreated and the Father–Creator, but wrong in regarding matter as likewise uncreated. In this schema, he says, a God who is not, alone, the unique sovereign cannot be God.

The deep engagement of Clement of Alexandria with Greek philosophy is not to be doubted, and indeed too extensive to be dealt with adequately here. This is particularly so in his *Stromateis* (all citations hereafter will be from this work), though in the *Protrepticus*, too, he deals more than favourably with contemporary thought as containing at least a partial grasp of the truth. Philosophy provides for the Greeks a preparation for the Gospel (6.6.44.4). ‘Pythagoras and Plato, listening to the inner voice and with the help of God, have reached the truth’ (1.7.37.1). Clement makes positive use (at 5.12.78.1 and 5.14.92.1–4) of *Timaeus* 28c3–4 on the nature of God, and also of *Epistle* 2.312e (at 5.14.103.1); of *Laws* 4.715e–716a (at 2.22.132.2 and 7.16.106.3); and of *Epistle* 7.341c (at 5.12.78.1). His reflections on the Logos also demonstrate some measure of influence from Plato and the Platonists and from Aristotle (4.25.155; 5.11.73; 4.25.156). Stählin lists, from Clement’s extant works, some 1,273 borrowings from the Apostle Paul and 618 from Plato.¹⁵

The engagement with Greco-Roman philosophy – particularly with Platonism and Stoicism, and not at all uncritically – on the part of Christian theologians, both predecessors and contemporaries of Athenagoras, is wide-ranging and often quite profound, and it includes matters of cosmology, theology (God as a transcendent being, the Logos and the Trinity), ethics, human psychology, and the relationship between reason and nature.

Who Was Athenagoras?

This chapter will address the questions of the who, where and what in relation to Athenagoras. Apart from the unreliable testimony of Philip of Side, a fifth-century Christian historian, little of anything certain is known about Athenagoras. A later historian declares, in *Codex Bodleianus Baroccianus* 142, fol. 216 [*Patrologia Graeca* vi. 182], that

Philip of Side says in his twenty-fourth book [of his *Christian History*]: Athenagoras was the first director of the School at Alexandria; his *floruit* was about the time of Hadrian and Antoninus, to whom he dedicated his *Embassy* on behalf of the Christians. He was a man who professed Christianity while still wearing the philosopher’s garb and was the leading man in the Academy. Before Celsus did so he had planned to write against the Christians, but, reading the Holy Scriptures to make his attack the more telling, he was so won over by

¹⁵ *Clemens Alexandrinus*, ed. O. Stählin (Leipzig, 1905–36), pp. 1–66.

the Holy Spirit as to become, like the great Paul, a teacher and not a persecutor of the faith he was attacking. Philip says that Clement, author of the *Stromateis*, was his disciple and Pantaenus Clement's. Pantaenus too was an Athenian, being a Pythagorean in his philosophy.

Even what I have previously written on this matter¹⁶ I would now largely discount, giving virtually no credibility at all to Philip's testimony. There is no independent support for the unlikely notion that Athenagoras was either the head of the Alexandrian school or a leading figure in the Academic school. Clement of Alexandria was certainly not his pupil, but rather that of Pantaenus (rather than the other way around). Athenagoras almost certainly comes from the latter part of the second century and not from its middle years (see below). Pantaenus was probably a Stoic.

Athenian?

Where Athenagoras comes from is a matter of some dispute. In the manuscript title of the *Legatio* he is called 'Athenagoras the Athenian'. This is done in the earliest known codex containing his work – codex Parisinus Graecus 451 (A), copied out in 914^{CE} by Baanes – secretary to Arethas, archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia – with annotations by the archbishop himself; and it recurs in later manuscripts – codex Mutinensis 126 (N), codex Parisinus 174 (P), codex Parisinus 450 (C), Argentoratensis 9 (S) and a number of others¹⁷ – all of which follow, directly or indirectly, 451. This is of key importance for understanding his writing in the context, and against the background, of contemporary philosophical conversations, particularly those to do with the matter of the divine (being). The particular philosophical–theological conversation in which he was engaged in the *Legatio* (see Chapter 3 for more detailed discussion of this matter) may also provide a pointer to where he comes from.

