

Truthful and Untruthful Lies:

Validating ancient Greek fiction through literary framing

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Abstract

*The division between sophisticated Late Antique literature of the Second Sophistic and Early Christian literature is not as stark as conventional scholarship might imply. On the one hand were authors writing for culturally sophisticated and presumably pagan audiences in the Second Sophistic tradition, and on the other hand were the Early Christian writers whose project was ostensibly concerned with faith and witness rather than literary cleverness. Both groups, however, were doing everything in their power to create fiction that could be passed off as history. While their intentions behind this were indeed different, these authors of Late Antique literature written in the Greek language used many of the same literary techniques to lend validation and believability to their work. In the paper that follows, I will lay out the four-tiered framing classification system that I have established for the purpose of investigating fictional histories as presented by ancient Greek authors. These four frames are **The Othering Frame**, **The Self-Referential Frame**, **The Pseudonymous Frame**, and the **Artefact Frame**.*

Introduction

“the interrogation of truthful and untruthful lies, the testing of non-literal ways of representing and misrepresenting knowledge, may be among the deepest and most necessary habits of a culture.”¹

“Truthful and untruthful lies”, or ‘fiction’, for simplicity’s sake, possess a storied history indeed, its origins just as difficult to place as its essence is to define. Fiction, in our postmodern era, may seem straightforward enough; fiction is the antithesis to history, to fact. But this division is one of our own creation, and a recent one at that. If we look back to the earliest writings of the earliest civilisations, that line between fiction and fact becomes increasingly blurred and elusive. In the ancient imagination, fact and fiction interweave and intermingle, as though they were always meant to coexist with one another.

“All literature is to an extent fictional. Its social and aesthetic role may shift at different times, as may the manner of its presentation, but there is -I suggest- never a point in any culture’s history when fiction is “yet to be invented.”²

While potentially controversial in scholarly fields that would ask for a more concrete basis for such a statement, the above quote presents an intriguing point of view that is worth further consideration. It presents a world in which the concept of fiction has always existed, in every human culture, twisting and turning along the tides of time, always filling the role which it is needed to fill in its given time and place. Whether its role was social, political, or purely artistic, in every instance a community’s fiction is capable of shaping and defining it, as its existence is one of the core tenants of the human identity.

¹ Wood (1993) p. xviii

² Whitmarsh (2013) p. 12

If the introductory quote rings true, if “the interrogation of truthful and untruthful lies” does indeed make up “the deepest and most necessary habits of a culture”, then I would like to think of the essay that follows as my civic contribution. In a postmodern world where fact and fiction have become increasingly confused, this process of interrogation has become more necessary than ever before, and by looking to the past we can create a fuller picture of the present. But rather than wax poetic about the fluid nature of fiction and the romantic effect its history has had on mankind, this essay has instead been devised to examine a very tangible element of fictive literature, the narrative devices which authors use to validate their fiction. Through narrative tricks and techniques, a work of fiction can become ever more realistic.

The essential element to creating good fiction is *believability*. To make a world that does not exist appear as one that does, or at the very least as one that *could*.

“The author’s duty is to construct a fictional world that is sufficiently plausible, either by virtue of its relatable similarity to the extra-diegetic world shared by the author and reader or else by virtue of its own inherent logic.”³

If we accept this as the core principle of creating fiction, the next logical step is to investigate the ways in which this can be (and has been) accomplished. In the essay that follows, I am going to be investigating the fictional realities of two worlds that were simultaneously disparate and unified; the world of Early Christianity and that of the Second Sophistic. Both the cultures surrounding developing Christianity and the new wave of intellectuality proposed by the Second Sophistic were focussed intently on the creation of realistic fiction. For the authors of the Second Sophistic movement, the creation of believable fiction was an exercise in rhetoric, a test of their skills as

³ Ní Mheallaigh (2008) p. 403

authors to create realities that were sufficiently believable. The stakes for Early Christian writers were slightly higher. While some were presumably writing to entertain and to fill in the gaps of the wider literary corpus, others were intent on creating stories that were not only merely plausible, but convincing enough to become the foundation for doctrine.

To go over every known literary device used to create plausible fiction would be an ambitious and extensive undertaking, far beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I have chosen to focus on one device in particular, the use of the *extradiegetic narrative frame*, a feature most commonly seen in the preface or introductions of ancient works, where an author inserts a narration that is at least one degree removed from the rest of the narrative. The identifier ‘*extradiegetic*’ has been taken from the seminal work of Genette, one of the forefathers of the study of narratology in the latter half of the 19th century⁴. An *extradiegetic narrative* is specifically one that occurs on a different, higher level from the diegetic narrative that is the universe in which the story or fabula⁵ is occurring.

“The level of the text is fundamentally different from the levels of story and fabula, that is to say, the narrator and his act of narration belong to a different time and place, a different universe than the characters in the story and fabula.”⁶

While Genette explains that the extradiegetic narrative, along with its counterpart the *metalepsis*⁷, “produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical...or fantastic” in

⁴ Genette (1972) p. 228

⁵ “The *story* is a focalized, i.e., filtered, coloured, and often temporally disordered version of the events of the *fabula*. The *fabula* consists of the events in their—reconstructed—chronological order and ‘pure’ form.” De Jong (2009) p. 88

⁶ De Jong (2009) p. 88

⁷ Genette defines *metalepsis* as the transference process by which the diegetic narrative moves to the extradiegetic or intradiegetic, and vice versa (1972) p. 234

modern and post-modern literature, De Jong argues that in Classical literature, these traits are better suited to “increase the authority of the narrator and the realism of the narrative⁸”. While De Jong has focussed in great depth on the effects of narratology in the Homeric epics and the earliest Greek works⁹, there is room to extend this narratological analysis even further, into the early centuries C.E. and the flourishing of the Greek novel.

I would propose that this increased authority and heightened realism in the narrative can also be achieved, not just through metalepsis, the act of shifting between narratives, but through the mere presence of extradiegetic narrative frame itself, which I have divided into four distinct types. Through the extradiegetic narrative frame, where the reader is addressed on an external level from the story that is occurring in the text, a layer is added whose purpose can be either to validate the text or to heighten the irony of it. Early uses of the extradiegetic narrative frame can be seen throughout the history of western literature, but it undoubtedly reached a peak of popularity in the earliest centuries C.E. when it was employed in the literature of both the Second Sophistic and Early Christianity. In studying the various works of Second Sophistic authors and the authors of the Early Christian world, the same introductory narrative motifs kept popping up again and again. These authors writing in the earliest centuries C.E. appeared to possess a unique affinity for the extradiegetic narrative frame and the myriad ways which it could be used to add layers of believability to a work of fiction or fictionalised history.

⁸ Grethlein & Rengakos (2009) p. 5

⁹ See *Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (2001) and *Narratology and the Classics: A Practical Guide* (2014)

What I have done here is to break the motif of the prefatory framing device into 4 basic sub-frames, *The Othering Frame*, *The Pseudonymous Frame*, *The Self-Referential Frame*, and *The Artefact Frame*. These divisions are not intended to be seen as historical categorisations that would have been known to the authors who were employing them, rather they are intended to serve as a lens through which modern scholars may view this unique literary phenomenon of the extradiegetic narrative frame. They are observer categories, designed to create a tool by which Greek novelistic literature can be analysed comparatively and comprehensively and, hopefully, better understood. These breakdowns have been created based on various subtleties in language that lend each frame a distinctive functionality and purpose that serves to add degrees of validity to the work into which they have been inserted. These frames will be explained in detail later, but first it would be wise to turn our attention briefly to the general history of the Second Sophistic and Early Christian period so as to give ourselves a foundation upon which we may build an argument.

Chapter 1: The World of Early Christianity and the Second Sophistic

“A classicist is a biblical scholar gone bad.”¹⁰

This statement, which has admittedly been removed from any semblance of its original context, is no less apt for its tongue-in-cheek nature. And I believe that it is just as fair to say the inverse. The fields of biblical —or at the very least New Testament and Early Christian— study and classical study are inherently interwoven, their timelines meshing and mixing in the multicultural milieu of the Mediterranean and Levant regions. It is, in a sense, a spinning ouroboros, where the study of the Early Christian world feeds directly into the classical world of the Greeks and Romans which in turn feeds right back around into the world of the Early Christian. It is a singular entity, but one with two distinct heads, the Empire and the Church. It is an incessant cycle of mutual give and take, a symbiotic partnership between two worlds that are not as separate as they may appear at the outset.

The question then becomes, why the separation? If these two worlds are indeed as closely connected as I have suggested here, why has there been such a stark division between the two when it comes to scholarly investigation¹¹? There are many potential reasons for this, but in the end it always seems to boil down to the professional and careerist separation between the classicist and the theologian. The fundamental issue has been the longstanding opinion that the Early Christian texts are simply a sub-par, lower class style of literature. As Young writes,

¹⁰ Schmeling (2012) p. 19

¹¹ The combining of the fields of classical and early religious study has been a recent development, taking place primarily in the last 20 years and growing fairly consistently in popularity; recent work in combining these two fields can be seen most profoundly in the recent series of books consisting of collected conference essays on ‘Ancient Narrative’ published by Barkhuis. (See Futre Pinheiro, et al. (2012) and Futre Pinheiro, et al. (2014))

“It was, of course, evident all along that judged by the standards of classical literature the earliest Christian texts fell short. The ancient charge that the apostles were illiterate and that Christianity flourished among women and slaves carried some weight because scholars trained in the classics could immediately see how these texts were wanting in sophistication of style and composition.”¹²

The literary history of Early Christianity was therefore designated as its own individual entity and placed at level of importance beneath the “classic” texts of Greek antiquity. Its lack of refinement and straightforward nature deeming it less worthy of study.

Of course, that is not to say that there are not those who have bridged the metaphorical gap in order to attempt to solidify our understanding of both the ‘Classical’ and the ‘Early Christian’ as a whole. When classical and Early Christian philology are allowed to merge, they create a much richer picture of both, providing essential context and influential insights that would otherwise go missing, leaving great rifts of information in both areas¹³.

While there is an endless numbers of avenues from which to compare the two fields, the one which will be pursued here is that of comparative literature. I have here selected from the vast array of surviving material and elected to focus on those works of literature that have received less than their fair share of recognition in academic circles. Specifically speaking, I intend to work from some of the less well-known and most recently published New Testament extra-canonical literature and the stranger end of Greek prose. However, before we can move on to the texts themselves, it is

¹² Young (2004) p. 6

¹³ “Those scholars behind the creation and nurturing of the Ancient Fiction and Early Jewish and Christian Narrative Section deserve our thanks and praise for putting back together fragmented academic disciplines, which had ceased to present an understandable picture of the mosaic that is the ancient world” Schmeling (2005) p. xvii

necessary to first grant some insight into the background of the cultures that produced these texts and to set forth a timeline for our current project.

