

# Lyric Addresses to Ancient and New Gods

Mesomedes, *Proems – Hymns – Prayers*

*Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris  
ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia  
XLV*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# SAPERE

Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris  
ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia

Schriften der späteren Antike  
zu ethischen und religiösen Fragen

Herausgegeben von  
Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, Reinhard Feldmeier  
und Heinz-Günther Nesselrath

unter der Mitarbeit von  
Natalia Pedrique und Andrea Villani

Band XLV





# Lyric Addresses to Ancient and New Gods

Mesomedes, *Proems – Hymns – Prayers*

Introduction, Text, Translation and  
Interpretative Essays by

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Egert Pöhlmann, Oliver Schelske

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## SAPERE

Greek and Latin texts of Later Antiquity (1st–4th centuries CE) have for a long time been overshadowed by those dating back to so-called ‘classical’ times. The first four centuries of our era have, however, produced a cornucopia of works in Greek and Latin dealing with questions of philosophy, ethics, and religion that continue to be relevant even today. The series SAPERE (Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia, ‘Writings of Later Antiquity with Ethical and Religious Themes’), now funded by the German Union of Academies, undertakes the task of making these texts accessible through an innovative combination of edition, translation, and commentary in the form of interpretative essays.

The acronym ‘SAPERE’ deliberately evokes the various connotations of *sapere*, the Latin verb. In addition to the intellectual dimension – which Kant made the motto of the Enlightenment by translating ‘sapere aude’ with ‘dare to use thy reason’ – the notion of ‘tasting’ should come into play as well. On the one hand, SAPERE makes important source texts available for discussion within various disciplines such as theology and religious studies, philology, philosophy, history, archaeology, and so on; on the other, it also seeks to whet the readers’ appetite to ‘taste’ these texts. Consequently, a thorough scholarly analysis of the texts, which are investigated from the vantage points of different disciplines, complements the presentation of the sources both in the original and in translation. In this way, the importance of these ancient authors for the history of ideas and their relevance to modern debates come clearly into focus, thereby fostering an active engagement with the classical past.



## Preface to this Volume

Between the third and the sixth decade of the second century CE (about 120–160) Mesomedes, a Cretan court musician to Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, wrote some short lyric poems, only five of which were known at first. Scholarly interest was long focused mainly on the metric and musical notation accompanying three of these poems, as well as on the scholia and their interpretation. In 1903, K. Horna however found eight new poems (nos. 4–11 Heitsch) in a late thirteenth-century manuscript (Ott. gr. 59). The metrics and style of these poems favour attribution to Mesomedes, because the rhythmic-musical scholia preceding both the old and new poems agree with each other. So now Mesomedes' corpus counts thirteen poems in all (three so-called poems included). This volume presents six of these texts, namely addresses, hymns and prayer to gods, both traditional Greek deities and "new" gods. In addition to a new edition of the Greek texts, a new translation, both in English and in Italian, is presented with a commentary, and a number of essays illuminate these texts and their author's work from different perspectives. Moreover, this volume aims to illustrate characteristic aspects of the distinctive cultural and religious "climate" that developed in the Roman Empire starting from the second century CE.

During my years of research at university I studied Mesomedes and his poems, especially the one entitled *To the swan*, and the hymns *To Physis* and *To Isis*. Thus, my main areas of research have become Imperial Greek Literature, History of Religions and related literary, epigraphic and papyrological documents of the Imperial period. Since the Seminar für Klassische Philologie of the University of Göttingen is, where I did part of my research, I am very grateful to the editors of SAPERE for including a volume on Mesomedes in their series: I express my heartfelt thanks to Heinz-Günther Nesselrath (Professor for Greek Philology, University of Göttingen), for supporting this editorial project with his so mindful checking all the work, and likewise to the other editors of this volume, Reinhard Feldmeier (Professor emeritus for New Testament, University of Göttingen), Rainer Hirsch-Luipold (Professor for New Testament and The History of Ancient Religion, University of Bern).

They have entrusted me with the presentation of Mesomedes and his poems, together with my edition of the text, Italian translation and

the notes on the translation. The English translation of Mesomedes' poems has been entrusted to Richard Gordon (Honorary Professor of the Religions of Antiquity, University of Erfurt), whom I would like to thank, too, for having reviewed my English version of the commentary and a number of paragraphs in the Introduction, as well as for having provided additional items and perspectives to the notes on the translation. He also reviewed the English version of some of the essays of Egert Pöhlmann. His historical-religious specialization is well documented also in his essay.

Important philosophical themes of the Imperial period have been discussed by Oliver Schelske (since 2023 Professor of Classics, University of Leipzig), a knowledgeable expert on these issues.

Egert Pöhlmann (Professor emeritus of Greek Philology, University of Erlangen) is an eminent specialist of long standing on ancient music and especially on Mesomedes' music. I would like to thank him for his significant contributions to this volume: he has provided essays on ancient documents of Greek music, re-opened the lively discussion on possible proposals of attribution of other texts to Mesomedes, and also provided generously some illustrations of Mesomedes' ancient manuscripts.

Together, we have compiled a volume presenting important aspects of Greek literature, music, philosophy and religion of the Imperial period, foregrounding on Mesomedes' poems and their philosophical-religious interest, and thereby shedding new light on both this Greek poet and cultural life in general of second century CE Rome.

Finally, I would like to extend my express thanks to all members of the SAPERE staff for their constructive advice: in particular to Dr. Natalia Pedrique, without whom this volume could not have been published and who has followed the authors and their contributions in the work in progress of the project over many years, and to Dr. Andrea Villani for his useful help; to Dr. Simone Seibert, responsible for the entire editorial process and the compilation of the bibliography. A further proofreading I owe to Prof. Nesselrath. Dr. Natalia Pedrique drew up the general index and Maria Gkamou the source index. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Serena Pirrotta, who (in her own SAPERE days) has initiated this editorial project.

Rome, March 2022

Sara Lanna

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## *A. Introduction*



# Introduction

*Sara Lanna*<sup>1</sup>

Not from the beginning the gods revealed to mortals all things,  
but over time, though searching, they are discovering what is the best.  
(Xenoph. fr. 20 Gentili / Prato)

But Titan appeared, as an ally  
of the swan,  
with his fire dart;  
...