Athenian Middle Platonism

From the latter part of the first century ^{CE} into the second, we see that in Athens itself – though one does not need to subscribe to the notion of the existence of a formal

¹⁶ See, for example, the section on Athenagoras in Rankin, *From Clement to Origen* (above, n5), p. 119.

¹⁷ *Athenagoras: Legatio and De Resurrectione*, ed. W.R. Schoedel, with translation and notes (Oxford, 1972), p. xxxv, says that there are four 'of lesser importance' and ten 'unimportant' ones. B. Pouderon, *Athénagore: Supplique au sujet des chrétiens et sur la résurrection* (Paris, 1992), p. 35, identifies some 24 manuscript copies in addition to A, N, P, C and S, including six deriving from N, ten from P, one from C, five indirectly from A, and others whose provenance is not so clear.

Middle Platonist ‘School of Athens’¹⁸ – there are philosophers associated with the city (either native Athenians or non-Athenians who had taken up residence there): figures such as Plutarch, Nicostratus, Calvenus Taurus, Atticus, Harpocraton and Severus, who reflect a particular understanding of the divine being which might help inform our understanding of the thought of Athenagoras.

‘We must never’, says Dillon, ‘underestimate the simplicity and informality of the arrangements in any ancient philosophical school’.¹⁹ Indeed he declares: ‘[a]fter 86 BC, I do not believe that there was any such thing as an official Platonic Academy, until (perhaps) Marcus Aurelius founded his Regius Professorships in 176 AD’.²⁰ We note, for example, that it is so-called members of the alleged ‘School of Athens’, like Plutarch of Chaironea writing towards the end of the first century CE and Atticus in the second, who identify the supreme divine entity with the Creator–Father entity of the *Timaeus*. And they do so, possibly in company with Apuleius of Madaura (associated with the so-called but historically improbable ‘School of Gaius’²¹) and with the Neopythagorean Nicomachus of Gerasa (early second century?), against the likes of Harpocraton of Argos – himself a pupil of Atticus (on which see Proclus, *In Timaeum* I.305.6), who had previously come under the influence of Numenius. Harpocraton distinguishes the two entities, the ‘Father’ and ‘Creator’ of the *Timaeus*, as does the Middle Platonist Alcinoüs (second century CE?) and the Neopythagoreans Moderatus of Gades (first century CE) and Numenius (second century). (Roughly speaking, the Neopythagoreans are Platonists who identify Plato essentially as a disciple of Pythagoras.) These two latter figures clearly distinguish the Supreme God–Father from the Creator figure of the *Timaeus*, whom they recognize as a second god at best.

The identification (or not) of the Creator entity with the Supreme God is also important because, for those like Plutarch, Atticus and Nicomachus, identifications

¹⁸ See J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists 80 BC to AD 220*, rev. edn (London, 1996), pp. 231ff. In his paper ‘The Academy in the Middle Platonic period’, *Dionysius* 3 (1979): 63–77, Dillon comments that Plutarch in the mid-first century CE ‘records himself as studying under Ammonius [in Athens]’ (p. 66), but that ‘[i]f he joined a material Academy ... it was no more than Ammonius’ school, which seems to have been a fairly simple foundation’ (ibid.). He then says that in the mid-second century CE Gellius speaks of L. Calvenus Taurus not as being the head of any formal Academy, but as ‘*vir memoria nostra in disciplina Platonica celebratus*’ (*Noctes Atticae*, 7.10), ‘implying simply that he was the leading Platonist of his time in Athens’ (p. 68).

¹⁹ Dillon, ‘The Academy in the Middle Platonic period’ (above, n18), p. 76.

²⁰ Ibid..Dio, in the epitome (or summary) of his *Roman History*, tells us that ‘when Marcus [Aurelius] had come to Athens ... [he], for the benefit of the whole world, established teachers at Athens in every branch of knowledge, granting these teachers an annual salary’ (31.3–32.1). Atticus, the leading Platonist in Athens in his time, was the [first?] ‘Regius Professor’ of Platonism there according to J. Dillon, “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘eclecticism’”: Middle Platonists and Neo-Pythagoreans’, in J. Dillon and A.A. Long (eds), *The Question of Eclecticism: Studies in Later Greek Philosophers*. (Berkeley, 1988), p. 114.

