

Ethiopianising the Devil: ὁ μέλας in Barnabas 4

CLARE K. ROTHSCHILD

5031 South Dorchester Ave., Chicago, IL 60615, USA.

Email: ckrothschild@gmail.com

Although interpreters refer to the association between blackness and evil in ancient texts as essentially universal, specific reference by Christians to the counter-divine with the colour epithet ὁ μέλας is new with the Epistle of Barnabas. Black is applied as an honorific to certain Egyptian deities, but it is never used in Egyptian religion with reference to the counter-divine. Furthermore, black demons proliferate in late third- and fourth-century Egyptian monastic texts, but these witnesses postdate Barnabas. The first explicit reference to the devil as black after Barnabas is in Didymus the Blind, who interprets the reference as ‘Ethiopian’. Exploring the origin and background of this nickname for the counter-divine, this essay argues that Didymus accurately apprehends Barnabas’ intention: namely, that ‘the Black One’ does not merely reflect the universal association of blackness and evil in Roman antiquity, but, rather it reflects the appropriation of an ethnic stereotype in an apocalyptic context with distinctly anti-imperial resonances.

Keywords: Epistle of Barnabas, Apostolic Fathers, Ethiopian, the Black One, Caracalla

1. Introduction

The curious epithet ὁ μέλας for the counter-divine figure in Barn. 4.10 and 20.1 has been all but bypassed in the history of research on this important letter.¹ Uniqueness of the *substantival* use of a *colour* adjective as an *epithet* for a demonic force among early Christian texts is never articulated by commentators

¹ I wish to thank David Brakke, Robert Matthew Calhoun and Henk Jan de Jonge for critical comments on an early draft of this essay. I also wish to thank Lourdes García Ureña, María Rodríguez de Velasco and all members of the EABS and ISBL session dedicated to the language of colour in the Bible (University of Helsinki, 2 August 2018) as well as SNTS Seminar #1 (Athens, August 8, 2018) for for the opportunity to present this paper in their seminar. On the provenance of Barnabas in Alexandria, see e.g. R. A. Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache* (The Apostolic Fathers 3; New York: Nelson, 1965) 53–6; P. Prigent, with the collaboration of R. A. Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé* (SC 172; Paris: Cerf, 1971) 20–2; F. R. Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief* (KAV 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999) 119–23.

and nowhere addressed in an investigative essay or article.² As an epithet, the expression is unremarkable, perhaps suggesting an early Christian, apocalyptic and/or sectarian context.³ Substantival use of the colour adjective, however, requires explanation.⁴ David Brakke articulates the assumption probably at work among scholars:

In the earliest surviving piece of Christian literature, 1 Thessalonians, Paul tells his followers, 'You are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness' (1 Thess 5:5). In Revelation, virtuous Christians are dressed in white robes (6:11; 7:13, etc.). *From here it was a short step to identifying the devil and evil persons as not merely darkness but black.*⁵

Yet this assumption is a premise in need of proof. If it is indeed a 'short step', why doesn't it occur elsewhere in Christian writings prior to fourth-century monastic literature?⁶ Why does the writer employ colour rather than absence of light or life (e.g. darkness, death)? The divine is never correspondingly referred to as white in Barnabas (Gk ὁ λευκός).⁷ Red – the third colour that appears frequently in apocalyptic texts – is likewise absent in Barnabas. Furthermore, scholars collapse the two occurrences of ὁ μέλας in Barn. 4 and 18 interpreting them in terms of each other. Persuasive redactional arguments, however, separate Barn. 1–17

2 See F. X. Gokey, *The Terminology for the Devil and Evil Spirits in the Apostolic Fathers* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1961) ch. 8. Of twenty occurrences of μέλας as an adjective in the Apostolic Fathers, only two function substantivally. Black occurs as skin colour in the Hebrew Bible (הררש, Cant 1.5) and with reference to sheep, birds, nighttime, clouds, hair, cumin and sometimes disease (Lev 13.37; Lam 5.10). Of six occurrences of μέλας in the NT, three denote ink (2 Cor 3.3; 2 John 12; 3 John 13), one refers to hair colour (Matt 5.36), and two refer to horses (Rev 6.5, 12; cf. Zech 6.2, 6).

3 Sobriquets are a feature of apocalyptic literature, although not exclusively. NT occurrences include: Luke 13.32, 'that fox'; Mark 3.17, 'Sons of Thunder'; Acts 1.23, 'Justus'; 4.36, 'Barnabas'; and 13.1, 'Niger'. Nicknames in apocalyptic literature may replace names of historical personages (e.g. Satan, the 'Spouter of the Lie', the 'Wicked Priest', the 'Teacher of Righteousness'). M. A. Collins, *The Use of Sobriquets in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls* (LSTS 67; London: T&T Clark, 2009). Apocalypticism, the Two Ways tradition, and anti-monasticism are aspects shared by Barnabas and the DSS. Μέλας appears as sobriquet in Diodorus Siculus 17.20.7: Κλεῖτος ὁ Μέλας ἐπικαλούμενος, the Greek warrior who severed the arm of a Persian in defence of Alexander the Great.

4 The counter-divine is referred to as 'black' (μέλας Ἄιδης) in Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 28–9.

5 D. Brakke, 'Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10/3–4 (2001) 501–35, at 507 (emphasis added).

6 The argument of this article will focus on the colour black exclusively, that is, it will not conflate occurrences of blackness and darkness.

7 In Mark 9.3, Jesus' clothes become dazzling white; and, in Mark 16.5, an angel is dressed in white. No such figures appear in Barnabas.

and 18–20/1.⁸ The latter section alone identifies ὁ μέλας as Satan.⁹ By collapsing these references, interpreters overlook certain important nuances of the earlier occurrence. The present article explores inferences of the passages concerning ὁ μέλας in Barn. 1–17 exclusively, arguing that it adopts an ethnic stereotype in an apocalyptic context with a possibly anti-imperial target.

2. History of Research

Since – with good reason – most regard the Epistle of Barnabas as reflecting allegorical exegesis, the geographical setting of Alexandria seems like an appropriate place to begin our investigation.¹⁰ The Coptic word for ‘Egypt’, κημε, means the ‘Black Land’ (κημε, καμε, καμη, κημε, καμ, ‘black’) and references to the Nile as the ‘Black River’ are also common.¹¹ Black was a divine epithet for the chief beneficent gods in Egypt; malevolent spirits were red.¹² Whereas black possesses a positive connotation in these examples, at the same time it denotes a broad swath of negative stereotypes, including sexual promiscuity.¹³ Because

8 Barn. 18–20 represents a version of the so-called Two Ways tradition. Barn. 21.1–9 may involve a third hand. C. Jefford thinks that a final redactor also added Barn. 1.1–5 (*Reading the Apostolic Fathers: A Student’s Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012²) 3–4). I am currently persuaded by interpreters arguing that Barn. 18–20 reflects its own (older) tradition over against the version attested by the Didache. Barn. 20.1 identifies ὁ μέλας as Satan, whereas the occurrence in Barn. 4.10 denotes an ‘evil archon’ (4.13). The epithet ὁ μέλας does not occur in the Didache’s parallel section. Cf. Barn. 20.1, a passage that I view as replacing ὁ θάνατος in the tradition known to Did. 5.1 with ὁ μέλας (20.1) based on Barn. 4.10 – the goal being to bring the Two Ways tradition into correspondence with the oldest part of the letter.

9 See Prigent, *Épître de Barnabé*, 41.

10 R. P. C. Hanson sums up the current consensus: ‘The first seventeen chapters of Barnabas obviously come from an Alexandrian source’ (*Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003) 100). The assumption of Barnabas’ Alexandrian provenance is also based on manuscript evidence. Codex Sinaiticus – representative of the ‘Alexandrian’ form of the text – contains the oldest complete form of the text in Greek. Contra K. Wengst, *Didache (Apostellehre); Barnabasbrief; Zweiter Klemensbrief; Schrift an Diognet* (Schriften des Urchristentums 2; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984) 117–18 (Asia Minor); and Prigent, *Épître de Barnabé*, 27 (Syro-Palestine).

11 The Nile received its name from the Greek word νεῖλος (‘valley’). Since the river deposits black sediment after it floods, the Egyptians called the river ‘Ar’ (‘black’). C. A. Diop, ‘Origin of the Ancient Egyptians’, in G. Mokhtar, *General History of Africa*, vol. II: *Ancient Civilizations of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 27–83, at 41–2, 75–6. Black is used of Egyptian gods and goddesses as an honorific: *kmwr* = ‘Great Black One’ for Osiris and *km* as epithet used with the name of the god (e.g. Hathor, Apis, Min, Thoth, etc.) or *kmt*, goddess (e.g. Isis) (Diop, ‘Origin of the Ancient Egyptians’, 43). This word is realised in Greek as Χημία. Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 33: χημία (‘black’) said of Egypt.

