

Concerning Ammonius Saccas

Part I

J. Ramón Sordo

Although the *Theosophical History Occasional Paper* Volume III, "Ammonius Saccas and his 'Eclectic Philosophy' as presented by Alexander Wilder" written by Dr. Jean-Louis Siémons, was published by Dr. James Santucci, editor of *Theosophical History*, in 1994, and the original paper was delivered by Dr. Siémons in London in 1988; the importance and timeless character of its content, despite the lapse of 18 years will be enough reason for a few remarks of mine concerning this important research.

Dr. Siémons' pioneering research is very well structured and has the merit of being the first and only inquiry into the sources of *The Key to Theosophy* by H.P. Blavatsky. However I would like to point out that notwithstanding all this, his conclusions are not really conclusive due to the fact that he was not able to substantiate the basis of his reasoning e.g., his assumption that Ammonius was born in the year 175 A.D.

A contrived date

How does he arrive at that date?

In p.20 he says: "The date of his birth is approximately 175 A.D." Then on p.21 Dr. Siémons says: "And Theodoret of Cyrus (an ecclesiastical writer of the 5th century) indicates that 'in the reign of Commodus [180-192] Ammonius left aside the sacks in which he carried wheat to embrace a philosopher's life'. How long were the years of training during the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211) we don't know."

Here we find the first methodological problem in the inquiry of Dr. Siémons. Theodoret of Cyrus does not give any precise date; he only gives a reference to the reign of Commodus. Theodoret was not a contemporary of Ammonius, he wrote in the 5th century A.D., but if provisionally we follow his reference, we have — from 180 to 192 A.D. — twelve years at our disposal to speculate about the probable time when Ammonius embraced "a philosopher's life". Dr. Siémons has taken the end of this period and to reinforce his idea he immediately adds: "How long were the years of training during the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211) we don't know." Dr Siémons is assuming that Ammonius was 17 years old in 192 A.D.; that is how he arrives at the year 175 as his date of birth. But with the same validity we could take the beginning of Commodus' reign and also assume that

by 180 A.D. Ammonius was 17 years old, and this would give us as his probable date of birth, the year 163 A.D. Thus at the end of the reign of Commodus he would be 29 years of age instead of 17. Furthermore in this speculation we should not forget that we are making two assumptions: (a) that the reference of a Christian father who lived two centuries after Ammonius is correct, and (b) that Ammonius embraced "a philosopher's life" when he was 17 years old.

But Dr. Siémons seems to have taken the year 175 A.D. as something established and fixed, whereas in reality it is a mere speculation proposed by him. Instead of maintaining an open mind he has closed any possible way of arriving at the truth in a matter in which we lack the necessary elements to give definite dates and definite facts.

In connection with this date, while analyzing Mosheim's main propositions (p.8), he makes the following bold assertion in square brackets:

3. The appearance of Ammonius Saccas, about the conclusion of this century [but, possibly, *later, as he has born ca 175*] was an important event
[Emphasis mine]

So he is taking for granted that Ammonius was born ca. 175 A.D., but he has nothing to support this, and the weakness of his premises invalidates most of his scholarly deductions based as they are in the fixity of that date.

The Church Fathers

Let us see the consequences of this methodological bias:

In p.15 Dr. Siémons writes:

Concerning the Church Fathers, he [Dr. Alexander Wilder] gave credit to the erroneous version of the *Encyclopedia*. Consequently he wrote (p.9 of his pamphlet): "Countenanced by Clement and Athenagoras in the Church, he [Ammonius] fulfilled his labor by teaching a common doctrine for all." Hence (*Key*, p.6): ". . . the great Philaetheian was supported and helped [. . .] by two Church Fathers, Clement and Athenagoras."

However, one moment of reflection reveals that this assertion of Wilder is untenable. Bearing in mind that the great Neo-Platonist **was born ca 175**, he must have been very young at the conclu-

sion of the 2nd century to be able to attract the attention of well established Christian masters like Clement (who was his senior by some 25 years), least of all to receive their approbation to carry out his plans *outside* of Christianity (while he was still perhaps a mere tyro in philosophy). [Emphasis mine]

Then in a footnote on p.15, Dr. Siémons develops his theory:

He already has affirmed that Clement of Alexandria was 25 years older than Ammonius, but if we — taking his own source of information — consider the equally valid hypothesis that he was born in 163 A.D., then, Clement was his senior by only 13 years. And if we take as another source the statement of HPB (in the Glossary of *The Key to Theosophy*, p.313), that Ammonius Saccas founded his school in 173 A.D. and we apply the same 17 years taken by Dr. Siémons, then the date of birth of Ammonius Saccas would go back to 156 A.D. and in that case Clement would be only 6 years his senior, assuming that he was born in 150 A.D., although that date is also very uncertain. Thus the whole reasoning of Dr. Siémons, being based on a very weak and rather personal assumption, is untenable.

In connection with Pantaenus Dr. Siémons says:

. . . Pantaenus who was at the head of the Alexandrian Catechetical School, until his bishop Demetrius sent him on a long missionary tour in India, *ca* 189 — at that time, Ammonius was about 14, **perhaps** still a Christian boy, working as a sack-bearer, carrying wheat on Alexandrian quays [Emphasis mine]

As we have said before, the source of information used by Dr. Siémons gives us 12 years to speculate. His argument is invalidated if Ammonius was 26 years of age at that date. We have to be very careful not to dogmatize with such meager information at our disposal.

