

From the Marginals to the Center: Olga Freidenberg's Works on the Greek Novel

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Olga Freidenberg, 1910s



Olga Freidenberg, 1950s

Olga Freidenberg: Image and Heritage

You see two faces of the same person – Olga Freidenberg born 1890. The first one is of a young and carefree woman before her becoming a great scholar and a philosopher. The other one is of the same woman, looking like someone who has lost all hopes. The photograph was taken when she served as the Head of the University Classics Department and had already written her major books. Most of what she wrote was locked away in an iron trunk and, after her death in 1955 in Leningrad, remained in that chest, that is, unpublished. In 1972, when I first opened that trunk, I found there – just to mention the most important items – nine completed monographs, thousands of pages covering such topics as Greek novel, Roman comedy and Greek tragedy, Sappho and Hesiod, Homer and ancient folklore and so forth; there

were at least two dozens of completed articles, an enormous manuscript of two thousand and five hundred pages of her memoirs, and several sets of correspondence with different people. It was rather astonishing to discover among all those riches one hundred and thirty letters from Boris Pasternak, Olga's first cousin and Russia's famous poet and novelist.

Russian Scholars: Colleagues or Informants?

The Correspondence was translated into dozens of European languages (in Dutch it appeared 14 years ago¹) and was widely read, which made Olga Freidenberg's name and personality rather familiar to Slavonic scholars, yet not to classicists. Even now that neither the iron trunk nor the iron curtain stand in the way of knowledge and communication, Russian scholars, it seems to me, look at their Western colleagues through a kind of one-way transparent glass. While Russian scholars do the utmost to follow what is going on in their professional field in Europe and the US, their Western colleagues, as a rule, notice Russian scholars when they occasionally become interested in Russians. With the exception of a few charismatic figures, like, for example, Bakhtin, the acquaintance with whom is considered obligatory, Russian scholars are usually viewed as informants rather than colleagues. They are expected merely to represent their national culture, rather than enter an international academic community as its equal members. It is easier to hold Bakhtin's theory of the novel as 'Russian' if he is the only representative of Russian thought. Yet, Bakhtin and Freidenberg were peers – their ideas on the novel were developing in the same period of time, and their theories 'are two antinomic worlds that badly need each other but never converge'.²

Scholar in Isolation

In these circumstances, as I understand them, I would like to introduce to the students of the ancient novel the ideas and writings of Olga Freidenberg, who, I believe, was the first one to draw the comparison between pagan

¹ Boris Pasternak and Olga Freidenberg 1988.

² Perlina 1991, 18. The Freidenberg-Bakhtin correlation deserves special and equitable treatment. See on the problem Perlina 1998.

erotic novels and both Apocryphal Acts and canonic Acts and Gospels, the inclusion of the latter being of course a rather daring initiative for those days. She discussed the existence of a narrative genre that she was the first one to define as 'Acts and Passions' and that incorporated both: the Greek romance and Christian narratives. In her Master thesis, written at the very beginning of the 20s, Freidenberg came to the revolutionary conclusion that the 'Greek' novel was Oriental in its origin, and that the plots of its different narratives exhibit a retentive archetypal pattern which turned out to be a remake of the *legomenon* which can be traced back to the *dromenon* of the fertility cults. At the time when Rohde's authority was still unquestionable, she rejected his *Entwicklungsgeschichte* together with his dating of the novels. Not knowing about the discovery of early papyri, she maintained that the first novels were probably written in the 1st century B.C. Karl Kerényi's famous book on the Oriental and religious origin of the novel was not yet written. Rosa Söder's³ pioneering work on Apocryphal Acts and *romanhafte Literatur der Antike* did not yet exist. Only seven decades later came into existence the Ancient Fiction and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative Working Group.

In 1926, Freidenberg used an opportunity to send a summary of her work, translated into German to Adolf Harnack. In his reply Harnack emphasized that Freidenberg's main idea sounded convincing and that her main conclusions were justifiable. He also called the author *ideenreich und erfindungsreich*, reconsidering thus his own writings on the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

Unfortunately, this contact with the world of free scholarship happened to be the last one in her life. Later in life, Freidenberg wrote: «I dreamt about entering the true science abroad. With time this dream became somehow choked by itself as choked became every living thing with Stalin's advent. But before my hopes had died, how many anxieties, searches for salvation, attempts to introduce my works into the common course of the humanities! I understood quite well that there were in Russia outstanding scholars but there was no scholarship».

