The Phoenician Solar Theology

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The Phoenician Solar Theology

An Investigation into the Phoenician Opinion of the Sun found in Julian's Hymn to King Helios

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DEDICATION

la khayi Ḥunna al-marḥoum

ya khayi, ya nufsi—
khahak ma biyinsa, ḥabibi,
abadan, abadan, abadan.

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Doubleday, New York
ACFP	Atti della congressi di studi fenici e punici
ANES	Ancient Near Eastern Studies
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, ed. Wolfgang Haase, Walter de Gruyter Berlin
An St	Anatolian Studies
AOF	Altorientalische Forschungen
BASOR	Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Ignace J. Gelb [et al.], The Oriental Institute, Chicago, 1952
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Jack M. Sasson (ed. in chief), John Baines; Gary Beckman and Karen S. Rubinson (associate eds), Charles Scribner's Sons, New York (in four volumes), 1995
CAT	*The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and other Places,* M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartin, Ugarit-Verlag, Munster, 1995 (2nd edition)
DCPP	Dictionnaire de la civilisation phénicienne et punique, ed. E. Lipinski, Brepols, Turnhout, 1992
DDD	*Dictionary of Demons and Deities in the Bible,* ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter van der Horst, E. J. Brill Leiden, (extensively revised edition), 1998
DNWSI	*Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions,* J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, E. J. Brill Leiden, 1995 (in two volumes)
EI	Erets-Israel
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Abingdon, Nashville
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal

JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JANER	Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions
JANES	Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
KAI	*Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*, H. Donner and W. Röllig, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1971-1976, in three volumes
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*
MUSJ	Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph
NPEA	Der Neue Pauly Enzyklopädie der Antike
OA	Oriens Antiquus
OCD	Oxford Classical Dicionary, (3rd edition)
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLP	Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica
Or. N.S.	Orientalia, New Series
RSF	Rivista di Studi Fenici
SEL	Studia Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente
St Ph	Studia Phoenicia
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmentum*, ed. H. von Arnim, Teubner, 1903-1905
UF	Ugarit-Forschungen
VT	Vetus Testamentum
ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie

FIGURES

SUMMARY

The Emperor Julian, in his *Hymn to King Helios*, states:

> For the opinion of the Phoenicians—(who are) wise and possessed of knowledge in respect of divine matters—stated that the sunlight (which is) sent forth everywhere is the immaculate action of pure mind itself.

I refer to this passage as the "Solar Pericope". This thesis demonstrates that Julian's statement is reliable evidence for one aspect of ancient Phoenician thought. It is shown that this concept is similar to a formulation found in Damaskios' short quotation from Mochos, the Sidonian philosopher, who probably lived in the sixth or fifth century BCE.

The Solar Pericope is placed in the context of Julian's other references to the Phoenicians and within the *Hymn to King Helios*. Julian saw this Phoenician concept as an independent confirmation of his ideas.

The Phoenician solar religion is examined in some detail, against the background of ancient Phoenician culture and religious and spiritual life. Seven concepts are abstracted from the evidence (particularly from the Phoenician funerary inscriptions), as forming the framework of a solar theology.

Relevant artistic evidence is gathered. All ancient writers who can shed light upon the solar theology as reconstructed are cited and considered. Analogs are also considered from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Ugarit.

The surviving Greek language evidence of Mochos, Philo of Byblos, and the Sidonian cosmogony preserved in Damaskios' quotation from Eudemos are especially important. Pausanias and Lydus are also considered.

A passage from Philo, preserved in Lydus, states that in the Phoenician language, "Iao" (= Yahweh) meant "the noetic light". This idea is reliable and is consistent with the Solar Pericope. Philo's reference in the first century CE to "noetic light" strengthens the argument that Julian's Solar Pericope contains authentic ancient Phoenician material, not dependent upon Neoplatonism.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one sets out the starting point, the extract from the Emperor Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* which I call the "Solar Pericope". In translation it reads:

> For the opinion of the Phoenicians—(who are) wise and possessed of knowledge in respect of divine matters—stated that the sunlight (which is) sent forth everywhere is the immaculate action of pure mind itself.

The questions for the entire thesis are posed here: was Julian a trustworthy witness to an aspect of ancient Phoenician thought? Did any Phoenicians ever maintain this doctrine? If so, what did they mean and when did they maintain it? How does this study affect our overall view of Phoenician religion and intellectual thought?

In order to consider such a doctrine fully, and to explore its ramifications, it proves desirable to engage with the ideas the Phoenicians formed about the sun. Thus, commencing from one suggestive statement, the thesis in effect reconstructs some of the skeleton of what might be called the "Phoenician solar theology".

It is noted that there has been a certain tendency in scholarship to see Phoenician culture as a chapter in the history of the Greek Mediterranean. That is changing, but it is still an influential tendency, and the attitude must be recognized and addressed impartially.

To understand the Solar Pericope, the other occasions on which Julian referred to the Phoenicians are set out. These are the "Aphrodite Pericope", the "Semele Pericope", the "Edessa Pericope", and the "Arithmetic Pericope". The "Aphrodite Pericope" and "Edessa Pericope" are also found in the *Hymn to King Helios* and are related by Julian to Phoenician ideas on the sun.

Chapter two deals with the Solar Pericope in detail. It commences by outlining Julian's background, and then deals with the genre of the *Hymn to King Helios*, concluding that it is chiefly a philosophical discourse. It then analyses the Solar Pericope and its place within the *Hymn to King Helios*. In the *Hymn*, Julian presented a scheme of the universe comprised of three cosmoses. The center of each cosmos is the deity Helios. All of these worlds are linked directly through their center, and that center is the sun of each world. Julian also stated that his discourse did not "sing out of tune with this" (i.e., the Solar Pericope), showing that Julian considered the Phoenician ideas to be exterior to his philosophy. That is, Julian saw the Solar Pericope as an independent confirmation of his ideas.