Again referring to Clement's work *Miscellanies*, which he says were published

probably from 194 (when Ammonius was about 19) to a date *before* 202. . . Obviously in the year 200, Clement must have been a full grown master at the height of his literary career, occupying an important position as a thoroughly convinced defender of the Christian faith, whereas Ammonius, at the age of 25, was perhaps only emerging out of obscurity. (p.15n)

But the age of Ammonius — I repeat, using the same source of information — could be 31 instead of 19; and 37 instead of 25 and the whole story would change.

Then at the end of this footnote Dr. Siémons gives us his own story about the relationship between Ammonius Saccas and the Church Fathers inverting the statements of *The Key to Theosophy*:

The probability is far greater that Ammonius himself was influenced by the trio of Christian Fathers — particularly by Clement, whose lessons he may have followed as a catechumen than the contrary. Moreover, it is most unlikely that the famous disciple of Pantaenus should have readily changed his mind to adopt the doctrines of a young **apostate** like Ammonius, let alone to support him in his endeavor. (p.15n) [Emphasis mine]

Thus we see that in this case “one moment of reflection reveals” nothing when it is based on false premises, because the assumption of Dr. Siémons is not supported by any fact. The only basis he has to criticize Wilder and discredit the assertions in *The Key to Theosophy* is the date 175 A.D. established by himself in an arbitrary way. As he cannot prove this, the rest of his reflections fall to pieces.

Pot-Amun

In connection with Pot-Amun, Dr. Siémons points out the following:

Now, another confusion prompted Dr. Wilder to his choice, as he gave credit to the (long discarded) theory that the Ammonian School “had a beginning much earlier,” being traced by Diogenes Laërtius to an Egyptian prophet or priest named Pot-Amun, who flourished in the earlier years of the dynasty of the Ptolemies’ — this Potamon being unanimously acknowledged as a regular Eclectic. (p.14)

And in a footnote to the former, Dr. Siémons asserts that “In fact there is nothing in Diogenes Laërtius’ *Lives* about this mysterious Egyptian prophet named Pot-Amun” (p.14n).

Well, maybe there is not much about him but enough for a mysterious Egyptian philosopher. One important fact is that he is mentioned in the Prologue of the First Book showing that he was a real personage whose influence was alive at the time when the Prologue was written; even giving a short excerpt of his *Elements of Philosophy*, a work of Pot-Amun (See *Loeb*, Vol. I, p.23).

“Potamon the Alexandrian lived not long ago. . .” we read in the *Lives*. Diogenes Laërtius is dated by some scholars in the 2nd century A.D. and by others like Dr. Siémons in the 3rd A.D. He says that “it is more probable that he [Pot-Amun] was born later, perhaps in the 2nd century [A.D.]” (p.14n) discarding the *Greek Lexicon Suidas* which says that Potamôn lived in the time of Augustus (63 B.C. / 14 A.D.) So Dr. Siémons lays aside some sources and takes others, and this is natural because all this is in the realm of conjecture.

It should be acknowledged that we have no certainty regarding the time when the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laërtius were written. “His date,

for example, can be estimated only by what he included or left out. He has been variously dated in every century A.D. from the first to the fourth” (Herbert S. Long, Introduction to the Loeb Edition of D.L., Vol. I, p.xvi). We know very little about Diogenes Laërtius. “The rather motley, fluctuating impression produced by Diogenes’ book as a whole derives, not particularly from his own personality, but from the huge and variegated mass of source materials that he transmitted to us.” (Herbert S. Long, op. cit. p.xviii). “Diogenes has acquired an importance out of all proportion to his merits because the loss of many primary sources . . .” (Ibid., p.xix). “In compiling his biographical encyclopedia of Greek philosophy, Diogenes drew on a great many sources of varying quality. His work is especially valuable because . . . he quotes many earlier writers, often verbatim.” (David Fideler, *The Pythagorean SourceBook and Library*, Phanes Press, Grand Rapids, 1987, p.141). In his 10 Books, Diogenes Laërtius presents 83 lives of philosophers; most of them belonging to the centuries B.C. “He does not refer to Neo-Pythagorism nor — a more striking omission — to Neo-Platonism.” (Herbert S. Long, op. cit. p.xvi). We do not possess any original of the *Lives*, and according to Robert D. Hicks translator of the work into English (Introduction to the Loeb edition of 1925) the oldest MS of the *Lives* in possession of European scholars is the *Codex Borbonicus* which dates from A.D. 1200. “For we may reasonably assume” says the same authority “that a single stray copy, brought to light in the ninth century, was the parent of all extant MSS.” Furthermore the same expert acknowledges that “this work in 10 books is a compilation from earlier compilations” e.g. it is a compilation of older sources. “Diogenes is a veritable tissue of quotations from all sorts of authors. . . . Richard Hope counted 1,186 explicit references to 365 books by about 250 authors, as well as more than 350 anonymous references: that is an average of nearly three references to a page of the Oxford Classical Text edition” (Herbert S. Long, op. cit. p.xix). Thus the phrase “Potamon the Alexandrian lived not long ago. . .” not necessarily indicates the time in which Diogenes Laërtius flourished, but it could be an assertion written 500 years before him, and copied by him.