²¹ See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (above, n18), pp. 266f.

of the supreme principle with the Creator also apparently led them to distinguish the God–Father–Creator from the Logos (that is, to see the Logos not merely as an attribute of God but as a distinct entity, an assimilation perhaps of the Platonic Demiurge to the Stoic Logos), which fulfilled an intermediary role between the intelligible and the sensible world.²² Dillon comments that ‘God, thus established [by Plutarch as Supreme Being, Real Being, the Good and the One], must relate to the world through suitable intermediaries, of whom the first is, not surprisingly, the Logos’.²³ At *De Iside et Osiride* 377e–378a, Plutarch speaks of ‘the one *logos* which orders (or regulates) all these things [*sc.* the sun, the moon, the heavens, the earth and the sea], the *providence* which watches over them, and the subordinate powers which are set over them’. This may not be, for Plutarch himself, the Logos of Philo and of the Christians, but it does provide a point of reference for the latter. So, rather than seeing the Logos as merely an attribute or aspect of, and thereby indistinguishable from, God, they propose the Logos as an entity distinct from, though subordinate to, him. This is crucial perhaps for Athenagoras’ articulation of the relationship of the Logos to the Father (God) and to the process of creation. In addition, Plutarch, Atticus and (this time) Harpocration – even though he takes a different position on the Father–Creator identification: a hangover perhaps of the influence of Atticus – understand Platonic creation in the *Timaeus* as being temporal or taking place in time, against those like Calvenus Taurus, Alcinous, Apuleius, and others in the ‘Platonist’ tradition, all of whom regard creation as atemporal (that is, as not happening in time and as shaped in language simply ‘for the sake of instruction’, μαθησεως χάριν).²⁴ Thus, if Athenagoras does come from Athens (and did much of his work there), he will more likely be writing within and against the background of this tradition, which emerges (reactively?) in the late first and in the second century in Athens and which takes a particular position on matters such as the identity of the Father–Creator, the Logos, and the temporality of creation, against others within the broader (Middle) Platonist tradition, particularly as represented by Neopythagoreans like Moderatus and Numenius. Athenagoras’ placement in this context might also help, at least in part, to explain Athenagoras’ reference at *Legatio* 7.2 to the ‘first principles’ of those poets and philosophers who have gained no more than a ‘peripheral understanding’ of God because they have relied upon their own resources and

²² The question of the influence, if any, of Philo Alexandrinus on Athenagoras, given that precisely these very issues are addressed in the writings of the former, is a crucial one. If, as I say below (see my Chapter 2), the *De resurrectione* is from the hand of Athenagoras, then our author will have spent some time in Alexandria, will almost certainly have gained some acquaintanceship with the writings of Philo and may well have been influenced by him at least in this matter. It must be said, however, that in many other ways, particularly in the choice of language, there is much that divides Athenagoras and Philo.

²³ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (above, n18), p. 200.

²⁴ See D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses* (Leiden, 2001), p. 17 and Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (above, n18), p. 242.

not upon God himself and have thereby come up with different doctrines about God, matter, the forms and the world. These four are the very issues at the heart of Middle Platonist discourse in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. And then, at *De resurrectione* 1.2, Athenagoras refers to the matters which others have misrepresented; and it is not improbable that this was designed to point back to the subject matter of the *Legatio*, which he identifies in passing as the ‘nature of God, the ‘knowledge [of God]’, and the ‘activity [of God]’. These were all topics at the centre of the Middle Platonist conversation in Athenagoras’ time.

An Alexandrian Connection?

Some sources point to a possible connection between Athenagoras and Alexandria. So does for instance Philip of Side, and somewhat fancifully (and thus his testimony, wrong on many other details, should be at least discounted, if not dismissed outright – see above); but others, let it be said, do it more convincingly. There are some internal pointers (including an interest in Egyptian religious matters (see *Legatio* 1.1 and 14.2 on Egyptian zoology; 22.8 on Isis and Osiris; and most of chapter 28 on Egyptian deities) – information which could, of course, be accessed by anyone in the empire at the time (especially the quotations in chapter 28 from Book II of Herodotus) – which might suggest at least some time spent in Alexandria. (There is of course the intriguing reference to ‘camels’ at *De resurrectione* 12.2 which suggests that the author of that work at least had some familiarity with the region.) I believe, however, that there is in fact no substantial evidence at all – apart from the testimony of Philip – to suggest, let alone prove, any period of residence in, or even a significant sojourn to, Alexandria. How any theologian, Christian or otherwise, who had spent some time in that city could fail, as is the case with the author of the *Legatio*, to demonstrate some acquaintance with the writings of Philo is difficult to explain.²⁵ There is in fact no reasonable *prima facie* case for any substantial Alexandrian connection whatsoever. It is time, in my view, to take more seriously the description ‘the Athenian’ and the suggestion of Athenagoras’ probable engagement with the Athenian Middle Platonist scholarship of his era – as well as his ownership of that engagement (see Chapter 3 below).²⁶ If Runia is right, of course – and I believe he is – that terms such as ἀγαλαματοφορεῖν (at 12.6) and