12 Diop, ‘Origin of the Ancient Egyptians’, 43.

13 See Brakke, ‘Male Sexuality’, 501–35.

'Ethiopian' was a somatic category, a variety of sub-Saharan people groups were frequent victims of this stereotype.¹⁴ The Greek word αἰθιοπία derives from the verb αἴθειν 'to burn' plus the noun ὄψ 'face, countenance' – hence referring to anyone (irrespective of homeland) with a somatically 'black' appearance. Beginning in the third century, Christians including Origen, Jerome, Didymus the Blind and Paulinus of Nola associated 'Ethiopians' with sin and vice.

Commentators on Barn. 4.10a fold the nickname ὁ μέλας for the counter-divine figure into an understanding of the writer's overall outlook.

2.1 Robert Kraft (1965)

Referring to Barnabas' 'eschatological atmosphere', Robert Kraft describes the narrative circumstances as 'charged with a view of "the last times" which borders on the apocalyptic and makes the task of parenthesis all the more important and urgent'.¹⁵ Kraft explains,

These are the 'last days', the climax of evils which will usher in the 'age to come' (2:1; 4:1, 3, 9; 16:5 f.) The Christian must walk carefully and perform his righteous tasks with deliberate haste (19:1b; 21:7b; cf. 1:5; 4:9a) as he continually looks forward to the imminent holy age (8:6; 10:11d; 21:1, 3). The Lord is about to judge (4:12; 5:7; 7:2; 15:5; cf. 10:5; 12:9) and the Christian must be prepared for this 'day of recompense' (11:8; 19:10f; 20:2c; 21:6).¹⁶

In this setting, Kraft emphasises dualism: the way of righteousness and the way of lawlessness (e.g. 4.12).¹⁷ According to Kraft, the kingdom of God is in a present state of anguish awaiting Jesus's intervention¹⁸ and 'the Black One', understood

14 Such rhetoric spans the gamut beginning with Herodotus, who refers to Ethiopians with the Greek word αἰθιοπία (2.29). In 2.104, Herodotus uses μελόγχροος (μέλας 'black' + χρώς, 'skin'). Cf. Martial 4.42.5; 10.12.12; *TLL* 1.963. Αἰγύπτιος and Αἰγυπτιακός are synonyms of *niger* and *ater*. Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 6.22.70) observes that the people living south of the Ganges River are brown not 'burnt black' like the Ethiopians. Cf. *Nat.* 2.80.18. Menander fr. 533 dismisses prejudice against both black and white skin (T. Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum fragmenta* (3 vols.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1880–8) III.157). Eratosthenes rejects the division of human beings into Greeks and barbarians, arguing that the distinction should be between virtue and vice (Strabo, *Geogr.* 1.4.9; cf. Plutarch, *Alex. fort.* 1.6).

15 Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache*, 27.

16 Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache*, 27.

17 'Two alternative courses of action are now open, righteousness and lawlessness. "Each man will receive payment in accord with his deeds – if he was good his righteousness precedes him; if he was wicked, the reward of wickedness goes before him" (4:12)' (Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache*, 27).

18 'Apparently, at least for the traditional material used in chapters 7–8, the present time of struggle is thought of as the "kingdom" of Jesus in which there are "evil and foul days" (8:6) characterized by Jesus' own suffering (8:5) and continued in the subsequent suffering of those who desire to appropriate the kingdom (= the church? [7:11]) for themselves. But "at the end of days" Jesus will be victorious over the forces of evil (12:9) and will "come to his inheritance"

as Satan, is an actor in this mythological drama – dragging Christians to the evil path.¹⁹ Kraft qualifies the moral struggle Christians face as symptomatic of the present tension between the two ages.²⁰

2.2 *Pierre Prigent (1971)*

Pierre Prigent links Kraft's interpretation of the text's eschatology to its soteriology.²¹ According to Prigent, the tradition that Barnabas adopts implies a history of Israel characterised by rebellion. Beginning with the golden calf incident, the Jews never understood their covenantal obligation to God and thus forfeited their divine alliance. Christians perceive the true sense of the law and have thus assumed that divine alliance, which they will retain, unless they too squander it through disobedience.²²

Like Kraft, Prigent interprets ὁ μέλας in 4.10 in light of 20.1, namely as a reference to Satan: 'Le Noir est un nom de Satan en tant qu'il préside à la voie des ténèbres.'²³ On the origin of the appellation, Prigent cites Dölger's history of anti-Ethiopian and anti-Egyptian sentiment in Greek texts beginning with Herodotus.²⁴ Dölger's monograph remains a standard on the topic. However, it lacks nuance in the interpretation of Christian texts by failing to differentiate

(4:3b; cf. 12:10f.). Pseudo-Barnabas does not elaborate in what sense Jesus has already, in his death and resurrection, defeated the adversary (see 10:5; 14:5), although he is definite that salvation is impossible apart from those events. In any case, the final victory, accompanied by judgment and re-creation of the universe, is yet future and ushers in the true "sabbath rest" for the Creator and his righteous people (15:5-7)' (Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache*, 28-9).

19 'The Christian's adversary is Satan (18:1), the "Black One" (4:10a; 20:1), the "Wicked One" (2:10b; 21:3), "Lawless One" (15:5 var.), "Wicked Archon (Ruler)" (4:13) who is in control of this "present lawless time" (2:1; 4:1; 18:2). He is able to "shove us away from the kingdom" (4:13) and "hurl us from our life" (2:10b) if he can ensnare us in the "error of the present time" (4:1; 5:4).' See Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache*, 27-8.

20 Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache*, 27; cf. 28-9.

21 Prigent, *Épître de Barnabé*, 35.

22 Prigent, *Épître de Barnabé*, 100.

23 Prigent, *Épître de Barnabé*, 101 n. 4.

24 F. J. Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit und der Schwarze* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1918) 49-75. E. Kamlah's opinion relies on Dölger: *Die Form der katalogischen Paränese im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964). Dölger begins with the Stoic tradition that views the elements as objects of worship (citing Eph 2.2, 6). This is followed by the way in which Hellenistic Jews from Paul to Philo of Alexandria reflect 'natural philosophy' (50-1). Citing Philo, see Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit*, 50. He includes discussion of Anubis and Pluto as black deities. Citing Dölger, Kamlah summarises the ancient position associating black and evil in which Pluto known as 'black Jupiter' (*Die Form der katalogischen Paränese*, 212). Cf. Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit*, 64-5, citing F. Zimmerman, 'Kleine Beiträge zur Religionsgeschichte. 1. Die schwarze Farbe des Teufels', *TGl* 4 (1912) 631-4, at 634).

between darkness (“Dunkelheit”, “Finsternis”) and blackness (“Schwarzheit”), and – among Christian texts – between the Devil and Satan.²⁵

2.3 F. R. Prostmeier (1999)

Ferdinand Prostmeier holds a similar view of the importance of eschatology in Barnabas. Based on the fourth-century interpretation of the text by Didymus the Blind, he rules out any understanding of ὁ μέλας as other than Satan who is in turn identified as the devil.²⁶ The work of this evil figure is to mislead the congregation. According to Prostmeier, 4.10a is followed by three warnings illustrating the devil’s seduction. No one, Barnabas warns, is immune to the tomfoolery of ‘the Black one’.²⁷ Vanity, arrogance and worldliness are his ‘inroad’ into the community.²⁸ The counter-divine creeps into communities imperceptibly – recognised only once it is too late. Prostmeier characterises such warnings as both (1) typical of heretical polemics and (2) a *topos* of paraenesis – eschatology adding urgency to moral demands.²⁹

2.4 Other Interpreters

Largely in isolation from the work of these commentators, a small group of scholars has investigated ancient black stereotypes and prejudice among early Christian texts. Until recently, conclusions of this group have swung back and forth between a perception of early Christians as either utilising colour symbolism to foster negative attitudes towards dark-skinned people or emphasising equality of all believers irrespective of skin colour. For example, in 1967 Roger Bastide argued that colour was used to facilitate racial hatred among early Christians.³⁰

25 Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit*, 49–75. Dölger views the two occurrences of ‘the Black One’ in Barnabas together as an aspect of the Two Ways tradition. Citing Cyril of Jerusalem, he writes, ‘Der Teufel wäre damit nach einem Worte Cyrills von Jerusalem der in der Finsternis Herrschende oder “der finstere und dunkle Herrscher”’ (49).