Then Dr. Siémons proceeds to give us a rather forced etymology of the word Pot-Amun:

On the rather common Greek name Potamôn (**re-calling** [?] Potamos = river), he [Wilder] has nothing to say concerning its Coptic or Egyptian derivation from Pot-Amun — possibly an etymology **imagined** by the learned Wilder. [Emphasis mine]

But the same could be said of Dr. Siémons derivation of Pot-Amun from a river.

Contrary to the speculations of Dr. Siémons, Blavatsky, quoting Wilder, “tells us that the name is

Coptic, and signifies one consecrated to Amun, the God of Wisdom” (*Key to Theosophy*, p.2n).

Concerning the influence of Neoplatonism on the Christian Church and the antiquity of Pot-Amun, HPB had the following to say:

As to Ammonius,

Countenanced by Clement and Athenagoras in the church, and by learned men of the Synagogue, the Academy and the Grove, he fulfilled his labour by teaching a common doctrine for all.’ (*New Platonism and Alchemy*, Alexander Wilder, p.18)

Thus it is not Judaism and Christianity that remodelled the ancient Pagan Wisdom, but rather the latter that put its heathen curb, quietly and insensibly, on the new faith; and this, moreover, was still further influenced by the Eclectic Theosophical system, the direct emanation of the Wisdom-Religion. All that is grand and noble in Christian theology comes from Neo-Platonism. [. . .]

Nor was the Eclectic Theosophical system — as some writers inspired by Rome would make the world believe — developed only during the third century of our era; but it belongs to a much earlier age, as has been shown by Diogenes Laërtius. He traces it to the beginning of the dynasty of the Ptolemies; to the great seer and prophet, the Egyptian Priest Pot-Amun, of the temple of the God of that name — for Amun is the God of Wisdom. Unto that day the communication between the Adepts of Upper India and Bactria and the Philosophers of the West had never ceased. (*H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, XIV, pp.305-306)

Moreover, taking in consideration the works of two important Egyptologists, Gustave Lefebvre and R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, we can assume that Pot-Amun was probably the last sage in a series of seers that flourished in Egypt in earlier times, all of them wearing the name of Prophets of Amun. Gustave Lefebvre, in his work *Histoire des Grands prêtres d’Amon dans Karnak* has shown the successive line of Prophets of Amun in Karnak; and Schwaller de Lubicz in his monumental book *The Temples of Karnak*, (Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont 1999) complemented that research with the reproduction of images of a series of statues of priests and Prophets of Amun extant in Karnak, going back to the 19th Dynasty: Rome Roy, First Prophet of Amun (at the end of the reign of Ramesses II, and reign of Seti II, p.699; Plate 375); Ramessesnakht first Prophet of Amun (20th Dynasty, at the time of Ramesses IV, p.690; Plate 356); Amenhotep, First Prophet of Amun, first high priest of Amun (20th Dynasty, at the time of Ramesses IX, p.699; Plate 374); Sheshonk First High Priest of Amun (22nd Dynasty, pp.692-693; Plates 358-359); Ahmose, High Priest of Amun (26th Dynasty, p.692; Plate 357); Mentuemhet, Fourth

Prophet of Amun (26th Dynasty, ca 660 B.C., p.716; Plates 442-443).

Therefore, this long tradition of Prophets, Hierophants, and Adepts in Egypt dedicated to Amun, the *God of Wisdom* (Theosophia?) being a historical fact supported by material evidence, gives credit to the assertions of Alexander Wilder and H.P. Blavatsky (*Key to Theosophy*, p.21) that “in the early days of the Ptolemaic dynasty” “lived Pot-Amun”, “an Egyptian priest” “consecrated to Amun, the God of Wisdom.” He taught the “Eclectic Theosophical system” or “Theosophy” in Alexandria — a Greek city on Egyptian soil — in which was prominent the Platonic philosophy which in its turn was derived in great measure from the Egyptian Wisdom, as can be shown by the next quotation:

Many philosophers and scholars of the ancient world, drawn thither by the fame of Egypt, came to her temples to receive both scientific knowledge and mystical illumination. Porphyry relates how Pythagoras . . . presented himself to the priests of Heliopolis, who sent him to those of Memphis, who in turn directed him to those of Thebes, where he was made to undergo hard painful trials. . . . According to Iamblicus, the sage of Samos spent twenty-two years in the temples of Egypt. There he studied the science of Numbers, which he afterwards taught with celebrated brilliancy to his disciples. Thales studied in the sanctuaries of Memphis. Democritus passed five years in the company of Egyptian priests, thanks to whom he made a thorough study of astronomy and geometry. Plato, accompanied by Eudoxus, spent thirteen years in Heliopolis, in whose temples both of them studied geometry, theology and the priestly science. The geographer Strabo relates how in Heliopolis he was shown the house where Plato and Eudoxus had stayed. (Solomon Lancri, *Occultism of Ancient Egypt*, The Blavatsky Lecture, 4: London, 1977, pp.3-4)

All the evidence presented above shows unmistakably, that it was not “a confusion” that “prompted Dr. Wilder to his choice,” giving “credit to the (long discarded) theory that the Ammonian School . . .” etc. etc., but his knowledge of the Occult tradition.