The Early Christian world was one of constant conflict. Both in a violent sense, as well as an argumentative one. The primary focus of the church fathers in the early centuries C.E. was to establish a solid and comprehensible foundation around which a universal religion could be built. It was a matter of creating The Church as a unique and identifiable entity, deciding what would be the official doctrine, what would be non-canonical, and what would be outright heretical. The study of Early Christianity is a study of conflict and compromise, history and fiction. As Humphries writes;

“One of the challenges of studying early Christianity is to allow room not only for the unity upon which church tradition has laid such great emphasis, but also for the diversity against which the advocates of that unity struggled so vigorously.”¹⁴

It is a study of beginnings, a study of change.

The study of the Second Sophistic is similarly a study of change, of new beginnings and fresh ideas. The Second Sophistic movement was a revival of rhetoric and a new era of fiction writing that would set forth unwritten rules for narrative that would be observed even into our present day. The main hallmark of the Second Sophistic was the ongoing development and production of a new class of literature, which we would later come to call the ‘ancient novel’¹⁵. The concept of fiction was refined in the Second Sophistic and as it was refined, authors of the Second Sophistic movement began to twist it and mould it to use in increasingly-creative ways;

¹⁴ Humphries (2006) p. 146

¹⁵ An imperfect term which will be discussed in the next chapter.

“A different tradition, stemming from Herodotus, which privileged storytelling, exoticism, and wonder (*thauma*)...Wonders occupy a particularly indeterminate epistemological position, between the plausible and the implausible.”¹⁶

And it was this line between the plausible and the implausible where the fiction of the Second Sophistic truly thrived, its authors working to manufacture fiction that was both relatable and realistic.

When it comes to the date range for this project, my goal was to encapsulate the entirety of the Second Sophistic and as much of the earliest Christian Apocrypha as possible, in order to present the fullest and most comprehensive corpus of works. The dates for the Second Sophistic were somewhat easier to come by. Although not all scholars agree on the precise range of dates which encompass this movement, it undoubtedly took place in the first three centuries C.E., reaching its “peak of popularity in the second and third centuries C.E.”¹⁷ These dates account for all of the eight surviving complete novels from antiquity, as well as the fictional prose works of authors such as Lucian, Dares and Dictys, and Antonius Diogenes, which will be the texts discussed in detail here.

When it comes to the Early Christian Apocrypha, dating becomes slightly more fluid. In *Early Christianity*¹⁸, Humphries sets out his own set of dates that ranges from the time of Jesus’ death in the early first century C.E., to the conversion of Constantine in the mid-fourth century. But these dates are not static by any means, and any attempt by modern scholars to divide history into neat, isolated periods will be open to criticism and reinterpretation. In a recent publication by Burke and

¹⁶ Whitmarsh (2013) p. 20

¹⁷ Whitmarsh (2005) p. 5

¹⁸ Humphries (2006)

Landau¹⁹, efforts to include the widest possible selection of apocrypha stretches these dates well into the sixth century and into the Early Medieval. Early Christian Apocrypha, as they will be discussed here, are fragments of the literary culture that surrounded a quickly developing religion from after the time of Jesus' death to roughly the beginning of the fifth century.

My reasoning for selecting this date range is twofold. The first reason that these dates were chosen is that, while Constantine's conversion was indeed a huge step forward in the development and acceptance of Early Christianity, it was not as extreme or immediate of a change as various church histories might seem to imply. By pushing the end date to the beginning of the fifth century, our timeline now includes the ratification of Athanasius of Alexandria's list of canonical scriptures that was officially sworn in at the Third Synod of Carthage in 393 C.E. This synod was an ecumenical council that set to the task of defining which books should make up the official canon of the Christian Church and was the one to set out the 27 canonical scriptures that would make up the Christian bible still used in the Church today²⁰. My second reason for pushing the date range as far as the fifth century is that, even once the official canon had been ratified, there was no shortage of texts that would subsequently be labelled apocryphal being produced. If anything, its popularity would seem to have increased as various authors rushed to fill in gaps in the stories and create their own narratives for their individual regions and churches, never with the intent of having them made canonical.

¹⁹ *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, 2016.

²⁰ Ehrman (2003) p. 341

With a dating range of the first to fifth centuries C.E. established, there is only one other matter that must be dealt with before we can move to an analysis of the texts themselves. Any collection on either the ancient novel or christian apocrypha would be incomplete without first defining just what ideas the words ‘novel’ and ‘apocrypha’ are meant to evoke.

Chapter 2: Defining ‘Novel’ and ‘Apocrypha’

“No one owns language: it is within anyone’s gift to redefine its terms.”²¹

The above is a poetic, if rather unhelpful, assertion. Here, Whitmarsh was referring specifically to the issues that arise in defining the concept of the Second Sophistic with any degree of certainty or rigidity. For the Second Sophistic, there is no solid consensus among scholars as to the ‘correct’ set of philosophical concepts that it is meant to encompass, nor a standard set of years to measure its progress by. And while the words themselves became the convention, their meaning remains obfuscated by the unending parade of disparate scholarly definitions²². But this is by no means a problem constrained merely to the study of the Second Sophistic; all classical study is, to some degree, bogged down by issues of definition. In fact, it is the varying interpretations of terms and ideas that create the field of study and allow it to flourish. That said, any account of Second Sophistic literature or early Christian apocrypha would seem to be remiss without first defining its terms as are relevant to the particular author. Therefore, I would like to here provide my own definition of terms as they can be understood here²³.

To start with apocrypha, the less approachable of the above terms. The word itself comes from the joining the Greek verb κρύπτω (I conceal) with the preposition ἀπό to create a noun which translates to ‘the hidden things’. An exceedingly vague term at best, misleading at worst. By labelling these texts as ‘hidden’, it becomes a

²¹ Whitmarsh (2005) p. 12

²² Whitmarsh (2005) cites Swain (1996), Anderson (1993), and Schmitz (1997) to list but a few.

²³ For more in-depth discussions of these terms and the various controversies surrounding them, see, for the ‘Second Sophistic’: Whitmarsh (2005). For ‘Novel’, see Bowerstock (1994), Schmeling (1996), Gill & Wiseman (1993), Ní Mheallaigh, (2008), Futre Pinheiro et al (2014). For ‘Apocrypha’, see Elliott (1993), Ehrman (2003), Gregory et al. (2015), Burke & Landau (2016).

simple matter to look for conspiracy where there is none²⁴. It implies that these pieces of literature had been secreted away, perhaps because they provided truer, darker truths, or presented ideas that mankind was not yet ready to receive. The reality of the situation is much more simple, however. The reason these texts are widely unknown is that, due to a variety of reasons, they were not selected for continued survival in the developing Christian Church. These reasons could range anywhere from the text's questionable authorship, to an inconsistent dating range, to an excess of fantastical imagery, to just not presenting the messages that the Early Church decided to pursue²⁵. But, the term has served its purpose of creating a default category into which Early Christian works that are not a part of the biblical canon can be placed. The apocryphal 'genre' continues to grow in fits and starts based both on more recent discoveries (such as Nag Hammadi²⁶ and the Dead Sea Scrolls²⁷) and an increased interest in the study of the Christian fringe²⁸.

The term 'novel' may be the more innocuous of the two terms, yet it is all the more complicated in spite of its apparent simplicity. There are two main problems with creating a holistic definition for the ancient 'novel'. The first problem, is that the term 'novel' is one of modern origins that we have attempted to apply to the ancient world, regardless of how fitting it may be. By using a word with no ancient equivalent, and creating a grouping of texts that did not exist in antiquity, we have created a category of works that is open to constant criticism and redefinition, a collection of texts that emphasises exclusion over inclusion without any strong

²⁴ Ehrman (2003 B)

²⁵ Ehrman (2003 A)

²⁶ Meyer (2009)

²⁷ Vermes (2004)

²⁸ See introduction to Burke & Landau, 2016

standpoint from which to do so. There are only eight ancient novels, five Greek, three Latin, that are generally accepted as “true novels”²⁹. These novels could also be referred to as ‘the romances’, as each follows the same general pattern of a boy and girl in love set against the backdrop of travel and adventure. And while a considerable amount of work has been done on comparative analysis between these ‘romances’ and the apocryphal gospels³⁰, the Greek prose that will be investigated here falls under a looser definition of ‘novel’, which brings us to our second problem of definition. The second, and larger, issue with defining and categorising the ancient novel comes from the fact that our modern conception of ‘fiction’ is not analogous to the way ‘fiction’ was interpreted by ancient peoples³¹.

The world of Classical Greece and Rome was less concerned with what was or wasn’t true and more with what *could* be true. There is a common motif in almost all these ancient novels of reality as it seems to be true, or as it might be true, were circumstances different:

“Fiction is pure invention, any sort of fabrication. It is invention that knows it is invention; or which knows *and says* it is invention; or which, whatever it knows and says, is *known* to be invention. It is permissible or noble lying...it is not lying at all, but exempt from all notions of truth or falsehood, licensed in quite a different way...it is hypothesis, neither lie nor fable but a narrative of things we cannot possibly (yet) know.”³²

²⁹ Excellent analysis of this is provided by Holzberg in Schmeling (ed.) 1996, p.11-28, who lists these texts as being those of: Chariton, Xenophon, Longus, Achilles Tatius, Heliodorus, The *Satyricon* of Petronius, Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, and the *History of Apollonius King of Tyre*.

³⁰ See Brant, et al (2010), Futre Pinheiro, et al (2012), (2014), Hock, et al (1998), Pervo (1996).

³¹ Schmeling (1996), Gill & Wiseman (1993)

³² Wood (1993) p. xvi-xvii.

In ancient prose works, the line between fiction and reality is fluid and ever-changing. The distance between historical fact and artistic interpretation is negligible. Lies are presented as truths, truths are presented as lies. Some lies are self-proclaimed, others are silent. Still others are more insidious, close enough to the truth to be utterly believable. And while we will never be able to claim true insight into the mind of the author, in the essay that follows, I would like to propose a solid connection between the fictional histories and historical fictions perpetuated by Christian and secular writers alike, during the earliest centuries CE. Through the use of the extradiegetic narrative frame, a method of validating a text was discovered and honed to an art form.

Chapter 3: The Preface's Precedents and Fictionalised Validation

“If all literature contains an element of fictionality, then the history of fictionality is also the history of literature.”³³

The importance of these framing devices stems from the fact that, through the proper application of a narrative frame, the believability of a written work can be increased exponentially. The human mind is naturally inclined to the hearing and telling of stories; we want to believe, whether or not our better judgment is against it. These narratological framing devices silence that judgement, they allow the reader (or listener) to be immersed in the story that is happening around them, validating and even reifying what we see before us, continuously blurring the line between the real and the unreal. Gareth Schmeling writes:

“It seems to me that the natural human condition is to lie. Lying is also more entertaining, since the truth is often both dull and hurtful.”³⁴

By all means, an intriguing statement, but perhaps overly aggressive in its straightforwardness. I would like to think of the texts that I will go on to describe as not lies, per se, but rather untruths. The act of lying would always seem to imply malicious intent, and these texts are not malicious creatures. The level of fictionality within them fluctuates, as it does in all works of recorded literature, and ultimately the decision is left to us whether or not we believe.

