

MOERAGENES AND PHILOSTRATUS: TWO VIEWS OF APOLLONIUS OF TYANA

It has commonly been assumed that the work of four books by Moeragenes on Apollonius of Tyana, to which Philostratus refers disparagingly when discussing the source material for his own work,¹ represented a viewpoint hostile to the sage, and was for this reason discarded by Philostratus. Hand in hand with this assumption has gone the view that Moeragenes presented Apollonius as an undesirable *μάγος*, a wizard and sorcerer, or even a charlatan pretending to be a *μάγος*. These views have recently been challenged by E. L. Bowie,² who rejects both, arguing not only that Moeragenes was favourable to Apollonius, but also that he presented him as an intellectual philosopher, a figure instantly recognisable from Philostratus' account. This leaves Bowie in some difficulty when he attempts to explain Philostratus' strong disapproval of Moeragenes' work. His only suggestion is that 'the main reason for Philostratus' hostile attitude is clearly the usual ground for ancient polemic: Moeragenes' was the standard work when he wrote'.³ In this paper I propose to argue, on the basis of a re-examination of the available evidence, that there was a considerable divergence between Philostratus' and Moeragenes' views of Apollonius, and that this offers a more substantial and satisfactory explanation of the later author's disapproval of his predecessor.

Philostratus himself says very little about the earlier book; he merely declares that no attention should be paid to Moeragenes, who was ignorant of or misconstrued many of the circumstances of Apollonius' life:

οὐ γὰρ Μοιραγένει γε προσεκτέον... πολλὰ δὲ τῶν περὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ἀγνοήσαντι.

The most we can deduce from this is that Philostratus did not approve of Moeragenes' work and accordingly wished to discourage his readers from consulting it. In the only other explicit reference in Philostratus⁴ to the work of Moeragenes, the latter is cited as a corroborating authority for a fact which Philostratus claims to have derived from his major source. This appeal shows us that there was at least some material in Moeragenes' work that Philostratus regarded as trustworthy.

The major direct evidence for the character of Moeragenes' work is to be found in a passage of Origen's work of Christian apologetic 'Contra Celsum'.⁵ The question under discussion is whether magical arts and powers are effective against all people, or only against the uneducated and depraved; Celsus maintains on the authority of one Dionysius, an Egyptian, that philosophers are immune to their effects. Origen on the contrary maintains that even philosophers are susceptible to magical powers, and that only Christians are unaffected by magic or demons. The point that is of interest to us here is that it is the work of Moeragenes to which Origen appeals as an authority for his position that philosophers may be influenced by magic. The relevant passage runs as follows:

On the subject of magic, we say that anyone who wishes to examine the question whether or not even philosophers can be caught by magical means should read what Moeragenes has written

¹ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 1. 3.

² *Apollonius of Tyana: Tradition and Reality*, Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, 2. 16. 2 (1978), 1652–99.

³ p. 1673.

⁴ op. cit. 3. 41.

⁵ 6. 41.

in his memoirs of the magician and philosopher Apollonius of Tyana. In this work the author, who is no Christian but a philosopher, says that certain not undistinguished philosophers were worsted by the magic of Apollonius, although when they approached him they regarded him as a mere charlatan. Among these, I think, he included both the well-known Euphrates and a certain Epicurean.⁶

The first point to emerge from Origen's testimony is that Moeragenes evidently credits Apollonius with the effective exercise of magical powers. This may seem to be an obvious point, but it needs to be made explicit, in view of the opinion represented by J. S. Phillimore⁷ that Moeragenes' work was of a 'sceptical, Lucianic [and] Epicurean' character. Moeragenes was clearly not attacking Apollonius as a charlatan or impostor, if he can be treated as an authority for the efficacy of Apollonius' magical powers. The viewpoint may not therefore be equated with that of Lucian,⁸ who treats Apollonius as a charlatan and trickster, and immoral to boot.

Moeragenes' recognition of Apollonius' magical power would be consistent with either a friendly or a hostile attitude towards him; he could either have taken the part of Euphrates and the Epicurean, deploring the sorcerer's victory, or have taken the part of Apollonius, praising him for his victory over his enemies and treating it as a demonstration of his high status and divine favour. The latter alternative is at least as likely as the former: this despite the statements of Bowersock⁹ that 'from [Origen's] account it appears that [Moeragenes'] account was hostile, perhaps incorporating the views of Apollonius' greatest enemy, the long-bearded philosopher Euphrates', and of Conybeare¹⁰ that 'Origen informs us that [Moeragenes' work] attacked Apollonius as a magician addicted to sinister practices'. Origen's statement does not offer conclusive support to the positions of these scholars; on the contrary, it contains a further piece of information which we may construe as strong evidence that Moeragenes' book was friendly towards Apollonius. Origen refers to the book in the following words:

τὰ γεγραμμένα Μοιραγένει τῶν Ἀπολλωνίου τοῦ Τυανέως μάγου καὶ φιλοσόφου ἀπομνημονευμάτων.