Chapter three analyses and contextualises the remaining "Phoenician Pericopes". It is demonstrated that these show that Julian's "Phoenicians" were the people whom we call by the same name, the inhabitants of the Lebanese coast. Further, Julian saw the Phoenicians as having had a lengthy history, and as having developed an advanced civilization before the Greeks did, although, in the Arithmetic Pericope he makes it clear that the Greeks perfected what he considered to be the originally Phoenician science of arithmetic.

Chapter four considers Julian and his sources. In particular, it sets the stage to investigate the influence of Iamblichos on Julian. It is necessary to examine Julian's sources, because he did take some of his "Phoenician theology" from Iamblichos, and Iamblichos did publish at least one work under another name. The possibility that the "Phoenician theology" was a Neoplatonic anachronism must therefore be considered. This chapter considers Julian's use of Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and other writers or philosophers in the Greek and Latin traditions (e.g., Homer and Empedokles). It also mentions some concepts found in Menander the Rhetor and Ammianus Marcellinus, as these illustrate certain features found in the *Hymn to King Helios.* The chapter also deals with the influence on Julian of Mithraism, and certain Neoplatonists, especially Maximos.

Chapter five studies the relationship between Julian and Iamblichos. It investigates Iamblichos' philosophy, and the evidence for Iamblichos' attitude to the Phoenicians. It examines whether any original Phoenician religious or spiritual ideas could have survived into the third and fourth centuries CE, and if so, how credible it is that Iamblichos and Porphyry would have had access to authentically Semitic material. Porphyry is mentioned not only because he was an elder contemporary of Iamblichos, but because of a specific controversy as to whether he knew any Semitic language at all. I also consider Julian's own contributions to the philosophical ideas found in his mature works such as the *Hymn to King Helios.*

Chapter six studies the Phoenicians. It considers the way that "Phoenicia" has effectively been seen as a division within the Greek Mediterranean, and concludes that although Phoenicia is often studied this way, it need not be. To provide context to the Phoenician Pericope, it discusses Preus' view that philosophy was actually a product of the Western Mediterranean as a whole, and not simply Greece. The theories of Phoenician influence on ancient Greece and Etruria are mentioned. There is some discussion of the connections between Greece and the East in philosophy.

Chapter seven examines Ugarit and its sun goddess, Šapšu, examining the extent to which Ugaritian ideas on the sun were consistent with Phoenician ones. It considers Šapšu as mediator and as psychopompe, but chiefly, as the sun itself.

Chapter eight commences the dedicated examination of the Phoenician solar religion. First, it considers the name of the sun deity (Šamaš), and then makes a study of certain funerary inscriptions (particularly those of Ahiram, Tabnit, and Ešmunazor II). It abstracts from these a group of seven related ideas. These ideas are set out both at the end of this chapter, and again in the Conclusion.

Chapter nine considers miscellaneous evidence for the Phoenician solar religion: chiefly certain inscriptions, works of art (especially the Sign of Tanit, which is shown to be a flexible symbol to which solar connotations could be attached), the institution of the *mrzḥ* (*mzrḥ*), temples and betyls, the onomastic evidence, Aštart and deities associated with Venus, the Phoenix bird, and astronomical interpretations of certain Phoenician bowls. Finally, it shows the plausibility of this reconstructed solar theology by reference to certain ideas about the sun current in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Chapter ten deals with the surviving Greek language evidence of Phoenician writers: Mochos, Philo, and the Sidonian cosmogony preserved in Damaskios' quotation from Eudemos. It is seen that the evidence here, especially the figure of Oulomos mentioned by Mochos (and Oton or Otos, perhaps the equivalent of Oulomos in the Sidonian cosmogony), substantiates details of the reconstructed Phoenician solar theology. This is, in some ways, the most direct evidence that before any possible influence from Neoplatonism, the ancient Phoenicians held the idea expressed in the Solar Pericope. It is seen that there are many issues in the study of Philo of Byblos. However, his reference to the sun and Mot in one of his cosmogonies is reliable, and does not stand in need of textual amendment.

Chapter eleven considers other late evidence, namely, Pausanias and Lydus. Pausanias describes a conversation with a Sidonian about the sun and its natural effects. This conversation is self-conscious in its use of religious metaphors, that is, it is explicitly recognized that in speaking of *deities* one is speaking of the *natural forces* represented by them.

It appears that Iao (Yahweh) could have had a role as a Phoenician deity. This would explain certain anomalous pieces of evidence, and would make sense of an enigmatic statement of Philo of Byblos, preserved only in a very short fragment of Lydus:

> The Roman Varro … says that amongst the Chaldeans in the mysteries he is called "Iao" (in place of) the noetic light in the Phoenician tongue, which Herennios (also) says.

Short as it is, this fragment is important, for it shows that Philo (writing two hundred and fifty years or more before Julian) preserved an idea which is consistent with the "philosophical" notions preserved in Julian. The very reference to "noetic light" goes to indicate that the Phoenicians must have developed some notions similar to those later encountered in the *Chaldaean Oracles* and in Neoplatonism. It is shown in this chapter that the reference to "Iao" or "Yahweh" is not fanciful: there is reason to think that Yahweh was recognized as a deity in Phoenicia.