The fact that the concept of the ‘novel’ did not exist in antiquity does not mean that ancient peoples did not have their own language for defining and categorising various elements of their literature based on how realistic they seemed to be. On the secular side, the philosopher Sextus, in the second century C.E. set out his own

³³ Whitmarsh (2013) p.15

³⁴ Schmeling (1998) p. 19

tripartite system of division which consisted of history (ἱστορία), fiction (πλάσμα), and myth (μῦθος), where

“History, he says, is the presentation of truths and of what actually happened; plasma, of things that did not happen but resemble things that have happened; myth, of things that did not happen and are false.”³⁵

The early Christian Church had its own tripartite system of division in order to sort through the vast and growing corpus of Christian literature, which consisted of accepted texts (ὁμολογούμενα), false or forged texts (νόθα or ψεύδε), and texts whose merit was disputed; accepted canon in some churches, but not in others (ἀντιλεγόμενα or ἀμφιβαλλομένα)³⁶. What we can see here is that, in both groups, there was a definite scale of realism upon which all works could be judged. The task for the author then becomes one of manufacturing believability, which must be created within the written word, regardless of how much truth is behind what is being written. This is where validation techniques come into play, where we first see the uses of extradiegetic narrative framing being used to add levels of realism to a scene.

³⁵ Bowerstock (1994) p. 10

³⁶ Burke and Landau (2016) p. xxvii

An Ancient Example

These narrative framing devices can be traced through well-known works from various sectors of the ancient world, going as far back as the opening of the great Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. From the beginning of this text, the one reading or hearing it is pulled into the first person narrative. The descriptive language does not so much invite you to settle in and get comfortable but rather, through the use of the imperative, the author has made the listener (or reader) an active agent in the story being told, transported to the places where the great Gilgamesh once trod. Before being truly introduced to the character of Gilgamesh, we are invited by the narrator to walk in his shoes, to see the wonders that were wrought by his hands and his deeds. Then at line 24, the first framing device appears;

“Open the tablet-box of cedar,
undo its clasps of bronze!
[Open] the lid of its secret,
[ho]ld the tablet of lapis lazuli and read out:
all that Gilgamesh went through, all the hardships!”³⁷

Here the author of the epic provides us with a clear example a narrative frame that is very similar in both composition and effect to the frames we can see at use in Second Sophistic texts.

Here, the validation motif is created through the supposed discovery or reveal of an ancient physical artefact or text. In this particular instance, that artefact is not only the implausibly ostentatious tablets of lapis lazuli, an expensive material not found in so large a quantity or size, but also the cedar box itself, its bronze clasps. Each detail provided paints a more vivid picture, turns these objects that were never

³⁷ Cited by Haubold (2013) p. 32

real into something you can nearly hold in your hand. Details are the essential element to any framing device that seeks to add validation or believability. As Ní Mheallaigh in her paper on pseudo-documentarism writes,

“Everything essential for the lie is open to suspicion, but when it comes to non-essential facts, the audience cannot see any sense in these having been made up nor can they credit another human being with so much criminal energy.”³⁸

This motif in *Gilgamesh* provides a physical (if fictional) supporting element that adds both an air of plausibility and the potential of exciting discovery that enriches both the fictive world as well as our own.

The same motif occurs also in the lesser known work, *The Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin*, whose opening reads;

"tupšenna pitēma narâ šitassi
ša anāku Narām-Sîn mār Šarru-kīn
išturūma ēzibūšu ana ūmē šāti

Open the tablet-box and read out the stela,
Which I, Naram-Sin, ‘son’ of Sargon,
Have inscribed and left for future days.”³⁹

The parallel to *Gilgamesh* is clear, but this particular frame also features the narrator addressing the reader directly in the first person. Naram-Sin identifies himself, establishes his authority via his lineage, and explains that what will follow is his true, personal account, and should be read as such.

³⁸ Ní Mheallaigh (2008) p. 407-408

³⁹ Goodnick Westenholz (1997) p. 301

Herodotus: Father of “History”

If we move further on in time, and further westward, to the *Histories* of Herodotus, we see another type of narrative frame come into play. The very first thing Herodotus says in his *Histories* is:

“Ἡροδότου Ἁλικαρνησέως ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις ἤδε”⁴⁰

“*This is a demonstration of the inquired knowledge of Herodotus of Halicarnassus*”

The text begins with a direct introduction to the author himself, an almost personal greeting, where the reader is told in no unspecific terms that what is presented here is an honest display of the author’s extensive, inquisitive work. Through the use of the word *ἱστορία*⁴¹, Herodotus is explaining how he obtained the information that he is about to deliver. The impression given is that this collected work took time, not merely to compose, but to gather reliable information from reliable sources, impressing the reader even before the text begins. Herodotus continues to introduce the work that follows as being a product of his inquiries into various cultures, presenting his text as implicitly being accurate as possible. Herodotus’ frame continues to unfold itself in the sentences that follow. Often in Herodotus we see lines like:

“Περσέων μὲν νῦν οἱ λόγιοι Φοίνικας αἰτίους φασὶ γενέσθαι...κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸ καὶ Ἕλληνας λέγουσι ...λέγουσι Πέρσαι, οὐκ ὡς Ἕλληνας”⁴²

“The scholars of the Persians say the Phoenicians to be...As both the Persians and the Greeks say...As the Persians say, but not the Greeks”

⁴⁰ *Hist.* 1.1.0

⁴¹ From the verb *ἱστορέω*, to learn through inquiry.

⁴² *Hist.* 1.1.1

By 'citing' the words of distant, nonspecific people, Herodotus manages to consistently and effectively distance himself from the narrative that is going to follow.

Here he paints himself less as a holder of infinite knowledge, and more as a translator. Herodotus is merely the professed intermediary through which these stories will pass. His agency, then, as author and narrator is put into question; where does he embellish, *does* he embellish? If we can trust the words of Herodotus, how do we know we can trust his indeterminate sources? On the one hand, this frame in Herodotus serves to grant the author of the transmitted text a degree of separation from any sort of responsibility they may have to tell the whole truth and nothing but. On the other hand, however, it makes implicit that these stories are tried and true. They are stories with a history, and whether they are real or not they have a visible lineage that can be traced back, at least on the most superficial level. This type of narrative framing is found throughout Herodotus' Histories, often layered upon itself multiple times, creating, if you will, an official pedigree for the stories he is recording. And while this pedigree cannot be traced back through history with any true degree of certainty, the idea of it, once it is placed in the reader's mind, strengthens the fiction, allowing the mind to smooth over what might otherwise appear as glaring inaccuracies.

Early Christian Canon

These motifs are not solely confined to the genres of epic and historiography. If we jump forward again a few hundred years, precedents for narratological framing and validation motifs can be found in the earliest Christian writings as well. As the Second Sophistic movement itself first began to develop, the earliest Christian writers also began to form the works that would later become the canonical New Testament. A fitting example of another type of narrative frame appears in the very opening of the Gospel of Luke, which was composed towards the end of the first century C.E., or the beginning of the second by a well-educated Greek speaker in the eastern Mediterranean. Luke's Gospel possesses its fair share of narrative traits that have made it suitable for comparison to the ancient novel⁴³. The Gospel of Luke is also the only one of the four canonical gospels that presents an example of a narrative framing device. Opposed to the frames seen in Gilgamesh and Herodotus, the frame in Luke is, in a sense, more self-aware.

“Επειδήπερ **πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν** ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν
πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων,
καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ
λόγου,
ἔδοξε ἡμῶν παρηκολουθηκότι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς **σοι γράψαι,**
κράτιστε Θεόφιλε,
ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.”⁴⁴

“Seeing that **many others have undertaken** to draw up accounts of the events that
have reached their fulfilment among us,
as these were handed down to us by those **who from the outset were eyewitnesses**
and ministers of the word,

⁴³ See Higbe (2006), Penner and Stichele (2003), and Pervo (1987).

⁴⁴ Luke 1.1-1.4

I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account **for you, most excellent Theophilus,** so that you may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received.”

Here is a metatextual frame that acknowledges the role it plays in the text that follows it. In Luke, the author steps outside the world of the written work and speaks directly to the reader in their own voice (or at least what is presumed to be their own voice). This frame exists outside the narrative completely, and declares directly, to you, dear reader, that the words you are about to read are, by my own account true. Or at the very least, as true as the author has chosen to present them. With its predominately third person narrative structure that is introduced by a first person frame, Luke’s Gospel becomes an ideal reference for narrative framing at use from the very beginnings of the Christian faith.

The author of Luke takes great care to emphasise the degree of certainty, the amount of investigative time that he has put into this creation. He is reassuring the reader that, under his own authority, the words presented are as true as it is possible to make them. Many early historiographies used this type of introduction to present their texts as authoritative works. The matter of just who the Luke-author is directing his address to is slightly complicated and adds another layer of depth to the narrative frame. The use of the word Θεόφιλε, can be taken one of two ways, neither of which have been generally agreed upon with any sort of definitiveness⁴⁵. Θεόφιλε can in one sense be taken as a vocative of a man’s name, Θεόφιλος, in which case Luke is addressing this gospel to a specific man. However, Θεόφιλε can also be broken down into its literal components Θεός and φίλος, to create the honorific “friend of God”, a more generalised address to a nonspecific, educated Christian reader. In either case,

⁴⁵ See Marx (1980)

the narrative frame is clear. Luke is explaining that the work that follows is truthful and valid as it is based on the account of eyewitnesses, those who saw the truth firsthand.

As can be seen through these three examples, narrative frame have been used by authors from various cultures and backgrounds in different centuries to add levels of validation to fiction. None were used in quite the same way, and yet the outcome for all is indeed similar. Through the application of a narrative frame, the work it precedes is granted new layers of credibility and, more importantly, *believability*. It is one technique, but it is one that is effective at creating realistic fictional histories. But the examples given above are merely the unpolished precursors of what was to come with the dawn of the Second Sophistic and the birth of true 'novelistic' literature.

Chapter 4: Framing the Frames

Before I turn to examples of narratological prefaces in the Second Sophistic and the Christian apocrypha, it is essential that I first set out and define the four groups of my own creation into which I will be dividing the works I have collected here. These four categories of *The Othering Frame*, *The Pseudonymous Frame*, *The Self-Referential Frame*, and the *Artefact Frame* are intended to provide a convenient and comprehensive breakdown of the various types of extradiegetic narrative frame that can be seen across the span of both Early Christian and Second Sophistic literature in particular.

