

Iamblichos' *Babyloniaka*, the Greek Novel and Satire

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I. Introduction

Iamblichos' *Babyloniaka* (*Babylonian Story*)¹ occupies a prominent position among the fragmentarily preserved novels. We have an extended summary by the patriarch Photios (cod. 94), along with some fragments of the original work; the total evidence occupies no less than 55 pages in Stephens and Winkler.² The *Babyloniaka* is a love-story set at a vague time³ and is told in an elaborate rhetorical style, which is consistent with Second Sophistic habits.⁴ It is by all means a peculiar work. Photios' summary gives us an idea of an extreme and convoluted plot, which was probably of greater length than the plot of the *Aithiopika*, our longest romance (the exact size of Iamblichos' novel is unknown, but Photios' summary

¹ Editions of the *Babyloniaka* are by Habrich (1960); Stephens and Winkler (1995, with English translation); and now Barbero (2015, with Italian translation). In this article, references to the *Babyloniaka* are to Photios' *Bibliotheka*, unless "fr." is used. The numbering of fragments follows Habrich. Translation mostly follows that of Stephens and Winkler, with alterations.

² (1995, 190-245). Three large fragments are manuscript excerpts; the attribution of fr. 61 to the *Babyloniaka* is certain, while the other two (1 and 35) are 'reasonably' (if not 'indubitably') assigned to this novel (ibid., 222; they are included in Barbero's edition). The numerous small fragments, most of which are *Suda* quotations in origin, do not add much to Photios' summary, and in some cases their context and relevance is hard to determine.

³ If the judge Βόροχος or Βόχορος (75b2) is an allusion to the wise Egyptian king Bocchoris (Stephens and Winkler 1995, 228), it sends us back to the 8th c. BC. But this identification is uncertain (the Egyptian name is Βόκχορις in Greek sources), and the mention of the Alans (78a15-16) takes us to the 2nd c. AD (see Dowden forthcoming 1). The canonical romances suggest a vague classical or Hellenistic setting; for a novelistic plot set in a distant past, cf. the *Ninos romance*.

⁴ Stephens and Winkler (1995, 183-184; 188).

mentions 16 books, while the *Suda* mentions 39),⁵ and of a similarly elaborate narrative structure.⁶ It tells an exceptionally violent tale, which abounds in macabre incidents and gruesome descriptions. It has an Eastern geography and character names (Rhodanes and Sinonis, but also Mesopotamia, Tigris, Euphrates etc.) that are out of the ordinary. Strong non-Greek geographical and cultural features are also present in the novels of Achilles Tatios and Heliodoros, but these novels possess, in comparison with Iamblichos' tale, a rather more explicit Hellenic relevance (to which their protagonists' perfect Greek names no doubt contribute), and less horror.

However, Photios' references to Iamblichos in his *Bibliotheka* reveal that he regarded the *Babyloniaka* as a comparable type of narrative to the romances of Achilles Tatios and Heliodoros: οἱ γὰρ τρεῖς οὗτοι σχεδόν τι τὸν αὐτὸν σκοπὸν προθέμενοι ἐρωτικῶν δραμάτων ὑποθέσεις ὑπεκρίθησαν 'These three authors have set themselves roughly the same goal – the enactment of plots involving erotic dramas' (*Bibl.* 73b27-29). Photios terms Iamblichos' work as δραματικόν, a term which he also uses for the works of Achilles Tatios, Heliodoros and Antonios Diogenes (author of the fictitious travelogue *The Incredible Wonders beyond Thoule* – a work of little romantic interest and strong exoticism).⁷ Additionally, after summarising Antonios' work (cod. 166), the patriarch links this author with Iamblichos, Achilles Tatios and Heliodoros as members of the group of τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐσπουδακῶτων διαπλάσαι 'others who devoted themselves to fiction of this kind'⁸ (*Bibl.* 111b32-35; the group includes Lucian and Lucius of Patras).

Unlike Photios, modern scholarship is rather undecided about whether the *Babyloniaka*, given the brutality of much of its plot, really has a place among the so-called 'ideal' novels,⁹ however loosely the latter term is used.¹⁰ Its exotic Eastern setting and other eccentricities have given licence to a variety of symbolic,

⁵ *Suda* s.v. Ἰάμβλιχος. See Barbero (2015, 141) on the possibility that the patriarch read an abridged version, and cf. Danek (2000, 125-126).

⁶ Thus Danek (2000, esp. 133-134).

⁷ On ancient generic terms for works that we now classify as 'novels', see Ruiz-Montero (2003, 35-36).

⁸ Thus Wilson (1994, 153). Stephens and Winkler translate simply 'the other novelists'.

⁹ Holzberg (1995, 63) includes the *Babyloniaka* in his category of 'idealistic novels' that were influenced by the Second Sophistic; cf. Ruiz-Montero (2003, 29). Whitmarsh (2005, 603-604) draws attention to the work's 'level of innovation and experimentation'. For Stephens and Winkler (1995, 179), 'it is a wonder that anyone could ever refer to this work as an "ideal romance" '.