If, as it is reasonable to assume, this phraseology preserves the usual title or superscription of Moeragenes' four books, we may draw from it certain conclusions. First, following Bowie,¹¹ we may note that the title ἀπομνημονεύματα, coupled with the division into four books to which Philostratus testifies, clearly shows the influence of Xenophon's work on Socrates; this encourages us to suppose that Moeragenes' work was written like Xenophon's in celebration of its subject. Consideration of the terms applied to Apollonius offers support to this position. *Μάγος* is of course a word that can be used in both complimentary and pejorative senses; but we may note that Origen in reporting the evidence of Moeragenes contrasts *μάγος* – the term rightly applied to Apollonius – with *γόης*, the charlatan, which proves not to be correctly applicable. This contrast should encourage us to take *μάγος* in the positive sense throughout this passage, as should the conjunction of *μάγος* with *φιλόσοφος*, a term which generally carried positive connotations.¹² We should note also in this context

⁶ My rendering owes a number of phrases to the translation by H. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1953).

⁷ Philostratus, *In Honour of Apollonius of Tyana*, tr. J. S. Phillimore (Oxford, 1912), xxv.

⁸ *Alexander the False Prophet*, 5.

⁹ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, tr. C. P. Jones, ed. & intro. G. W. Bowersock (Harmondsworth, 1970), 12.

¹⁰ Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, tr. F. C. Conybeare (London & New York, 1912), viii.

¹¹ p. 1673.

¹² LSJ cites no pejorative use, outside comic contexts.

the two short 'letters of Apollonius to Euphrates',¹³ which discuss the correct application of the term *μάγος*. The two letters make clear that for their author it was a term of great praise. If, as Bowie¹⁴ plausibly suggests, Moeragenes made use of the epistolary tradition in his work, this strengthens our argument that he used the term *μάγος* in its complimentary sense. We shall return to the subject of the term's precise connotations: the discussion so far suffices to establish that Moeragenes' work may be taken to have been favourable to his subject.

It remains for us to explain why the work should have attracted such strong disapproval from Philostratus. The evidence suggests that, though it celebrated the life and works of the Tyanean, it celebrated them for what seemed to Philostratus to be the wrong reasons. The difference in the attitudes of these two authors will become clear if, remembering that Moeragenes evidently presented Apollonius as an impressive *μάγος* as well as a *φιλόσοφος*, we turn to the introduction of Philostratus' work. For in his second chapter, before ever he names his sources, he castigates those who preserve an incorrect and unbalanced picture of the sage, praising him for only one aspect of his achievement, rather than presenting the complete account. Philostratus is equally vehement against those who praise Apollonius, but for the wrong reasons, and those who attack him as a sorcerer; in this connection, he explicitly states that Apollonius should not be regarded as a *μάγος*. He is clearly aware that undue stress upon Apollonius' mighty works and magical achievements lays him open to charges of both sorcery and charlatanry – charges which Apollonius is made to answer in his speech before Domitian,¹⁵ and of which we have a specimen in the Lucianic charge cited above. Philostratus is accordingly concerned that his subject should be recognised to be no common thaumaturge, but an ascetic Pythagorean philosopher; he stresses that all the wonders with which the sage is associated derive from his peculiar wisdom and the high spiritual state which he attained. Miracles and wondrous works are throughout the book kept firmly subordinated to philosophical achievements, and the latter made the fount and spring of the former.¹⁶ In view of the conclusions reached concerning the work of Moeragenes, we may suppose that Philostratus disapproved of it because it presented an emphasis different from his own: in fact that very emphasis against which he argues, which stressed the supernatural actions of Apollonius while giving insufficient weight to the philosophical aspect. In short, it was no hostility on the part of Moeragenes which turned Philostratus against him, but rather misplaced enthusiasm. This would account for Philostratus' reticence on the subject: for a hostile work could have been explicitly attacked, whereas a work favourable to Apollonius, but of which Philostratus disapproved for such a reason as this, could only have been an embarrassment to him, and was best played down.

The argument could be offered against this thesis that the title of Moeragenes' work shows that he presented Apollonius at least partly as a *φιλόσοφος*, and that he cannot therefore have been so far away from Philostratus as has been suggested. This argument calls for a discussion of the exact connotations of Moeragenes' description of Apollonius. It could for instance be maintained that the term *μάγος*, when conjoined with *φιλόσοφος*, should be taken simply to denote a man who is, or tries to be, *θεῖος καὶ δίκαιος*; the phrase is taken from letter 16, which could be taken to support this position. However, it is clear from the use made of his work by Origen that this cannot for Moeragenes have been the sole connotation of *μάγος*, since Moeragenes' evidence on the effectiveness of Apollonius' *μαγεία* is adduced in the context of a

¹³ Letters 16 & 17.

¹⁴ pp. 1676–7.

¹⁵ Philostratus, op. cit. 8. 7.