And the swan came winging  
on air, happy.  
(Mesom. *Cycn.* 10.13–15, 19–20)

Nous rentrâmes à Alexandrie quelques jours plus tard. Le poète Pancrates organisa pour moi une fête au Musée; on avait réuni dans une salle de musique une collection d'instruments précieux: les vieilles lyres doriennes, plus lourdes et moins compliquées que les nôtres, voisinaient avec les cithares recourbées de la Perse et de l'Égypte, les pipeaux phrygiens aigus comme des voix d'eunuques, et de délicates flûtes indiennes dont j'ignore le nom. Un Éthiopien frappa longuement sur des calebasses africaines. Une femme ... joua d'une harpe triangulaire au son triste. Mésomédès de Crète, mon musicien favori, accompagna sur l'orgue hydraulique la récitation de son poème de *La Sphinge*, œuvre inquiétante, sinueuse, fuyante comme le sable au vent. La salle de concerts ouvrait sur une cour intérieure: des nénuphars s'y étalaient sur l'eau d'un bassin, sous les feux presque furieux d'une après-midi d'août finissante.

(M. Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien* [Paris 1974] 196)

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<sup>1</sup> The sections 1 (The Author and His Historical Context) and 2 (Proems, Hymns. Prayers: The Generic Forms of Mesomedes' Poetry) of this Introduction were translated from Italian into English by Richard Gordon.

## 1. The Author and His Historical Context

### 1.1. A Citharodic Poet from Crete

We do not possess much information regarding the lyric poetry of the Imperial period, nor indeed many texts: Greek authors at this time were under the influence of the domination of Rome, even when they were not destined to serve at the court itself. Of ancient musical production still less has survived. Mesomedes is one of a tiny number of Greek authors who form an exception under each head. He was born in Crete around 100 CE, though we know nothing of his life there.<sup>2</sup> He was a lyric poet, author of μέλη,<sup>3</sup> or rather citharodic odes.<sup>4</sup> He was also a performer on the lyre, accompanying his compositions to musical settings; that is, he both sang and played, as was typical for ancient citharodes. We may take it that he was well-known in this mode already in his homeland.

Up to the end of the Archaic period, citharodes performed in the context of musical competitions that took place during religious festivals. They competed against one another for victory, which brought them glory (for which they were honoured by their own cities) and renown (the precondition for winning, derived from other performances). Between the Archaic and the Imperial period, citharodism altered its character in different ways. In its Archaic and Classical form (up to Phrynis) it was not a particularly creative musical form: the citharodic poet merely composed the hymnic proem, while the remainder was taken from Homer or other poets (cf. Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 6.1, 1133B–C).<sup>5</sup> Thereafter (we do not know exactly when)<sup>6</sup> it became customary for the professional performer at musical competitions to sing selec-

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<sup>2</sup> *Suda* μ 668: Μεσομήδης-Κρής, λυρικός, γεγονώς ἐπὶ τῶν Ἀδριάνου χρόνων, ἀπελεύθερος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα φίλοις, “Mesomedes: lyric poet, a Cretan, born at the time of Hadrian, whose freedman he was and one of his very close friends”. Eusebius (ap. Jerome, *Chron.* 284 F.22–24, 202 HELM) put his *floruit* in the CCXXX Olympiad (141–144 CE), i.e. under Antoninus Pius.

<sup>3</sup> Jerome, *Chron.* 284 F.22–24, 202 HELM: *Mesomedes Cretensis citharicorum carminum musicus poeta cognoscitur*; cf. Cassius Dio 77.13.7: (Caracalla) τῷ τε Μεσομήδει τῷ τοὺς κιθαρωδικούς νόμους συγγράψαντι κενοτάφιον ἔχῳσε; *Suda* μ 668: λυρικός ... γράφει καὶ ἄλλα διάφορα μέλη, followed by the same phrase from Cassius Dio.

<sup>4</sup> The equivalence also emerges from a comparison between the Greek and Latin sources, and from an epigram of Lucil(l)ius, *AP* 11.133.1, mocking a certain Eutyichides, ὁ μελογράφος; cf. BÉLIS 2003a, 223f.; 1994, 44–46.

<sup>5</sup> The fragment is to be attributed to Heracleides, cf. ERCOLES 2008, 130 n. 11, with bibliography relating to other attributions.

<sup>6</sup> ERCOLES 2008, 129 and n. 10 with further bibliography. In Heracleides’ day the citharodic practice of setting Homer to music and performing at competitions seemed traditional (cf. the passage of Ps.-Plut. already cited).

tions from the Homeric poems or other examples of Greek poetry: “and indeed [sc. Heraclides Ponticus] states that Terpander, as composer of citharodic *nomoi*, set his own poetry and that of Homer to melodies in accordance with the rules of each *nomos*, and then performed them at competitions” (Heracl. Pont. fr. 157 Wehrli). The performance of a musician-poet who was an excellent musician with a fine voice and who could manage a citharodic *nomos*, in which both music and poetry were composed and performed by the same individual, was capable of enthusing an audience as no other Hellenistic art-form could.<sup>7</sup> Once established, this ‘new music’ would transform the older ritual singing and make of it a spectacular musical event. Already around 442 BCE Pericles had an Odeion especially built at Athens to ensure the optimum acoustics for the art. Given that it was rebuilt after the Sullan sack in 86 BCE, it was clearly still in use then. To our knowledge, similar buildings were erected at Patras, Corinth, Epidaurus, Gortyn on Crete, Taormina in Sicily, and then Pompeii and Aosta in Roman times.<sup>8</sup> The citharodes travelled from city to city, from competition to competition,<sup>9</sup> in search of the glory attained by those whose virtuosity brought victory. By thus ensuring that their name was recorded in the inscribed victor-lists, they won public acclaim. In the Roman period too the poet-musicians, adjusted now to a more restrained musical taste, performed at competitions and in designated venues in cities – theatres, *odeia*, palace halls. The name Mesomedes happens not to survive on inscriptions recording the victors in such competitions.<sup>10</sup> But he must have been extraordinarily good for Hadrian to have chosen him as his favourite.

### 1.2. *First a Slave, then a Freedman at Rome*

We do not know when Mesomedes came to Rome, nor whether he arrived there as a free man, or first as a slave and then a freedman of his patron, the emperor Hadrian. Around 115 CE Jewish revolts broke out in Egypt, Cyrenaica and Cyprus. Hadrian was praetorian governor of Syria when Trajan died on August 7, 117 CE. After putting an end to Trajan’s Parthian war at the price of abandoning the territory gained, Hadrian entered Rome on June 9, 118. Was it on this occasion, together with the new emperor, that Mesomedes arrived in Rome? If so, assum-

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<sup>7</sup> See J. A. F. DELGADO / F. PORDOMINGO, “La actividad poético-musical de época helenística en las Vitae de Plutarco”, in: GOSTOLI / FONGONI / BIONDI 2017, 451–474.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. PRIVITERA / PRETAGOSTINI 1997, I 420.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. CINALLI, “Storia di ‘poeti vaganti’ a Delfi: quando il viaggio nasconde un imprevisto”, in: GOSTOLI / FONGONI / BIONDI 2017, 385–409.