²⁵ See D. Runia, ‘*Verba philonica*, ἀγαλαματοφορεῖν, and the authenticity of the *De resurrectione* attributed to Athenagoras’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 313–27.

²⁶ L.A. Ruprecht, ‘Athenagoras the Christian, Pausanias the travel guide, and a mysterious Corinthian girl’, *Harvard Theological Review* 85 (1992): 35–49, posits the environs of Corinth as the natural habitat of Athenagoras on the basis of Athenagoras’ understanding of sculpture and related art matters (commonly sourced with the travel writer of antiquity, Pausanias); but, again, even someone domiciled in Athens could surely reflect a similar knowledge and competence in such matters. There are no other pointers to this claimed geographic connection. There are, then, no sufficient grounds to advance this particular suggestion, intriguing and thought-provoking though it is.

συνδιαίωνίζειν employed by the author of the *De resurrectione* (at 12.6, 15.8, and 25.4) are *verba philonica* and can really only have come into patristic usage via Philo and Alexandria;²⁷ and if it is also true that the *De resurrectione* is from the hand of Athenagoras (a thesis which, for the record, Runia himself does not accept²⁸) – then Athenagoras may have spent at least some time in Alexandria, and enough for him to imbibe some Philonic language.

The Athenagorean Corpus

One needs from the outset to deal with the matter of texts and, as I will argue more extensively in Chapter 2, I side with those who are inclined towards a ‘not proven’ verdict on the authenticity of the *De Resurrectione* and therefore, on the basis of the *status quo* (the attribution by Arethas in the tenth century and the majority opinion since that time), I also side with those who see the need to include this treatise in any account of Athenagoras’ thought. In this work, however, I will keep consideration of the two writings, the *Legatio* and the *De Resurrectione*, somewhat separate as I explore the various themes in Athenagorean thought. This is, of course, something relatively easy to do, given the very different primary themes of the two works (see the monographs of both Barnard²⁹ and Pouderon³⁰ for evidence of this). My primary starting point in the consideration of a particular Athenagorean theme or sub-theme will almost invariably be the *Legatio*, while any material from the *De resurrectione* which deals with the same or a similar theme or sub-theme will be included in parentheses, for the sake of recognition. I will offer, where appropriate, an interpretation of the material from both writings.

Up until the middle of the twentieth century, the *De Resurrectione* was almost universally accepted as authentic on the basis of a marginal ascription in a tenth-century manuscript and of a reading of *Legatio* 37.1; and thus it was not seriously challenged. Grant changed all that in the early 1950s, though his own arguments were somewhat specious.³¹ The fact is that, now when the debate has been opened, scholars need to stand back and ask whether there is any real evidence (internal

²⁷ Runia, ‘*Verba philonica*’ (above, n25), *passim*. Some have suggested to me that a majority of scholars believe that Numenius of Apamea drew his ‘He who is’ in frg. 13 from Philo – and that therefore it was possible to have drawn from his work from outside of Alexandria – but it is also possible that Numenius himself spent some time in Alexandria. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (above, n18), p. 368, note 1, is adamant, however, that in frg. 13 Numenius was not using the phrase ‘He who is’ in the Philonic sense.

²⁸ Runia, ‘*Verba philonica*’ (above, n25), p. 324.

²⁹ L.W. Barnard, *Athenagoras: A Study in Second Century Christian Apologetic* (Paris, 1972).

³⁰ B. Pouderon, *Athénagore d’Athènes: Philosophe chrétien*. (Paris, 1989).

³¹ R.M. Grant, ‘Athenagoras or Pseudo-Athenagoras’, *Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1954): 121–9.