³ Söder 1932.

‘Greek novel as Acts and Passions’

Two accompanying texts below provide the translation of the contents of Freidenberg’s thesis ‘The Greek novel as Acts and Passions’ and the translation of a short excerpt from the text. It illustrates the scale of her research and the themes she pondered. I’ll attempt to emphasize the most important ideas comparing them to what has been done in European scholarship since 1921.⁴

Freidenberg attributed the origin of the schematic plot of the novel to the mythic pattern, the story of death and resurrection of the fertility gods. The pattern, treated in ascetic mode in one case and in erotic in another, was common to the Christian Acts (partly to the Gospels as well) and to the Greek erotic novel. At the beginning, this approach made a shocking impression. Freidenberg became conscious of suffering as the essential motif of the novel rather than the love of a young couple. Suffering, passions, martyrdom was at the same time the leading motive of Acts, Lives of the Saints, Gospels and Martyrdoms. So the motif of suffering unites novel and early Christian narratives. And unbelievable beauty of the heroine is also a common feature. Thecla is a beautiful virgin and τοῦ θεοῦ δούλη, or ἱεροδούλη, as pagan priestesses used to be, as was, for example, Chariclea. Freidenberg showed that virginity (not chastity), physical beauty and sacral slavery – all of these motifs were alien to early Christianity but were typical for paganism.

She wrote: «Death and resurrection – were the alpha and omega for Christians; immortality and eternal life were of equal significance for Neopythagoreans. On the one hand, there was Christ, on the other Dionysus. The way the Christians bestowed on Christ all the cult motives of death and resurrection, the Pythagoreans surrounded Pythagoras with a halo of Dionysian legend, which once upon a time was the property of Dionysus alone... Similarly, the first Christian Church ... finds in the elements of the erotic novel all the conditions it needs and from that moment on is prepared to share with it even its own content. In this way numerous Lives of Saints, with their plots borrowed from the Greek novel, came into being». Myth and ritual provided the novel as well as the Acts or Lives of the Saints with empty structures to be filled in the first centuries after Christ with ‘new

⁴ Freidenberg’s work on the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* was written in 1919–21, her thesis ‘The Origin of the Greek Novel’ or ‘Greek Novel as Acts and Passions’ in 1922–23 and defended in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg) University in 1924.

wine'. There was a great difference in the cast: a young amorous couple in their wanderings in one case, and a god or sage accompanied by one or more disciples in another. Yet the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* obviously transform the story of love into the story of religious devotion, while the story of *Joseph and Aseneth* combines both variants in one plot: religious conversion becomes indistinguishable from marriage. Daphnis – another character of the novel – proves his affinity to the god of fertility periodically dying and arising, while the *Life of Aesop* presents a wandering sage slandered and put to death. The characters of the novels and those of pious or didactic genres form part of a system of characters that includes the main character of the Gospels as well.⁵

Posthumous Context.

As far as I am aware – and my awareness is limited due to the scarcity of professional literature in Russia – there are not many works that are theoretically close to what Freidenberg was discussing. The scholars whose thoughts were compatible with Freidenberg's are easy to mention. First of all, Rosa Söder in 1932, then Graham Anderson in 1984,⁶ with his emphasis on Oriental origins of the Novel. The latter sidesteps the actual question of invention of the novel by tracing the themes of the novel to the ' [near-eastern] fertility and divine kingship myths of several millennia before'. Richard Pervo discussed the *Acts* as novels, pointing to, among other things, the artistic design imposed on the story, and to the presence of the omniscient author.⁷ Kate Cooper, in *The Virgin and the Bride*, discussed both the ancient novel and the *Apocryphal Acts* as manifestations of the same literary genre;⁸ Judith Perkins, analyzing the themes of martyrdom and suffering in early Christian texts, drew parallels with the suffering heroes and heroines in Greek novels.⁹ In her time Freidenberg knew the book of the Belgian academic Maurice Wilmotte¹⁰ who proclaimed in 1923 the parallel study of pagan and hagiographic literature. (Meanwhile I never met any references to his work in our

⁵ Cf. Wills 1997.

⁶ Anderson 1984.

⁷ Pervo 1987; 1994; 1996.

⁸ Cooper 1996, 20–67, esp. 45–67 (on the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*).

⁹ Perkins 1995.