Until more information is discovered, the peripatetic way of reasoning will always negate the Occult tradition. For the moment the two positions are irreconcilable regarding Pot-Amun.

The Eclectics

Now turning to the Eclectics.

Dr. Siémons says that

Dr. Wilder’s enthusiasm led him to a number of **imprudent** generalisations and **wrong** assertions that he could have corrected by a direct reference to the original Grecian literature.

Examples may be given as follows:

1. His too *exclusive attribution to Neo-Platonists* of specific terms like *Eclectics* and *Eclectic Philosophy* (chosen as the title of his pamphlet) is the apparent result of **a series of confusions** or misinterpretations. . . . (p.13)
2. Taking for granted that the various denominations enumerated in the *Encyclopedia* (Eclectics, Analogetici [Analogeticists] and Philalethes [Philaletheians]) applied to the Neo-Platonists. . . . (p.14) [Emphasis mine]

This long quotation shows that Dr. Siémons is under the misapprehension that Dr. Wilder, one of the greatest American Platonists of the nineteenth century, knew nothing about the original Platonic and Neoplatonic literature and had to resort to the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia* to get his knowledge. But indeed he is not the only one to refer to the Neoplatonists as Eclectics. Isaac Preston Cory in the Introduction of his book *Ancient Fragments* published in 1826, talks the same way about the Neoplatonists:

In the third century, Ammonius Saccas, universally acknowledged to have been a man of consummate ability, taught that every sect, Christian, Heretic or Pagan, had received the truth, and retained it in their varied legends. He undertook, therefore, to unfold it from them all, and to reconcile every creed. And from his exertions sprung the celebrated Eclectic school of the later Platonists. Plotinus, Amelius, Olympius, Porphyrius, Jamblichus, Syrianus, and Proclus, were among the celebrated professors who succeeded Ammonius in the Platonic chair, and revived and kept alive the spirit of Paganism, with a bitter enmity to the Gospel, for near three hundred years. (*Ancient Fragments*, Isaac Preston Cory, first ed. 1826; photographic copy of 1832 ed. Wizards Bookshelf, Savage MN, 1975, pp. lii-liii. For the particulars of this philosophical transaction see Gibbon, [*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*], Ch. xl)

However we have to accept that there is a tradition written and unwritten about the School of Ammonius Saccas coming down from antiquity, not necessarily all recorded by the scholars, which refers to them as Eclectics, Philaletheians, Analogeticists and Neoplatonists. And here we encounter a paradox, Mosheim; an enemy of Neoplatonism collected many of the traditions of that school with the purpose of criticizing them. Part of his material went into the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*, and a Platonist like Wilder recognizing immediately the truths buried in the text, like a good Eclectic, took what he thought was true and discarded what he considered to be false. This is nothing new; it is the way that many texts of antiquity burnt by the Christian Church have been recovered. The originals were burnt but many of their tenets have survived in the works of their enemies. Dr. Wilder used this procedure, Blavatsky too. That is . . . continued on page 95

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why we shouldn't be surprised to find in *The Key to Theosophy* quotations from Mosheim and the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*.

Dr. Siémons says that because Diogenes Laërtius “never spoke of Ammonius” in connection with the *Philaletheians*, the *Eclectics* and the *Analogeticists*, “it seems clear that he had in mind *other* philosophers of the past” (p.15). Yes, on this we agree completely with him, only pointing out that if Diogenes Laërtius does not speak of Ammonius Saccas it is because, as I said above, he wrote his *Lives* before Ammonius was born or was known; but he mentions the *Philaletheians*, the *Eclectics* and the *Analogeticists* showing their existence at that time in the past, and for some reason he puts them together. “These philosophers of the

past” as Dr. Siémons puts it, represent a long philosophical tradition to which Ammonius Saccas belonged, and it is from them — although we don't know who his master was — that he started his initial philosophical inquiry, launching later on his own school, and calling it with the various terms discussed above, which are in consonance with this tradition of many centuries.

As Blavatsky has remarked:

Between the secrecy imposed, the vows of silence and that which was maliciously destroyed by every foul means, it is indeed miraculous that even so much of the Philaletheian tenets has reached the world. (CW, XIV, p.313) 

[To be continued in next issue of Fohat]

Concerning Ammonius Saccas

Part II

J. Ramón Sordo

Concerning the Grove

On p.15 of his pamphlet, Dr. Siémons strongly criticizes the assertions on p.6 of *The Key to Theosophy*, and Dr. Wilder's assertions on p.9 of his own pamphlet:

And the addition of "learned men of the Synagogue, the Academy and the Grove" to the list of Ammonius' supporters is **open to all manner of criticism**. (p.15) [Emphasis mine]

Concerning the *Grove* (or the *Groves*, as in the *Key* p.6), **this unexplained word** is perhaps the loose rendering of the Greek [*kepoi*] = the Garden(s), referring to the School of Epicurus who, in effect, gave his courses in a garden, in the south-west quarter of Athens, the Epicureans being collectively named "those of the Garden" [oi apo ton kepon]. There being practically no common ground between Epicureans and Platonists (for whom metaphysical principles played a major part) it is very doubtful that Epicurean contemporaries of Ammonius felt like joining hands with him. (p.15n) [Emphasis mine]