CHAPTER 1
THE QUESTION AND THE METHOD

> ἡ μὲν οὖν τῶν Φοινίκων δόξα, σοφῶν τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἐπιστημόνων, ἄχραντον εἶναι ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τοῦ καθαροῦ νοῦ τὴν ἁπανταχῇ προϊοῦσαν αὐγὴν ἔφη·...
>
> For the opinion of the Phoenicians—(who are) wise and possessed of knowledge in respect of divine matters—stated that the sunlight (which is) sent forth everywhere is the immaculate action of pure mind itself.[1]

So wrote Julian the Emperor in his *Hymn to King Helios*.[2] This thesis is, I believe, the first historical investigation into the reliability of this passage, which I call the "Solar Pericope". Such an enquiry is now overdue, for Julian records, here and in the related Aphrodite and Edessa Pericopes, a series of ideas which I have never seen seriously considered in any study of Phoenician religion. Yet, the authenticity of the Solar Pericope is an interesting and important issue. The idea that the sun is related to mind might not seem at all novel: after all, the light of the sun reveals what has been in darkness. That is, both mind and the sun shed light, they clarify. But the Solar Pericope is set within the context of ideas which develop this observation beyond the scope of a commonplace. If Julian is a trustworthy witness to an aspect of ancient Phoenician thought, and if one can make sense of this single remark in its context, then our sketchy picture of Phoenician religion and spirituality, based largely on Philo of Byblos and a small number of inscriptions, acquires shades of interest which had been absent.

The ramifications of this short passage are not unimportant. For example, this statement cannot readily be categorized as either mythological or philosophical. It is not simply a statement of

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[1] Compare W. C. Wright's translation: "Now the doctrine of the Phoenicians, who were wise and learned in sacred lore, declared that the rays of light everywhere diffused are the undefiled incarnation of pure mind". Wright (1913) p. 363. I have considered the translation of "doctrine", but opted for "opinion" as being equally true to the Greek, but less suggestive of a rigid corpus of formulations.

[2] *Hymn to King Helios* 134A.

mythology, because it includes an explicitly abstract statement about the nature of mind in the world. Yet, neither is it analytic philosophy, for—as we shall see—Julian purports to relate it to opinions which deify the sun and speak of the goddess "Aphrodite" (almost certainly Aštart) as the sun's assistant in his work. In trying to come to grips with this, we must remember that very often in modern discourse the term "philosophy" is taken to mean "analytic philosophy". Perhaps a better, although not entirely satisfactory, term for this Phoenician body of ideas would be "spiritual philosophy" or (with some qualification) the word Julian used—"theology". In some ways, the term "spirituality" is even better than "theology" because it does not suggest a formulated body of doctrines, but rather a cast of mind. These questions will be resumed in later chapters. Although by no means central to my thesis, these issues of definition are legitimate.

Another important implication of this study relates to the celebrated Iamblichos, a Neoplatonic philosopher who is undergoing something of a reassessment in scholarly circles. As shall be seen below, there is reason to believe that Julian's source for the Solar, the Aphrodite, and the Edessa Pericopes was Iamblichos. Only a few of Iamblichos' works have survived, and none of these refers to any Phoenician ideas similar to this one. So this study has the potential also to expand our knowledge of Iamblichos. If developed, it also might broaden our understanding of the sun cult of the Roman Empire.

However, the focus of this thesis is neither Iamblichos nor religion in the Roman Empire generally: it is the Phoenicians. The questions posed here include the following: did any Phoenicians ever in fact, at any time, hold the belief that sunlight comprises the immaculate action of pure mind? If so, what was meant by that, and when did they conceive that idea? Is it possible that the Phoenicians formulated a related idea, but that when Julian or his source came to restate that concept, they rephrased it using the vocabulary of Neoplatonism? What does Julian mean to say that the Phoenicians "believed"? How widely is the belief attested? How does this study affect our overall view of Phoenician religion and intellectual thought?

This short chapter aims only to set the parameters of my enquiry. Time and again, I shall return to the importance of establishing the context of our data and our categories. This is not a trite statement: Phoenician studies are in a state of flux, and I shall contend that even our understanding of who the Phoenicians were depends upon the framework we accept for this issue.

In brief, I shall maintain that, to a certain extent and in particular quarters, there has been a more or less unconscious tendency to see Phoenician culture only, if not merely, as a chapter in the history of the Greek Mediterranean. That is, Greek texts, Greek artifacts, and Greek history—in a word, Greek civilization—are taken as the axis around which all ancient Mediterranean civilization turns. This is not to say that the importance of these other civilizations is ever denied. However, especially in the past, their contribution to science and the arts has been tacitly and implicitly devalued. Recent years have brought a definite change in this regard.

Yet the situation still obtains that foreign documents, artifacts, and history are interpreted in the light of the Greek ones. Greek society and history are treated as cardinal, and statements by Phoenicians are not accepted where they contradict those of Greek writers. As we shall see, scholars have refused to accept the plain sense of a statement made by Porphyry *à propos* of his name, basically because it does not correspond to the picture we have from the other Greek language sources. In this respect, it is important that it is rarely acknowledged that while the Phoenicians did come to use Greek, they did so because it was the tongue of their conquerors. If Julian's statement about Phoenician opinions is authentic—and I contend that it probably is—then it could mean that the Phoenician contribution to the religion and philosophy of the Mediterranean was camouflaged not only by the Greek language, but by the ascendant Greek culture in general.

We shall see that it is not infrequently asserted that ideas which circulated amongst these non-Greek peoples must have commenced with the Greeks because they are first attested amongst the Greeks. Any scholarly misgivings about this—however well-reasoned—are dismissed as lacking evidence. This approach is so completely dominant that even the possibility of a non-Greek origin or contribution is rejected when scholars might at least have entertained it as a possibility. It is becoming more apparent that fresh perspectives are available upon the Mediterranean and its civilizations—perspectives based upon a consideration of all of the evidence including the results of archaeology and not only upon the Greek texts.