26 ‘Didym. *comm. in Zech.* 3.196; 4.312; *Ps.* 35–39 (Cod. 262,34) stellt unter Berufung auf Barn und Herm heraus, daß (ὁ) μέλας nichts anderes als σατανᾶς (vgl. Barn 18. 1) bzw. διάβολος meint und überhaupt für Unwissenheit und Übel steht; Näheres dazu gl. S. 48 und 554’ (Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief*, 220 n. 123).

27 Flee from what is futile (v. 10), do not live alone (v. 10), be spiritual (v. 11).

28 Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief*, 219–20.

29 Prostmeier also points out that they can occur as an element of popular literature (e.g. Physiologus) (*Der Barnabasbrief*, 219–20 n. 122). Prostmeier discusses ‘der Weg des Schwarzen’ again with regard to Barn. 20.1–2 (555–61). Barn. 20.1–2 is parallel to Did. 5.1–2, although in the Didache ‘the Black One’ replaces ‘death’ (i.e., Barn. 20.1, ‘But the way of the *Black One* is crooked and full of cursing’ (Ἡ δὲ τοῦ μέλανος ὁδὸς ἐστὶν σκολιὰ καὶ κατάραις μεστή); Did. 5.1 ‘But the Way of *Death* is this: First of all, it is wicked and full of cursing ...’ (Ἡ δὲ τοῦ θανάτου ὁδὸς ἐστὶν αὕτη πρῶτον πάντων πονηρὰ ἐστὶ καὶ κατάραις μεστή; trans. Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache*, 156, emphasis added). Kraft interprets Barnabas’ version as ‘characteristically eschatological’ (156).

30 R. Bastide, ‘Color, Racism and Christianity’, *Daedalus* 96 (1967) 312–27.

Swinging back in the other direction, in 1970, Frank M. Snowden, Jr. argued that the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.26–40 suggests that colour prejudice is a recent development;³¹ and, in 1979, swinging back again, J. M. Courtès argued that the universal appeal of the gospel was achieved *through reversal* (i.e., *even* the black-skinned may come to faith).³² In 1989, Lloyd A. Thompson's *Romans and Blacks* established the present consensus: somatic blackness coupled with spiritual whiteness is a theme Christians 'harp on'.³³ Subsequent work by Peter Frost (1991) on early Christian attitudes towards blacks, Vincent Wimbush (1992) on ascetic boundaries among accounts of Moses as Ethiopian, David Brakke (2001) on portrayal of blacks in monastic literature³⁴ and Gay Byron (2002) on demons (often female) as Ethiopian explores specific instances of the consensus, usually acknowledging, but not interacting in depth with, the example in Barnabas.³⁵

3. Evidence: Barn. 4.9b–14

With this background in mind, we turn to Barn. 4.9b–14. Ὁ μέλας occurs in the context of a series of four eschatological warnings.³⁶ In terms of early Christian writings, in most respects this exhortation is unexceptional: the end

31 F. M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1970) 196–215. Cf. also 'Simeon called Niger' in Acts 13.1. Snowden defends this position in 'Some Greek and Roman Observations on the Ethiopian', *Traditio* 16 (1960) 19–38, esp. 35.

32 J. M. Courtès, 'The Theme of "Ethiopia" and "Ethiopians" in Patristic Literature', *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. II: *From the Early Christian Era to the 'Age of Discovery'*, part 1: *From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood* (ed. D. Bindman and H. L. Gates, Jr.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) 199–214.

33 L. A. Thompson, *Romans and Blacks* (Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture 2; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989) 40.

34 The earliest datable reference to a black demon in monastic literature is the devil's appearance as a black boy in Athanasius, *Life of Antony* (ca. 357). As Brakke has demonstrated, the stereotype of the promiscuous homosexual Ethiopian underlies this characterisation. In *Life of Antony*, the first demon to confront the monk is a black boy who says to him, 'I am the friend of fornication; I trap and seduce the young, and I am called the spirit of fornication' (P. Mayerson, 'Anti-Black Sentiment in the "Vitae Patrum"', *HTR* 71 (1978) 304–11, at 307).

35 I am not persuaded that Barnabas was written in the first century, although the first-century authorial persona may be deliberate. I am currently working with the assumption that Barnabas was written before Clement of Alexandria (182–202 CE) cited it.

36 I have divided v. 9 into three parts. Verse 9a, which is not pertinent to the present discussion, nevertheless poses a significant exegetical challenge. Kraft, perhaps correctly, reads it as a 'parenthetical personal note'. He translates v. 9a as follows: 'But since I wish to write many things – not as a teacher would, but as is fitting for a friend to do – and to omit nothing of what we have received, I hurry along. I am your devoted slave' (*Barnabas and the Didache*, 90). Prostmeier refers to v. 9a as a '*captatio benevolentiae ab nostra persona* und Autorität des Mitgeteilten' (*Der Barnabasbrief*, 193).

days are near and Christians must be vigilant or the counter-divine will ensnare them and they will be found sinful at the final judgement.³⁷ Three points are, however, distinctive. (1) A counter-divine figure, referred to as ‘the Black one’ (v. 10a) and ‘the wicked archon’ (v. 13b),³⁸ threatens to capture and banish believers. (2) Together with conventional admonitions to flee vanity (v. 10a), fear God (v. 11c) and avoid complacency (v. 13a–b), the writer warns addressees not to ‘monasticise’ (μονάζειν, v. 10b).³⁹ (3) The writer exhorts his audience to be pneumatic and a perfect temple (4.11b). Although each one of these anomalies is a desideratum of research on this text, I will focus exclusively on ὁ μέλας in vv. 9c–10a.

4. Interpretation

Substantial evidence supports the conclusion that black Africans were looked upon with aversion and contempt (occasionally even as a threat to Roman rule in Upper Egypt). I review nine brief examples next.

4.1 *Tannaim*

One tannaitic interpretation of Deut 32.21 may refer indirectly to these circumstances. Deut 32.21 describes the punishment that God has decided to inflict on Israel for disloyalty:

I will incense them with a no-folk (*be-lo’am*); I will vex them with a nation of fools (*be-goy nabal*).

The interpretation follows:

‘And I will incense them with a *be-lo’am*.’ Do not read *bl’am*, but *blwy’m*; this refers to those who come from among the nations and kingdoms and expel them from their homes. Another interpretation: This refers to those who come from the *barbaria* and *mrtny*, who go about naked in the marketplace.⁴⁰

David Goldenberg argues that the ‘other interpretation’ – by its reference to *Barbaria* in East Africa and *Mauritania* in West Africa – indicates that the tannaitic

37 Barn. 4.9c shares verbatim agreement with Did. 16.2b. See Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief*, 218 n. 119. No evil figure occurs among the parallels.

38 Col 2.15; Eph 2.2. The *Secret Book of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *Gospel of Judas* propose that the god of the Old Testament and his angels were nothing but archons.

39 LXX Ps 101.8 (102.7). Verses 7–8: ‘I am like an owl in the desert. I am like a little owl in the wasteland. I lie awake. I am like a lonely bird at the housetop.’ PGL 876–77, s.v. μονάζειν.

40 Sifre Deuteronomy 320 (p. 367) according to D. M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 70. See also *idem*, ‘Rabbinic Knowledge of Black Africa’, *JSQ* 5/4 (1998) 318–28.

exposition interprets the biblical term *be-lo'am* as Blemmyan, and the word *nabal* as Nobaen (Nubae, Nobatae, Nobadae), two groups of black Africans frequently viewed as a threat to Roman rule in the third and fourth centuries. The Blemmyans were the best-known tribe in East Africa (on the border of Upper Egypt). Their political importance lasted 300 years (*ca.* 250–550 CE). Goldenberg characterises them as ferocious:

During this time, they are mentioned again and again in Roman sources as a fierce nomadic people who inhabit the desert south of Egypt between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea and often invaded Egypt. Their raids finally forced Diocletian in 297 to cede control of Roman territory south of the first cataract, even though the raids later continued. The Nobae were also known for their raids into Roman territory and they are regularly mentioned by Roman writers together with the Blemmyes as threats to Roman security.⁴¹

4.2 Epigram #1

Lloyd Thompson presents two third-century Romano-African epigrams likewise expressing abusive attitudes towards sub-Saharan people.⁴² The first of these reads:

*Faex Garamantarum nostrum processit ad axem
et piceo gaudet corpore verna niger,
quem nisi vox hominem labris emissa sonaret,
terreret visu horrida larva viros.
Dira Hadrumeta tuum rapiant sibi Tartara monstrum:
custodem hunc Ditis debet habere domus.*⁴³

The dregs of the Garamantians came up to our part of the world
And the black slave rejoices in his pitch-black body.
Whom, if the voice emitted from his lips didn't sound human,
The frightful demon would terrify men by his appearance.⁴⁴

41 Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 70. A. A. Vasiliev refers to this time as the 'period of Blemmyan terror' (*Justin the First* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950) 286 and n. 49). The Blemmyes' period of political importance extended from 250 to 550 CE. ('Rabbinic Knowledge of Black Africa', 320–1; cf. 323; final quotation from T. Papadopoulos, *Africanobyzantina: Byzantine Influence on Negro-Sudanese Cultures* (Athens: Memoirs of the Academy of Athens, 1966) 23). See also D. M. Goldenberg, 'Geographia Rabbinica: The Toponym Barbaria', *JJS* 50 (1999) 53–73. Βαρβαρία, sing., Ptolem. 1.17.6; 4.7.28 = 'our Berber(se)'.