Dr. Siémons says that "the *Grove* (or the *Groves*, as in the *Key* p.6)" is an "unexplained word," and he tries to find its origin **only** in the Garden or *Kêpos* of Epicurus? I really don't see any need to do this. "*Grove* is a word meaning *sanctum* or ashram, in Platonic thought" (Richard Robb unpublished MS). This is confirmed by Virgil when he talks about the Elysian Fields:

*Devenere locus laetos, et amaena vireta
Fortunatorum nemorum, sedesque beatas. . . .*

They came to the blissful regions, and delightful green retreats, and happy abodes in the fortunate **groves**. (*The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, Thomas Taylor, with Introduction, Notes etc., by Alexander Wilder, New York, 1875. Facsimile reprint, Wizards Bookshelf, San Diego, 1980, p.52)

And on the next page:

The poet, in describing the employments of the blessed, says:

*. . . Inter odoratum lauri nemus: unde superne
Plurimus Eridani per silvam volvitur amnis.*

. . . amid a fragrant **grove** of laurel; whence from above the greatest river Eridanus rolls through the woods. (Ibid., pp.54, 55n) [Emphasis mine]

We should observe that according to the Latin dictionary the word **nemus** means grove, or a grove consecrated to a divinity. Further on Thomas Taylor gives us the esoteric meaning of Grove:

The shady groves are symbols of the retiring of the soul to the depth of her essence, and there, by energy solely divine, establishing herself in the ineffable principle of things. (Ibid., p.57)

These esoteric explanations are confirmed by any good dictionary of Greek. My dictionary translates the Greek word **álsos**, or **álseos** for the English word **grove; a sacred grove; a sacred place**. Thus we see that all that Dr. Siémons needed before criticizing Blavatsky was to consult a Greek dictionary. In a very simple way the dictionary explains away all the perplexities of Dr. Siémons. Not having done this Dr Siémons opens himself to "all manner of criticism."

However from the physical point of view the word *Grove* is clearly referred throughout the Platonic tradition and even Diogenes Laërtius writes about it in his *Lives of the Philosophers*.

All this is very well documented in one of the works of John R. Dillon (a Platonic scholar and professor of Greek at Trinity College), where he answers all the uncertainties of Dr. Siémons:

The Academy was, properly speaking — to quote the formulation of Diogenes Laërtius — "a *gymnasion* [or place of exercise], outside the walls [of Athens], in a grove, [*alsôdes*] named after a certain hero, Hekademos." (III, 7): that is to say, a public park, accessible to all who wished to walk, or exercise, or converse in it. In this grove, or *gimnasion*, it had been the practice for sophists and philosophers (including, for instance, Cratylus, the "neo-Heraclitean", to whom Plato attached himself for a while) to meet with their disciples for a generation or so before Plato thought to establishing himself there at some time in the early 380s, after his return from his first visit to Italy and Sicily. What Plato himself seems to have done was to purchase a property, possibly with the financial help of his Syracusan friend Dion, where he lived, and where his disciples were no doubt welcome to visit and dine, while the main philosophical business of the school was conducted within the Academy grove, which was a public park. Within this grove, we are told that a shrine of the Muses, or *mouseion*, was at some stage erected by Plato (to which later, we are told, his nephew Speusippus, presumably

on his accession to the headship of the school, added statues of the Graces) and this may have in some way marked out the area in which the school habitually met. . . . How the business of the school was divided between the public park and the private estate is less than clear. There is considerable evidence, at least, that much of the philosophical disputation went on in the park, either in the open air or in some corner of the gymnasium building. (*The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy* (347-374 BC), John Dillon, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003, pp.2-3)

An anecdote, of which I see no reason to disbelieve at least the essential accuracy, is one told by Aelian, (*Varia Historia* 3.19) which casts some light on the relationship between the public park and Plato's private estate. This story relates to a time not long before 347 BC, the date of Plato's death:

Once when Xenocrates went off on a visit to his homeland, Aristotle set upon Plato, surrounding himself with a gang of his own partisans. . . . Speusippus at that time was ill, and for this reason was unable to stand by Plato. Plato was by now eighty years. . . [s]o Aristotle devised a plot and set an ambush for him, and began to put questions to him very aggressively and in a way "elenctically", and was plainly behaving unjust and unfeeling. For this reason, Plato left the concourse outside (*tou exō peripatou*), and walked inside with his companions (*endon ebadize sun tois hetairois*).

After an interval of three months, Xenocrates arrived back from abroad and, checking in to the School, found Aristotle perambulating where he expected to find Plato . . . he asked one of those who had been participating in the *peripatos* where Plato was. . . . The other replied, "He is not ill, but Aristotle has been giving him a bad time, and has forced him to retire from the *peripatos*, so he has retired and is philosophizing in his own garden (*en tōi kêpos tōi heautou*)."
We may note first that the only two pieces of real estate concerned in the story are the *peripatos* and Plato's own *kêpos*. . . . What then, are we to imagine Plato's *kêpos* to have consisted of? Is it to be thought of as what later ages spoke of Plato's Academy? . . . A *kêpos* is not necessarily just a garden. Epicurus' *Kêpos*, after all, included a suburban villa of considerable dimensions as well as a garden, enough to hold a community. We could, therefore, imagine living-quarters for Plato himself and at least a few companions, with room also for an ever growing library. . . . (Ibid., pp.3-5)