<sup>10</sup> See p. 56f. below.

ing he was a prisoner of war, we must suppose that he had been taken from Crete, or from some other city in Greece, Egypt or Asia Minor. Under the Empire people could be enslaved either by being made prisoners of war or because they had lost their freedom through debt. If a slave, Mesomedes might however have met Hadrian on one of his early journeys to Greece as emperor – in that case we would have to suppose that he had been enslaved in Greece, possibly for debt. Being captured by pirates or a robber-band might also lead to one's being sold into slavery. Is that what happened to Mesomedes? On the other hand, there do not seem to have been many robbers interested in a musical artiste, albeit one who might be able to teach Greek and music. However that may be, whenever he arrived as a slave in Rome, at the same time as Hadrian, or earlier than 118, or later, the emperor, as a writer, musician, refined aesthete, and an admirer of Greek culture, found himself in sympathy with the Cretan musician – to judge from his style an inspired, self-confident poet, who in his poetry likens himself to a swan who escapes being killed by a 'boorish' goatherd by gaily flying off (*Cycn.* 10.4–5, 19–20). Music and poetry, or perhaps again the cultic inclination, given Hadrian's interests, may have furthered the development of friendship. A slave must have considered himself lucky to be able to make use of his cultural achievements instead of being assigned to other duties; the emperor was surely interested in improving his own artistic attainments or his knowledge of Greek culture by learning from Mesomedes. As a slave Mesomedes was probably required to teach Greek, citharodic art, and literature at court, and not simply to Hadrian, just as the emperor required. At any rate, the two became friends and the emperor freed the slave but retained him at court as a freedman-poet.

We know that at Hadrian's court there were at least two other poets, composers (μελοποιοί) and citharodes, who are known from a number of inscriptions, namely T. Aelius Alcibiades of Nysa<sup>11</sup> and P. Aelius Pompeianus Paion, "poet with many victories".<sup>12</sup> We do not know whether Mesomedes competed in the great panhellenic competitions for poets and citharodes. It was he, and none other, who was Hadrian's friend, to the point that it was he whom Hadrian commissioned to compose the elegy for the emperor's ἐρώμενος Antinous, the ἔπαινος

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<sup>11</sup> See STEPHANIS 1988, 40 no. 134; *IK* 11.1, 22 (Nysa, second century CE); also L. ROBERT, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques* (Paris 1938) 45–53.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. STEPHANIS 1988, 350 no. 1979; *IK* 11.1, 22.1–6 (Nysa, second century CE); See also FEIN 1994, 118–126; BÉLIS 1994, 50, and 2003a, 224.

εἰς Ἀντίνοον, which has not survived.<sup>13</sup> On the basis of the *Historia Augusta*, we may suppose that, as the court singer, Mesomedes arranged the concerts with which Hadrian, as himself a great lover of poetry and proud of his talents as citharode and singer,<sup>14</sup> liked to enliven his banquets.<sup>15</sup> The *Vita* ascribed to ‘Spartianus’ claims that Hadrian honoured the *musici* and other artists, playwrights and scholars at court,<sup>16</sup> he was always ready to criticize and even humiliate them *ut doctior*, “as though he thought himself more accomplished”.<sup>17</sup> Mesomedes was one of these specialized professional musicians.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3 *At the Court of Antoninus Pius*

Hadrian’s successor Antoninus Pius likewise included Mesomedes among his poets.<sup>19</sup> According to an anecdote referring to this period in the *Historia Augusta*, Antoninus cancelled (*subtraxit*) the salaries paid to a considerable number of hangers-on, and reduced (*inminuit*) that of Mesomedes *lyricus*.<sup>20</sup> We may hazard two hypotheses here: if Antoninus reduced Mesomedes’ salary as part of a policy of cutting payments

<sup>13</sup> See again the *Suda* entry: γράφει οὖν εἰς Ἀντίνοον ἔπαινον. LEBEK 1973 suggested attributing the *Hymn to Antinous* inscribed in *IKourion* 104 to Mesomedes (MITFORD 1971, 197 with n. 1 on p. 198, dating it to 130/131). On the discussion relating to the attribution, see LANNA 2013, 64–67, arguing that it is best to attribute it to a pupil of Mesomedes. But see Egert Pöhlmann’s contribution to this volume (p. 247–257), arguing for Mesomedes himself.

<sup>14</sup> On Hadrian’s poetry, see BOWIE 2002, 172–185; TURCAN 2008, 141–144, 172–174; cf. too GALIMBERTI 2007, 155–158.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Hist. Aug. Hadr.* 26.4: *in convivio tragoedias, comoedias, Atellanas, sambucas, lectores, poetas pro re semper exhibit.* According to WHITMARSH (2004, 383) nos. 7–13 HEITSCH “look more like sympotic pieces. If Mesomedes was as closely connected with Hadrian as the tradition suggests, these poems may have been performed at the emperor’s famous literary symposia, perhaps even on tour with the ‘restless emperor’”.

<sup>16</sup> *Hist. Aug. Hadr.* 16.8.

<sup>17</sup> *Hist. Aug. Hadr.* 15.10. On Hadrian’s relations with contemporary intellectuals, see GALIMBERTI 2007, 168f., 182–184.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. BÉLIS 2003a, 225. On literary figures connected to Hadrian, cf. FEIN 1994, 214–220; TURCAN 2008, 139–141.

<sup>19</sup> Syncellus, *Ecl. Chron.* 662, 428 MOSSHAMMER names Mesomedes, ‘poet of citharodic *nomoi*’, first among well-known poets under Antoninus Pius. He also names L. Calvenus Taurus, ‘(who was) a Platonist and from Berytus’. That suggests that Mesomedes really was well-regarded even under Antoninus Pius: Taurus, although virtually nothing of his work survives except references in Gellius, *NA* 12, and citations in later commentators such as Iamblichus and Philoponus, was an eminent Middle Platonist philosopher and head of some sort of Academy in Athens between c. 145–165. I owe these observations to Richard Gordon.