42 Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 36.

43 Text F. Bucheler and A. Riese, eds., *Anthologia Latina sive poesis Latinae supplementum* (2 vols.; BSGRT; Leipzig: Teubner, 1894–7²) 1.155 (no. 183).

44 The expression *sonare hominem* means to sound human. Cf. *nec vox hominem sonat* (Vergil, *Aen.* 1.328).

Hadrumeta, let horrifying Hell take your monster for itself.
Hades should have this man as guardian.⁴⁵

This text depicts the black-skinned man as frightening. Associated with death, he *resembles* a human being, but is in fact a monster who belongs at the gates of hell. Thompson notes that this epigram may have been directed at a single well-known black warrior who was either captured in combat and made a slave at Hadrumetum (modern Susa in Tunisia) or born into slavery there (and possibly collaborating with the barbarian bandits).⁴⁶ However, the epigram may simply express xenophobic aversion to black African immigrants (possibly slaves) in Rome.

4.3 *Epigram #2*

Rhetorically less severe, the second epigram focuses on the black skin colour of Ethiopians:

*Ex oriente die noctis processit alumnus,
sub radiis Phoebi solus habet tenebras.
corvus carbo cinis concordant cuncta colori.
quod legeris nomen convenit: Aethiopsis.*⁴⁷

From the daylight of the East, Night's child comes forth
Beneath the rays of Phoebus, he alone has darkness.⁴⁸
The crow, carbon and ash all agree with respect to his colour.
The name you call him fits: Ethiopian.

While less violent, a tone of mockery in the second epigram is, nevertheless, present. Black skin is ugly, possessing an unwelcome permanence. The writer uses the slanderous epithet 'Night's child' to suggest malevolence and fear – 'ugliness of the ruffian "whom one would not care to meet late at night as one drives past the tombs on the Latin Way"'.⁴⁹ According to Thompson, repetition of the Latin *c* sound in the third verse evokes the word *caca-* (i.e. Lat. *cacare*, 'to pass, defecate, or go to stool'). Alternatively, it may mimic the 'cackle' of the partridge (Lat. *cacabare* < Gk κᾰκκᾰβίζειν) or the clicking sound of certain African

45 English translations of both epigrams are my own – with gratitude to Frances Spaltro.

46 Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 37. This depiction excludes the stereotype of Ethiopians as cowardly seen in, e.g., Aristotle and Philo. See Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 46–47. Goldenberg asks whether Origen drew on Philo, QG 2.82 for his interpretation (49). He might also have asked whether Origen drew on Barnabas, and if so, what source Barnabas used.

47 Text Bucheler and Riese, *Anthologia Latina*, 1.155 (no. 182).

48 Juxtaposition of what is right 'under the sun' (i.e. on earth) and what is right 'under the earth'.

49 Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 39, citing Juvenal 5.54.

languages.⁵⁰ Thompson views these epigrams as reflecting a xenophobic fear (in the frontline provinces) of armed conflict with sub-Saharan marauders coming up to Roman territory in the early third century, although mere aversion may suffice to explain them also.⁵¹

4.4 *John of Lycopolis (305–94 CE)*⁵²

With this same setting in mind, David Brakke reflects on an episode in the *Historia monachorum* about the incursion against the Thebaid border town of Syene by ‘Ethiopians’. A Roman general asked the monk John of Lycopolis whether John thought the general would prevail in the event of an invasion. According to Brakke, this vignette depicts Ethiopians as ‘a military threat powerful enough to worry a general *and* as opponents of the Christian state’.⁵³ Brakke writes:

While persons elsewhere in the Mediterranean may have been able to roman-ticize the mythic military power of the Ethiopian people, Egyptians had a more palpable sense of an ‘Ethiopian’ threat and thus were more likely to scapegoat darker-skinned persons in their midst. And indeed, the anti-ascetic Ethiopian demon was ‘a product typical of the monastic environments of Egypt’, which was then exported through literature to Syria, Palestine, and western Europe.⁵⁴

As Thompson points out, Romans loved mockery of all kinds – black *versus* white was just one example among many.⁵⁵ However, Alexandria was well situated for this particular lampoon since use of somatic categories meant that confusion between Ethiopians, Egyptians and Alexandrians was rampant. The stereotype of ‘Egyptians’ as ‘black’ goes back to Herodotus, who characterised them as

50 Cf. also *cacabatus*, adj., ‘black, sooty, besmeared like a cooking-pot’ (Lewis and Short s.v.). Since only a percentage of African languages utilise clicks, it may simply reflect the ‘bar-bar-bar’ sound to Greek or Roman ears of ‘barbarian’ languages. Thompson relates the sound to *faex* (‘shit’ in line 1 of the prior epigram), *Romans and Blacks*, 37. On the language of Kush as ‘barbaric’ (e.g. Sib. Or.), see Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 71–2; *idem*, ‘Geographia Rabbinica’, 53–73.

51 Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 37. See also L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum* (Publications de l’Université de Tunis ser. 1, Archéologie, histoire 10; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964) 170–1, esp. plate 12d; R. Lonis, ‘Les trois approches de l’Éthiopien par l’opinion gréco-romaine’, *Ktéma* 6 (1981) 69–87, at 87; and J. Desanges, ‘The Iconography of the Black in Ancient North Africa’, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. 1: *From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. D. Bindman and H. L. Gates, Jr.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010²) 246–68, 308–12, at 265.

52 John was a hermit of the Nitrean desert (Wadi el Natrun, aka Scetis).

53 Brakke, ‘Male Sexuality’, 512 (emphasis original).

54 Brakke, ‘Male Sexuality’, 512. With regard to Nubia, see N. M. Sherif, ‘Nubia before Napata (3100–750)’, *General History of Africa*, II.245–77. Concerning the spread of Christianity in Nubia, see K. Michalowski, ‘The Spreading of Christianity in Nubia’, *ibid.*, 326–40.

55 Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 96.

μελάγχροος (2.104). Such a blanket stereotype inevitably piqued Alexandrian sensibilities. Among the propertied classes in Roman Egypt but especially in Alexandria, 'Egyptian' denoted uncivilised peasant. Supporting this point, Thompson cites P.Oxy. 1681: 'Perhaps, my brothers, you think I am some barbarian or uncivilized Egyptian [Αἰγύπτιος ἄνθρωπος].'⁵⁶

4.5 Imperial Letter of 215 CE

In 215 CE, fear of an armed 'Ethiopian' incursion against Alexandria prompted an imperial letter of Caracalla ordering the expulsion of all 'Egyptians' from the city. The letter specifies its target as 'the countryfolk who have fled from other parts' and who, 'by the numbers of *their kind* and their *uselessness*, are disturbing the city', to which they have fled from their own districts, 'to escape rustic toil'. The ban exempted 'pig-dealers and river boatmen and the men who bring down reeds for heating the baths' (ll. 17–19). Tourists and those visiting on business were also exempt (i.e., those who had come 'to view the glorious city of Alexandria' or to enjoy 'a more civilized life [πολιτικώτερα ζῶη] or for incidental business').⁵⁷ Below I will return to Caracalla's relationship with Alexandria and its possible importance for Barnabas.