To an extent, this Hellenocentric view of the Mediterranean prevails because we have a much better knowledge of Greek history than we do of the history of the Phoenician, Jewish, and other peoples of that world. Yet this does not justify a failure to make an attempt to look at these cultures without Hellenic spectacles, especially when it is known that the Greeks (on the whole) felt superior to these peoples, and literally coined the word "barbarian" to refer to them.

At the very outset, it is apparent that the task of discerning the extent to which Julian's "Phoenician theology" is in fact authentically Phoenician will not be an easy one. First of all, Julian is writing in Greek. He read no Phoenician; and indeed, apart from Greek seems only to have known Latin; and even then he may not have been fully bilingual.[3] Paradoxically, this supports my contention that the Solar Pericope is authentically Phoenician, for Julian was a Hellenist, and had no reason to cite "Phoenicians" when he could have drawn upon his own beloved Greeks. This line of thought shall be developed below. On the other hand, because we are reading this in Julian, and not even in the text of a Phoenician who can write in Greek (such as Philo of Byblos), it does mean that our information is coming to us indirectly: the direct connection with Phoenicia is no longer extant, if indeed there ever had been such a connection.

Secondly, Julian is manifestly writing within a Hellenist world-outlook, and is thus viewing the Phoenicians through a colored lens. This has the effect that Julian cites the "Phoenician theology" in such a way that he gives the impression that the Phoenician concepts and his own Neoplatonic ideas on King Helios entirely coincide. In fact, this is an illusion. If Julian is read closely it can be seen that he cites the Phoenicians only at certain points, and even then, those points are less crucial than the far greater number where he is quoting Greek writers. The Solar Pericope does not contradict Julian's Neoplatonic synthesis, but neither is it necessary for it. It appears simply to be a Phoenician novelty which struck Julian as offering support for certain of his arguments. For all that, it may be significant that it was a Phoenician novelty to which

[3] Bouffartigue (1992) pp. 408 and 500.

Julian turned. Bouffartigue is of the view that a development in Julian's attitude to the Greeks, Romans, and "barbarians" can be discerned. Commencing from the observation that, in his later writing, Julian seems to have been departing from Greek astronomy in favor of the Phoenician version, Bouffartigue notes that Ammianus attributes to Julian a tendency to adopt Asiatic manners.[4] It is in fact difficult to make much out of this passage of Ammianus,[5] except that Julian must be emperor at the time he is rebuked by Eutherius for his affectations. We are not told that these indulgences were becoming more frequent or in what they consisted. However, I think Bouffartigue must be presuming that Julian could not have maintained Asiatic manners before he was sole emperor. Bouffartigue claims to discern the beginnings of a tendency in Julian to abandon Hellenism as being a ship in danger, and to seek a sort of refuge amongst the "culturally advanced" barbarians of Egypt and the East.[6] However, as we shall see, the evidence does not bear this out. Julian is influenced by the *Chaldaean Oracles* and, to an extent, Mithraism. He certainly had a great respect for Egypt, and encouraged the observance of Egyptian pagan rites, but he never cites Egyptian ideas or teachings in his philosophical works.[7]

The terms of the Solar Pericope are quite specific: they cannot be taken to attribute a broad philosophy or theology to the Phoenicians. Yet, if it is valuable to test the authenticity of this passage, then we must examine what Julian meant when he said that sunlight comprises a pure mental action. But even before that, in order to understand the Solar Pericope, it is also necessary to consider the four other attested occasions on which Julian refers to the Phoenicians. These are the passages I refer to as the "Aphrodite Pericope", the "Semele Pericope", the "Edessa

[4] Bouffartigue (1992) pp. 482 and 666.

[5] Ammianus 16.7.6.

[6] This must be read together with Bouuffartigue's argument that Iamblichos was a more important influence on Julian than the relatively few references to him would suggest, and that Julian named Iamblichos less extensively because he was a "modern" and therefore of less compelling authority: Bouffartigue (1992) pp. 76, 277 and 666.

[7] Hornung (1999) p. 71 for the limited extent of Julian's interest in Egypt.

Pericope", and the "Arithmetic Pericope". The "Aphrodite Pericope" occurs in the *Hymn to King Helios*, where Julian affirms:

> ὀλίγα ἔτι περὶ Ἀφροδιτής, ἣν συνεφάπτεσθαι τῆς δημιουργίας τῷ θεῷ Φοινίκων ὁμολογοῦσιν οἱ λόγιοι, καὶ ἐγὼ πείθομαι.
>
> A few things (remain) yet, concerning Aphrodite, of whom the erudite among the Phoenicians speak as one, saying that she takes part with the god (sc. Helios) in the creation. And I believe them.[8]

The paragraphs which follow this sentence form an integrated piece, leading to Julian's statement of his source for Phoenician ideas. The goddess is, he says, a σύγκρασις τῶν οὐρανίων θεῶν—a blending of the gods of the sky. She is the φιλία καὶ ἕνωσις of their ἁρμονία—the love and unity of their harmony. That is, the gods of the sky have separate functions, but when they act as one, they are considered to be Aphrodite. Their blending in itself forms a force or a virtue, which he calls φιλία καὶ ἕνωσις, and for Julian, this too, is Aphrodite. The generation of life is due to Helios, for Helios "holds (or 'possesses') within himself the first-working cause"—ἔχει τὴν πρωτουργὸν αἰτίαν. While "Aphrodite" is, literally, below Helios, she works with him as a causal agent; thus Julian affirms that she is συναίτιος (150B). Julian then states that he has been drawing these ideas from the θεολογία, the "theology", of the Phoenicians (150C).