¹⁰ Wilmotte 1922.

days). Yet his view was restricted by the problem of influence and borrowing: he regarded the novel as a genre contemporary to the early Christian narratives. His approach of a historian prevented him to understand similarities in any terms other than the terms of the arguable contact.

Freidenberg was not very much interested in using novels as one of the historical sources for their time, something that is usually of special interest to historians and theologians. Ronald F. Hock shows that for New Testament scholars the real reason for reading and studying novels is their ability to clarify and illuminate early Christian and Jewish literature.¹¹ As he believes, the novels provide the reader with a detailed and coherent or so to say ‘thick’ account of the social, economic, and religious institutions of the people and regions that witnessed the spread of Christianity. I am not discussing here the historical value of the data taken from the romances pretending to refer to a remote past; it is not my issue now. I am sure that Ronald Hock and many others know how to extract historical evidence from fiction. I merely want to emphasize that to learn more about the private life and social institutions of the first and second centuries of our era, it would be better to have an encyclopedia on these subjects written by scholars contemporary to the events, instead of fiction. The use of fictional texts as historical sources remains a delicate issue.

Freidenberg did not describe the similarities between novels and Christian narratives exclusively in terms of influence and imitation. Usually if one finds borrowing and adoption of the elements of fiction into the Acts or Gospels, the presumed aim of such ‘re-use’ of pagan elements in Christian education is declared to be combining profit with delight or introducing elements of entertainment into hagiographic literature.¹² In my opinion, however, the analysis of these matters by Olga Freidenberg reaches a level that lies at a greater depth. She called it ‘paleontology of the plot’.

Novels have a common pattern of plot and set motives not because their authors imitated each other. Freidenberg did not deny the existence of literary tradition and imitation, but the plot, *die Handlungspersonen* and the names of the novel, according to Freidenberg, were not a free invention, that is, they did not appear as a result of the author’s literary activity. Imitation is often understood as an ultima ratio for the fact that the novels and the Acts and Gospels are built out of very similar elements. I understand researchers

¹¹ Hock 1998, 126.

¹² Cf. Parsons 1989, 407–10; Huber-Rebenich 1999.

who acknowledge the difficulties in deciding who is imitating or/and influencing whom.¹³

Influence means that the things to influence and to be influenced do exist as such: pagan novel on the one hand and Christian literature on the other. We became used to the existence of such entities as Christianity, paganism, and Christian literature opposing Classical literature. But people of the first decades or centuries of the new era were unaware of their being inhabitants of a new Christian world; neither did they suspect that what they read could be described as exclusively pagan, Christian, Gnostic or Jewish.

It is worth noting, however, that in recent decades the influence is not interpreted always as an irresistible impact. The *Acts of the Apostles*, mostly Apocryphal, are regarded now not simply as a genres with some motifs parallel to those of ancient romance, but are conceived as subverting the latter's ideological tasks by turning inside out its values of social stability and gender roles.¹⁴ The rejection of passionate persecutions and sexual harassment, obsession with chastity and virginity, are common to romances and Christian literature. Yet the search for a beloved, and matrimony as a final goal in the romances are opposed to the rejection of marriage, celibacy, virginity and chastity as a final goal in the Christian narratives.

In a recent article by Jo-Ann A. Brant¹⁵, who compares elements of the plot in the Gospels to those in novels, the compound motifs 'Abandoned child', 'Family tension' and 'Adopted parents' are described in terms of archetypal patterns reconsidered in the Fourth Gospel and in the novels quite differently or even in opposite modes. This approach has much in common with Olga Freidenberg's.

Freidenberg was far from limiting herself to apocryphal works, as it had been customary until recently. I think that one of the impediments for Anglophone scholars was the implication of the very word 'fiction'. The term 'Christian Fiction' usually encompasses apocryphal works – Acts, Lives of Saints and Gospels; scholars often felt that when viewing canonic Gospels or any other part of the *Sacra Scriptura* as fiction, they would enter forbidden ground and deny kerygma. I do not intend to either deny or confirm this position. I would prefer to speak about literary works, their origin, structure

¹³ Swain 1999, 11.

¹⁴ Categorizing of the Apocryphal Acts as romance one may find now along with Pervo (see above) on the canonical Acts as Romance – Alexander 1995; Aubin 1998.