Frame	Method of Creating Validation	Key Indicators
Othering	By distancing the author from the text's production and adding the element of the foreign.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Description of the translation process.• Insertion of unnamed or nonspecific foreign sources
Pseudonymous	Establishing authority of the author through the use of a historical or fictional figure's identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Written under a false name (either historical or fictional)• Revisionist content
Self-Referential	By inserting the direct address of the reader by the author/narrator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occurs on a level outside the narrative• Use of the first and/or second person• Imperative phrasing
Artefact	Through the discovery of a physical artefact upon which the text has ostensibly been inscribed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mention of physical artefact (book, tablet, scroll, etc.)• Description of the circumstances concerning the text's discovery and redistribution.

Going from least to most common, I will begin first with *The Othering Frame*. The name for this frame came from the concept of the "Other" as it is known

in historical and anthropological fields, in reference to any places or persons outside of a given community's general knowledge base⁴⁶. The primary indicator of the use of *The Othering Frame* is when the author of the text goes out of their way to explain the process of translating a (presumably fictional) preexisting source, or requiring the information from peoples or communities outside of the target audience's realm of knowledge. *The Othering Frame*'s purpose is twofold. On the one hand, it highlights the 'foreign-ness' of the text you are about to read. For ancient readers in particular, the concept of the foreign was universally intriguing and often fantastical. To see this, one needs only to look at their early histories —such as those of Herodotus, who wrote of the giant gold-digging ants of India⁴⁷ and the one-eyed race of the Arimaspians⁴⁸— to see the world outside the boundaries of Western thought as a mysterious place where anything was possible. *The Othering Frame* also does its job of lending a new layer of fictionalised authority by creating the imagined process through which this text was discovered and translated. The implication that this text's original form was 'Other' gives it a heightened level of realism through the translation process alone. It implants the idea in the reader's mind that this text is more ancient than it is, and therefore its story is all the more credible.

The second frame I would like to discuss is *The Pseudonymous Frame*. *The Pseudonymous Frame* is so named because its major hallmark is that the author of a text is writing under a false name in order to lend credence to their work. There are a

⁴⁶ “This anthropological other is basically epistemological. It is based on the notion of perceived differences and is a cognitive process involving observation, collection of data and theorising” Sarukkai (1997) p.1406.

⁴⁷ Herodotus *Histories* 3.102.2

⁴⁸ Herodotus *Histories* 4.13.1

number of traits that can indicate that a work has been written under a false name, from incorrect date ranges to differences in writing style and general content. The pseudonymous works that will be discussed here all fall into one of two types: either the author of the text is writing under the name of an historic figure who existed prior to them, or they are writing under the name of a pre-established fictional character, typically from popular myth or legend, who never existed at all. While both of these types fall into *The Pseudonymous Frame*, their methods of validating their fiction are slightly different.

When the author of a text takes the name of a famous historical character to create their text, it is to add a layer of authority that would not exist under the original author's name. Famous philosophers, historians, and church fathers often fall to this fate. Using the name of a well-known, well-regarded historical figure increases the likelihood that the text will be widely-received and the potential that its ideas will be submitted to a less thorough vetting process than it might otherwise have received.

When an author chooses to write under the name of a well-known fictional character, the outcome is slightly different. Revisionist fiction is one particular area where this style of *The Pseudonymous Frame* can be found most consistently. When the author of a revisionist fiction, for example the Homeric revisionist fiction of authors such as Dares and Dictys, takes the name of a pre-established fictional character, they are adding a new level of complexity to the work. Fictional pseudonymous authors can be used in an attempt to reify a pre-existing work of fiction. This process, unlike the use of an historical personage, requires a certain level of suspended disbelief on the part of the reader. The reader of a fictional author's text is required to either make the logical leap that perhaps this character did, in fact, exist

after all, or they must simply allow themselves to account for the disconnect between reality and fictional reality that the author has attempted to establish.

Moving on, we come to *The Self-Referential Frame*. *The Self-Referential Frame* stands out from the others in that it features the direct address of the reader by the author or narrator. *The Self-Referential Frame* is a self-aware, metatextual framing device where the author breaks from their narrative, either in the work's introduction (more common) or somewhere within the body of work itself (rarer), to not only address the reader in their own voice (or what is presumed to be their own voice) but to also introduce themselves and their work. *The Self-Referential Frame* can be used in a variety of ways, but its primary method of establishing authority and validation is by creating the reassurance of the author themselves that the words they have written are honestly true (or as we will see in the case of Lucian's *True Histories*, honestly false). This validation technique relies heavily on the author's influence over the reader, allowing the reader to judge for themselves whether or not the author of the piece is to be trusted, given that there are no attempts at external validation as we have seen in both *The Othering Frame* and *The Pseudonymous Frame*.

Finally we come to the most widely attested of the four frames, *The Artefact Frame*. This frame is not so much one of my own original creation as it is a compilation and summation of categories that have already been documented by other scholars. The unique feature of *The Artefact Frame* is that validation of the fiction is created through the use of an imagined physical object (and its discovery) that is

introduced, typically, at the beginning of a text. Ní Mheallaigh refers to this phenomenon in her 2008 article as ‘pseudo-documentarism’⁴⁹, which she describes as:

“a strategy in which an author claims—with varying degrees of irony—to have discovered an authentic document which he transmits to his readers.”⁵⁰

Horsfall also refers to this phenomenon in his 2008 essay on Dictys as simply the ‘discovery of an ancient book motif’⁵¹. Merkle titles the same phenomenon with the slightly less approachable ‘Beglaubigungsapparat’, which he defines as:

“an elaborate “authentication strategy” designed to produce in the reader a belief in the text’s reliability and genuineness.”⁵²

The Artefact Frame as it will be discussed here focusses on the fictional existence of a physical object through which the story has been transmitted to the current author, whether this object is a indeed a book, or carved tablets, or some other item upon which the story has been inscribed and transferred to the current author/narrator. The author of the text uses this motif of the discovery of a physical artefact to add a layer to the narrative by planting the fiction of the story somewhere in the very tangible and real environment of our own world. Not only does this layering frame create validation through its assumed ancient status, it also creates this idea that the story you are about to be told is one that has survived through the ages, hidden, and newly discovered. It entices the readers by implying that the text which they hold in their hands may indeed hold revelations heretofore unknown, or indeed forgotten.

⁴⁹ For more on pseudo-documentarism see also Hanson (2003)

⁵⁰ Ní Mheallaigh (2008), p. 403.

⁵¹ Horsfall (2008), p. 41

⁵² Merkle (1996), p. 566

Chapter 5: The Preface in the Second Sophistic

*“I think that I have confessed my own experience to you from the beginning of our conversation: I am inclined to disbelieve legends.”*⁵³

To begin with the Second Sophistic, an age where the convention of narratological framing was finely tuned into an art form of its own. As I have mentioned earlier, the Second Sophistic saw the rise of the ‘novel’ and with it, the development of a multitude of novel-like works of prose. The extradiegetic narrative frame, which could indeed also be referred to as a *sphragis*, or seal, left its mark on the literature of the Second Sophistic, across all avenues of recorded literature. While this essay is primarily set to investigate the fringe of the Second Sophistic rather than the mainstream ‘novel’, that is not to say that the better-known novels do not present their own renditions of these motifs⁵⁴. The works of the Second Sophistic, whether in the form of the “true novel” or one of its many variants, presented a unique, new format that was ideal for the use of the extradiegetic narrative frame. As Hanson remarks,

“Although it is found in Greece and Rome in association with compositions of different sorts, the practice of adding **an authenticating preface or coda that was entirely invented** became common in the imperial period, especially in writings of a popular nature, both novels and practical literature.”⁵⁵

As the popularity of the ‘novel’ rose, so too did these conventions of lending imagined validity to a work of fiction. There are four authors of Second Sophistic literature whose works I would like to go over here, beginning with the works of Lucian that present examples of narratological framing, before moving on to the

⁵³ Philostratus *On Heroes* 7.9

⁵⁴ For examples in Chariton, Xenophon, and Apuleius, see Nuñez (2014).

⁵⁵ Hanson (2003) p. 303, emphasis mine

similar Troy novels of Dares and Dictys, and finally closing with *The Wonders Beyond Thule* of Antonius Diogenes.

Lucian's "True" Stories

Lucian of Samosata seems to have possessed a unique love of the introductory narrative framing device, particularly the sort which falls into my category of *The Self-Referential Frame*. At least two works by Lucian fit nicely into this category, both *A True Story* and *The Syrian Goddess*. To begin with the most well known, the *True Story*, or *Ἀληθῆ Διηγήματα*. Lucian's *True Story*, a heavily satirical work directed at the authors of ancient histories and myths, opens with an indirect address to the reader by the author. However, unlike the author of the Gospel of Luke, who opens with an earnest example of *The Self-Referential Frame*, eager to reassure the reader that his account is genuine, Lucian's preface is included to indicate to the reader that he cannot be trusted, and that everything he has written is a lie. In the very first paragraphs of Book I, Lucian begins by discussing what he hopes the reader will get out of his work; that it not be simply for entertainment purposes, but also thought-provoking in its own unique way:

“οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὸ ξένον τῆς ὑποθέσεως οὐδὲ τὸ χαρίεν τῆς προαιρέσεως ἐπαγωγὸν ἔσται αὐτοῖς οὐδ' ὅτι ψεύσματα ποικίλα πιθανῶς τε καὶ ἐναλήθως ἐξηγητόχαμεν”

“They will find it enticing not only for the novelty of its subject, for the humour of its plan and **because I tell all kinds of lies in a plausible and specious way**⁵⁶”.

He goes on to explain that not only is this a work of the most blatant fiction, but it is also a parody of fictive works that have been presented as truths, whether in the form of poems, histories or philosophies, labelling these works as prodigious (*τεράστια*) and fantastical (*μυθώδη*). He cites the works of famous historiographers including

⁵⁶ Harmon (1913)

Herodotus, Ctesias, and Iambolus, infamous for their less than accurate accounts, as well as many others of whom he does not see the merit in naming, as he believes the parodies will be quite clear to the reader who is well-versed in false or pseudo histories.

Lucian lays the ultimate blame for all of these deceptive untruths at the feet of the great poet Homer, whose character of Odysseus paved the way for the clever telling of wild and imaginative events in a way that would not only be believed, but be well and highly regarded. Lucian goes on to explain that not only has he seen through the deceptions of these authors, but he implies that the reader has seen through them as well. Lucian indicates that the tendency of historians and poets to lie is a well-known truth, that indeed even philosophers are not exempt from the telling falsehoods.