Discussion of "first causes" sounds distinctly Platonist, if not Neoplatonist (and that distinction is itself a modern one). But the idea that life begins in the sun, and that a goddess has a role in it, is not by any means necessarily Platonist. That is, the language of "first causes" might well be Platonist, but the idea of "causes" *per se* is not. Julian as a Neoplatonist will naturally use the terminology of Neoplatonism. But the substance of his argument may yet be authentically Phoenician. As we shall see, it is important to interrogate the sources, as it were, to try and learn what the Phoenicians may have meant in speaking of terms such as "mind", "harmony", "love", and "unity". Although it is limited, there is

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[8] *Hymn to King Helios* 150B. Wright (1913) p. 411 translates: "I have still to say a few words about Aphrodite, who, as the wise men among the Phoenicians affirm, and as I believe, assists Helios in his creative function".

indeed more information on this point than one might have thought.

Julian follows the Aphrodite Pericope with an argument drawn from a practice in the temple of Helios at Edessa, and declares that he has this on the authority of Iamblichos, and, indeed, "all else"—τἆλλα πάντα.[9] This phrase is found embedded in what I term the "Edessa Pericope".

> ἔτι μετριάσαι βούλομαι τῆς Φοινίκων θεολογίας· εἰ δὲ μὴ μάτην, ὁ λόγος προϊὼν δείξει. οἱ τὴν Ἔδεσσαν οἰκοῦντες, ἱερὸν ἐξ αἰῶνος Ἡλίου χωρίον, Μόνιμον αὐτῷ καὶ Ἄζιζον συγκαθιδρύουσιν. αἰνίτεσθαί φησιν Ἰάμβλιχος, παρ' οὗ καὶ τἆλλα πάντα ἐκ πολλῶν μικρὰ ἐλάβομεν, ὡς ὁ Μόνιμος μὲν Ἑρμῆς εἴη, Ἄζιζος δὲ Ἄρης, Ἡλίου πάρεδροι, πολλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ τῷ περὶ γῆν ἐποχετεύοντες τόπῳ.
>
> Τὰ μὲν οὖν περὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ τοιαῦτά ἐστι, καὶ διὰ τούτων ἐπιτελούμενα μέχρι τῶν τῆς γῆς προήκει τελευταίων ὅρων·[10]
>
> I yet wish to measure[11] more from the Phoenician theology. As to whether that is not useless, my argument will show as it goes on. Those who dwell at Edessa,[12] a place sacred to Helios from ages past, make joint consecrations to him (i.e., Helios) and to Monimos and Azizos. Wrapped up in riddles, says Iamblichos, from whom I have taken all else too—a little from an abundance, is that Monimos is (identical with) Hermes and Azizos with Ares, (and they are those who) sit beside Helios. It is they who conduct many things, especially good things,[13] to the place about the earth. Therefore such as these are the works of this god round about heaven, and when these works are completed through these (i.e., Monimos and Azizos) they advance even to the furthest boundaries of the earth.

[9] *Hymn to King Helios* 150D.

[10] *Hymn to King Helios* 150C-D.

[11] I restore here the reading of the original manuscript: Wright (1913) p. 412.

[12] Again, I restore the original manuscript's reading: Wright (1913) p. 412.

[13] Admittedly an awkward translation, but an attempt to render the force of the καί which is deliberately positioned between πολλά and ἀγαθά.

This pericope is not as important as the other two for my thesis, yet it is significant. First, it provides good reason to see in Iamblichos the source of the Solar and Aphrodite Pericopes. Second, it confirms the notion that the sun and the deities of the sky were important in Phoenician religion. However, there are a number of problems associated with this pericope, as we shall see when it is dealt with in more detail.

The fourth of these "Phoenician pericopes", the "Semele Pericope", is found in the seventh oration: *To the Cynic Herakleios*. Julian sets out the myth of Dionysos' birth, and then abruptly remarks at 220D:

> τί οὖν οὐ καταβάλλοντες τὸν λῆρον ἐκεῖνο πρῶτον ὑπὲρ τούτων ἴσμεν, ὡς Σεμέλη σοφὴ τὰ θεῖα; παῖς γὰρ ἦν Κάδμου τοῦ Φοίνικος, τούτοις δὲ καὶ ὁ θεὸς σοφιάν μαρτυρεῖ· <u>Πολλὰς καὶ Φοίνικες ὁδοὺς μακάρων ἐδάησαν λέγων</u>.
>
> Why therefore not leave off that silly talk? For first, we know this: that Semele was wise in divine matters. For she was the child of Kadmos the Phoenician, and the god testifies to the wisdom of these people, saying: <u>Many are the ways of the blessed (gods) the Phoenicians learnt</u>…[14]

The Semele Pericope includes a quote from a longer oracle, which is preserved in Eusebius. The fifth and final reference to the Phoenicians in Julian is found in *Against the Galileans,* perhaps Julian's best known work. There Julian attacked what he saw as the presumption of the Hebrews. Julian conceded that the divine being has taken care of the Hebrews, but countered that the gifts he has bestowed upon them are as nothing compared to those vouchsafed to others. Here Julian refers to the wisdom of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Hellenes.[15] He claims that a certain body of theory, or θεωρία (which he does not define but effectively

[14] I note that Taylor, in his translation of this passage, interprets δῶ as "to show" i.e., "to teach" (1821) pp. 295–296, in the footnote. The reduplicated aorist of this verb bears the causal sense of teach, and is cognate with our word "didactic". But the fundamental sense of the verb, and hence of our aorist, is "to learn". There would be a slight, and not a significant, difference in meaning for our purposes. I have added the underlining to indicate the quotation.