¹⁵ Brant 1998, 199–217.

and function and avoid defining them from the religious point of view. The reason for doing so is not confessional but historical. What I mean is that no one consciously went about creating apocryphal works, no one knew what canon one's work would be considered to fit. There was no one (possibly with the exception of Julian the Apostate) who called himself 'pagan'. Ross Shepard Kraemer successfully demonstrated that *Joseph and Aseneth*, for example, could be read in more than one religious context.¹⁶ Genres as well as meter, for example, are not so to say 'monosemantic'.

On the other hand, to state that the Greek novel was some kind of reflection of remarkable stories coming out of Palestine is just 'to scratch the surface of a huge topic'. If looking at the stories of resurrection we would perceive the prevalence of '*Scheintod*' narratives in the novels as an influence of the Gospel stories,¹⁷ we presumably miss the historical depth of these stories and their similarities.

Moreover, such approaches impose upon the ancients a modern point of view. In fact, any detail found in the Gospels has numberless reverberations in arts, commentaries, poetry, literature and imagination nurtured by Christian tradition. Analysing common features in the narratives that were composed contemporaneously with the rise of Christian literature, European scholars are mostly inclined to see the Gospels as the primary source. But *Scheintod* in Lucian, Chariton or Achilles Tatius is not 'an unmistakable echo' of the Gospels. Gospels have no genuine priority in this case. They have true and incontestable singularity only for European researchers (believers and not-believers), not for the readers in the early Roman Empire. Freidenberg illuminated Christian and Jewish literature with the help of the novel in a different way by disclosing their common origin as a genre.

The story of sufferings, adventures and final glorifying in love and life or love and death was considered by Freidenberg as a common heritage of Mediterranean culture, of the Hellenistic world under Roman power. It was a common semantic vocabulary used and reused by Pythagoreans, Christians, Platonists, montanists etc. The author of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* did not have to remember that Ishtar gave her jewelry to the door-keeper of the netherworld when he described how Thecla gave her bangle and silver mirror to a prison's guard. On the other hand, the usage of the archaic mythic plot does not exclude the probability that a Greek or Roman author imbued

¹⁶ Kraemer 1998.

¹⁷ Bowersock 1994.

his work with a symbolical meaning of his own coinage. It is well known that medieval authors too were skilful in symbolical interpretation of the ancient novels. Philip the Philosopher applied it to presumably Heliodorus's 'Charicleia' and many others did the same with the tale of Cupid and Psyche.

It is extremely difficult to reconcile the optics of the folk and literary or historical study. When Pieter J. Lalleman asks to submit any proof for the Jewish novel as a key to the origin of the Greek novel, he obviously wins: apart from some partial textual parallels there is no such a 'proof'.¹⁸ Yet we know that folktales all over the world share common motifs and the scale of the phenomenon restrains our thirst for evidence and testimonies.¹⁹

Freidenberg thought that to understand this phenomenon one should place the Greek novel into a non-Greek context. This she did at the time when E. Rohde and those who followed him saw in the novel an obvious indication of the decay of the Hellenic culture. The very idea of the decay of Greekness in late antiquity and the perception of the novel as a result of the degradation of the Hellenic culture are based on fixed notions of what is Greek and what is non-Greek, moulded by traditional classicist education. The tendency to discard the Greek novel altogether, to explain it away rather than to provide an explanation, was, in my opinion, a normal response to something not Greek *by origin*. I would compare it to the reaction of the traditionally educated Hellenistic philosophers to Christian writings and homilies.

It is mostly in the 90s that classicists recognized 'new standards of otherness' emerging in Late antiquity, and a new sense of the Hellenic – or better Hellenistic – standard. While recognizing the Oriental origin of the novel, Freidenberg was far from agreeing with Kerényi or Merkelbach. Kerényi concentrated on Isiac religion and on Egypt, Merkelbach saw in the novel the actual *legomenon* of the mystery cults. Seeing mystery cults behind the novel, both scholars offered a narrow and unnecessarily concrete solution. Freidenberg instead considers religion as one of the manifestations of social values, and Egypt as one of the Mediterranean localities, and its role as prominent only for the period when the novel emerged as Greek fic-

¹⁸ Lalleman 1998. I think it exists, but reserve for the future both furnishing the evidences and developing the proof.

¹⁹ I would like to point here to an article by Cristiano Grottanelli (Grottanelli 1987, esp. 30–31), who shows the amazing similarity of the Biblical story of Joseph and that of Callirhoe.

tion. Her analysis of proper names led Freidenberg most often to the Near East and Asia Minor, sometimes to Egypt as well.