“ἐκείνο δὲ αὐτῶν ἐθαύμασα, εἰ ἐνόμιζον λήσειν **οὐκ ἀληθῆ συγγράφοντες.**”⁵⁷

“But I did wonder at this, if they thought to escape notice as **having written untruths.**”

With this line, Lucian has, in effect, made himself into an authority on what is true and what is false, and he goes on to say;

“κἂν ἐν γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο ἀληθεύσω λέγων **ὅτι ψεύδομαι.** οὕτω δ’ ἂν μοι δοκῶ καὶ τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων κατηγορίαν ἐκφυγεῖν αὐτὸς ὁμολογῶν **μηδὲν ἀληθὲς λέγειν.** γράφω τοίνυν περὶ ὧν μήτε εἶδον μήτε ἔπαθον μήτε παρ’ ἄλλων ἐπυθόμην, ἔτι δὲ μήτε ὅλως ὄντων μήτε τὴν ἀρχὴν γενέσθαι δυναμένων. διὸ δεῖ **τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας μηδαμῶς πιστεύειν αὐτοῖς.**”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Harmon (1913)

⁵⁸ Harmon (1913)

“I shall at least be truthful in saying that **I am a liar**. I think I can escape the censure of the world by my own admission that **I am not telling a word of truth**. Be it understood, then, that I am writing about things which I have neither seen nor had to do with nor learned from others--which, in fact, do not exist at all and, in the nature of things, cannot exist. Therefore **my readers should on no account believe in them.**”

With this chunk of text, Lucian has effectively turned *The Self-Referential Frame* on its head, changing it from a device that is conventionally used to create validation of a narrative into a frame that is designed to *invalidate* everything that comes after it. With that said, however, Lucian’s body of work is not without its more conventional examples of *The Self-Referential Frame*.

In *The Syrian Goddess*, the body of text opens with an introduction that provides a less cynical version of *The Self-Referential Frame*. *The Syrian Goddess* possesses all the elements of a pseudo-history and reads similarly to the *Histories* of Herodotus which Lucian criticises so harshly in his *True Story*. In fact, it is these striking similarities that have led to questions regarding the true authorship of *The Syrian Goddess*⁵⁹. The text lacks any overt examples of Lucian’s biting, satirical style, and presents a much more mild and even reverential opinion of religion than we are used to seeing from Lucian⁶⁰. Yet if we do take this work as being Lucian’s own, it is clear that what is presented in *The Syrian Goddess* is less of a ‘parody’, like *A True Story*, and more along the lines of what Lightfoot refers to as “pastiche”⁶¹, a more honorary sort of work. Unlike *True Story*, *The Syrian Goddess* is intended not as a mockery or criticism, but as a faithful reproduction of the historiographic style. Our

⁵⁹ For a very thorough discussion of the question of authorship, see Lightfoot (2003) p. 184-208

⁶⁰ See *Alexander the False Prophet* and the letter which Lucian addresses to Celsus.

⁶¹ Lightfoot (2003) p. 198

concern here, however is not with matters of genre and authorship, but framing devices, which *The Syrian Goddess* presents in its opening lines.

At the opening of the text, we are greeted by the narrator who is, we are to presume, Lucian himself, who begins by stating that there is a Holy City along the Euphrates river that is dedicated to the Assyrian Hera, and that it is his desire to discuss that city and its customs here, from rites, to festivals, to sacrifices, to stories and traditions. In this it would appear Lucian is in fact presenting ‘a true story’, as opposed to *A True Story*, and to assure you of his honesty, he inserts a more conventional example of *The Self-Referential Frame*;

“γράφω δὲ Ἀσσύριος ἑὼν, καὶ τῶν ἀπηγέομαι τὰ μὲν αὐτοψίῃ μαθὼν, τὰ δὲ παρὰ τῶν ἱερέων ἐδάην, ὅκῳσα ἑόντα ἔμευ πρῆσβύτερα ἐγὼ ἱστοπέω”.

“**I myself that write am an Assyrian**; and of the things that I relate **I have seen some with my own eyes**, while others—the parts of my account that happened before my time—I **have learnt from the priests**⁶²”.

Unlike his declaration in *A True Story*, that he is dishonest and his story is full of all kinds of fantastical lies, here the author is demonstrating the authority he possesses on which this work has been written. Lucian presents himself as an eyewitness to everything he is about to tell and anything he did not witness for himself he has on the word of one of the highest authorities, the priests. This particular example of *The Self-Referential Frame* bears a much closer resemblance to the frame seen earlier in the Gospel of Luke, where the author/narrator addresses their audience in an effort to reassure them that their text is founded on the best possible authorities, eyewitnesses and learned holy men.

Here, with just two examples and one author, the true scope of *The Self-Referential Frame* can be seen. This narrative can be sincere or ironic, but either way

⁶²Lightfoot (2003) p. 249

it always follows the same conventions. It is the metatextual address in this extradiegetic narrative that creates a connection between author/narrator and reader. It is a direct and personal connection, that exists outside the text entirely, and creates the validation for the fiction that follows through its intimate connection with the reader.

Dares and Dictys: Reifying Troy

For our next example of these narrative framing devices at use in the Second Sophistic, we can turn to the authors Dares and Dictys who both wrote their own “firsthand” accounts of the Trojan War. The Trojan stories of both Dares and Dictys are Homeric revisionist fiction in its purest sense. The authors of these two texts have taken on the personas of minor players on either side of the Trojan war, Dictys as a Cretan soldier fighting on the side of the Greeks, Dares a Trojan priest of Hephaestus. For the writers who produced the accounts of Dares and Dictys, Homer’s version of the tale was insufficient. It was too fanciful to be a true history and its focus on the narrative of Achilles took away from other aspects of the story that they thought more important. And so both writers produced their own ‘Homeric revisions’, purported to be realistic, eyewitness accounts of the Trojan War as a true historical event. As the imagined Latin translator of Dares, Cornelius Nepos, writes:

“Thus my readers can know exactly what happened according to this account and judge for themselves whether Dares the Phrygian or Homer wrote the more truthfully— Dares, who lived and fought at the time the Greeks stormed Troy, or Homer, who was born long after the War was over.”⁶³

The author of the Dictys preface takes a similar shot at Homer, albeit a more subtle one, when he writes:

“these were the records of an ancient man who had been at Troy, he had them translated into Greek; thus a more accurate text of the Trojan War was made known to all.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Frazer 1966 B

⁶⁴ Frazer 1966 A

With both authors of these ‘revised’ histories having established their distaste for the mythic work of Homer, they are then free to recount the tale as it ‘actually happened’.

If we begin with the *Ephemeris belli Troiani* of Dictys, the older and more complex of the two Troy novels, we can see three of the four artefact frames being used in the story’s double introduction. Unlike with Dares, we have physical evidence of an original Greek version of the *Ephemeris* that can be dated within the years 66 C.E. to 200 C.E., given the mention of 66 C.E. in the prologue text and the dating of the papyrus fragments to approximately the third century⁶⁵. The *Ephemeris* as it exists in its Latin recension possesses two distinct prefaces, one a prologue from an unnamed narrator, the other a letter from a one Lucius Septimius writing to Quintus Aradius Rufinus. The two prefaces tell roughly the same tale and it would appear that the letter was designed to replace the original Greek prologue, which was added later to the Latin editions by an author who possessed both the Latin and Greek versions of the text⁶⁶. In both letter and preface, we can see examples of *The Artefact Frame*, *The Othering Frame*, and the *Pseudonymous Frame*. Both Septimius and the unnamed narrator begin the same way. They both tell the story of how the text was first found by shepherds who stumbled across ruins at Knossos⁶⁷ that had recently been upset by an earthquake. This earthquake had unearthed the tomb of Dictys and revealed a box⁶⁸ resting within. The shepherds steal the box, hoping to find some manner of wealth contained within, but upon discovering only unreadable linden

⁶⁵ Merkle 1996 p. 578.

⁶⁶ Merkle 1996, p. 566

⁶⁷ Septimius explains in his letter that Knossos was the former site of the Cretan king.

⁶⁸ Septimius writes that the box was “skillfully enclosed in tin”, but no such specification is made in the Greek prologue.

tablets in place of treasure, they brought the tablets to a man named Eupraxides⁶⁹. Up to this point, both the Greek and Latin authors have been working to validate the authority of their work using *The Artefact Frame*, seen in the discovered box filled with inscribed linden tablets.

From here, the two prefaces begin to diverge with the introduction of *The Othering Frame*. In the Greek prologue, the tablets that the shepherds find have been inscribed in Phoenician, which Eupraxides recognises as significant, so he hands the tablets over to the governor of the island, Rutilius Rufinus. Believing that these tablets must contain important knowledge, the two men go to present the tablets to the emperor Nero, who recognises them as Phoenician and sets his philologists to decipher their meaning and translate them into Greek. In this example of *The Othering Frame*, The ‘Other’ is the race of Cretans and their foreign alphabet and is a detail that is included to connect the fictional authorship of Dictys the Cretan to the text, while also adding the element of foreignness and intrigue that is an essential hallmark of *The Othering Frame*. In the Latin letter of Septimius, he writes that Praxis had the tablets transliterated into the Attic alphabet from the Greek, before presenting them to Nero. This Greek work was then translated and abridged by Septimius himself in order to provide the current text.

The use of *The Pseudonymous Frame* can be seen in two places in these prefaces. The first is obviously the false attribution to Dictys the Cretan, a quasi-fictional Greek soldier, as the author of the text. While this pseudonymous authorship does indeed grant a level of extradiegetic validation through its proposed nature as a firsthand account, this example particular also contains what may be a slight nod to

⁶⁹ Referred to as Praxis by Septimius. In the Greek prologue he is the master of the shepherds, in Septimius’ letter he is also the owner of the land where this box was found.

the reader indicating the text's fictionality, a reference to the paradox of Epimenides in which "All Cretans are liars."⁷⁰ The second use of this frame can be seen through the use of Nero as a predominant figure in the discovery and translation of these texts. By crediting the historical Nero with the publishing of the *Ephemeris*, another level of authority is established via Nero's supreme authority as emperor. The fact that the historical Nero was indeed fascinated by history and relics of the past just adds another level to the believability of the story⁷¹. We have now seen the use of three individual frames in one introduction, but if we scan down further through the work, there is a delayed prologue within the main body of narrative wherein Dictys introduces himself with an example of *The Self-Referential Frame*. His introduction reads as follows;

"I followed along with these. As to what happened earlier at Troy, I have tried to make my report as accurate as possible, Ulysses being my source. The account that follows, **based as it is on my own observations**, will meet, I hope, the highest critical standards."⁷²

Here, as we saw earlier in *The Syrian Goddess* and *The Gospel of Luke*, the 'author' of the text has inserted themselves directly into the narrative, with a short aside that vouches for the credibility of their work and the unique effort they have put into making their story as accurate as possible.