4.6 P.Oxy. 480

In Roman Egypt, Hellenised Egyptians and Jews were considered Greeks who mutually 'scorned or disliked the peasant of the soil' (ἀγροῖκοι Αἰγύπτιοι), 'and wished to hold themselves aloof'.⁵⁸ Most Hellenised Egyptians were wealthy and lived in Alexandria,⁵⁹ which was considered *ad Aegyptum*

⁵⁶ Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 140. Cicero, *Off.* 1.129–30 expresses a similarly derogatory concept, *munditia ... fugiat agrestem et inhumanam negligentiam* ('human elegance should avoid rude and uncivilised carelessness'). Acts Pet. 22 also attests these categories: Peter dreams about a 'most evil-looking woman, who looked like an Ethiopian, not an Egyptian, but was all black' (trans. Brakke, 'Male Sexuality', 507).

⁵⁷ Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 140. P.Giess. 40.2 ll. 16–29 in *Select Papyri: Official Documents: Edicts and Orders* (ed. and trans. C. C. Edgar and A. S. Hunt; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934) 90–3 (no. 215). Caracalla's edict also specifies how to identify an 'Egyptian'. Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 220 n. 205 offers the following comparative evidence: P.Yale 46 col. 1.13 (complaint of a victim of the contemptuous treatment that *Aigyptioi* were apt to suffer); P.Zen. 2.66 (victimisation owing to inability to 'play the Hellene', ἑλληνίζειν).

⁵⁸ Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 140, citing R. MacMullen, 'Nationalism in Roman Egypt', *Aegyptus* 44 (1964) 179–99, at 190. The Greek expression is in P.Giess. 40.2 ll. 16–29 (see previous note). Jews in Egypt were not, however, unanimously approved. *CPJ* 156c categorises Jews in Egypt as almost 'Egyptian' with an un-Hellenic mentality.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 141.

(‘near Egypt’), not in it.⁶⁰ Alexandrians considered themselves above all other classes.⁶¹ P.Oxy. 480 (180 CE) provides evidence of this view in its division of the Egyptian population into ‘stranger, Roman, Alexandrian, Egyptian, freedman’.⁶²

4.7 Origen

Given that he was dwelling in Alexandria off and on during his career, it is unsurprising to find such stereotypes in the writings of Origen.⁶³ Although he traces all creation to God and considers all humanity ‘equal and alike’ (*Princ.* 9.6), demographic groups have distinguishing characteristics: Ethiopians are cannibalistic, Scythians legally sanction parricide, and so forth.⁶⁴ Origen associates the black skin colour of sub-Saharan people with sin and vice.⁶⁵ Therefore, he demonstrates real concern in *Comm. Cant.* over the text’s qualification of black skin as beautiful (Cant 1.5).⁶⁶ Christians, he argues, can view blackness as a recoverable condition: ‘If you have repented, however, your soul will indeed be black because of your old sins, but your penitence will give it something of what I may call an Ethiopian beauty.’⁶⁷ But from the length at which he discusses

60 See Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, 206–7; H. I. Bell, ‘Alexandria ad Aegyptum’, *JRS* 36 (1946) 130–2; P. M. Fraser, ‘Alexandria ad Aegyptum Again’, *JRS* 39 (1949) 56 (raising one exception).

61 Brakke aptly describes Egyptians as ‘in-between’ (‘Male Sexuality’, 508).

62 The text was written by a census administrator. See MacMullen, ‘Nationalism in Roman Egypt’, 184.

63 Origen regarded Barnabas as a ‘general epistle’ (*Cels.*, 1.63, citing Barn. 5.9; trans. H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 58). He may allude to Barnabas in *Comm. Rom.* 2.9 (Barn. 4.7–9) and 2.13 (Barn. 9.6; 15.9) (trans. T. P. Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; FC 103, 104; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), although I do not find these allusions entirely convincing. See Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 97–111, 311; J. N. Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church: Its Origin and Influence on Christian Theology up to Irenaeus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943) 14–15, 29, 42.

64 Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.5; trans. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles* (repr. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973 [1966]) 133.

65 Origen, *Comm. Cant.* 2.1; trans. R. P. Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* (ACW 26; New York: Newman, 1957) 91–113, at 106. Origen draws a connection between Cant 1.5 and Moses’s marriage to an Ethiopian in *Comm. Cant.* 2.2. See J. C. King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom’s Perfect Marriage Song* (Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs; Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 87, 112 n. 88, 126–31.

66 Origen, *Hom. Cant.* 1.6. Cf. Paulinus of Nola, *Carm.* 28.249–51: *qui [sc. draco] vorat Aethiopum populos non sole perustos | sed vitibus nigros et crimine nocticolores | tales Aethiopas serpens edit* (text G. de Hartel, ed., *Sancti Pontii Meropii Paulini Nolani Carmina* (CSEL 30; Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894) 302).

67 Origen, *Hom. Cant.* 1.6; trans. Lawson, *Song of Songs*, 276–7. Cf. also Cant 1.4 Vulgate (LXX 1.5): *nigra sum sed formosa*. Origen, *Comm. Cant.* 2.9; trans. R. S. J. Daly, *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) 122. Origen, *Comm. Cant.* 2.2; trans. Lawson, *Song of Songs*, 107. Following Origen, Jerome advances a similar argument: ‘At one time we were Ethiopians in

blackness in this commentary – even *acknowledging* that his argument is slightly obsessive⁶⁸ – we infer that Origen was aware of the threat posed by blackness even as he understands it as an impermanent state for those who repent.⁶⁹

4.8 *Didymus the Blind*

Reliant on the Epistle of Barnabas, Origen's student in Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, offers the next explicit Christian reference to the counter-divine as black after Barnabas. With regard to Zeph 2.12 (i.e., 'You also, O Ethiopians, shall be killed by the sword'), Didymus argues that black-skinned people (literally: 'Ethiopian') are progeny of the devil who is black:

How is it that they became 'Ethiopians', those who are wounded by the good so that they might die to impiety? Is it not because they have been born from the devil [cf. John 8.44] and want to perform his desires (ἐπιθυμίαι)? *For it is said concerning him that he is black* because of the dark ignorance and evil attaching [to him], as it is made clear in the Book of Repentance, called The Shepherd, and in the Epistle of Barnabas.⁷⁰

our vices and sins. How so? Because our sins had blackened us. But afterwards we heard the words: "Wash yourselves clean!" And we said: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." We are Ethiopians, therefore, who have been transformed from blackness into whiteness' (Jerome, *Tract. Ps. 18* (Ps 86); trans. M. Liguori Ewald, *The Homilies of St. Jerome* (2 vols.; FC 48, 57; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1964–6) 1.135–45, at 140).

68 In *Comm. Cant. 2.2*, Origen writes: 'Although we may seem to have dealt with these matters at too great length we adjudged the opportunity afforded by these passages such as should certainly not be missed; especially because they bear a certain likeness to this saying of her who is darkened because the sun has looked askance at her. And we have shown that this takes place wherever a sinful condition has previously obtained, and that a person is darkened or scorched by the sun where the ground of sin exists ...' (trans. Lawson, *Song of Songs*, 112).

69 Origen's interpretation is important for subsequent patristic interpretation, including Peter of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind (see below), Apollinaris, Ambrose, Paulinus of Nola, Ephrem, Apponius, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Cassiodorus, Cyril of Alexandria, Faustus, bishop of Riez, Gregory the Great, Ennodius and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 49).

70 For Brakke's masterful interpretation of the passage as sexually charged, see 'Male Sexuality', 515. The colour black occurs in the apocalyptic contexts of Vision 4 and Similitude 9 in the Shepherd of Hermas: Vis. 4, 1[22].10, the beast's head is partly black; 3[24].2, the world is described as black; Sim. 9, 1[78].5, 19[96].1, the first mountain is black; 9, 6[83].4 and 8[85].1, 2, 4, 5, 7; 27[104].2, stones are black; 9[86].5, 13[90].8, 15[92].1, 3, women are dressed in black. According to C. Osiek, images may correspond across the text (e.g. first black stones may correspond to first black mountain) (*The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (ed. H. Koester; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 223). Osiek notes that the use of colour is traditional in apocalyptic literature, especially black, red, white and a variant fourth colour (93).

4.9 *Epistle of Barnabas*

Four resemblances to the evidence above suggest that Barnabas' characterisation of ὁ μέλας belongs among such fourth-century North African depictions of Ethiopians.