¹⁶ For a similar assertion concerning Pythagoras, v. Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, as discussed in J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London, 1974), 52.

discussion on sorcery. We must however concede that these magical works are evidently produced by one who is thought worthy to be called a philosopher, and whose powers are demonstrated in contests against philosophers. The philosophical aspect is thus not absent from Moeragenes' presentation of Apollonius; it is however combined with the magical side to present a full picture. We may now understand the contest between Apollonius, Euphrates and the Epicurean to convey the message that a contestant who is *both μάγος and φιλόσοφος* gains the victory over mere *φιλόσοφοι*.

We conclude, then, that Moeragenes gave weight to both the magical and the philosophical sides of his presentation; Philostratus, by contrast, as we have seen from his introductory remarks, is rather embarrassed by the magical side, and wishes to emphasise the philosophical aspect. This presents him with something of a dilemma, since the tradition he inherited evidently contained many accounts of wondrous works, which must have contributed in no small degree to the reputation and popularity of Apollonius. He solves the problem of the presence of such elements in the tradition by treating them as evidence of Apollonius' high spiritual and philosophical achievements; the wondrous works are achieved *κατὰ σοφίαν*, not *μάγῳ τέχνῃ* (1. 2).¹⁷ It is notable that the overriding characteristics of Apollonius' miraculous works as presented by Philostratus are perception and knowledge, rather than spells or sorcery after the usual Hellenistic fashion. We may cite as representative examples Apollonius' encounter with an empusa (2. 4), his purging of the plague at Ephesus (4. 10), his exorcisms at Athens and Corinth (4. 20, 25), and his visions of contemporary events (5. 30, 8. 26), all of which demonstrate the sage's superhuman powers of perception and knowledge, and are thus consequent upon his achievement of the Pythagorean spiritual ideal. The same powers of perception are demonstrated by Apollonius' skill at foretelling the future, often mentioned by Philostratus, and discussed explicitly at 5. 11, where it is credited not to wizardry but to divine grace. In this way Philostratus can assimilate much of the content of the tradition without compromising his presentation of the philosopher Apollonius. He also takes pains to equate the more remarkable phenomena associated with Apollonius with the achievements of other famous philosophers whose reputations are beyond challenge: thus he refers in 1. 2 to Anaxagoras, Democritus, Empedocles, Plato and Pythagoras, who despite various supernatural achievements were never taken for wizards, and similarly in 8. 6. 9 to Socrates, Thales and Anaxagoras. He takes especial care, when speaking of the sage's spontaneous translation from Smyrna to Ephesus (4. 10), to cite immediately a similar achievement of Pythagoras; it should be noted that this also prepares the ground for Apollonius' spontaneous disappearance from the scene of his trial before Domitian (8. 5), and gives such achievements respectable philosophical credentials. In the last resort, however, Philostratus cannot avoid admitting a certain scepticism. We may find this most clearly in his handling of the account of Apollonius raising a young bride from the dead (4. 45): Philostratus is unwilling to state unequivocally that Apollonius achieved this supreme miracle. He prefers to suggest that the sage's powers of perception enabled him to detect a spark of life in the girl.

We have now examined sufficient evidence to show Philostratus' embarrassment at the thaumaturgic traditions concerning Apollonius; he cannot afford to suppress them, realising the damage this would do to Apollonius' reputation, but he attempts to assimilate them to his own presentation. He drives his message home at the end of the book (7. 39, 8. 7. 3), putting in the mouth of Apollonius explicit denial and

¹⁷ Note that the misattribution of Apollonius' achievements to magical power is condemned by Philostratus as *τὴν τῶν πολλῶν ἄγνοιαν*: cf. his accusation of Moeragenes as *ἀγνοῦσαντι*.

condemnation of any dealings with magic: the sage condemns magic in the name of and by the arguments of Pythagorean philosophy, leaving the reader in no doubt how Philostratus wishes us to view him.

Thus we find in our two authors strikingly different presentations of their subject. The later author's disapproval of the earlier may be plausibly and adequately explained in terms of such a difference; his embarrassment in dealing with Moeragenes' work is well accounted for by the thesis that the latter, while in favour of Apollonius, presented him at least in part as a successful and formidable μάγος. Adoption of this view, though it differs from Bowie's in important respects, does not prejudice acceptance of Bowie's sterling detective work on the personal identity of Moeragenes.¹⁸ The background and interests of Bowie's conjectural Moeragenes are compatible with the production of a work on Apollonius of the character outlined above. As to the character of the work, it is pleasant to find that Reitzenstein's reference to it as 'einem den πράξεις entsprechenden Werke'¹⁹ is vindicated at least in part; though we must write off as unfounded speculation his further discussion of the growth of the tradition. While we have sufficient material to enable us usefully to discuss the nature of Moeragenes' work and Philostratus' attitude to it, we have not sufficient for a discussion of its history or its detailed use by later authors.²⁰

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¹⁸ pp. 1678–9.

¹⁹ *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (Leipzig, 1906), 40.

²⁰ Moeragenes' work is also mentioned by John Tzetzes, *Histories*, 2, 60, line 977, alongside the names of Philostratus and of Maximus, another of Philostratus' sources. This need only indicate that Tzetzes found the name in Philostratus; his short narrative cannot be used to furnish any evidence on the nature of Moeragenes' work or on its survival into the twelfth century.