The *Acta diurna belli Troiani* of Dares is the less complex and less studied of the two Troy novels. As Merkle explains, the text is "much less sophisticated than Dictys', its style is even less ambitious, the narration is more compressed, the

⁷⁰ Ní Mheallaigh (2008) p. 409

⁷¹ Ní Mheallaigh (2008) p. 408

⁷² Frazer (1966) 13.3-13.5.

characters appear more schematic.”⁷³ Its dating appears to be later than that of Dictys, and there are various indicators that would seem to imply that the Dares author knew of the Dictys text. Unlike Dictys, there is no extant Greek original. This has raised queries as to whether the Latin work we have is indeed the full account, or an abridged version of a more extensive Greek text. The account of Dares opens with an imagined letter from the historical scholar Cornelius Nepos to a friend. Within this introductory letter in Dares, we can see examples of *The Artefact Frame*, *The Othering Frame*, and *The Pseudonymous Frame*. Cornelius’ letter opens with the following;

While I was busily engaged in study at Athens, **I found the history which Dares the Phrygian wrote** about the Greeks and Trojans. As its title indicates, **this history was written in Dares’ own hand**. I was very delighted to obtain it and immediately made an exact translation into Latin...Following the straightforward and simple style of the Greek original, **I translated word for word.**⁷⁴

As with the first preface to Dictys, the Dares novel exhibits a double example of *The Pseudonymous Frame* through the use of the historical Cornelius Nepos and the quasi-historical⁷⁵ Dares Phrygius, both of whom are here imagined to have contributed to the creation of this story, Dares in the writing of the account, Cornelius Nepos in the translating. Less additional detail is given in comparison to the *Ephemeris* of Dictys, the only information we are given on the text is that it was discovered by Cornelius while he was engaged at study in Athens. We are given no details of the book itself or the library in which it was found. This lack of extraneous detail creates an example of *The Artefact Frame* that is much less convincing,

⁷³ Merkle (1996) p. 572

⁷⁴ Frazer (1996 B)

⁷⁵ See Merkle (1996) p. 572

lacking as it is in any true layers that would create a successful extradiegetic frame. As for *The Othering Frame*, we are told by Cornelius that his translation is exact, “neither adding nor omitting anything, nor giving any personal touch”⁷⁶ from the Greek original. His process is not described in any greater detail than this and is missing what Hanson refers to as the “relay”⁷⁷ we saw in Dictys, where the story was passed from person to person before finally appearing in the form that we are reading it. Through the Troy novels of Dares and Dictys we can see the ways in which these same frames can be used with varying levels of conviction, leading to variance in the believability of the work itself. The more in-depth and pronounced the detail, the more realistic the work becomes as a whole.

⁷⁶ Frazer (1996 B)

⁷⁷ Hanson (2003) p. 306

The Wonders of Diogenes

Our last example of a Second Sophistic text that exhibits one of these four framing devices is Antonius Diogenes' *Wonders Beyond Thule*, an extensive narrative prose work that composed 24 books, but survives only in a summary in codex 166 of Photios' *Myriabiblios*⁷⁸. While the text of *Wonders Beyond Thule* is no longer available to us, the overview that Photios provides shows an intricate interweaving of narrative framing.

“In the thought, it is most agreeable as, so close to the myths and incredible wonders, it gives to the material of the story a fashion and arrangement which is absolutely believable.”⁷⁹

The novel, according to Photios, begins with a series of letters written under the names of various personages, and with these we can see an example of *The Pseudonymous Frame* that is extraordinarily complex. The first letter is one from the author himself to his sister, Isidora, declaring that he is dedicating these works that follow to her, and places himself in the outermost diegetic layer of the narrative. The text then moves in a level and the figure of Balagros is introduced, also through the use of letters, which he is writing to his wife, Phila. These letters of Balagros describe the discovery of a series of stone coffins with carved epitaphs, which were revealed to him when Tyre had been burned to the ground in its capture by Alexander the Great. However, the curiosity of these epitaphs is quickly overshadowed by the revelation of a small coffer of cypress wood, which contained cypress tablets (an embedded example of *The Artefact Frame*). These cypress tablets purport to be the autobiography of a character yet another narrative layer further in, Deinias the

⁷⁸ Morgan (1985) p. 475

⁷⁹ Photios (1920) Codex 166

Arcadian. These tablets, we are told, were not inscribed by Deinias himself, but rather it is said that he dictated them to his companion Cymbas, whose scribe, Erasinides, copied down the story twice, one copy for Cymbas to take to Arcadia, the other to be buried alongside Deinias⁸⁰. These buried cypress tablets are the ones that contain the story the Deinias told to Cymbas to tell to his mistress, that Balgros is telling to his wife, which the author is telling to his sister. This example of *The Pseudonymous Frame* is one of the most involved uses of an extradiegetic narrative frame that we have seen in use so far, but any and all validation that it supplies is counteracted by Diogenes' own attestation in a letter that he has invented every layer of this fiction. Photius says of Diogenes that,

“he is called the narrator of an ancient intrigue and even while inventing these incredible and untrue stories, he pretends to use the testimony of older authors on the fables he tells; it is on these witnesses he would throw the responsibility for all the mischief in the story he wrote; he even cites at the head of each book the authors who have treated the subject before him so that his incredible stories do not lack the air of witnesses..”⁸¹

With the author's own admission that every level of the narrative is a fabrication, the extradiegetic narrative frame ceases to provide validation, for there is now none to give, and turns in on itself to become an ironical statement on division between reality and the imagined, just as we saw in the frame used by Lucian in his *True Story*.

⁸⁰ Ní Mheallaigh (2008) p. 415

⁸¹ Phoitus (1920) Codex 166

Chapter 6: The Early Christian Preface

*“Fiction would not be a hindrance to doctrine but a major element in the expansion of it.”*⁸²

At this point, we have looked not only at the historical precedence of these four narratological framing devices, but we have also seen the vast and important role that these devices played in well-known prose literature of the early centuries C.E., particularly in relation to the Second Sophistic. What I have collected in the pages that follow is a look at these framing devices in action in some of the earliest apocryphal traditions. The texts gathered and analysed here are primarily taken from the 2016 book compiled by editors Burke and Landau, *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*. Vol 1. Placed alongside other Apocryphal compilations, such as those of Elliot⁸³ and Ehrman⁸⁴, the study of Apocryphal New Testament/ Early Christian literature has a huge body of works from which to draw reference. Thanks to the additions to the accessible body of texts that have been made by Burke and Landau, as well as apocryphicity.ca in general, our view of the entire corpus is ready to change.

In terms of Christian literature more broadly, we have already seen the extradiegetic narrative frame at use in the opening of the Gospel of Luke, but the Apocrypha, wide ranging in terms of date and place of origin, possess numerous examples of these frames seen in use in much the same way as their Second Sophistic counterparts. I have compiled in the pages that follow a case study for each of these frames—**Self-Referential**, **Othering**, **Pseudonymous**, and **Artefact**—as they are

⁸² Wood (1993) p. xviii

⁸³ *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1993)

⁸⁴ *Lost Scriptures* (2003B)

used in John and the Robber, The Acts of Pilate, The Acts of Barnabas, The Apocalypse of Paul, and the Legend of Aphroditianus.

The Self-Referential Frame

The Self-Referential Frame is unique in that it is the only one of the frames that we can see with any true degree of certainty in the Canonical Christian Bible, with the Book of Luke. The piece of Early Christian Apocrypha that I would like to look at as an example for *The Self-Referential Frame* is the story of John the Robber, taken from Burke & Landau (2016).

John and the Robber is essentially an extracanonical companion to the biblical Acts of John. It is a better-known piece of apocrypha as it has been preserved in the texts of famous early Christian writers, including Iraneus and Eusebius⁸⁵. By all indications, the written history of John and the Robber appears to have originated with Clement of Alexandria, where it appears at the end of his homily *Quis dives salveteur*, a homily that was directed primarily at answering the question of the fate of the rich in the Kingdom of Heaven. Likely based on an oral tradition, Clement seems to be the first to ever have put it into writing⁸⁶, which puts the dating of the ultimate origins of this particular story within the bounds of his lifetime, 150-215 CE. The story itself is a fairly straightforward gospel-like tale of a young man who strays from the light of God's teaching, only to repent and be brought back into the fold. It highlights the depth of love and dedication that should be present in all disciples of Christ as well as emphasising the eternal nature of divine forgiveness. What makes the text interesting for our purpose is localised entirely in the first sentence of Clement's introduction to the story:

⁸⁵ Brannan (2016)

⁸⁶ Brannan (2016) cites Butterworth in this assumption

“Listen to a **story (that is) not (actually) a story** but a **genuine account from John the apostle** that was passed down and preserved in memory.”⁸⁷

Here, Clement is using his own authority as a well-respected man of the church to lend validation to the story he is about to tell. Despite the fact that the account of John and the Robber does not appear in any surviving copy of the canonical Acts of John, Clement is insistent that the story he is about to present is not a story at all. And he requires no ‘proof’ for this assertion outside of his own word, and the word of the apostle John himself. This is easily one of the shortest examples of an extradiegetic narrative frame that will be investigated here, but it still presents its own use of fictionalised validation in a relatively small space. This introduction of Clement’s falls into the category of *The Self-Referential Frame* in that the only source of validation we are given is the author’s word. We are expected to trust this word as a higher authority, just as we are asked to trust in the the author of the Gospel of Luke, and just as Lucian asks the reader not to trust him at all. The author, Clement, is also stepping outside of the narrative to address the reader directly, in second person imperative, a primary hallmark of *The Self-Referential Frame*. Following this, the narrative switches from first person to third, and the story itself (which is not a story at all) begins, following the traditional style of the Canonical Acts.

⁸⁷ Trans. Brannon (2016)

The Othering Frame

We have already seen the *The Othering Frame* at work in the texts of Dares and Dictys, where the process of translation was used to create a level of validation through distancing the author from the text and adding a layer of ‘foreign-ness’ to further intrigue the reader. Our example of *The Othering Frame* in the Apocryphal tradition comes from the Acts of Pilate, also known as the Gospel of Nicodemus⁸⁸.

The Acts of Pilate and its companion Christ’s Descent into Hell can be dated definitively to at least the 5th/6th century C.E.⁸⁹. That said, there are indicators that The Acts of Pilate, in particular, can be traced back even earlier. References to events contained in The Acts of Pilate can be seen in the writings of Epiphanius, writing in the late 4th century. We also have historical record of a “spurious Acts of Pilate” published under the Emperor Maxim in the early 4th century, specifically for use *against* the Christians. Elliott states that there is possibility that the creation of this inspired the apocryphal Acts of Pilate as a response⁹⁰. However, if we turn to the text itself, the frame opens with a very precisely calculated date. As the narrator Ananias tells us, he has made this translation

“ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ δεσπότη ἡμῶν Φλαβίου Θεοδοσίου, ἔτους ἑπτακαιδεκάτου, καὶ Φλαβίου Οὐαλεντινιανοῦ τὸ ἕκτον, ἐν ἰνδικτιῶνι θ’.”⁹¹

“In the seventeenth year of the reign of our Emperor Flavius Theodosius and in the sixth year of the Nobility of Flavius Valentinianus, in the ninth tradition.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Elliott (1993) p. 164

⁸⁹ Elliott (1993) p. 165

⁹⁰ Elliott (1993) p. 164

⁹¹ Tischendorf (1853) p. 203-204.