<sup>20</sup> *Hist. Aug. Anton.* 7.7–8: (Antoninus Pius) *salaria multis subtraxit, quos otiosos videbat accipere, dicens nihil esse sordidius, quam si rem publicam is adroderet, qui nihil in eam suo labore conferret. unde etiam Mesomedi lyrici salarium inminuit.*

to those whose work was of no value to the state, the activity of a *musicus* would have been considered of no further use, or its value no longer recognised.<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, the reduction specifically of Mesomedes' salary underscored the gesture and was intended as a warning to the other *otiosi*.<sup>22</sup>

Did this decision alter Mesomedes' relation to the imperial court? We cannot say. However, it seems that he did not die at Rome,<sup>23</sup> since Caracalla, himself likewise a citharode, had a cenotaph built for him, as a 'guide', a 'model', among the composers of citharodic *nomoi*.<sup>24</sup> We do not otherwise hear of Mesomedes as a teacher; but if Caracalla, setting out to learn to play the lyre, paid him homage in this fashion, he evidently did so because he considered him a maestro of the art.<sup>25</sup>

#### 1.4. A Lyric Poet of the Imperial Period

Although we do have a few examples of Greek lyric of the first centuries of the imperial period, we lack accounts of individual authors whose poetry survives. The main authors are writers of prose, first of all Plutarch and Epictetus, and then Aelius Aristides, Lucian, Marcus Aurelius, and the various novelists. Interest in poetry seems to have diminished, and, though it survived in the context of banquets, competitions, religious festivals and rituals, it generally amounted to poems of just a few strophes, apart from Orphic literature (specifically the *Hymns*), *Magical Hymns* and oracular poetry. It is striking that most of what survives is anonymous. The personal voice of the poet seems to have lost any meaningful pedagogic function within the state. In Latin literature, too, the prosperous and vital years of Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius saw no significant blossoming of poetic talent. From Pliny the Younger's correspondence, poetry appears as a refined hobby of the upper class rather than a true vocation. In the age of grand orators and erudition poetry seems to have lost its cultural significance.<sup>26</sup> Against this background, the figure of Mesome-

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<sup>21</sup> "Antonin, nettement tourné vers l'archaïsme romain, ne pouvait avoir de l'indulgence pour cet affranchi d'Hadrien" (J.-P. CALLU, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. I 1: *Introduction générale. Vies d'Hadrien, Aelius, Antonin* [Paris 1992] 155 n. 76, referring to PIR<sup>2</sup> M 503: *sine dubio Hadrianus ei salarium concessit, quod ei Antonius Pius imminuit*).

<sup>22</sup> "This etiam shows that the emperor intended to make a spectacular example by punishing one of the most prominent courtiers, without however removing him entirely from his place" (BÉLIS 2003a, 224).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. MUSSO 1998, 35.

<sup>24</sup> See Cassius Dio 77.13.7, cited in n. 3 above.

<sup>25</sup> On Mesomedes' music, see the contribution by Egert Pöhlmann, p. 235–246 below.

<sup>26</sup> B. CONTE / E. PIANEZZOLA, *Lezioni di Letteratura latina. Corso integrato*, 3. *L'età imperiale* (Milan 2010) 565.

des becomes noteworthy. We are interested in him because he provides us with shards of the Greek – and Latin – lyric experience of his period, alongside Hadrian, the emperor-poet.

The poetry of Mesomedes that we can read today reveals a poet who favoured brief compositions: the longest, no. 8 Heitsch, contains all of 29 lines. The structure too is simple. The genres practised are those of the court and its celebrations: the hymn, above all, and compositions suited to the entertainment of guests at banquets, which combine elements of different genres, and finding a place for discreet flattery of the emperor.

### 1.5. *Mesomedes' Poems*

Thirteen poems by Mesomedes survive. Two in the *Greek Anthology* actually bear his name, and are thus certainly by him, namely an ἔκφρασις Σφριγγός, *Description of the Sphinx* (AP 14.63)<sup>27</sup> and a poem describing the manufacture of glass (*APlan.* 323).<sup>28</sup> Eleven further poems have been ascribed to him by a succession of scholars, although no manuscript explicitly attributes them to Mesomedes: the invocation *To the Muse* (no. 1 Heitsch, εἰς Μοῦσαν), the hymns *To Helios* (no. 2, ὕμνος εἰς Ἥλιον) and *To Nemesis* (no. 3, ὕμνος εἰς Νέμεσιν), compositions that follow a metrical-musical treatise in several manuscripts; and then eight poems transmitted solely by the codex *Ottobonianus graecus* 59: the hymns εἰς τὴν Φύσιν, *To Nature* (no. 4), εἰς τὴν Ἴσιν, *To Isis* (no. 5), a poem εἰς Ἀδριαν, *To the Adriatic Sea* (no. 6), two poems εἰς ὠρολόγιον, *To a sundial* (nos. 7 and 8), an ἔκφρασις σπόγγου, *Description of a sponge* (no. 9), and two fables, εἰς κύκνον, *To a swan* (no. 10) and εἰς κώνωπα, *To a gnat* (no. 11).

The value of classifying such poems by genre is that it allows the reader better to grasp their significance and compositional aims. However, Mesomedes was adept at introducing variations into the tradition, starting with metre, and then structure, by drawing upon elements derived from different genres. Poem no. 1, as transmitted, consists of two introductory invocations, the first *To the Muse* (1a), the second *To Calliope and Apollo* (1b); poems no. 2–5 are hymns.<sup>29</sup> The metrical composition *To the Adriatic Sea* (no. 6) uses hymnic formulae<sup>30</sup> and ex-

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<sup>27</sup> HEITSCH 1963, 31f. (II 12). The title is due to VON WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF 1921, 605.

<sup>28</sup> HEITSCH 1963, 32 (II 13).

<sup>29</sup> These poems are the topic of the present volume, which we will look at in greater detail below.

<sup>30</sup> The introduction (l. 1f.) is in formal terms a hymnic *propositio* (see below “The Hymn: a genre and its development”, p. 127–148). The choice of solemnly addressing a

pressions<sup>31</sup> (cf. ll. 1–5, 10–12, 13, 16), but also elements of the *προ-πεμπτικόν*;<sup>32</sup> Whitmarsh considers it an *epibatêrion*.<sup>33</sup> Given that in formal terms the poem shares a number of structural elements of a non-cultic hymn, with apostrophe, prayer and a promise to sacrifice, to a personified aspect of nature (in the imperial period we often find abstract entities or objects in nature being personified),<sup>34</sup> I prefer to take it, in generic terms, as a prayer,<sup>35</sup> and for that reason in this volume it will be analyzed together with the poems already mentioned.

Poems 7 and 8 also share some similarities to hymns,<sup>36</sup> although the unusual subject, a sundial, and the descriptive treatment, link it to the *ἐκφοράσεις* (nos. 9 and 13).<sup>37</sup> No doubt the implicit aim of celebrating the emperor (presumably Hadrian) made it necessary to adopt a solemn, rather high-flown tone in treating the objects described – hence the formal outcome.