(1) The first epigram (4.2 above) refers to the Ethiopian slave as frightening. Because the Ethiopian communicates using language instead of sound (e.g. bark, tweet), he is human, although abhorrent as a monster – a 'Trojan horse' – i.e., disguising malevolent intent.⁷¹ The second epigram (4.3 above) underscores the Ethiopian's association with night-time, an ominous bird (e.g. crow), eschatological judgement (e.g. carbon, coal) and death (e.g. cinders). In Barnabas the counter-divine resembles both of these portraits in its description as vigilance is required because 'the Black One' sneaks around like a thief penetrating cloisters through secretive means and catching Christians off guard.⁷²

(2) The first epigram portrays the Ethiopian as frightening even to grown men. Similarly furtive, Barnabas refers to the counter-divine as terrifying, threatening salvation by seizing and hurling believers from safety. The addressees are exhorted not to live alone (μονόζειν) – implying safety in numbers – and not to grow confident, as if the threat had passed.

(3) The first epigram also depicts the Ethiopian as grotesque – not only resembling a monster but belonging, like Cerberus, at the gates of the Underworld. Barnabas too associates ὁ μέλας with death – the object of the believer's worship prior to the day on which each confessed Christ (Barn. 16.9). The power of ὁ μέλας to eject Christians from the kingdom constitutes a threat of death.⁷³

(4) An unpleasant permanence comes through in the second epigram's association of the Ethiopian with the natural environment: night, crows, carbon and cinders. Barnabas refers to 'the Black One' as ruling both in the present age of lawlessness and creating scandal in the future, that is, he is, like nature, a permanent fixture of the universe until Jesus returns.⁷⁴

As Brakke insightfully observes, the vignette about John of Lycopolis suggests that Christian Egyptians (probably northern) knew the sub-Saharan as unwelcome

71 The language is masculine, but undoubtedly implies no gender restriction.

72 As David Brakke, from whom I have borrowed the expression 'Ethiopianize' ('Male Sexuality', 503) has demonstrated, 'Ethiopianizing' frequently involves hypersexualization. Barnabas' characterisation of 'the Black One' as infiltrating the community and costing believers their salvation may reflect a specific set of ascetic ideals. Prohibitions against deviant sexual behaviours (e.g. Barn. 10.6–8) might be seen to undergird this assumption, likewise, the exhortation against 'dwelling alone' (4.10).

73 Association of black with mourning and (thus) earthly existence is ubiquitous across time, locations and culture.

74 Origen seems to share this emphasis on the counter-divine's permanence, overturned only in repentance. Origen, *Comm. Cant.* 2.2, trans. Lawson, *Song of Songs*, 107–9.

military exposure. Closer examination of Barnabas' warnings concerning the counter-divine suggests a similar disposition. Comparing Barn. 4.9b–14 with the warning in 2.10b, we observe that three elements in the earlier passage (2.10b) recur in the latter (4.9c: #1, #3; 4.13b: #1, #2). These elements are: (1) counter-divine figure as subject; (2) action of thrusting away from safety (alternately referred to as salvation, life and kingdom); and (3) evil achieving ingress and jeopardising believers in an eschatological confrontation. According to 4.9c, unless he is resisted, ὁ μέλας penetrates the proverbial backdoor (Gk παρείσδυσις) of the believer's life, costing them the reward of a lifetime of faith. Similarly, in 2.10b, ὁ πονηρός brings error in through the backdoor (Gk παρείσδυσις), casting Christians from 'life'. 244 TLG hits for the word παρείσδυσις show a surprising predilection for applications in scientific literature. The oldest occurrences are in works on botany by Theophrastus – the fourth-century BCE successor to Aristotle at the Lyceum, known for his work on botany (3 hits), Thessalus of Tralles – a first-century CE physician and author of a few medical works (4 hits), and Hero, a first-century Alexandrian physician (10 hits, see below). Hero probably taught at the Musaeum since a majority of his writings are lecture notes for courses in mathematics physics and mechanics at the Library in Alexandria.⁷⁵ He was widely read in Alexandria in the second and third centuries CE.

Hero uses παρείσδυσις in his work *Pneumatica* (10 hits, *Pneum.* 1.2, 8, 19, 22, 40; 2.25, 28) to describe machines, such as the hydraulis, that utilise air, steam or water pressure. In most cases, παρείσδυσις refers to the interruption of a vacuum by air or water.⁷⁶ This scientific context suggests Barnabas' view of his community as a vacuum threatened by material contaminants undetectably making their way in from the outside.⁷⁷ Barnabas' exhortation to his audience to be spiritual (γενώμεθα πνευματικοί, 4.11b) and 'a perfect temple' reinforce this metaphor of an airtight context to which nothing impure should gain entry. This interpretation might be improbable if not for a very similar construction in Shepherd, Mand. 5.1.3 [33.1].

In Barn. 2.10b the counter-divine figure 'hurls (ἐκσφενδονᾶν) Christians from life'. Similarly, in 4.13b, ὁ πονηρός ἄρχων wrests authority and forces Christians out of the kingdom. Barn. 4.13b also describes Christians as 'driven out' or 'expelled from' (ἄπωθεῖν) the kingdom. A TLG search finds 43 occurrences of ἐκσφενδονᾶν; only Barn. 2.10b and Basil (*Homilia adversus eos qui irascuntur* 31.357.48.) predate the seventh century. LSJ offers two occurrences of the verb,

⁷⁵ Hero performed some of the first formal research into cybernetics. J. P. Oleson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology in the Classical World* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 24–5.

⁷⁶ Trans. B. Woodcroft, *The Pneumatics of Hero of Alexandria* (London: Taylor, Walton & Maberly, 1851).

⁷⁷ The Shepherd of Hermas implies a similar mechanism in its discussion of spirits in the vessel of the soul.

translated ‘throw as from a sling’. The second source is Michael, *In parva naturalia commentaria* (93.32), but the first is a passage on Ethiopian battle tactics deployed against the Persians in Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 9.5.8. In ch. 8, Heliodorus relates the special hurling talent of the Troglodytes:

The Troglodytes are a nomad people who live in Ethiopia on the borders of Arabia. They are naturally swift runners, and practice the art from childhood. They have no training whatever in heavy arms, but use slings to attack from a distance. Either their speed disconcerts the enemy, or, if they find themselves worsted, they run away. No one ever tries to pursue them, for they are known to be as swift as the wind and to hide in rocky caves with small openings⁷⁸ which are difficult to find. Though on foot, these Troglodytes overtook the Persian horsemen and succeeded in wounding some of them with their slings.⁷⁹

Barnabas’ use of slinging as the primary action of the counter-divine against Christians strongly suggests his Ethiopianisation of this figure. Together with the qualities of ‘seizing authority’ and polluting the vacuum, the reference to the counter-divine as ὁ μέλας mirrors the geopolitical and cultural circumstances of Alexandrians in the third century.

5. Conclusion

Interpreters understand ὁ μέλας in Barn. 4 as Satan – the undifferentiated counter-divine figure appearing unsystematically across early Christian literature. Yet only Barn. 18 refers to this figure as Satan.⁸⁰ Barn. 2 refers to it as ὁ πονηρὸς ἄρχων, ‘the evil ruler’. Didymus the Blind interprets the figure as Ethiopian. Two clues suggest that Didymus accurately apprehends Barnabas’ intention. The first

78 Holes created by gnawing or nibbling (τρώγω) as by a mouse. LSJ s.v. τρογλοδυντέω, ‘dwell in holes’, e.g. ‘Troglodytes, Cave-men, an Aethiopian tribe’.

79 Text T. W. Lumb, J. Maillon and R. M. Rattenbury, eds. and trans., *Héliodore: Les Éthiopiennes (Théagène et Chariclée)* (3 vols.; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960²); trans. M. Hadas, *Heliodorus: An Ethiopian Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957) 214 (ch. 8). Cf. also, ‘The Troglodytes and those who lived near the cinnamon country, who were light-armed, nimble, and excellent archers, he assigned to harry the slingers and javelin throwers on the enemy’s left’ (trans. *ibid.*, 231). On the Troglodytes, see Herodotus 2.161, 4.183; Strabo, *Geogr.* 1.1; Pliny, *Nat.* 6.34. ‘A late rabbinic anthology of earlier material, Leqah Tov, authored by Toviah b. Eliezer of Bulgaria at the end of the eleventh century, contains a unique text that associates the twelve signs of the zodiac with twelve specific peoples or lands. In what may be an echo of the ancient Kushite reputation with the bow, Sagittarius the Archer is associated with the Kushites’ (Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 68).