[15] *Against the Galileans* 176A-C.

describes so as to suggest to the reader the discipline of astronomy), began in Babylon but was perfected by the Hellenes. Geometry began in Egypt but has since been augmented. Julian then provides another example:

> τὸ δὲ περὶ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν Φοινίκων ἐμπόρων ἀρξάμενον τέως εἰς ἐπιστήμης παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησι κατέστη πρόσχημα.
>
> The learning of numbers, beginning with Phoenician merchants, has now been rendered an ornament of science among the Hellenes.[16]

The Semele and Arithmetic Pericopes are the least important of all the Phoenician pericopes for my thesis. Their chief significance is that they aid us in ascertaining who it was that Julian referred to when he spoke of the "Phoenicians". The Arithmetic Pericope also helps to provide a fuller notion of Julian's view of the Phoenicians, particularly as compared to the Greeks. It would appear that this work is earlier than *Hymn to King Helios*. If it is, it might provide slender evidence that towards the end of his life, Julian started to lose his pro-Greek prejudices, and to value at least some of the barbarian cultures more highly.

This thesis opens by examining the Solar Pericope, and by placing it within as full a context as can be furnished. I conclude that this short text is probably a reliable statement of one idea which had been present in Phoenician religion, or as noted above, in Phoenician "theology" and "spirituality". The term "spirituality" is rarely encountered in historical studies of Phoenician religion. This thesis unequivocally reinstates the term. Although this study is fairly narrowly defined—it enquires whether the Solar Pericope represents authentically Phoenician ideas—I have found it necessary to pitch my study over a long historical perspective, including even the relevant surviving fragments of Ugaritic literature. It shall be seen that it is necessary to discuss the nature of ancient Ugaritic and Phoenician culture and religion, if only to meet the argument that the Phoenicians were not capable of this type of thought before their conquest by Alexander and subsequent saturation with Hellenic philosophy.

As neither the ideas of the Solar Pericope, nor identical concepts, are cited anywhere apart from in the *Hymn to King Helios*,

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[16] *Against the Galileans* 178B.

it is not possible to say exactly when this idea was first formulated in Phoenicia. However, for reasons I shall discuss, there are grounds to believe that the Phoenicians held refined theological ideas about the sun by the time of King Tabnit of Sidon (ca. 470-465 BCE) and his successor, Ešmunazor II (ca. 465-451 BCE). Although the evidence is slight, such ideas may go back even further. Later, ideas which are entirely consistent with the Solar Pericope are encountered in Mochos, writing no later than the Persian period. Philo of Byblos, writing later than Mochos, is valuable for certain ideas and traditions he preserved, and in particular, for allowing us to reconstruct certain lines of continuity between Ugarit and Phoenicia. It is one of the accidents of history that because Ugaritic theologians committed some of their literature to cuneiform tablets and baked these, a great deal of Ugaritic literature has survived in the original language. The later Phoenician culture has not been so fortunate. The thematic study of Ugaritic and Phoenician religion is limited to material which can throw light on the Solar Pericope and the background against which it might have emerged.

In the fragments of Eudemos and Mochos we find material which provides strong support for my thesis. These authors are preserved only in one short passage in Damaskios, and their importance has been underestimated, but they are dealt with here in some detail.

The next chapter addresses the threshold issues of Julian and the Solar Pericope.

CHAPTER 2
JULIAN AND THE "SOLAR PERICOPE"

Julian, Emperor of Rome, wrote the *Hymn to King Helios* in December 362 CE,[1] and dedicated it to his friend and praetorian prefect, Salutius (also spelled as Sallust).[2] Julian's description of the work is quite important. Julian opens the *Hymn* by declaring that this writing (λόγος) is of the greatest importance for all animate creatures, and particularly, those with a rational soul (λογικῆς ψυχῆς).[3] By contrast, his *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, with which it may in many respects be compared, does not include such a declaration.

Further, it is practically certain that Salutius was also the philosopher whose small "catechism" of refined paganism, *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, has survived.[4] In 363, Julian honored Salutius in an exceptional way when he made Salutius his colleague in the consulship.[5] Salutius, for his part, seems to have reciprocated Julian's affection and respect. They first met and worked together when Julian was sent to Gaul, and, although they were separated by Constantius, they were reunited once Julian became emperor. Salutius was with Julian on his final campaign. After Julian's death, Salutius was the generals' first choice for emperor, however, he declined the purple. Instead, Jovian, who

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[1] Athanassiadi-Fowden (1981) p. 148, and Smith (1995) p. 144.

[2] On Salutius, see Athanassiadi-Fowden (1981) p. 68 and n. 74; Browning (1976) pp. 77 and 139-140, and Fowden (1979) pp. 237-238. On the intellectual relationship between Julian and Salutius, see also Athanassiadi-Fowden and Frede (1999) p. 9. The known details of Salutius' career are conveniently gathered in Jones, Martindale and Morris (1971) pp. 814-817, under "Saturninius Secundus Salutius 3".

[3] *Hymn to King Helios* 130B.

[4] This work has been edited, translated and commented upon: Nock (1926). Bowersock (1978) p. 125 disputes the identification of the two men, but does not consider the contents of *Concerning the Gods*.

[5] Ammianus 23.1.1.

was a Christian, was appointed.[6] The *Hymn to King Helios* was, therefore, dedicated to one of Julian's closest intimates. From this alone, we could safely infer that Julian considered it to be a significant effort.