Poem 9, *Description of a sponge*, ‘ein galantes Billett’<sup>38</sup> in apocrota and paroemiaci, consists of a statement of the gift offered (l. 1f.), followed by a description of the object (ll. 3–10) routed through references in myth to the use of sponges in the depths of the sea. Lines 11–12 have a narrative structure; there follows the description of the treatment and uses of the sponge now in reality, which is obtained through the heroic efforts of divers. The finale (ll. 13–15), which completes the exemplifications of the uses of the sponge, alludes to matters erotic, thus revealing the poem’s true intention. The result is “a *tour-de-force* lyrical treatment of an unlikely topic”.<sup>39</sup> Paul the Silentiary took over several phrases from this poem in two of his epigrams (*AP* 6.65 and 66).<sup>40</sup> In the second of these, the soft stone of the ink-well, porous as a sponge,<sup>41</sup>

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poem to the Adriatic, appealing to the sea as to a divinity, made it necessary to build in elements typical of a hymn, albeit undefined for an entity that is just an expanse of water, by means of the interrogative phrases (see also l. 3).

<sup>31</sup> The expression τὸ πανόλβιον ὕδωρ is interesting in this connection, cf. n. 126 on the translations, p. 114 below. PERNOT (1993, 246) calls the poem a ‘hymn’, citing the parallels that “font ressortir le caractère hymnique du discours *A la mer Égée*” by Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 44).

<sup>32</sup> See REGENAUER 2016, 283–288.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. WHITMARSH 2004, 381.

<sup>34</sup> See p. 23 below.

<sup>35</sup> See p. 18–39 below.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. HORNA 1928, 31.

<sup>37</sup> See DELATTE 1913, 146–156; HORNA 1928, 21; A. REHM, “Zum V. Hymnos des Mesomedes”, *Philologus* 83 (1928) 267–272; WHITMARSH 2004, 381 with n. 21.

<sup>38</sup> HORNA 1928, 19.

<sup>39</sup> HOPKINSON 1994, 80.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. HORNA 1928, 26; BALDINI 1932, 28.

<sup>41</sup> Paul. Silent. *AP* 6.66.4 ~ Mesom. 9.2.

and the sponge itself<sup>42</sup> are the writing-tools offered to the Muse by Kallimene, whose eyes and hands are now weakened by old age (l. 9f.). In Mesomedes, however, the sponge dissipates “the weariness of love’s wrestling” (l. 15).<sup>43</sup>

As regards theme and organisation of the narrative materials, the fable *To a swan* (no. 10) recalls three poems in *AP* Bk. IX (76 [Antipater], cf. 12.42; 343 [Archias]; 396 [Paul. Silent.]).<sup>44</sup> Two of these epigrams, featuring a blackbird which escapes from the snare because it is a sacred bird, antedate Mesomedes; but he effects a variation, mainly in the metre (anapaestic monometers almost all ending in proceleusmatics); beyond that, by introducing new protagonists, namely a swan trapped on an ice-bound river who risks having its head chopped off by a boorish goatherd. Mesomedes thereby effects an assimilation of the poet and his poem to a bird known for its sweet song, the swan being an image of the poet who enjoys divine protection, and thus occupies one pole of a binary opposition to boorishness.<sup>45</sup> We should here note especially the variations on several literary motifs.<sup>46</sup>

No. 11, *To a gnat* is a fable in paroemiaci and apocrota. Phaedrus, in transposing Aesop, was the first to use the iambic senarius in narrating fables.<sup>47</sup> Valerius Babrius later once again tried versifying the corpus of Greek fables in his *Μυθίαμβοι Αἰσώπειοι*.<sup>48</sup> Until then the fable had apparently not existed as an independent poetic form.<sup>49</sup> We do not

<sup>42</sup> Paul. Silent. *AP* 6.66.7 ~ Mesom. 9.1–2.

<sup>43</sup> REGENAUER 2016, 342 with the app. crit. on p. 343. WHITMARSH offers a poetological interpretation of various elements and images throughout the poem (2004, 396).

<sup>44</sup> See HORNA 1928, 28; BALDINI 1932, 30; E. A. PEZOPOULOS, “Φιλολογικά Μελετήματα”, *EEBS* 11 (1935) [421–448] 428. On these three poems, concerned with bird-trapping, cf. VAN DIJK 1997, 267f. and nn. 53–54 with bibliography.

<sup>45</sup> On this topic see L. SBARDELLA, “Il poeta e il bifolco. Il percorso poetico di uno schema oppositivo da Saffo a Teocrito”, *Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici* 38 (1997) 127–141 and *idem*, *Filita: testimonianze e frammenti poetici* (Rome 2000) 132f. I confine myself here to observing simply that the illiterate ἀνήρ ἀγροεῖος (Alcman fr. 16.1 DAVIES), or ἀγροιώτης (Sapph. fr. 57.1 VOIGT), or ἀγροιώτης (Philitas fr. 10.1 POWELL), to which the passages analysed by Sbardella refer, becomes in Mesomedes an ἄμουσος αἰπόλος ἀγρότας, ‘a boorish country goatherd’ (l. 4f.). I discuss such passages further in LANNA 2009b, 221–223.

<sup>46</sup> On the poem as a whole, see further LANNA 2009b.

<sup>47</sup> For the revival of the iambic senarius by Phaedrus, see A. GUAGLIANONE, “Fedro e il suo senario”, *Rivista di Studi Classici* 16 (1968) 91–104.

<sup>48</sup> We have no reliable information about the chronology or provenance of Babrius. He is supposed to have been of Italian origin but to have lived in Syria in the second century CE. His fables must have been circulated and read between the late second and early third century CE, whereas he may have produced them somewhat earlier, cf. M. J. LUZZATTO / A. LA PENNA, *Babrii Mythiambi Aesopei* (Leipzig 1986) vi–xi (esp. ix).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. SCHIRRU 2009, 9. Demetrius of Phaleron had a prose collection of the ‘Aesopic fables’ compiled in the late fourth century BCE. From the eighth to the fourth century in

know whether Mesomedes was prompted by Babrius (given the uncertainties regarding the relative chronology), or by epigrammatic poetry (cf. n. 43 above) to give an autonomous poetic form to the 'Aesopic fable';<sup>50</sup> at any rate, whether the choice of conferring literary status on the genre was due to Babrius' influence (who, however, worked in 'limping' iambic trimeters), or Mesomedes picked up a strand of the ancient fable in verse and helped transform it into a poetic genre, he certainly demonstrated his capacity of making his own way both formally and in terms of content. The content of no. 11 is a blend of elements found in two Aesopic fables, the theme of *The Gnat and the Bull* (137 Perry, cf. Babrius *Mythiamb.* 1.84 Luzzatto / La Penna), while Mesomedes' protagonists are an elephant and a gnat, who figure together in another fable.<sup>51</sup> In Mesomedes' text we also find other elements that recall the moral of the fable: l. 5, "and he spoke with a mocking laugh (γέλωτος)" can be compared to the beginning of the finale of Babrius' "Someone who ... is absurd (γελοῖος)" (84.7); the epilogue of the Ae-