80 The counter-divine figure is an evil archon, implying qualities borrowed from a range of natural and supernatural foes including corrupt Roman officials, angels, demons, the devil, Satan and planetary deities. *DDD*² has no entry for ‘the Black One’. The colour ‘black’ does not even appear in the index. On archons, see D. Aune’s discussion of ‘archon’ vis-à-vis Satan, noting Barn. 18.2 (‘Archon’, *DDD*² 82–5, at 83).

is Barnabas' construal of the community as a vacuum which 'the Black one' – albeit a natural part of the environment – contaminates. The second is Barnabas' characterisation of this figure as using 'slings' in battle.⁸¹ Thus, reference to the counter-divine as 'the Black One' should be added to the anti-Egyptian rhetoric in the Epistle of Barnabas (e.g. 9.6), supporting a view of the writer as leader of an Alexandrian Christian community.⁸²

Is Barnabas a sophisticated Alexandrian Roman Christian quavering over sub-Saharan marauders? Such a position would be pro-Roman given that the Roman government greatly feared this type of incursion. If, however, as most commentators agree, the apocalyptic predictions alluding to Daniel's vision of the ten kingdoms (Barn. 4.4, Dan 7.24) and the fourth beast (Barn. 4.5, Dan 7.7–8) (and perhaps also the discussion of the temple in ch. 16) reliably indicate the epistle's date, then the stereotypical ethnic epithet 'the Black One', rather than representing unspecified fear, disdain or loathing of 'Ethiopians' or an Ethiopian incursion, may signify aversion to a specific 'Ethiopian' foe.

In 193 CE, Septimius Severus became the first Roman emperor to have been born in Africa.⁸³ From 198 to 211 he ruled together with his son Caracalla, and after his death in 211 Caracalla ruled with his brother Geta until Caracalla murdered Geta later in the same year. As Richardson and Shukster have shown, the 'offshoot' or 'excrescence' in Barn 4.5 is clearly the present emperor.⁸⁴ They surmise that this figure is Nerva. Another possibility is that reference to the counter-divine as 'the Black One' – a factor Richardson and Shukster did not consider in their study – indicates Caracalla *and* Serapis, the notoriously black deity with whom Caracalla associated.⁸⁵

81 J. R. Asher discusses 'slinging' as a cowardly battle tactic applied to the devil in Eph 6.11, 16 ('An Unworthy Foe: Heroic Ἡθῆ, Trickery, and an Insult in Ephesians 6:11', *JBL* 130 (2011) 729–48).

82 Portraying the counter-divine with the qualities of one's human adversary, together with the use of a sobriquet, confirms Kraft's evaluation of ch. 4 as apocalyptic.

83 Before he died he had an ominous dream involving an Ethiopian soldier, who had become famous as a jester. When this soldier greeted Severus with a garland of cypress-boughs, the emperor flew off in a rage ordering that the man be removed from his sight 'troubled by the man's ominous color and the ominous nature of the garland'. Foretelling the emperor's death, the Ethiopian cried out, 'You have been all things, you have conquered all things, now, O conqueror, be a god.' When the emperor arrived in town he wanted to perform a sacrifice. In error, he was led to the Temple of Bellona, and given black victims. Abandoning the sacrifice, he returned to the palace but the black victims followed him there (*SHA, Sept. Sev.* 1.22.4–7, trans. D. Magie, *The Scriptores historiae Augustae* (3 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921–32) 1.424–7).

84 Richardson and Shukster argue that the excrescence humiliates the 'other three', where the more natural reading of the Greek is that one of three takes over. P. Richardson and M. B. Shukster, 'Barnabas, Nerva, and the Yabnean Rabbis', *JTS* 34 (1983) 31–55, at 40.

85 L. de Blois, 'The *constitutio Antoniniana* (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?', *Mnemosyne* 67 (2014) 1014–21.

Following the death of Commodus on 31 December 192 CE, three emperors succeeded one another in a short period of time: Pertinax, Didius Julianus and Septimius Severus.⁸⁶ Barn. 4.4 cites Dan. 7.24: 'Ten kingdoms will rule the earth and a small king will rise up afterwards, he will humble three under one of the kings'; and Barn. 4.5 cites Dan 7.7–8.⁸⁷ It is possible to see the fourth beast as Severus and the small horn and offshoot as Caracalla, who assumed rule, after his father died, by murdering his brother.

At the outset of his reign as sole emperor in 211, Caracalla declared divine support for Serapis. Σέρραπις was a hybrid god created by Ptolemy I ca. 300 BCE by fusing Osiris and Apis. The deity's iconography has many Greek elements. The image is anthropomorphic – a bearded man with a Greek men's hairstyle wearing a Greek robe. On top of his head is a *modius* (i.e. a basket for measuring corn symbolising fertility). Sometimes Cerberus, the three-headed dog and guardian of the Underworld, sits at his feet as in the first epigram (4.2 above).⁸⁸ Neither Septimius nor Caracalla were considered black emperors,⁸⁹ although each was of African descent. Serapis, however, was depicted as black because he was perceived as a combined manifestation of Osiris and the black bull Apis. Like other Egyptian gods including Osiris and Anubis, black was a frequent honorific epithet for Serapis. Plutarch associates Serapis with Pluto, also known as black.⁹⁰ Clement of Alexandria describes the face of Serapis as 'dark blue'.⁹¹ A fragment of papyrus belonging to the *Alexandrian World Chronicle* depicts it as black.⁹²

86 As mere claimants to the title, Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus do not count; however, the black and white imagery of their names is duly noted.

87 Cf. ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω (Mark 13.14).

88 Temples to Serapis were often oriented on astrological principles.

89 Although certain modern Afrocentric groups have attempted to see him as such. A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor* (New York: Routledge, 1999²).

90 Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 27–9. E. R. Bevan, *The House of Ptolemy* (London: Methuen, 1927) ch. 2. Chthonic deities were often associated with the colour black (Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit*, 67–8). Suetonius, *Cal.* 57.4: 'A nocturnal performance besides was rehearsing, in which scenes from the lower world were represented by Egyptians and Aethiopians' (trans. J. C. Rolfe, *Suetonius* (rev. edn; 2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950–1) 1.502–3). On 'black Pluto', see Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit*, 69–70.

91 Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 4; trans. W. Wilson, *ANF* IV/1.54).

92 A. Bauer and J. Strzygowski, *Eine alexandrinische Weltchronik. Text und Miniaturen des griechischen Papyrus der Sammlung W. Goleniščev* (Vienna: Gerold, 1905) 224, Tafel 6 verso; discussion at 49–75. The image is based on the Christian destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria in 391 CE. On the grandeur of this temple, see Ammianus Marcellinus 22.16.12, trans. J. C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus* (3 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950–2) II.300–3. Rufinus (402 CE) describes the Serapeum as a temple elevated on a platform one hundred plus steps high (*Hist. eccl.* 11.23; trans. P. R. Amidon, S.J., *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia: Books 10 and 11* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 80–1).

The Serapeum in Canopus was known for healing.⁹³ The Serapeum in Alexandria was destroyed and rebuilt during Caracalla's co-reign with his father.⁹⁴ Both father and son were devotees of Serapis.⁹⁵ Caracalla also erected a temple dedicated to Serapis on the Quirinal Hill in 212.⁹⁶ The population of

93 Strabo mentions the Serapeum in Canopus renowned for curing the sick (*Geogr.* 17.1.17; trans. H. L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo* (8 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949–54) VIII.62–5).

94 Attesting the Serapeum in Alexandria: Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.84; Strabo, *Geogr.* 17.1.6. Strabo reports that the Serapeum had fallen into neglect (*Geogr.* 17.1.10). Philo of Alexandria described the grandeur of the sanctuary and library ca. 38 CE (*Legat.* 22.151). In 181 CE, the temple burned down (Jerome, *Chron.* according to Jerome's version of Eusebius' *Chronicle*: R. W. O. Helm, ed., *Eusebius: Werke*, vol. VII: *Die Chronik des Hieronymus* (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte 47; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956); Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 4.47) and was rebuilt on a much grander scale by Septimius Severus. It was this new temple about which Ammianus wrote, 'the whole world beholds nothing more magnificent' (22.16.12). See also J. S. McKenzie, S. Gibson and A. T. Reyes, 'Reconstructing the Serapeum in Alexandria from the Archaeological Evidence', *JRS* 94 (2004) 73–121, at 86 n. 43). It was completed sometime before 215, when Caracalla sacrificed there before ordering his army to slaughter a group of Alexandrians (Herodian 4.9.1–9; trans. C. R. Whittaker, *Herodian, History of the Empire*, vol. 1 (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). According to Aphthonius, the books of this library were located in the colonnaded stoa (other rooms served as shrines to honour the gods) (Aphthonius, *Prog.* 10, according to G. A. Kennedy, ed., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (WGRW 10; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 118–20). The libraries seen by Tertullian were probably also in the stoa surrounding a stone courtyard in the centre of which was the temple. According to Tertullian, the sanctuary contained an important library that housed (among other holdings) the LXX (*Apol.* 18.8). Aristea relates how Ptolemy II Philadelphus agreed to a request by his librarian Demetrius to translate the Torah housing it in the book collection at the Library of Alexandria (Let. Arist. 9; Philo, *Mos.* 2.31, Josephus, *Ant.* 12.2; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.21.3; Clement, *Strom.* 1.22; Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 5.8.2). John Chrysostom evidently also saw this copy of the LXX (*Adv. Jud.*, 1.6.1; trans. P. W. Harkins, *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses against Judaizing Christians* (FC 68; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979) 21–2). After the library was destroyed, the Serapeum would have been the main book repository until it too was destroyed. C. Rowan spells out the evidence for Severan worship of Serapis (*Under Divine Auspices: Divine Ideology and the Visualisation of Imperial Power in the Severan Period* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 137–9). See also E. Manders, *Impact of Empire: Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, AD 193–284* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 226; C. Ando, *Imperial Rome AD 193 to 284: The Critical Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) 57.