We have, then, two separate entities, both important to the life of the school, the *kêpos* and the public park, with its gymnasiums and walks. (Ibid., p.8)

The property is described in various ancient sources, with a diminutive, as a "little garden", but this description must be seen, I think, as reflecting the more spacious perspective of the Roman imperial period (*Kêpidion*, Diogenes Laertio, III 20; *khôridion*, Plutarch, *De Exilio* 10; *illi hortuli*, Cicero, *De Finibus* V 2). The evidence indicates that it must have comprised a couple of acres at least, since in Polemo's day, according to Diogenes Laërtius (IV 19), the students of the Academy were able to live in huts or cabins (*kalybia*) of their own construction "near the shrine of the Muses and the lecture-hall (*exedra*)". (Ibid., p.9)

I think that the above quotations will be enough to show that the Academy of Plato was in a Grove [*âlsos* in Greek] according to the ancient sources and therefore this term is not an unexplained word as Dr. Siémons thought it was. At the same time we see that the private quarters of Plato were in a Garden (*Kêpos*), a term used also by several authors of Antiquity to designate the Academy of Plato. So there is no need to derive the word *Grove* from *Garden*, or to argue that it is "an unexplained word."

Porphyry the Jew

Dr. Siémons thinks that the allusion of Dr. Wilder to Porphyry as a Hellenized Jew is among his minor historical mistakes?

In his *New Platonism and Alchemy* Wilder says: "The Jew Malek, commonly known as the distinguished author Porphyry . . ." (p.12). And H.P. Blavatsky in her *Key to Theosophy* says "Porphyry, his [Plotinus] disciple, whose real name was Malek (a Hellenized Jew) . . ." (p.3n).

To the above Dr. Siémons objects. He says that

Malek, has a Semitic resonance, it was rather common in Phoenicia (which had been under the influence of Assyria, Babylon and Persia). Porphyry, educated at Tyre, a city open to Hellenistic influence, **was not a Jew** — his supposed **apostasy** would have been one more weapon against him in Eusebius' hands. (p.17n) [Emphasis mine]

I don't think the issue here is if Malek was a common name in Phoenicia or if it has a "Semitic resonance." Of course it has. In this regard we have several authentic sources concerning his origin. Porphyry was born in Tyre: "I myself, Porphyry of Tyre" (*Life of Plotinus*, MacKenna, p.7). "He was born in a distinguished family and received a careful education" (Eunapius, *Vitae Soph.* 455). "He was of Semitic descent" (*Porphyry's Letter to his Wife Marcella*, translated by Alice Zimmern, Introduction by David Fideler, Phanes Press, 1986, p.7). And in the *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry says that Amelius "dedicated the work [*The Difference Between the Doctrines of Plotinus and Numenius*] to me, under the name of Basileus (or King). This really is my name; it is equivalent to Porphyry

(Purpled robed) and translates the name I bear in my own tongue" (*Life of Plotinus*, 17. *op. cit.* p.11).

But the issue here is if Porphyry was a Jew, or not.

Dr. Siémons says that Malek was a "common" name "in Phoenicia" **ergo** "Porphyry was not a Jew."

I am afraid this syllogism is not properly structured; there is no connection between the premise and the conclusion. Once more Dr. Siémons is giving us an assertion based only in his own personal opinion, without any real "historical" facts; and in consequence he has no foundation to say that Dr. Wilder and H.P. Blavatsky are mistaken.

Dr. Siémons says that Porphyry was not a Jew because: "his supposed apostasy would have been one more weapon against him in Eusebius' hands." Well, I think that on the contrary the fact of being of Jewish descent was a powerful tool in the hands of Porphyry and something that those early Fathers feared.

While still a young man Porphyry had the opportunity to hear Origen, the great Christian intellectual, lecturing in Caesarea. But Porphyry found Origen's attempt to reconcile Christianity with the Greek intellectual tradition to be profoundly absurd, and he would note later in life that Origen, while being "a Greek schooled in Greek thought, plunged headlong into un-Greek recklessness; immersed in this, he peddled himself and his skill in argument. In his way of life he behaved like a Christian . . . in his metaphysical and theological ideas he played the Greek, giving a Greek twist to foreign tales." (Porphyry quoted by Eusebius, *History of Church*, 6.19. In: *Porphyry's Letter*, *op. cit.* pp.7-8)

Porphyry wrote two major works which relate to Christianity: *Against the Christians*, (*Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*. R. Hoffman compiler & translator, 1994); and *The Philosophy from the Oracles*, quoted by Augustine.