The identification of Julian's friend Salutius with the author of *Concerning the Gods* provides some much needed context for the *Hymn to King Helios*. That identification rests upon the following points: first, no other Salutius known to us is a possible candidate for authorship of *Concerning the Gods*. Second, Salutius is known to have been a scholar and a thinker, who even came to neglect his official duties in favor of his studies.[7] Third, and, I think, making the case for identification virtually certain, there are striking similarities between certain ideas found in Julian and in *Concerning the Gods*. The most prominent points are to be found in the defence of mythology (especially upon the basis that myths challenge the intellect to seek the truth which lies hidden beneath the outward form),[8] and the linking of Attis with the Milky Way, and his castration with the point at which the processes of the generation of life cease to be fecund.[9]

The *Hymn to King Helios* is marked by a certain exaltation in tone and language. First, there is the bold announcement of its sublime gravity, enhanced with a citation from Homer, and a declaration that Julian himself is an attendant (ὀπαδός) of King Helios. As we shall see below, the piece itself proceeds "with no middle flight", to expound conceptions and almost mystical insights into the very nature and order of the universe. Just as critical for understanding it, the close of the text is most solemn. Julian apostrophizes Salutius, and declares that as the power of the

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[6] Smith (1995) p. 9. It is an interesting thought that had Salutius accepted this nomination, Julian's paganizing agenda could have been continued.

[7] Eunapios of Sardis 479.

[8] Compare the treatment in Salutius *Concerning the Gods and the Universe* III with Julian's *To the Cynic Herakleios* 222C-D. This argument is apparently first attested in Vergil, but it is quite rare, and hence its occurrence in both Julian and Salutius warrants comment: Nock (1926) pp. xliii-xlv.

[9] Compare *Concerning the Gods and the Universe* IV and Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 161C-D, 165B-C and 167D. The latter similarities are noted by Wright (1913a) p. 461 nn. 3 and 4.

deity is threefold (a constant theme of this work), so also it was composed over three nights. Its purpose was not, he modestly asserts, to instruct, but to express his gratitude to the god; and in this vein, he closes with three prayers to Helios (εὔχομαι οὖν τρίτον).[10] The *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* likewise closes with a prayer and petition (but does not refer to threefoldness).

As Bowersock said, it comprises "… a sustained utterance of great piety …".[11] So the *Hymn to King Helios* is an important part of Julian's oeuvre, but it is necessary to consider Julian and to place the *Hymn*, and the Solar Pericope in particular, in context.

JULIAN

Julian was born into the royal family of the Roman Empire in 331 or 332 CE,[12] and was slain in 363, while he was sole emperor. His father, Julius Constantius, had been one of the Emperor Constantine's half-brothers.[13] Julian is often known by the unflattering sobriquet "the Apostate", not only because he abandoned the Christianity of his childhood in favor of paganism, but also because he made such an impact upon the empire that he alone of all the host of apostates of the late Roman world[14] was so signally designated. Julian enraged Christians and yet he also infuriated many pagans. Today he is, together with Constantine and Justinian, the best known of the late Roman emperors. Certainly he has inspired more modern literature in the wider marketplace than either of these two, most famously, perhaps, poetry by Swinburne and a novel by Vidal.

Today, it is difficult to appreciate how controversial Julian's reversion to paganism was throughout the empire. Indeed, "controversial" is too weak a word for an eighteen month reign

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[10] *Hymn to King Helios* 158A-B.

[11] Bowersock (1978) p. 103. This is Bowersock's only reference to this hymn.

[12] Probably 331 *per* Smith (1995) p. 1, and 332 *per* Lieu (1989) p. ix.

[13] Julian's position in the royal family, and his early relations with his relatives through to his accession to the throne are clearly dealt with in Smith (1995) pp. 1-4.

[14] For a concise account of this aspect of Julian's reign, and for the necessary biographical details, see Cameron (1993) pp. 85-98.

which caused such frenzy and partisanship.[15] Yet the man who aroused these passions was also known among his contemporaries for his "native mildness",[16] and has given modern scholars cause to observe that he was "highly intellectual".[17] Julian gives credit to Maximos of Ephesus for having taught him the poets and philosophy.[18] From the context, this must be taken to mean that Maximos taught him a philosophical interpretation of the Greek poets.[19] Further, his letter to Himerios on the death of Himerios' wife displays an intelligent sympathy.[20]

THE GENRE OF THE *HYMN TO KING HELIOS*

Considerations of genre are important in historical studies. In the modern disciplines of the humanities, genre studies have proved to be tenacious despite some very high profile skeptics who—in the name of authorial creativity—deny the existence of genre. Genre studies have survived, perhaps precisely because of an awareness that these considerations can be pushed too far:

> … in studying generic patterns, like psychological ones, we always need to qualify our generalizations about the type with close and sympathetic observations about the individual human being or the individual work before us. For generic categories rarely provide simple answers to problems about literature—but they regularly offer us one of the surest and most suggestive means of seeking those answers.[21]

Another important aspect of genre theory is the recognition that genres are not necessarily exclusive, for the one piece of

[15] Modern views of Julian can often be shaped by reading him in the light of subsequent events. Thus, Lieu speaks of Julian's efforts to "revive traditional Roman religion and classical … culture against the prevailing tide of inexorable Christianization …", Lieu (1989) p. vii. But how can one say that the "prevailing tide" was "inexorable" except by hindsight?

[16] Ammianus 16.5.

[17] Cameron (1993) p. 95.

[18] *To the Cynic Herakleios* 235A-D. Maximos is not named, but Wright is correct to understand that this is a reference to him.

[19] Athanassaidi-Fowden (1981) p. 31 on Maximos.

[20] Letter 69 in Wright (1923).

[21] Dubrow (1982) p. 118.

literature may simultaneously fall within several genres.[22] It is a convention, that when identifying features of several genres within the document, scholars refer to each of the sub-units which exhibit the various features, as a "form". For example, a work like T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, considered as a whole, belongs to the genre of the "play", but its texture includes various forms, such as the poem and the homily.

To some extent, every scholar labors under assumptions about genre when writing; and this is not to be deplored—it is necessary. For example, the author of an article in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* has the perfectly valid assumption that the article will not be read as comedy. Genre is important because it is a part the context of any document, and that context, in turn, provides us with an orientation and a methodology with which to evaluate the document and possibly clear up points of ambiguity.