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Greece, and from the third to the first century BCE in the Latin-speaking world, fables are attested as components of literary works of different sorts. The earliest fables in verse are found in Hesiod and Archilochus, later in Stesichorus and Aristophanes (see SCHIRRU 2009, 9–12, 17f. with further bibliography). "Addirittura pare che già Socrate abbia usato apologetici esopici in distici elegiaci" (PISI 1977, 75 n. 3, citing Plato, *Phaed.* 60d; Diog. Laert., *VP* 2.42; cf. on this VAN DIJK 1997, 260–262, 324–326). On the presence and function of fables in different genres, in verse and prose, in Greek literature from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period, see VAN DIJK 1997, 124–382 with the relevant texts. In Latin, they appear in the satires of Ennius, Lucilius and then Horace (PISI 1977, 20 n. 9 and the bibliography cited there). Complete self-standing narratives that can be classified as fables occur in some Hellenistic epigrams (VAN DIJK 1997, 262–269); note esp. Leonidas of Tarentum, *AP* 9.99, where "la favola non è legata, come in Esiodo o Archiloco, ad una vicenda contingente o subordinata alla dimostrazione di una verità: l'autonomia artistica dell'epigramma consente al poeta di esprimere in primo piano, nella rappresentazione del fatto, l'etica antica, patrimonio di un popolo. È un consapevole esempio di arte nuova: su un materiale esopico Leonida costruì per la prima volta l'epigramma favolistico, trasformando la prosa didascalica in una poesia raffinata" (M. GIGANTE, *L'edera di Leonida* [Naples 1971] 100). Note also Archias of Mitylene, *AP* 9.339 (raven and the scorpion). Other epigrams of the early imperial period also pick up themes from fable: Antiphanes, *AP* 11.348 (cf. GOW / PAGE 1968, 115); Marcus Argentarius, *AP* 9.87 (cf. GOW / PAGE 1968, 177); Euenus of Ascalon, *AP* 9.75 (cf. GOW / PAGE 1968, 291); also Anon., *AP* 9.252; Bianor 9.272 (cf. GOW / PAGE 1968, 202, 203). For the different theories regarding the fable, see esp. VAN DIJK 1997, 3–78.

<sup>50</sup> According to HORNA (1928, 29): "Wir haben somit ein Beispiel selbständiger literarischer Verwendung dieser Gattung in der griechischen Literatur der Kaiserzeit, vermutlich noch vor Babrios, der in seiner 84. Fabel den gleichen Stoff mit der geringfügigen Veränderung Stier statt Elefant behandelt hat." At any rate, Babrius must have drawn on the Greek fable tradition that went under the name of 'Aesop'.

<sup>51</sup> In *The Lion, Prometheus and the Elephant* (259 PERRY), the elephant is bothered by a gnat. REGENAUER 2016, 390, provides a table listing the parallels, including a Babylonian fable.

sopic fable refers to “an incapable person, good for nothing (ἀδύνατος)”; in Mesomedes we find, “what the gnat has to say (μῦθος)” is “nonsense (ἄφρων)” (l. 3).

The style of the *Description of the Sphinx* (no. 12) is more like that of the epigrams of the *Greek Anthology*, apart from the metre, which is catalextic anapaestic dimeters, with the final anapaest resolved as  $\upsilon -$  (i.e. apocrota).<sup>52</sup> The composition shows a certain taste for accumulating attributive participles, organized in a non-linear fashion, as though the observer’s gaze were constantly moving round the figure:<sup>53</sup> “Creeping, striding, flying ... raising (her suppositious clawed foot) ... winged ... roaring” (ll. 1–5). Note also the capricious combination of contraries: “She had a body disordered and confused – the imperfect so mingled in her so as to be perfect” (ll. 10f.).<sup>54</sup>

The structure of poem 13, *Description of a Glass-Blower*, whose end is lost, may have been similar to that of no. 9 (Sponge): here the description of the craftsman (l. 2) during different steps in blowing glass<sup>55</sup> is more rounded than the rapid sketch of the diver in 9.11f.<sup>56</sup> The missing section probably contained a brief description of the result of the operation, a glass object (cf. 9.1–10), no doubt a gift, as in 9.13–15. In these two ἐκφράσεις, Mesomedes varies the organization of the material

<sup>52</sup> I accept HERMANN’S correction (1842, 12f. = 1877, 351–353), which is also admitted by HORNA (1928, 39), taking the entire poem to be in anapaests.

<sup>53</sup> For the solution to this ‘enigma’, see MUSSO, who thinks that Mesomedes’ description refers to an image of the Sphinx like that in the floor mosaic in a side chapel in the Church of SS. Victor and Corona at Grazzano Badoglio (prov. Asti), “databile al secondo secolo d. Cr.” [an image is available on the website of the church], which has “volto di donna ..., corpo di leone nella parte di mezzo, di drago nella parte posteriore e zampe di chimera” (1998, 37). He also thinks that, just as on the mosaic, the Sphinx might represent Isis (1998, 38). The accumulation of participles in ἐκφράσεις would become a characteristic mark of the late style, like the constant change of the observer’s point of view, parallel to the development of figural complexity in mosaics, cf. G. AGOSTI, “Immagini e poesia nella tarda antichità. Per uno studio dell’estetica visuale della poesia greca fra il III e il VI sec. d.C.”, *Incontri Triestini di Filologia classica* 4 (2004/05) 351–374, esp. 353–368.

<sup>54</sup> On the basis of this statement, A. VILLARRUBIA, “Una nota sobre Mesomedes de Creta y la Esfinge”, *Trivium* 10 (1998) [137–140] 140 sees the Sphinx as “el símbolo elíptico” of the cosmic order.

<sup>55</sup> Pliny *HN* 36.192–196 provides a brief account of glass manufacture, cf. BALDINI 1932, 40. Insofar as their accounts can be compared (cf. LANNA 2013, 12 n. 49), it is perhaps possible that Mesomedes had read Pliny.