95 For this point on Septimius Severus, see *SHA, Sept. Sev.* 17.4; trans. Magie, *Historia Augusta* (LCL), I.410–11; on Caracalla, see Cassius Dio 78.22.1; trans. E. Cary, *Dio's Roman History* (9 vols.; LCL; London: Heinemann/New York: MacMillan, 1914–27) IX.332–5. The *Historia Augusta* emphasises Caracalla's import of the Isis cult to Rome (*SHA, Sept. Sev.* 9.10–12; trans. Magie, *Historia Augusta* (LCL), II.24–7).

96 Rowan, *Under Divine Auspices*, 142–3.

Alexandria viewed Caracalla as a deceitful and villainous ruler.⁹⁷ According to both Dio (78.2.2) and Herodian (4.9.8), Caracalla came to the city to pay respects to the tomb of Alexander the Great. Prior to his visit, he heard that he was being mocked (διδάσκω, 78.22.1) by the Alexandrians for murdering his brother. On arrival, he nonetheless cordially greeted the people of the city hosting a banquet in their honour. Following the banquet, however, he turned on his guests slaughtering a great many. He reported to the Senate that, on that occasion, he had no idea how many Alexandrians he had killed and that it was irrelevant 'since all had deserved to suffer this fate' (78.22.3). Dio sums up: 'Now Antoninus, in spite of the immense affection which he professed to cherish for Alexander, all but utterly destroyed the whole population of Alexander's city.' While in Alexandria, Caracalla frequently took part in the battles, but when he did not, he issued official communiques from the temple of Serapis where he had set up quarters (78.23.2). Caracalla's association with Serapis and his temple was thus intimate.⁹⁸

Further suggestive that Caracalla's reign comprises the backdrop of the Epistle of Barnabas is an oracle applied to Caracalla – one in which Dio records the emperor took pride.⁹⁹ Dio writes that on a visit to Pergamum, the following oracle comes to be applied to Caracalla: 'Into Telephus' land the Ausonian beast shall enter' (78.16.8). Twice Dio explains that Caracalla was delighted by this reference to himself as θῆρ: 'And because he was called "beast" he was pleased and proud and put to death great numbers of people at a time' (cf. 78.23.4). Just as Barnabas equates the small king who subdues the other two kings with the fourth beast, so it seems 'beast' was a nickname Caracalla favoured.

To be sure, with Richardson and Shukster, the author's discussion of the rebuilding of the temple in Barn. 16 refers, at least on one level, to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. However, the reference may reflect verisimilitude of the life of the historical Barnabas with an allegorical referent in the author's own day. Caracalla finished the magnificent Serapeum in Alexandria in 215 CE, the same year he issued the edict expelling Egyptians from Alexandria and roughly the same year in which the Epistle of Barnabas is first attested. According to Clement of Alexandria (who first attests Barnabas), Basilidean Christians could

97 Cassius Dio 78.22.1; trans. Cary, *Dio's Roman History* (LCL), IX.332–5.

98 Cassius Dio (78.23; trans. Cary, *Dio's Roman History* (LCL), IX.334–7) also reports that Caracalla consecrated to Serapis the sword he used to kill his brother Geta in his mother's arms.

99 The assumption that Clement of Alexandria and Origen could not regard Barnabas as scripture and cite it in their writings if the text had not been written many years before is flawed. Pseudepigraphical writers, such as Barnabas, did not write for the future but for the present. A successful pseudepigraphon is persuasive the moment it appears. When Clement of Alexandria and Origen cite Barnabas, they attest not its much earlier date, but its success as a fake. With gratitude to Henk Jan de Jonge for raising this possible objection.

be found worshipping Serapis as the highest God in the pagan temple (*Strom.* 1.146).¹⁰⁰ Also attesting this dual commitment, Hadrian writes, in a letter to Servianus, that it is easy to confuse Christians and worshippers of Serapis. Caracalla's new temple to Serapis drove more Christians towards this kind of syncretism. Barnabas' emphasis in 4.11 on a 'a perfect temple to God' (ναὸς τέλειος τῷ θεῷ) – the temple carefully qualified in ch. 16 as the individual believer – reflects disapproval of worship in a publicly designated ναός. While a variety of historical circumstances may lie in the background, Christian Egyptians living in Alexandria who simultaneously confess belief in Serapis (e.g. followers of Basilides) or disguise their Christian faith by also worshipping publicly in the new temple to Serapis is an obvious choice. From either group (or both), Barnabas would be demanding exclusive devotion.¹⁰¹ In such an historical context, utilisation of an ethnic stereotype to characterise the counter-divine disguises anti-imperial as anti-pagan critique, accusing Caracalla of barbarianism, heresy and promoting Christian (in particular) association with the cult of Serapis in Alexandria, and condemning such behaviour as an unqualified compromise of God's covenant akin to the golden calf. In Memphis, such Serapian Christians followers cloistered themselves as anchorites (ἀναχωρεῖν 'to withdraw') – a practice Barnabas explicitly forbids ('Do not live alone', 4.10).¹⁰² Although Barnabas directs his message primarily against Christians, the author depicts the counter-divine on anti-imperial terms to make clear a distinction between a pro-imperial form of Christianity condoning simultaneous Serapis worship and an exclusive form of Christian worship with distinctly anti-establishmentarian implications.

In the Book of Revelation, followed immediately by Barnabas in Codex Sinaiticus, the Empire is an enemy of the Christians; in the Epistle of Barnabas, Rome is likewise a foe. Both texts hypostatize stereotypes to concretize anxiety. If this is correct, all anti-Egyptian rhetoric in Barnabas, including the passages singling out Moses (e.g. 4.6–8; 14.1–5), must be reconsidered. The potential of such

100 The Venice manuscript states that the Basilideans celebrated the night before the Epiphany singing and flute-playing in a heathen temple at Alexandria.

101 During the second century, popularity of the cult of Serapis increased. In Alexandria, Serapis and Christ existed side by side and were frequently seen as interchangeable. Some early Christians made no distinction between Christ and Serapis, worshipping both. Both cults practised baptism. In 134, after a visit to Alexandria, Hadrian wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, Servianus, attesting the interchangeability of these two groups: 'There those who worship Serapis are, in fact, Christians, and those who call themselves bishops of Christ are, in fact, devotees of Serapis (*SHA*, Firmus etc. 29.8.1–10; trans. Magie, *Historia Augusta* (LCL), iii.398–401).

102 P.CairoZen. 59034. M. Rostovtzeff, 'Ptolemaic Egypt', *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. vii: *The Hellenistic Monarchies and the Rise of Rome* (ed. S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock and M. P. Charlesworth; London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1954 [1923]) 109–54, at 145–6.

work to stipulate the *communis opinio doctorum* concerning Barnabas' anti-Jewish position should be obvious:¹⁰³ the warnings against Jews are a component of an attack on the surrounding environment and the message is an allegory. Fellow Christians compromising the laws of God stand to forfeit the covenant forever.

103 Writing under the pseudonym of a Cypriote Levite convert from the Pauline historical stratum of the Christ-belief movement as the author of Barnabas does, his various ostensibly anti-Jewish (e.g. supersessionist) arguments must be interpreted as emerging from *within* a Christian community and directed at it. This contrasts with Justin Martyr whose arguments against Trypho come from outside the Jewish community and are directed at it. The writings of Athanasius and Origen at times reveal a similar aim. It is shadow-boxing to reinforce ideals already in place; it is not authentic Christian-Jewish dialectic. See J. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 49–60.