⁹² Elliott (1993) p. 170

Were this an accurate dating, it would place this text's creation firmly in the year 398 C.E. However, this date cannot be taken without question as it is an integral part of The Acts of Pilate's extradiegetic narrative frame. A date so precise is intended to convince the reader that the work of fiction they are about to read has firm basis in reality, as it can be temporally placed. However, this precise date is only one element of this frame.

The use of *The Othering Frame* in The Acts of Pilate is twofold. The first element of which comes from the narrator himself.

“**Εγὼ Ἀνανίας** προτίκτωρ ἀπὸ ἐπάρχων,”⁹³

“**I am Ananias**, commander of the praetorian guard”

Here, the narrator introduces himself at an extradiegetic layer of the text, and establishes himself as both a Roman, specifically a pagan outsider, and a figure of authority. Ananias goes on to tell us that he came to know of Jesus through the sacred scriptures, and was given holy baptism, reforming him in the Christian faith. In this short exchange, Ananias changes from foreigner, or ‘Other’, to become a member of the group for which the text is intended, the baptised Christian. The second level of *The Othering Frame* is seen in Ananias’ description of the text itself. He states after being baptised, he searched the reports that the Jewish people had committed to writing during the time of Pontius Pilate. We are told of his success here,

“**ταῦτα εὗρον τὰ ὑπομνήματα ἐν ἑβραϊκοῖς γράμμασιν καὶ θεοῦ εὐφοξία μεθερμήνευσα γράμμασιν ἑλληνικοῖς εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν πάντων τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.**”⁹⁴

⁹³ Tischendorf (1853) p. 203

⁹⁴ Tischendorf (1853) p. 203

“**I found these acts in the Hebrew language** and according to God’s good pleasure **I translated them into Greek** for the information of all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹⁵

We are given no information on *where* Ananais discovered these Hebrew texts, yet we are asked to believe his words solely on the basis that this account was ‘originally’ written in Hebrew, and is therefore more authentic. This example of extradiegetic narrative framing relies almost entirely on its specific detailing when it comes to dates and names. The diegetic narrative itself opens with a lengthy paragraph explaining the time in which it was written.

“**Ἐν ἔτει πεντεκαιδεκάτῳ** τῆς ἡγεμονίας Τιβερίου Καίσαρος βασιλέως Ῥωμαίων, καὶ Ἡρώδου βασιλέως τῆς Γαλιλαίας, **ἐν ἔννεακαιδεκάτῳ ἔτει** τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτοῦ, **τῇ πρὸ ὀκτὼ καλανδῶν Ἀπριλλίων**, ἣτις ἐστὶν εἰκὰς **πέμπτη Μαρτίου**, ἐν ὑπατεία Ῥούφου καὶ Ῥουβελλίωνος, ἐν **τῷ τετάρτῳ ἔτει τῆς διακοσιοστῆς δευτέρας ὀλυμπιάδος**, ἐπὶ ἀρχιεπέως τῶν Ἰουδαίων Ἰωσήπου τοῦ Καϊάφα.”⁹⁶

“**In the nineteenth year** of the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, when Herod was king of Galilee, **in the nineteenth year** of his rule, **on the eighth day before the Kalends of April**, that is, **the 25th of March**, in the consulate of Rufus and Rubellio, **in the fourth year of the two hundred and second Olympiad**, when Joseph Caiaphas was high priest of the Jews.”⁹⁷

This extended bit of text continues the motif of validation seen in the introductory frame by adding insignificant detail to insignificant detail in order to create a more robust illusion of reality.

⁹⁵ Elliott (1993) p. 170

⁹⁶ Tischendorf (1853) p. 205

⁹⁷ Elliott (1993) p. 170

The Pseudonymous Frame

The work of Apocrypha that I have found to be best suited to *The Pseudonymous Frame* is the Acts of Barnabas, an Apocryphal Act written to display the deeds of the minor apostles Barnabas and John Mark. While a huge number of the Christian apocrypha can be deemed ‘pseudonymous’ in the truest sense of the word, The Acts of Barnabas specifically include an extradiegetic narrative preface wherein the author claims the identity of the figure whose name they are writing under. The Acts of Barnabas was originally composed in Greek but, given its multiple recensions, the Acts of Barnabas that we have is likely a composite work. Certain elements of the story date to the fifth century while other elements indicate that parts of the story come from much earlier traditions⁹⁸. Given that this text appears as a composite work, it can be broken down into its individual segments, the first of which is an introduction that takes the form of an extradiegetic narrative frame. Snyder states that, given inconsistencies with elements of the rest of the Acts, it is possible that the author of the preface may have only known the oral tradition, and created this introduction prior to the establishment of major events that would later make their way into the final recension of the Acts, however the evidence is not sufficiently strong to make any definite claims⁹⁹.

For the frame itself, The Acts of Barnabas opens with a first person account from the point of view of the apostle John Mark. Before even introducing himself by name, however, he begins his preface by declaring his authority as an eyewitness.

“From the descent of the presence of our Savior Jesus Christ...**I gazed upon and saw** the ineffable, sacred, blameless mystery of the Christians...**Since I myself beheld the**

⁹⁸ Snyder (2016) p. 319

⁹⁹ Snyder (2016) p. 321

mystery, to which I am willingly enslaved, I have considered it necessary to explain the mysteries **that I heard and saw.**"¹⁰⁰

We are told three times in just the opening two sentences that what we are about to read is an eyewitness account and therefore indisputable. In the next sentence, the narrator introduces himself as "I, John" and we are given a name to go with the authoritative validation. This repetitive example of *The Pseudonymous Frame* lacks detail upon which to back up its claims, but it nevertheless serves its purpose as a motif.

¹⁰⁰ Snyder (2016) p. 327

The Artefact Frame

Finally we come to the narratological frame which can be seen in the largest amount of works that I have been able to find to date. *The Artefact Frame* was seen earlier in the Epic of Gilgamesh, with the cedar box and its improbably rich tablets of lapis lazuli. We saw it again in the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin, where the reader is instructed to open the tablet box themselves to read the story. There is the reference to the use of *The Artefact Frame* in Antonius Diogenes' *Wonders Beyond Thule*, with the discovery of the cypress box with its cypress tablets upon which the story is based. We also saw *The Artefact Frame* come into use in the history of Dictys, where a tin-covered box with mysterious linden tablets enclosed within was discovered after an earthquake split the ground, revealing it to the world. The two pieces of biblical apocrypha I've found with the most complete examples of *The Artefact Frame* are the Visio Pauli and the Legend of Aphroditianus.

However, before we delve into each of the individual works, I would like to first subdivide *The Artefact Frame* into two distinct categories. The first, which follows the tradition we have already seen in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Photios' summary of Diogenes, and Dictys' Trojan novel, is the discovery of a box of secrets, often unearthed by some sort of natural (or supernatural) event. The second subdivision is subtler, and takes the form of the motif of the hidden library book¹⁰¹. In this aspect of *The Artefact Frame*, the text is presented as one that was laid up in a library somewhere and forgotten, only to rediscovered at a later time by someone who knew what to do with the information that was presented to them, sometimes adding

¹⁰¹ Ní Mheallaigh refers to this as embedded pseudo-documentarism, as apposed to general pseudo-documentarism. (2008) p. 403

an ‘Othering’ element through the author translating the discovered text into a more approachable language.

The Artefact Frame is intriguing for a number of reasons, but perhaps the most profound is the idea that there is a physical, tangible object that exists out there *somewhere*, waiting to be found. It assures the reader that the story is real because it can be tied to something that, while ancient and mysterious, is still something that exists, something that could be touched and examined. This strategy of course ignores that fact that in the case of both a box of tablets and a hidden book, while the physical object is present, the one who possesses it is still relying on the inherent truth of the the words written or inscribed upon it. According to Ní Mheallaigh, this device also walks a dangerous line in that it reifies its fiction through

“(the thrilling suggestion that the fictionally discovered text is the one in the reader’s hands!), yet, paradoxically, its emphasis on the text’s materiality and the constant reminder of the very process of reading itself threatens to undermine that fiction.”¹⁰²

The Artefact Frame, more so than the other three, relies very strongly on the reader’s ability to suspend disbelief. To believe in this story simply for the reason that it is an artefact of a different time.

¹⁰² Ní Mheallaigh (2008) p. 404

The Visio Pauli

The Apocalypse of Paul is one of the better known of the apocryphal works. For one thing, next to the Apocryphal Gospels, the Apocryphal Apocalypses have been the most widely studied and closely investigated¹⁰³. The Apocalypse of Paul also owes some of its familiarity to its popularisation in the medieval period. Many apocryphal works were widely read in the medieval period, as can be seen in the numerous artistic works, from paintings to cathedrals, that include motifs and themes found only in the noncanonical tradition. The Visio Pauli, alongside the earlier mentioned Gospel of Nicodemus, appears to have lent a considerable amount of inspiration directly into works like Dante's *Inferno*¹⁰⁴, with its vivid imagery of Heaven and Hell. According to Elliott, the Apocalypse of Paul is likely to have originated in Egypt in the Greek language sometime in the middle of the third century C.E.¹⁰⁵

The story of The Apocalypse of Paul opens with an unnamed man living in a house in Tarsus during the consulship of Theodosius Augustus the Younger and Cynegius. This house in Tarsus was once that of Saint Paul, and one evening an angel appears to the man living in this house and instructs him to dig up the buildings foundation so that he might discover what is buried beneath it.

“ἀπεκαλύφθη αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου λέγων τον θεμέλιον τῆς οἰξίας ταύτης καταλύσας ὄπερ εὐρήσεις ἔπαρον.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Both are present in their own Greek language collections as early as Tischendorf's early 19th century collections.

¹⁰⁴ Elliott (1993), p. 616.

¹⁰⁵ Elliott (1993), p. 616.

¹⁰⁶ Tischendorf (1851B) p. 34

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him saying that he should tear up the foundations of the house and **discover what was there.**”

Dismissing the angel’s words as a dream, the man does nothing. The angel comes to him twice more, and on his third visit he “beat him and forced him to open the foundation¹⁰⁷”. Digging up the foundation of Saint Paul’s old house the man discovers a marble box (γλωσσόκομον μαρμάρινον¹⁰⁸) inscribed along the sides with the revelation of Saint Paul. Alongside the box, there is also a pair of shoes, which purport to be the shoes Paul had travelled in as he went around teaching the word of God. Not knowing what to do with his find, the man brings the box to the ἄρχων, or chief magistrate of the city. Upon examining the box, the magistrate finds that it has been sealed with lead, which remains unbroken. He then makes the decision to send it along to the emperor Theodosius, being wary of its contents. Upon receiving the box, Theodosius opens it up to reveal a copy of the revelation of Saint Paul, which he had sent forth into Jerusalem. At this point, the introductory story ends as the revelation of Paul begins.