She believed that ancient literature differs from modern literature not so much in its function as in its origin. Freidenberg would say that 'free invention on a Tuesday afternoon in July' meant building up romances out of pre-fabricated units; their plots, characters, many details and expressions were preconfigured by 'raw' material from the reservoir of traditional narratives.

The Fate of the Work: Marr, Stalin, and Oblivion.

Freidenberg's work was not accepted then by the majority of the Leningrad scholarly community. Yet, there was one very powerful person who supported her. His assistance was limited, but fatal. It determined a lot in her life: success and tragedy, fortune and loss and total oblivion after her retirement and death. His name was Nikolai Marr, an extremely controversial figure in our history. He was a highly respected and powerful academic at the time when he radically changed his research field and created a new linguistic theory that rejected everything that had been done in comparative linguistics until then. His global theory was a bizarre mixture of insights and insanity.

Freidenberg, unlike other women of her generation who became scholars and scientists, could not claim any support from her own family. She was neither a daughter, nor a wife, not even a mistress or a niece of any member of the academic community. The support offered to her by Marr meant everything for her; it was like a gift from heavens. As for him, he needed only one thing – devout followers of his theory. Freidenberg's success was partially the result of her association with Marr, who clothed his theories in Marxist formulas in order to promote his teaching. He was the only member of the Tsarist academy of science to become a member of the Communist party. He surrounded himself with scholarly feeble, insignificant people who based their career on their membership in the Communist party and 'soon they turned into the huge force that Marr himself feared' and turned his highly suspicious theory into the only acceptable school of linguistics in the Soviet Union. When Marrism became obligatory, Freidenberg was forced to claim an even closer connection to him. «They demanded that I recognize that my book [Poetics of Plot and Genre - *NB*] was written after Marr; all my own breath was driven out

of it. They forced Marr on me – and this was incorrect, since I followed German archaeology, Usener and his metaphoricisms of the thing» (Memoirs).

She had a mighty, powerful and independent mind; she was herself a theorist and philosopher of culture of world class. But in the 30s she apparently used her reputation of being a Marrist for her career. Later when Stalin himself denounced Marr as a non-Marxist scholar, she paid for being Marr's disciple by having her reputation buried in oblivion.

Whatever scholarly reasons for the refutation of Marr could exist – for Stalin in any case they were not purely academic – the obligatory and enforced change of mind achieved one of the goals of the totalitarian ruler, which was to ruin a person's intellectual independence and sense of one's personal dignity. Freidenberg did not renounce Marr when he became a scapegoat. She retired and died leaving a trunk full of manuscripts.

One may only wonder what was better for the scholar: support or persecution from the Stalinist regime. In the first situation, as a person, one lost the sense of critical perspective. And in the latter one could hardly survive as a human being. Freidenberg survived. But as much as she succeeded in escaping ruin as a person, she was ruined as a scholar, and as much as she survived as a scholar, she was ruined as a person.

The Role of the Marginal.

I often ask myself whether such a thing as *Zeitgeist* really exists, whether science and humanities move and develop in some regular way, whether the accumulation of knowledge as well as the alternation of paradigms could be predicted. If that is the case, how can we understand the phenomenon of the vanguard on the margins of academic community? Maybe there are some advantages in the lack of a synchronicity between the development of Russian semi-European scholarship and Western scholarship, education and humanities? Does Western scholarly tradition provide people not only with a firm foundation for further research but is it also a powerful source of pressure exercised by this tradition upon the individual? If so, I believe that European scholarship may benefit from having Russian, Hungarian, or Pol-

ish works translated into more current languages and thus profit from the Marginals who were ahead of their time.²⁰

I started working with Freidenberg's archives immediately after graduating from the Moscow University and wanted to publish her work on the Greek novel among the first. But in order to write a preface I needed to know the context of contemporary studies of the ancient novel. Alas! The middle of the 70s coincided with the outburst of Novel studies. Up to now, I am hunting for works on the ancient novel and cannot either practically, or theoretically catch the tail. I do now what I can. I add to my concise introduction an excerpt in English from Freidenberg's manuscript together with the Table of Contents, which offers the reader a perspective of the whole work. I hope it will be enough to persuade the international academic community into searching a way to make the works of Freidenberg available for Western scholars.²¹

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²⁰ Freidenberg was not the only 'inventor' in her family: her father Mikhael Freidenberg designed the first device for films with sound – 'talkie movies' at the beginning of the century, the first automatic telephone station in Europe (working without telephone operator), and what we call *linotype*. He died in 1920 with his inventions unknown or stolen from him.

