THE ANTECEDENTS OF ARIUS

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The problem of the antecedents of Arianism, both theological and philosophical, has been the subject of several studies during the past decade, without decisive agreement. On the one hand T. E. Pollard has argued that Arius' thought cannot be understood apart from Antiochene influence, exemplified by Lucian — an explanation in terms of an Alexandrian background being insufficient to account for Arius' literal type of exegesis, his extreme emphasis on the One-ness of God, and the distinction which he makes between Logos and Son. Professor Pollard's arguments were subjected to a critical evaluation by M. F. Wiles who concluded that the claim that Arianism could not be understood in terms of a purely Alexandrian heritage had not been established. A similar conclusion was reached by G. C. Stead who, in an important study of Arius' philosophical background, concluded that Arius drew on a Platonic tradition evolving within the Alexandrian Church — and, indeed, his theology may have been shaped by a dialogue with non-Christian Platonist contemporaries in the Egyptian metropolis. Both Professor Wiles and Mr. Stead underline the influence of an anti-Origenist and literalist tradition existing within the Alexandrian Church which was developed to an extreme degree by Arius. The purpose of this article is to study the Christian thinkers of Alexandria from the time of Athenagoras to Peter the Martyr, who was Arius' exact contemporary. My aim is to discover whether they witness to a common tradition on which Arius could have drawn; or whether it is more probable that Arius himself was a somewhat

1 Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius, Studia Patristica Vol. 2, T. und U. 65 (Berlin 1957) 282–7; The Origins of Arianism, J.T.S. 9 (1958) 103–11. Professor Pollard has kindly allowed me to read, in photostat, a further contribution of his on this subject.
eclectic thinker who picked up ideas from his predecessors which he then worked into a comprehensive and logical system of his own.

In discussions of Arian antecedents, Athenagoras, who wrote two works c. 176–180, the Πρεσβεία (or Legatio) for the Christians and a treatise on the Resurrection Περὶ Ἀναστάσεως (De Resurrectione), has usually been forgotten. This may be due to the fact that he was virtually unknown in Christian antiquity. An Alexandrian origin for Athenagoras is, however, suggested by a notice in a fragment preserved by Nicephorus Callistus, or some other late Greek historian, and attributed to Philip of Side. This states that Athenagoras was the first head of the catechetical school at Alexandria and that Clement was his pupil, Pantaenus being the pupil of Clement. There are obvious mistakes in the passage which, to some scholars, render it suspect. Yet Eusebius H.E. 5.10 suggests that Pantaenus had two periods as head of the school broken by a missionary tour to the East and India and it is possible that Clement may have taken over during this time. It is also noteworthy that Alexander of Jerusalem, in his letter to Origen (Eus. H.E. 6.14), speaks of Pantaenus and Clement as if they were both known to Origen and had each been his master. These notices suggest that Philip of Side’s account may contain elements of historical truth. Certainly, Philip’s knowledge of the Alexandrian School could have been more trustworthy than his knowledge about other periods of Church history, as the school had continued in existence to his own day when it was transferred to Side, his birthplace. Another small piece of evidence connecting Athenagoras with Egypt occurs in De Res. 12, where Athenagoras casually mentions a shelter for camels. The camel was unknown in Greece and Asia Minor (where Athenagoras has sometimes been located) but in Egypt it was a familiar sight, being used in the postal service.

I turn now to Athenagoras’ thought. This is strongly dualistic, God being radically distinguished from the world and matter. So Leg. 4: "Now when we make a distinction between matter and God and show

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4 For the view that De Resurrectione is from the hand of a third or early-fourth century writer, see R. M. Grant, H.T.R. 47 (1954) 121–9. I think this is unlikely, as both works are alike in style and thought and have many words in common; cf. E. Schwartz, T. und U. 4.2 (1891) Index Verborum.

5 The first and almost only Patristic writer to quote him is Methodius, De Res. Anim. 37.1.

6 Dodwell, Dissertationes in Irenaeum (1689) 488; P.G. 6.182.

7 So C.C. Richardson, Early Christian Fathers (London 1953) 290.

8 Noted by J.H. Crehan, A.C.W. 23.8. The camel was also known in Syria but this is an unlikely location for Athenagoras.