Against the Christians is said to have consisted of 15 books and mostly dealt with historical and textual criticism of the four gospels and other writings, such as the "Book of Daniel," which were often quoted by the early Christians to justify their beliefs. Porphyry was in fact the first scholar to apply the canons of historical criticism to the books of the Bible. (See Casey, P.M., "Porphyry and the Origin of the Book of Daniel," *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., XXVII, Pt. 1, 15-33). ". . . In this work Porphyry also exposed the many inconsistencies which exist between the gospel narratives, thus showing that they cannot be regarded as accurate historical accounts. (David Fideleer, *Porphyry's Letter to his Wife Marcella*, *op. cit.* pp.13-14)

The fact that Porphyry knew the Jewish scriptures and was able to make a scholarly criticism thereof goes in favor of his Jewish origin. This is corroborated

by his able attack to Paul concerning several aspects of the Jewish religion. For instance: Paul's ambiguous references to circumcision, which Porphyrius seems to know well (*Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*, edited and translated by Joseph Hoffmann, Oxford University, Prometheus Books, New York, 1994, pp.58-59). The defense that Porphyry makes of the Law of Moses throughout the text (Chapter 7):

" . . . for a man who one day uses the law as his rule and the next day uses the gospel is either a knave or a fool. . ." (Ibid., p.61). "Paul invokes the law [of Moses] in support of his greed. . ." (Ibid., p.61). "I, Paul, testify that if a man keeps any bit of the law then he is indebted to the whole law.' [Gal. 5.3, paraphrased; cf. James 2.10] He says this rather than simply asserting that it is wrong to keep the commandments set down in the law" (Ibid., p.61). "Those who are under the law [of Moses] are under a curse.' [Gal. 3.10] The same man who writes, 'The law is spiritual' to the Romans, and 'The law is holy and the commandment holy and just' now puts a curse upon those who obey what is holy!" (Ibid., p.62). "Look again at this charlatan's record. Following any number of references to the law which he uses to find support [for his case], he nullifies his argument by saying 'The law entered so that the offense might increase' and previous to this, 'The goad of death is sin and the power of sin is the law.' [Cor. 15.56]" (Ibid., p.62)

And in connection with Jesus, Porphyry says:

If we turn our attention to [the Christian] account, it can be shown to be pure deceit and trickery. Matthew writes that Christ met up with two demon[iacs] who lived among the tombs and that, being afraid entered into swine, many of which were killed [Matt. 8.31]. Mark exaggerates when he says there was a great number of swine [Mark 5.1]. . . . What story! What nonsense! What an offence to reason! . . . Can anyone tell me what business a large herd of swine had roaming the hills of Judah, given that the Jews had always regarded them as the vilest and most detested form of animal life? (Ibid., pp.41-42, 44)

And again:

"If you believe Moses, then you would believe me for he wrote about me" [John 5.46]. The saying is filled with stupidity! Even if [Moses] said it, nothing of what he wrote has been preserved; his writings are reported to have been destroyed along with the Temple. All the things attributed to Moses are really written eleven hundred years later by Ezra and his contemporaries. (Ibid., p.41)

And in a footnote to the above, R.J. Hoffmann, the translator and compiler, makes the following important remarks:

The philosopher shows a surprising awareness of the history of biblical text in delaying the traditional attribution of the books of the law to Moses. . . . A feature of the philosopher's argument . . . is the notion that Ezra copied portions of the law incorrectly. (Ibid., p.41n)

Church fathers from Eusebius to Augustine **were intimidated** by Porphyry's challenges and arguments . . . , Constantine in the fourth century and Theodosius in the fifth decided that the only way to overcome Porphyry's objections was to put his books to the torch. (Ibid., p.155) [Emphasis mine]

If Porphyry was a Hellenized Jew, as Wilder and Blavatsky assert, this is nothing new in the history of that people. History has recorded the names of many eminent and famous Hellenized and Romanized Jews in Antiquity, and many Germanized, Russianized and Americanized Jews in modern times.

Dr. Siémons gives no scientific proof to support his assertion that Porphyry "was not a Jew," except his own dictum. Whereas, all the historical facts confirm the assertions of Wilder and Blavatsky.

Clement of Alexandria

Another of the "minor historical mistakes" of Dr. Alexander Wilder, and H.P. Blavatsky, according to Dr. Siémons is their assertion that "Clement 'had been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries' and 'is said to have declared that the doctrines there taught contained in them the end of all instruction' [*New Platonism*, etc., p.8] (cf. *Key*, 37n) must be taken with great prudence" (p.17n).

I don't think that what we need here is prudence but knowledge. H.P. Blavatsky and Alexander Wilder follow the Pagan and Occult tradition; Dr Siémons' sources of information seem to be scholastic and Christian. Of course their points of view will be always at loggerheads. For Dr. Siémons Ammonius was a "young apostate" (p.15n). For H.P. Blavatsky Clemens of Alexandria was a "renegade Neo-Platonist," (CW, XIV, p.323n) being "a Christian Neo-Platonist and a very fantastic writer." (CW, XIV, p.11n)

But in this case, using Christian sources and one of the works of Clemens of Alexandria quoted by H.P. Blavatsky, we can prove that Clemens was an Initiate of the Mysteries:

And Clement, as an Initiate of the Mysteries — **at which the secret of the heliocentric system was taught** several thousands of years before Galileo and Copernicus — proves it by explaining that

By these various symbols connected with (sидereal) phenomena the totality of all the creatures which bind heaven with earth, are figured. . . . The chandelier represented the motion of the seven luminaries, describing their astral revolution . . . because the Sun placed as a candelabrum in the middle of other planets distributes light to them.