²¹ I apologize on account of the vague and inaccurate translation, which is all my responsibility; it would have been much worse without the kind assistance of Alla Zeide-Becker and Prof. Eve Adler.

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Appendix 1

[Falconilla] A chapter of the 'Greek Novel as Acts and Passions'
by Olga Freidenberg

The Semantics of the Proper Names

1

We have just seen that the structure of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* reveals its identity as the structure of the Greek Hellenistic narrative usually called the

‘Greek novel’. Since we do not know what makes for the peculiarity of the Greek novel itself, we cannot proceed with just stating the existence of similarity. The *Acts* are helpful in analyzing the Greek novel and in inquiring into the origin of its peculiarity and its presence in a genre presumably alien to it.

But what is it, however, the ‘structure of a work’? It is a ‘ready-made’ fact, which could be taken for granted or on trust. But having agreed that the more stable and complete a ready-made fact is, the more we should suspect it and break it down into its constituent parts, we now strike upon the very ‘ready-made’ forms of the novel.

So what is the most immovable and most ‘complete’ in it? The names. The names are the most stable remnants of the sources.

So we start our analysis exactly with the names. Where did they come from? What do they mean, these resonant or as they say ‘poetic’ names. Let us take the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* – a Greek novel. The scholar would appreciate its literary naivité, its provocative mixture of dissimilar features, its revealing character, deserving the highest attention in treating names.<...>

... Let us try to penetrate into the semantics of the proper names starting with the rare Latin name *Falconilla*.

Its oddity is striking. Who is this Falconilla? Everything pertaining to her is incongruous, from her Latin name to her role. Her character seems to be a rudiment or remnant: she is emphatically mentioned in the entanglement of the martyrdom but she is practically absent from the story and completely forgotten at the denouement.

She is tightly linked to Thecla. Every time Tryphene addresses Thecla, Falconilla is sure to be mentioned. And the very intercession of Tryphene (that saved Thecla: 27–31, 39) is evoked by an association of her deceased daughter with this adopted one.

In vain would we discuss the historical existence of the name Falconilla. It really did exist as a Roman aristocratic name (e.g CIL, VIII, 7066); yet to know its refined character is enough to reject any historical Falconilla as the historical base for a genre like the apocryphal acts. The apocrypha never make use of rare or uncommon names. Being popular stories usually shaded by vulgarity and based on folk legends as their sources, the Apocryphal narratives use only names which had become impersonal due to their popularity (like Diocletianus, Nero, Tryphene, Alexander), or had been inherited from the sources of the tradition either in their original form or in a disguised one.

The name *Falconilla* is of this kind. Its stem is *falco, falconis* (ἰέραξ in Greek). Therefore Φαλκονίλλα is a disguised name for the ‘she-falcon’. Such a name could be dated after Alexander both by form – namely its combination of the Latin root with the latinized Greek form, and by content – namely its reference to an Egyptian cult, and provides us with a typical example of Hellenistic syncretism.

The name itself that indicates one of Isis’ aspects involves some Egyptian religious notions: the Falcon is a symbol of her son Horus in his solar nature.²²

Isis’ aspect as the mother of her solar son Falcon is figuratively presented in her sobriquet ‘she-falcon’. She conceived her falcon son while mourning over the corpse of her husband Osiris. At that moment she herself was a ‘she-falcon’.²³ As a she-falcon she appeared before Osiris. On one of the monuments she is presented as a she-falcon hovering over her husband’s dead body. As a ‘she-falcon’ she is pictured on Osiris’ tomb. Bracelets decorated with golden falcons were worn by Egyptian queens.²⁴

It is presumably not by a coincidence that this symbol is attached to Isis in the context of the mourning ritual. According to the myth, Isis after giving birth to her son, hid him in the bushes. In one of her visits to him she found him dead.²⁵ Here we have a version of the myth that was most popular in the Ancient East (and just as popular in the West in the post-Hellenistic period). It was a myth about nature’s young force dying a temporary violent death. But soon it will revive for a joyful life. Harpocrates (that was the name of Horus as a child) will rise from the dead with the help of Ra, the great god of the Sun.