<sup>56</sup> The diver is an ἀτρωμος ἐργάτας, ‘an intrepid worker’ (9.12); in the ‘Glass-Blower’, seeing the ‘busy-fingered craftsman’ (τὸν ἐργάταν τρέμοντα) produces a marvel (l. 8: θαῦμα). For τρέμω denoting the craftsman’s ceaseless rotation of the blowpipe when he blows air into the spool to form the required shape, see E. M. STERN, “Ancient Glass in a Philological Context”, *Mnemosyne* 60 (2007) [341–406] 354 (cf. Pliny *HN* 36.193: *aliud flatu figurantur, aliud torno teritur*, “some [glass] is shaped by blowing, some turned on the lathe”). For the lexical analogies between the two ἐκφράσεις, see WHITMARSH 2004, 394f.

and the relation between the different parts. He also uses different metres: in the first apocrota and paroemiacs, in the second, by contrast, trochaic dimeters.<sup>57</sup>

In conclusion we can say based on the material at our disposal that Mesomedes' style of composition tended to produce texts with non-linear syntax and sometimes irregular structure, but at the same time without letting the word-order fall into artificiality. He tries not to employ precise thematic, metrical, or lexical models, but constantly varies them; he adapts themes and materials of the epideictic epigram, in a highly original manner, for lyric,<sup>58</sup> and elsewhere snatches of epic *formulae* or hexameter poetry. Maintaining the simplicity and subtle refinement that are so characteristic of him, Mesomedes deftly weaves different literary motifs and poetic elements into his texts and reworks them to his own ends. However, in his eagerness to introduce novelty into the reference-models provided by tradition, he does make compositional choices that are not always elegant.

In terms of content, Mesomedes' compositions refer to the historical, cultic and religious context of his time, to which we now turn.

### 1.6. *The Historical and Religious Context*

The Antonine period saw the advent of a 'humanist' age. In the second century the Roman state was directed by a class of philosophically inclined persons, intellectuals and humanists such as Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius. The latter, with reference to the heavy debt he owed to the practical instruction of his adoptive father Antoninus Pius, rightly emphasised "the regard (in which he held) those who truly pursue philosophy" (*de ips.* 1.169 = 1.16.18). More especially the Roman state took on and absorbed Stoic philosophy, whose major representative at this time, after Seneca, was Epictetus, admired by Marcus Aurelius himself. The intellectual and religious life of Rome, from the mid-first century and especially in the second, both under Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, was suffused with philhellenic fervour. Hadrian promoted the cult of Iuppiter/Jupiter, which in Greece, above all in the temple of Zeus Ὀλύμπιος which he caused to be completed at Athens, and in Asia Minor, came to be associated with the imperial cult, as is shown by the dedications to Hadrian Ὀλύμπιος, Σωτήρ and Πανελλήνιος.<sup>60</sup> Ha-

<sup>57</sup> See WEST 1982, 165f. for the pure form (-υ-υ-υ-υ-υ | with catalexis) of the trochaic dimeters of no. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. HOPKINSON 1994, 80f.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. BEAUJEU 1955, 234; THORNTON 1975, 443f.; TURCAN 2008, 159–161.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. A. S. BENJAMIN, "The Altars of Hadrian in Athens and Hadrian's Panhellenic Program", *Hesperia* 32 (1963) 57–86; THORNTON 1975, 444 and nn. 32f., 458; J. R. FEARS,

drian also had himself initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries in 124, and four years later attained the rank of *epoptês*.<sup>61</sup> Beyond that, he showed “a predilection for certain Egyptian cults”.<sup>62</sup> Starting with Hadrian, the cult of Cybele was subjected to a series of reforms continued by Antoninus Pius up to Severus Alexander.<sup>63</sup> Antoninus encouraged the restoration of traditional religion by reviving ancient Latin legends and cults,<sup>64</sup> while at the same time favouring the cult of Mater Magna: he promoted reforms to encourage acceptance of the Phrygian side of the cult.<sup>65</sup>

The religious phenomenology of the Roman Empire in the second century CE,<sup>66</sup> the attempts of Antoninus Pius to reclaim the traditional, truly Roman deities notwithstanding, displays complex aspects and processes.<sup>67</sup> Thanks to the stimulus of two factors characteristic of the Hellenistic period, individualism and cosmopolitanism, the individual was free to enrich his own religious experience on the basis of his own spiritual needs, combining, without struggle or decisive breaks, his own traditional religious horizon with special devotion to one or other ‘oriental’ deity.<sup>68</sup> Worship of a variety of divinities spread, especially those cults that provided for close contact between the god and human reality: Petronius *Satyr.* 17 makes a character exclaim, *utique nostra regio* (i.e. Campania) *tam praesentibus plena est numinibus, ut facilius posses deum quam hominem invenire*, ‘especially as our part of the world is so

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“The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology”, in: ANRW II 17.1 (1981) [3–141] 87–89; GALIMBERTI 2007, 136, 138f.; J. S. SPAWFORTH, *Greece and the Augustan Cultural Revolution. Greek culture in the Roman world* (Cambridge / New York 2012) 242–255.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. BEAUJEU 1955, 276; GALIMBERTI 2007, 126, 128f., 131f.

<sup>62</sup> GALIMBERTI 2007, 144f. minimising the ‘Hadrianic orientalism’ advocated by earlier scholars, notably BEAUJEU 1955, 239–241.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. G. SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Soteriology and mystic aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden 1985) 58 with n. 135, 57 n. 133 with older bibliography; A. BRENT, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian*. *Vigiliae Christianae*, Suppl. 45 (Leiden / Bristol / Cologne 1999) 263.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. BEAUJEU 1955, 311.

<sup>65</sup> See p. 275, n. 10. On Antoninus Pius and the cult of the Magna Mater see G. FORTY, *Time in Roman Religion. One Thousand Years of Religious History* (New York / London 2012) 92.

<sup>66</sup> On Roman religion in the imperial period, see J. SCHEID, *La religione a Roma*. *Universale Laterza* 620 (Rome / Bari 1983) 130–161; J. SCHEID, “Le statut du culte d’Isis sous le Haut-Empire”, in: BONNET / PIRENNE-DELFORGE / PRAET 2009 [173–186] 182–185.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. A. CHANIOTIS, “The dynamics of the rituals in the Roman Empire”, in: O. HEKSTER / S. SCHMIDT-HOFNER / C. WITSCHEL (eds.), *Ritual dynamics and religious change in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the eighth workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire, Heidelberg, July 5–7, 2007* (Leiden / Boston 2009) 3–29 for the changes and transfer of cults and rituals in the Roman Empire during the imperial period.