At the start of this chapter, some brief comments were made on the nature of the *Hymn to King Helios*. To expand on these, it should be observed that the *Hymn to King Helios* is known today as a "hymn", and, in fact, it was so described by Julian.[23] He also described it as a λόγος,[24] a "word", and metaphorically, "a statement, speech", and even a "reasoned account". Its title in Greek is εἰς τὸν βασίλεα Ἥλιον πρὸς Σαλούστιον ("To the King Helios, for Salutius"). Fauth states:

> … nicht den Charakter einer theoretisch fundierten, systematisch angelegten Lehrschrift besitzt, wegen ihrer prosaichen Form aber auch nicht als "Humnos" im Sinne eines individuell oder liturgisch disponierten Gebets gelten kann, sondern die Kennzeichen einer weitgehend improvisierten …[25]

What, for Julian, was a hymn? In Greek literature, the early history of this word is obscure. It suffices that there is no doubt that by the fourth century BCE the word came to mean a musical lyric in praise of gods and heroes.[26]

While one might think pre-eminently of the *Homeric Hymns* and the hymns of Kallimachos, Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* clearly

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[22] Longman (1991) pp. 15-17.
[23] *Hymn to King Helios* 158A.
[24] *Hymn to King Helios* 130B and 158A.
[25] Fauth (1995) p. 147.
[26] See the authorities cited in Furley (1995) esp. at pp. 29-31.

represents a development within the genre from these works. First, it is written in prose, not verse. Secondly, it is not meant to be used in a cultic setting: it is a work of literature in its own right, as its dedication to Salutius shows. There is no evidence that it was ever read aloud in public or elsewhere, and so it would seem to be meant to be studied. Thirdly, it clearly could not have been accompanied by a musical instrument, a feature which was considered essential to the ancient hymn. These were almost always accompanied by the lyre (or a lyre-like instrument). The dithyramb in honor of Dionysos was sung to the sound of a flute or similar instrument.[27] Fourthly, it is philosophical to a degree that these others are not. Finally, it is extraordinarily longer than these earlier "hymns".

As a whole, I would say that the *Hymn to King Helios* can only be considered as a philosophical treatise. And yet, there are points of contact between this "hymn" and earlier ones. As Furley observes, even in Hesiod there is an attempt to combine "traditional verse form, including the hymnic address of a deity, with speculative thought to express insights into the nature of the universe and man's place in it".[28] This is not the place for an exhaustive analysis of this issue, but while Furley has a valid point, it seems to me that the degree of "speculative thought" in the *Hymn to King Helios* so far surpasses anything in Hesiod, that it belongs to an utterly different genre (or set of genres). However, a full and balanced review would be needed to do justice to the history of the Greek hymn.[29]

Perhaps the surviving piece which most directly anticipated the *Hymn to King Helios* is the Stoic Kleanthes' hymn to Zeus. This elevated piece, indeed, refers to its own dynamic with the verb ὑμνεῖν and a participle derived from it—ὑμνοῦντες—twice at the very end, at lines 37 and 39.[30] This, as noted, was written by a philosopher.

The dedication of the *Hymn to King Helios* to Salutius reminds us that that author wrote a pagan "catechism". There is reason to

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[27] Furley (1993) p. 23.

[28] Furley (1993) p. 38.

[29] This is not to imply that Furley is unaware that the genre sees a development: (1993) pp. 38-39.

[30] *SVF* vol. 1, # 537 (p. 122). It is odd that Julian's hymns are not mentioned by *Der Neue Pauly* under the heading "Hymnos, Hymnus".

suspect that this small work was written between March and June 362.[31] This treatise deals with the basics of classical polytheism (at that time defensive in the face of expanding Christianity), causing one to wonder whether either that work or Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* was not meant to complement the other.

So, Julian's hymns to Helios and the Mother of the Gods do not seem to fall squarely within a tradition dominated by the genre of hymnography, even if it employs the form of a hymn particularly at the close, and also, to an extent, the beginning. That Julian called it a "hymn" alerts us to how he wanted this philosophical treatise to be read and accepted. It seems to me to be significant that the actual living tradition of composing and performing the Greek hymn died out in the fourth century CE.[32] By the time of Julian, the pagan hymn was becoming an increasingly literary phenomenon. In fact, we know that Julian was concerned to revive and maintain the classical traditions of sacred music. In one of his letters to Ekdikios, prefect of Egypt, Julian orders him to take steps, and quite expensive ones at that, to cultivate sacred music among the youth of Alexandria.[33]

I do not think that Bouffartigue's analysis of the genre of *Hymn to King Helios* is necessarily inconsistent with mine. Bouffartigue refers to the *Hymn to King Helios* as a piece of "rhetoric" which is in the nature of a "hymne physique". He follows Wright, who had referred to the brief discussion of the genre by Menander the Rhetor.[34] Bouffartigue notes that one of these hymns was said to be in honor of Apollo as sun.[35] However, a reading of the relevant passages in Menander proves disappointing if one is looking for comparative material to aid a study of Julian's *Hymn to King Helios.* The treatise in question is the first attributed to Menander of Laodicea-on-Lycus, called *Division of Epideictic Speeches.*[36] Menander's date is uncertain, but he was

[31] Reale (1990) pp 542-543, n. 16.

[32] Bremer (1981) pp. 211-212.

[33] Letter 49 in Wright (1923).

[34] Wright (1913a) p. 348. Smith (1995) p. 144 also believes the *Hymn to King Helios* to take the form of a *physikos hymnos* on the nature of Helios.

[35] Bouffartigue (1992) p. 540.

[36] See Russell and Wilson (1981) p. xi. Russell and Wilson provide much the fullest available commentary on Menander, and the difficult questions of authorship and textual integrity.