In the post-Hellenistic era the Greek myth literally repeats this story. It creates a hero Hierax (ἰέραξ) – Falcon who is young and who dies young. The ritual music and festivals of flowers and adoration of Hera are related to him.²⁶ Another myth makes Hierax die because of Poseidon, the symbol of Water. In this legend from Asia Minor Hierax is linked to the presentation of the grain and to the cult of Demeter.²⁷

²² Wiedemann 1897, 26; Breasted 1912, 109; Frazer 1914, II, 21.

²³ Breasted 1912, 28.

²⁴ Frazer 1914, II, 22; Amélineau 1899, 107–115.

²⁵ Budge 1911, I, 92; II 84; 274; Frazer 1914, II, 8.

²⁶ Poll. 4, 10, 78–79.

²⁷ Ant. Lib. 3.

As youthful son or new growth of flowers and grains, yet always as a lad, Horus being son of Isis dies suddenly and his cult is one of mourning and tears. At first, in Egypt, he was attached to his mother Isis as her son. Later in the period of religious syncretism and strong Syro-Phoenician influence the myth makes the idea of beauty and flourishing more prominent and thus the image of son is either screened or merged with an image of the lover – the young Adonis snatched away by death. Now the Egyptian goddess Isis loses the clearness of her primordial image of mother and wife. In her case also the idea of beauty and fertility advances to the forefront and Isis acquires the features of the Phoenician and Greek goddess Astarte-Aphrodite. Harpocrates blends with Adonis-Tammuz in the aspect of the prematurely deceased young lover of Isis-Astarte.²⁸ In his turn Osiris is conceived as Isis' son, or rather the search for Osiris and his ritual mourning appears to be transferred to her son. So, according to Minucius Felix (in the early Christian era), Isis was mourning over the loss of her son and was searching for him, grieving and beating her breast until finding him and giving way to her joy at the sight of his resurrection. The cult that once had belonged to Osiris was transferred to Harpocrates-Horus because Isis was perceived as the mother of both.²⁹ Syncretism leads to the merging of Harpocrates-Osiris with Adonis, and to the fusion of Isis as Astarte-Aphrodite (who absorbs the features of the great Mother of the Gods from Asia Minor) with 'Dea Syria' and Hera.³⁰ In the times of Apuleius she was regarded as the principle of all things worshipped under various names: as God's Mother in one locality, Aphrodite in the second, Kore in the third and Demeter in the fourth etc.³¹

So when the Greek myth joins Hierax with Hera or Demeter, it is again Isis as mother or as beloved. In post-Hellenistic cults of Egypt Isis meets Hierax in her initial form. There is a dedicatory inscription from Isis' sanctuary in Ptolemais dated to the time of Philadelphus. The inscription addresses the god APBAKEI KAI IEPAKI and Ἀρβάκει would be the same as ἱέρακι, i.e. Horus-Falcon.³² In his fusion with Adonis Horus retains the solar substance of the Falcon. At least Adonis (called Κίρρις on Cyprus), has the ap-

²⁸ Baudissin 1911, 153; 178; Ohnefalsch–Richter 1893, 188; 194; 196; 198; 200.

²⁹ Min. Fel. *Oct.* 21; cf. Plu. *De Is.* 14.

³⁰ Luc. *Syr.D.* 1; 6; 13; 15.

³¹ Apul. *Met.* 11, 5.

³² *RA*, sér. III, 1883, 2 (Miller).

pearance of a falcon (εἶδος ἰέρακος).³³ Horus whom Greeks called Apollo becomes a falcon in his fight with Typhon-heat.³⁴

So whether it is Isis-mother with her son Harpocrates-Hierax, or Astarte-Aphrodite with her beloved Adonis, the essence remains always the same: the Falcon would always relate to Falconilla as a young, subordinate part to the great creative principle. The structure of the myth that joins them consists of images of beauty, flourishing, and violent death. The cult to which both names, Falcon and Falconilla, belong consists of ritual lament, mourning music,³⁵ rites of wanderings, search, and findings.³⁶ It seems that the vulgar mixture of Greek and Latin in Falconilla's name suited popular literary templates. We would look in vain for her name in refined classical literature. Yet we may find it emerging in the *Lives of the Saints*. Myths and their vocabulary were not to the taste of the *Lives*. On the contrary the *Lives* denied myths but being themselves founded on myth, though vulgar and trivial, they introduced mythic characters in disguised form. Falconilla appears in one more Christian book besides our *Acts*, namely in the *Life of Saint Pancratius*.³⁷ There is an episode with the beautiful queen Falconilla. People brought gifts to her merely in order to see her beauty. She had a young son, Falcon, who lived in her gardens and unexpectedly died. Mourning for him, she built a temple in his honor. And his statue was called 'Falcon God'. We see now the full and final representation of the myth about Aphrodite-Astarte, who lives in her sacral grove with her son-lover. Suddenly in the garden death abducts him and Aphrodite starts her rite of search and tears. The garden of Falconilla where Falcon perishes in his bloom presents a combination of the gardens of Aphrodite and the 'gardens of Adonis'. We have just seen an embodiment of the most tender vegetation suddenly withered and we have just seen how Adonis amalgamates with Harpocrates, Osiris and Horus.³⁸