<sup>68</sup> SFAMENI GASPARRO 1994, 416.

full of watchful powers that it's easier to run into a god than a man' (transl. Sullivan). The mystery cults were not just limited to the Eleusinian mysteries but included other mysteric deities too, so-called 'oriental', such as Isis, Osiris, Cybele and Attis. The cult of Dionysus likewise opened itself up to fideistic currents with its Orphic and Neopythagorean associations.<sup>69</sup> In this period of 'crisis' people felt the need for answers, to be found in the religio-mystic beliefs that at this time were on the rise and becoming ever stronger. Among the models of mystic experience and the quest for transcendence, the figure of the Neopythagorean Apollonius of Tyana stands out. At the heart of Neopythagoreanism, under the stimulus of Middle Platonism, lay the quest for teachings never divulged by the first master, with the aim of constructing a system of spiritual instances and mystic ideals expressed in the βίος Ὀρφικός, by dint of falsely claiming to be returning to the secret teachings of Pythagoras. On the basis of this type of mysticism, metaphysico-ontological and moral primacy was accorded to the incorporeal dimension, with all its implications, among them the progressive development of transcendental thinking, i.e. the opposition between soul and body.<sup>70</sup> Oriental influences enriched philosophical and religious thinking to produce a new amalgam. The Gnostic<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> On syncretism see the volume M. PHILONENKO (ed.), *Les syncrétismes dans les religions grecque et romaine. Colloque de Strasbourg 9–11 juin 1971* (Paris 1973), esp. P. LEVEQUE, "Essai de typologie des syncrétismes", 179–187 also SFAMENI GASPARRO 1994, esp. 414–419; BELAYCHE / REBILLARD 2007. On the 'oriental cults' in the Roman world and the reasons for their spread, see TURCAN 1989, esp. 7–33. On the conceptual value (useful?) of the category syncretism, note P. XELLA, "«Syncretisme» comme catégorie conceptuelle: une notion utile?", in: BONNET / PIRENNE-DELFORGE / PRAET 2009, 135–150.

<sup>70</sup> On Apollonius of Tyana, see M. DZIŁSKA, *Apollonius of Tyana in Legend and History* (Rome 1986); J. J. FLINTERMANN, *Power, Paideia and Pythagoreanism: Greek identity, conceptions of the relationship between philosophers and monarchs and political ideas in Philostratus' Life of Apollonius* (Amsterdam 1995); J. J. FLINTERMANN, "'The ancestor of my wisdom': Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in Life of Apollonius", in: E. BOWIE / J. ELSNER (eds.), *Philostratus* (Cambridge 2009) 155–175; B. BÄBLER / H.-G. NESSELRATH, *Philostrats Apollonios und seine Welt: Griechische und nichtgriechische Kunst und Religion in der Vita Apollonii* (Berlin / Boston 2016). On the presence and value of Orphism in the imperial period from the second century, see M. HERRERO DE JAUREGUI, *Tradición órfica y cristianismo antiguo* (Madrid 2007), esp. 41–83, 85–102. Middle Platonism: e.g. DILLON 1977, 43–51; REALE 1991, 307–364. Middle and Neopythagoreanism: REALE 1991, 365–409; HIRSCH-LUIPOLD 2009, 124–135; and Oliver Schelske in this volume.

<sup>71</sup> The term 'gnosticism' is used here in accordance with the propositions formulated at the Messina conference *Le origini dello gnosticismo* (13–18 April 1966) with reference to different gnostic systems or sects of the second century CE (cf. U. BIANCHI [ed.], *Le origini dello gnosticismo. Colloquio di Messina, 13–18 aprile 1966* [Leiden 1967], xx f.). Note also Manlio Simonetti's observation: "perché un testo, una dottrina possano essere definiti gnostici in senso specifico, considero indispensabile la presenza di almeno due concetti fondamentali: caduta e degradazione di un elemento divino nel mondo e conseguente

systems were precisely the attempt to assimilate Judeo-Christian elements in a grand project of Hellenisation.<sup>72</sup> The foundations were thus laid for the development of philosophical thought and the production of religious or pseudo-religious literature: the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the magical papyri are all products of these centuries. This is not to place to pursue these themes; the only point here is to underscore the historico-cultural complexity of the second century CE.

As we have seen, Mesomedes was a court-poet. Among the poems that have come down to us, there is not a single mortal name, nor any direct reference to the social context of poetic production. What contextual information can we gather from the poems?

In connection with the two *Horologia* texts, we can point in general to the signs of the zodiac represented in Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli.<sup>73</sup> Astrological ideas gained a firm hold in the decades between Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius (cf. Vettius Valens' *Anthologiae*, written between 152–162 CE).<sup>74</sup> However, we cannot be sure whether the poems (Heitsch nos. 7 and 8) are to be dated to the reigns of Hadrian or Antoninus Pius.<sup>75</sup>

The hymns *To Physis* (no. 4) and *To Isis* (no. 5), whose content is very 'syncretistic' and orientalisising, are quite in keeping with second-century expressions of religious feeling, and to that extent also reflect the

consustanzialità con Dio degli gnostici che tale elemento divino (spirito) albergano dentro di sé; distinzione tra il Dio sommo e il Dio inferiore, creatore del mondo (Demiurgo), il Dio del VT" (M. SIMONETTI, "Alcune riflessioni sul rapporto tra gnosticismo e cristianesimo", *Vetera Christianorum* 28 (1991) [337–374] 342 with n. 16). Further on the question of the definition and delimitation of the concept 'gnosticism' see H. JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion. The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston 1963) 31–47; BIANCHI 1976, 144–152; *idem*, "A propos de quelques discussions récentes sur la terminologie, la définition et la méthode de l'étude du gnosticisme", in: G. WIDENGREN (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm, August 20–25 1973* (Leiden 1977) 16–26; *idem*, "L'uomo gnostico di fronte al divino e al mondo", in: J. RIES (ed.), *Crisi, rotture e cambimenti* (Milan 1995) 143–162; K. RUDOLPH, *Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion* (Göttingen 1977) 58–67; R. McL. WILSON, "Gnosis and Gnosticism: The Messina Definition", in: G. SFAMENI GASPARRO (ed.), *Αγαθή ἔλπίς: Studi storico-religioso in onore di Ugo Bianchi* (Rome 1994) 539–555; G. FILORAMO, "Gnosi e gnosticismo", in: *idem* (ed.), *Storia delle religioni*, vol. III, *Religioni dualistiche. Islam* (Rome / Bari 1995) 5–26; for a bibliographic sketch of studies of the religio-historical phenomenon of gnosticism, see SANZI 1996, 93f. n. 1, and cf. Z. PLESE, "Gnostic Literature", in: HIRSCH-LUIPOLD et al. 2009, 163–198.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. S. MAZZARINO, *L'impero romano*, vol. I (Bari 1973) 316–334.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. WHITMARSH 2004, 392f., citing *Hist. Aug. Hadr.* 16.7, on Hadrian's self-proclaimed proficiency in astrology.

<sup>74</sup> See J. KOMOROWSKA, *Vettius Valens of Antioch: An intellectual monography* (Cracow 2004).

<sup>75</sup> REGENAUER 2016, 34 opts for Hadrian.