THE FALL OF THE ANGELS AS THE SOURCE OF PHILOSOPHY IN HERMIAS AND CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

BY

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1. Introduction

The *Irrisio Gentilium Philosophorum* (Διασωμάς τῶν ἐξω φιλοσόφων) of Hermias "the philosopher" has long been an enigma for patristic scholars, not least because neither the author nor his work is mentioned anywhere in ancient literature, while the work itself provides little in the way of internal evidence for dating it. While a majority of scholars have placed it in the second or third century and associated it with the Christian apologetic literature of that period, others have argued for a fourth, fifth or even sixth-century date.

One clue to the date of the *Irrisio* may be found in ch. 1, where Hermias explains the worthlessness of Greek philosophy, shown in the fact that the philosophers contradict each other on every topic, by claiming that "it took its beginning from the apostasy of the angels" (τὴν ἀφελμένην ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν ἀγγέλων ἀποστασίας). Already in his 1742 edition of the *Irrisio*, Maran suggested that such a view was only possible at a relatively early date, and some other scholars have agreed with this suggestion. The purpose of this article is to develop and refine this suggestion by means of a thorough investigation of the background and parallels to Hermias' idea that philosophy derives from the fallen angels, in order to show that it provides a very strong and fairly precise indication of date. It will also become clear that the *Irrisio* provides an interesting insight into the context of Clement of Alexandria's discussion of the origins of Greek philosophy.

2. The Teaching of the Fallen Angels in the Book of Watchers

In the background to Hermias' statement lies the ancient Jewish tradition of the fall of the Watchers, an interpretation of Gen. 6:1-4
which is first found in the Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36). Since one of the Qumran manuscripts of this part of 1 Enoch is dated, on palaeographical grounds, to the early second century B.C., the Book of Watchers must have been written c. 200 B.C. at the latest. The section of the Book which concerns us (chs. 6-19) some hold to be an earlier source incorporated in the Book of Watchers, though few would follow Milik in dating it as early as the fifth century. At any rate the story of the Watchers is a very old part of the Enoch tradition, and its sources are probably to be found in ancient Near Eastern mythology rather than in Greek mythology.

The story in the Book of Watchers interprets the "sons of God" (Gen. 6:2, 4) as angels. It tells how in the days of Jared, the father of Enoch, two hundred angels (of the class of angels called "Watchers"), under the leadership of 'Aša'ēl and Šemihazah, were attracted by the daughters of men and descended from heaven on Mount Hermon. They took human wives, who bore them children, the giants (Gen. 6:4). The fallen angels and the giants were responsible for the corruption of the world in the period before the Flood. Enoch had the task of conveying God's sentence on the Watchers, which was that they themselves were to be imprisoned until the Day of Judgment, while their sons the giants were condemned to destroy each other in battle. The Flood was sent to cleanse the earth of the corruption caused by the Watchers, but the spirits of the dead giants remained on earth as the demons who are the cause of evil in the world until the Day of Judgment. Thus the Book of Watchers uses the story of the fall of the Watchers as a myth of the origin of evil (cf. especially 10:8).

The aspect of the story which most concerns us is the teaching of the Watchers. They brought with them from heaven knowledge of "secrets" which were hitherto unknown to humanity (8:3 Aramaic and Syncellus; 9:6; 10:7; 16:13), and revealed these to their wives and children. It was this teaching which caused the increase in human wickedness in the period before the Flood (cf. 10:8). The content of the teaching is described in 7:1; 8:1-3, and can be divided into three categories: (a) the magic arts, including magical medicine (7:1: "charms and spells and the cutting of roots ... plants"; 8:3"... the loosing of spells, magic, sorcery and skill"); (b) the technical knowledge of finding and using metals and minerals, both for the making of weapons of war and for the adornment of women—bracelets, eye makeup, precious stones and dyes (8:1); and (c) the knowledge of astronomy or