Legends similar to those about Osiris are attached to one of the Saints Pancratius, namely to the Pancratius in whose Life there is a story about Falcon and Falconilla. The stories tell us about parts of his body buried far

³³ *EM s.v.* Κίρρις; *Et.Gud.* s.v. Κίρακος.

³⁴ *Ant. Lib.* 28.

³⁵ 'Falconian fret (stop)' [ἰεράκιον] was invented by Hierax; see *Poll.* 4, 78.

³⁶ *Plu. De Is.*: ἀφανισμός, ζήτησις, εὑρεσις [disappearance, search, finding].

³⁷ Greek text seen by *Veselovskij*, 1886 I, 65.

³⁸ *Luc. De Dea Syr.*; *Plu. De Is.* 13 sqq.; *St. Byz.* s. v. Ἀμαθοῦς; *Hippol. Haer.* 5, 9 (Migne, SG 16,3); Ohnefalsch – Richter 1893, I, 208 f.

from one another and worshipped in different places. Saint Pancratius (his name meaning ‘Omnipotent’) repeats in this way the fate of Osiris whom Typhon had torn into pieces. Isis buried Osiris’ limbs in different localities of Egypt thus giving birth to many cults.³⁹ There is however also a direct proof for considering ‘Falconilla’ to be one of Isis’ names. In Tauromenium on Sicily where the events of the story about Falcon and Falconilla took place there was a Church of Saint Pancratius. In this place excavations have brought to light a dedicatory inscription in honor of Isis and Serapis (the later form of Osiris).⁴⁰ It turned out that this church of Pancratius = Omnipotent once had been a temple of Isis, and there had survived a marble plaque with the figure of a priestess of Isis incised on it.⁴¹ We see now that on the place of Pancratius there had been the worshipping of Osiris and on the place of the cult of Falconilla there had been the cult of Isis. Meanwhile Saint Pancratius, the bishop of Tauromenium, a disciple of the Apostle Peter, was born in Antioch.⁴² In our Apocrypha we find that Falconilla was from Antioch. Whether or not there ever existed any connection of the myths with the native cities of the Saints as places of their worship, or not, nevertheless in Syria of the Christian times and in Asia Minor, Isis as well as Horus-Osiris were quite popular. As for Horus, he had his own myths in Troas and in the Phrygo-Bithynian territory,⁴³ that is in the places close to Iconion – Thecla’s native city.

Let us draw a first conclusion from our first experience: Falconilla being supposedly a rudiment or remnant in the Christian Apocryphal narrative and playing the role of the dead daughter who is compared with the living Thecla turns out to be a character of pagan myth, a Hellenistic double of the Egyptian deity Isis, namely of her mourning aspect in which the coming of death and the waiting for revival is accentuated.

Unexpectedly the world of ancient ideas and conceptions is disclosed before us. The negligible and accessory name in our *Acts* proved to belong precisely to the Egyptian goddess Isis. It remains only to discover whether this is accidental or not. How could Isis get into the *Acts* and why is her role

³⁹ Plu. *De Is.* 18; *Acta Sanctorum Maji*, 12, t. III, 17.

⁴⁰ *CIL* X, 6989; *IG* XIV, 685 n.14 a.

⁴¹ *Archäologische Zeitschrift* 1868, 131; Ciaceri 1911, 262 sq.

⁴² *Menolog. Imp. Basilii*, 305, 177.

⁴³ *Ant.Lib.*3.

so tiny? Naturally we cannot answer this question until we decode the rest of the names in the *Acts*. Let us continue with Thamyris...

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Appendix 2

Olga Freidenberg, Greek Novel as Genre of Acts and Passions, 1919–1923. Table of Contents

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