This introduction reads very similarly to the introduction to Dictys’ *Ephemeris*. From the element of boxed tablets buried in the foundation of an important historical location to the extensive relay process through which the text eventually ends up in Jerusalem where our author has ‘discovered’ it. It contains reference to two important historical figures, both Paul and the Emperor Theodosius, which lends this frame extra levels of fictionalised validation. If there were such a thing as a textbook example of *The Artefact Frame*, this would be it.

¹⁰⁷ Elliott (1993), p. 620.

¹⁰⁸ Tischendorf (1851B) p. 35.

The Legend of Aphroditianus

The Legend of Aphroditianus is a curious piece of apocryphal literature for a number of reasons. Much of this is due to the fact that while it is indeed a work of Early Christian fiction, it is one of the rare surviving works in which the story of the birth of Christ has been modified so that it may be more comprehensible and palatable to a pagan audience. As Heyden writes;

“the mixture of pagan and Christian elements in favor of a popular mariology and Christology is striking, since it shows that differentiation between pagans and Christians was actually not as clear as many Christian apologists tried to suggest.”¹⁰⁹

The Legend of Aphroditianus combines numerous elements of pagan religious belief and practice with the more recently established belief system of the Christians. The resulting work therefore becomes a complex, almost jumbled mishmash of religious motifs that takes time and energy to unpack. That isn't to say that this complexity is what relegated The Legend of Aphroditianus to the fringes of apocryphal history. In fact, while remaining relatively unknown in Western tradition, The Legend of Aphroditianus has enjoyed popularity in the Slavic Church from the medieval time to the present, where Aphroditianus is considered among other pagan prophets such as Sibyl and Homer, who foresaw the birth of Christ¹¹⁰.

Rarely transmitted on its own, the story is more often included as part of *De Gestis in Perside*, a religious discussion at the court of the Sassanids, where our oldest surviving copy of the Legend of Aphroditianus can be found. *De Gestis in Perside* is a

¹⁰⁹ “This association is reflected in Aphroditianus’s representation on the bronze portals of Kremlin cathedrals.” Heyden (2016) p. 5

¹¹⁰ Heyden (2016) p. 3

text that appears to have been written in the second half of the 6th century¹¹¹, with the older Legend of Aphroditianus being inserted into the dialogue. *De Gestis in Perside* can be dated by its introductory paragraph, where the character of the Christian historian Philip is mentioned. In the introduction to the 14th century Slavonic translation of *De Gestis in Perside*, this Philip can be identified as Philip of Side who, in the 5th century in Constantinople, compiled the *Historia Christianae*, a book of gathered sources meant to outline early Christian history that survives only in fragments. The oldest surviving copy of The Legend of Aphroditianus is from a Greek manuscript of *De Gestis in Perside*, which dates back to the fifth or sixth century, although there are elements within the work that point to the formation of the Legend of Aphroditianus prior to the fifth century and even pre-Constantine. There are parallels in The Legend of Aphroditianus with both the Letters of Abgar as well as the Syrian goddess and her cults, which were seen in the *De Dea Syria* of Lucian. Eusebius of Caesarea also refers to this legend in his Ecclesiastical Histories, although some key elements of the story are missing. Given these parallels, Heyden determines that the original rendition of The Legend of Aphroditianus was composed sometime in the third century, potentially in Syria¹¹².

De Gestis in Perside opens in the midst of an assembly of bishops organised under the authority of Arrihinatus, the (fictional) king of Persia. These men had come from all across Persian territory and the narrator tells us that he is the only one from

¹¹¹ Andrist (2017)

¹¹² Heyden (2016) p. 7

Roman territory to have been asked along¹¹³. The reason for the assembly is to settle a dispute that had arisen between pagans and Christians, over the writers of history, specifically the pagan author Dionysarus and the Christian author Philip. Aphroditianus is called in as a mediator, being well-known for his honesty and impartiality. Brought before the court, he begins to weave a story connecting the Christian and pagan histories. The frame in this story appears in the second sentence of Aphroditianus' tale.

“Ἐν Περσίδος ἐγνώσθη Χριστός ἀπ' ἀρχῆς· οὐδὲν γὰρ λανθάνει τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ νομομαθεῖς ἅπαντα φιλοπονούτων.”¹¹⁴

“**To Persia**, Christ was known from the beginning, for nothing escapes the learned lawyers of that country, who investigate all things with eagerness.”¹¹⁵

followed by;

“ὥς γὰρ ἐν ταῖς χρυσαῖς ἀρκλαρίαις κεκόλαπται καὶ κείνται ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς βασιλεῖσι λέξω,”¹¹⁶

“Therefore, I will announce **what is inscribed upon the golden tablets** and laid up in the royal temples.”¹¹⁷

In these first two sentences of *The Legend of Aphroditianus*, we can see an example *The Artefact Frame* with a nod to *The Othering Frame*, is seen in the way Aphroditianus references the learned lawyers of Persia. Here, the wise men of Persia are introduced as reliable sources who have invested great time into the study of everything. Then the inscribed golden tablets are introduced, the source of the story Aphroditianus is about to tell.

¹¹³ While *De Gestis in Perside* is a later rendition of the Legend of Aphroditianus, it is worth noting that the first person narrative of the dialogue provides its own example of The Self-Referential Frame.

¹¹⁴ Wirth (1894) p. 160

¹¹⁵ Heyden (2016) p. 11

¹¹⁶ Wirth (1894) p. 160

¹¹⁷ Heyden (2016) p. 11

“ὥς αἱ γεγραμμένοι πτύχαι διδάσκουσιν,”¹¹⁸

“as the inscribed tablets teach-“¹¹⁹

Once again the author inserts into the text that what we are being told comes from these tablets themselves, and therefore a higher level of authority. With this final reminder of the text’s source, the story of The Legend of Aphroditianus begins. The story itself is intricate and fantastical, told from the mouths of enchanted singing statues who describe the miraculous conception of the goddess Hera. The statues are seen first in quarrel over the name of the virgin mother, whether her name is truly Hera (Ἥρα) or if through this process of events becomes Urania (Οὐρανία), the queen of heaven. The female statues argue that she is also Pege (Πηγὴ) “the source” who was loved by the great Helios (Ἥλιος), the divine personification of the sun, through whom she has conceived. They finally settle the matter that she is all these and yet she shall be known as Myria (Μυρία) for

“ἢ τις ἐν πελάγει μυριάγωγον ὀλκάδα φέρει.”¹²⁰

“she bears in her womb, as in the sea, a vessel burdened with a myriad.”¹²¹

The story of Pege Myria continues where she is crowned by a great star sent by Helios, for she is to give birth to the unbegotten newborn who will be known as

Ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος—ἀρχὴ μὲν σωτηρίας, τέλος δὲ ἀπωλείας,¹²²”

“The Beginning and the End—the beginning of salvation, and the end of destruction.”

As soon as this interlude with the singing statues and the crowning of Pege has been completed, the king of Persia sends immediately for the magi under his dominion and

¹¹⁸ Wirth (1894) p. 160

¹¹⁹ Heyden (2016) p. 11

¹²⁰ Wirth (1894) p. 161

¹²¹ Heyden (2016) p. 13

¹²² Wirth (1894) p. 162

sent them away with gifts to follow the star to where the child would be born. When the magi return, they tell the story that was inscribed upon the golden tablets (ἄπερ καὶ αὐτὰ χρυσοῖς πετάλοις ἀνεγράφη οὕτως)¹²³ from the story's introduction, bringing the narrative full circle. In this example of *the Artefact Frame*, the motif of the fictional artefact is continued through the entire narrative to lend its validation to the text.

The idea that these prophetic tablets did indeed bear the story of what the magi would see is at least convincing enough for the assembly listening to Aphroditianus' tale and his arguments ends with the ruling in favour of the Christians. By combining Christian and Pagan history along with the Othering presence of the wise men and the intricate version of *The Artefact Frame*, Aphroditianus has created a story that is not merely believable, but one that highlights the interconnectivity of both pagan and Christian tradition.

¹²³ Wirth (1894) p. 164

Conclusion

“We must restore this work to its sense of unfulfillment, to the shiver of the indefinite, to the breath of the *imperfect*.”¹²⁴

In summation, I would posit that while there may be no true solutions here, what this study has done is opened a door to new possibilities and approaches that can be utilised by future scholars. Throughout this extended textual analysis, my foremost desire was to create a system for looking at connections between texts that have rarely been connected. Over the course of this study, I have assembled a toolset that can be used to investigate the relationship between secular Greek and Christian Greek literature. Through this approach, the interplay of forms and styles in these works has been shown to be undeniable, and that connection alone is worth pursuing. These four frames have created a comprehensive overview of the introductory preface in classical Greek literature and provided an innovative way in which to approach these specific texts as well as all other texts that share these similar features. The motif of fictionalised validation can be found in an astounding number of texts and hopefully through its investigation we can learn more about the culture and peoples who produced these works. By studying the fictional elements of these histories and the historic elements of these fictions, the intent is not to divide and exclude, but rather to look at the way in which the human conceptualisation of history and fiction is inherently interwoven, in all times and through every strata of life. History and fiction are by their nature indefinite, *imperfect*, and most importantly, universal, and it is this that makes them worthy of our interest and our time.

¹²⁴ Genette (1972) p. 267

The stories studied here, from Gilgamesh to Luke, Lucian to Aphroditianus could not be more different, each with their own background and agenda, and yet still there is a clear thread connecting all of them. A real and tangible motif that can be identified and evaluated. By isolating this motif and subdividing it into the four frames of Othering, Pseudonymous, Self-Referential, and Artefact, more precise similarities can be drawn between these texts and others like them. It can be seen in the destroyed foundations in Dictys and the Visio Pauli that reveal tablets containing untold truths, in the exotic legacy of Herodotus and The Acts of Pilate bolstered by the concept of the foreign, in the earnestness of address in Luke and Lucian where we are asked to trust. The specific purpose of the story becomes inconsequential, the narrative itself takes a backseat. Within the extradiegetic narrative frames of these works, the authors of all of these texts have created a bridge between our physical world and one that is unknown, possible and believable, but always one step beyond our grasp. This motif of the extradiegetic frame is the link that not only holds these fictions together, but makes them more than just 'fiction'. By rendering these stories as plausible, these texts are lifted to a higher level, one in which they are constantly in question. This is not a bad thing. These works deserve to be read, to be studied and interrogated indefinitely, to be torn apart and put back together in attempts to find the bright pieces of them that make them unique, as well as a part of a larger whole.

*“Even—or especially?—when he is silent, the critic says too much.
Perhaps the best thing would be, as with Proustian narrative itself, never to “finish,”
which is, in one sense, never to start.”¹²⁵*

¹²⁵ Genette (1972) p. 268

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