(Clemens of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, V, vi) (CW, XIV, p.323)

. . . the above, written in the earliest Christian period by the renegade Neo-Platonist [Clemens of Alexandria] . . . (CW, XIV, p.323n) [Emphasis mine]

The secret of the heliocentric system was taught at the Mysteries. Clemens of Alexandria talks about this teaching. The only way he could obtain this knowledge is by having been initiated in the Mysteries.

That Clemens was conversant with the Mysteries can be seen by the next quotation:

But Pindar, speaking of the Eleusinian Mysteries, says: Blessed is he who, having seen those *common concerns* in the underworld, knows both the end of life and its divine origin from Jupiter. (*Stromata*, book iii., quoted in *The Eleusinian Mysteries and Bacchic Mysteries*, by Thomas Taylor, edited by Alexander Wilder, New York, 1875. Facsimile edition by Wizards Bookshelf, San Diego, 1980)

Again, according to Clemens Alexandrinus, the following confession was made by the new initiate in these sacred rites, in answer to the interrogation of the Hierophant: "I have fasted; I have drank the Cyceon; I have taken out of the Cista, and placed what I have taken out into the Calathus; and alternately I have taken out of the Calathus and put into the Cista." (Ibid., p.110)

As we have shown above [see *Fohat* vol.X, no.4], Ammonius Saccas was born between the years 150 and 156 A.D. being a contemporary of Clemens of Alexandria for whom the experts give a date of birth between the years 150 and 153 A.D., although the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that "his date of birth is unknown." In the pamphlet of Dr. Siémons I don't see any solid proof — except his own opinion — to invalidate the assertions of H.P. Blavatsky concerning Clemens of Alexandria. On the contrary our research confirms what she said in this respect:

Clemens Alexandrinus. A Church Father and voluminous writer, who had been a Neo-Platonist and a disciple of Ammonius Saccas. He was one of the few Christian philosophers between the second and third centuries of our era, at Alexandria. (*Key*, Glossary, p.326)

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that Dr. Siémons was not able to prove his case. His critique of Dr. Wilder's *New Platonism*, and H.P. Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy* turned out to be groundless as I have shown above. And although he makes valuable detective research to trace certain paragraphs to the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia* and then to the work of Mosheim, he was not able to explain why Blavatsky and Wilder . . . *continued on page 23*

. . . **Ammonius** *continued from page 16*

used the work of a very well informed enemy of Neoplatonism as a partial source of information. And I say partial because both had other sources of information, not only occult but written, which Dr. Siémons was not able to detect.

On page 4 of his pamphlet he boldly asserts that “after a century of progress in the field of learning, many of his [Wilder’s and Blavatsky’s] statements concerning the figure and doctrines of Ammonius Saccas, the founder of the ‘Eclectic Theosophical system’ (Blavatsky, *Key*, 2), are found wanting in accuracy, if not completely groundless.”

Unfortunately, the only proof of the “progress of learning” that he was able to produce before the reader was a contrived date of birth of Ammonius Saccas. His whole reasoning, as I have shown above is based on that fictitious date, fabricated by him, which only proves his own power of imagination. In vain he has tried to demolish every bit of information given in the first pages of the *Key to Theosophy*: the influence of the School of Ammonius Saccas upon three early Church Fathers: Pantaenus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen; the existence of Pot-Amun using a very unscientific etymology, not being aware of the existence of the Prophets of Amun reported by two French scholars; discarding at the same time the fact that the *Lives* of Diogenes Laërtius are a compilation of ancient sources; and attributing ignorance

in Platonic matters to Dr. Wilder for talking about the Neoplatonists as Eclectics.

To have said in his pamphlet that the word **Grove** is an “unexplained word” (p.15) has left Dr. Siémons “open to all manner of criticism” showing that he is not conversant with the Platonic tradition, as I have demonstrated with proofs in my analysis. And not being a Platonist himself, it was rather injudicious to criticize a well informed Platonist like Alexander Wilder.

His assertions concerning Clement of Alexandria have been proved inaccurate, due to a lack of research in the very works of Clement of Alexandria.

Dr. Siémons’ assertions that Porphyry was not a Jew, is groundless, as we have shown. It is only based on a bias and a personal point of view, devoid of any documentary support.

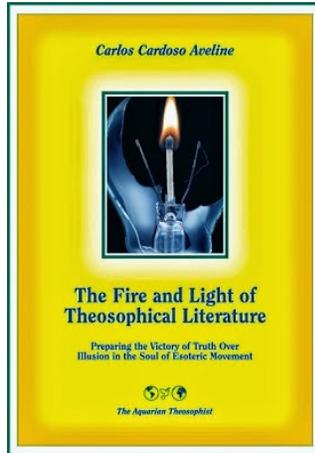
One good thing coming from Dr. Siémons’ research is the fact of making us aware of the importance of Alexander Wilder as a pioneer of Theosophy. He used the word Theosophy in 1869, six years before the formation of the Parent Theosophical Society in New York. His notions concerning Pot-Amun, Ammonius Saccas and his Eclectic, Philaletheian Neo-Platonic School, were corroborated by H.P. Blavatsky, not only in her *Key to Theosophy* but in other of her writings. 

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The end of “Concerning Ammonius Saccas”.

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On the role of the esoteric movement in the ethical awakening of mankind during the 21st century, see the book “**The Fire and Light of Theosophical Literature**”, by Carlos Cardoso Aveline.



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