¹⁰ Not all romantic plots are 'idealistic', in the sense of 'morally perfect', cf. especially Achilles Tatios' *Leukippe and Kleitophon*. All 'ideal' novels contain 'realistic' elements, i.e. raw representations of events that at times verge on the grotesque. The novel is notoriously hard to define generically; see most recently Whitmarsh (2018, esp. 15-20).

allegorical and often far-fetched interpretations.¹¹ But the eccentric features of the *Babyloniaka*, however one chooses to interpret them, hardly distract attention from the novel's strong Greek aroma, which is felt in its numerous plot and character elements that are closely similar to those of the Hellenocentric novels of Achilles Tatios and his colleagues. In order to ease (if not completely cure) this interpretive discomfort, the *Babyloniaka* needs to be contextualised primarily within the broader framework of the 'Greek novel', a framework which, like Photios' 'canon' of the novels, includes (but is not limited to) works of clear romantic focus. This contextualisation has concerned scholars in the past, but the topic is arguably worth revisiting. Building on relevant previous research,¹² the present article draws attention to a number of themes present in the *Babyloniaka*'s plot as reflected mainly in Photios' summary and the larger fragments. In particular, my discussion will consider the various thematic links between this novel, the romantic canon and some fictitious narratives outside the canon. While the novels of Chariton, Xenophon Ephesios, and Antonios Diogenes probably predate the *Babyloniaka* and may have been known to its author, most of the other narratives discussed here are contemporary or later. However, this article is not so much concerned with questions of influence (which are hard to answer in the case of roughly contemporary works) but with generic analogies. In particular, after surveying the 'Greek' features of Iamblichos' novel, it brings out the similarities between the *Babyloniaka* and the novel of Achilles Tatios, which have not been adequately studied before, and which may suggest these two works as closer generic 'relatives' than previously thought.

II. *The Babyloniaka as a Greek Novel*

The *Babyloniaka* is a product of the second century AD – the period when Greek novel production peaks.¹³ It features a central couple in love, Sinonis and

¹¹ Morales (2006, 84-88) may be right that the character and experiences of Mesopotamia include a 'political' hint, as echoing the fortunes of the homonymous place, which was involved in 2nd c. AD Roman wars in the region (the historical background is summarised by Connors 2018). But Morales' other allegorical readings (e.g. of Sinonis' temporary jilting of the hero as a symbol of rebellion from the coercion of Roman rule) are more difficult to sustain. Kasprzyk (2018, 41-44) has recently brought forward an interpretation of Aphrodite's island, which provides temporary shelter to the main characters, as 'a geographically and ontologically hybrid world'. Cf. Beck (1982; see below, n. 52).

¹² See Barbero's references (2015, 2-3).

¹³ Henrichs (2011, 303-304). The internal reference to Verus' campaign against the Parthian king Vologaeses (75b39) suggests a *terminus post quem* of AD 164-166. On the novel's date, see further Barbero (2015, 1), with bibliography.

Rhodanes, who are ‘beautiful and handsome in appearance’ (καλή καὶ καλὸς τὴν ὄψιν, 74a5). It is not entirely clear whether they are already married at the beginning (like the couples in the two earlier romances, by Chariton and Xenophon Ephesios) or marry at the end (as do the couples in the later, sophistic romances),¹⁴ though the former possibility may be encouraged – if Chariton’s bigamous Kallirhoe is anything to go by – by the fact that the heroine marries someone else in the course of the plot before returning to the hero. Rhodanes and Sinonis travel and experience a range of extraordinary adventures (in which Tyche, a central force in the canonical romances, certainly played a part¹⁵), but are reunited at a happy ending (78a39-40). Iamblichos’ narrative technique is hard to reconstruct from Photios’ summary,¹⁶ but fr. 61 reveals a third-person narration, and all of the longer fragments attest to a sophistic flair. This flair is most strongly manifest in the author’s apparent taste for digressions, which he shares with Achilles Tatios.¹⁷ Both fr. 1, ‘Concerning the Procession of the King of the Babylonians’, and fr. 35, a court scene, are of digressive content. Furthermore, Photios’ summary explicitly refers to the account of Aphrodite’s island (75a36-37) and the narrative about Berenike, daughter of the Egyptian king (77a20), as digressions;¹⁸ the references to magic (75b20-26) and the ‘woman who slept with the executioner’ (78a1-2) are also, perhaps, of a digressive character. Moreover, one of the novel’s basic external features, its title, is similar to that of other Greek novelistic works. In fact, Iamblichos’ work is not the only Greek *Babyloniaka*. The homonymous work of Berossos (*BNJ* 680), a contemporary of Alexander the Great, apparently had a historiographical focus but was influenced by Greek fictitious narratives,¹⁹ while the *Suda* refers to a (lost) erotic *Babyloniaka* of one ‘historian’ Xenophon of Antioch.²⁰ Incidentally, Babylon is a familiar geographical location in the

¹⁴ See Whitmarsh (2011, 101). The relevant passage in Photios’ summary suggests that they are at least betrothed: ...νόμῳ γάμου ἐρῶντες ἀλλήλων καὶ δὴ καὶ ζευγνύμενοι (74a5-6). Stephens and Winkler translate: ‘...deeply in love with each other within the bounds of matrimony, and they are in fact being married (or betrothed?)’. In fr. 61, Sinonis is called a κόρη ‘maiden’, but so is the widowed farmer’s daughter.

¹⁵ Cf. its explicit mention in fr. 61,63.

¹⁶ See Danek (2000), who shows that Photios’ account of the *Aithiopika* misrepresents Heliodoros’ complex technique by summarising a chain of events in linear order.

¹⁷ See Anderson (1982, 53). Note that Achilles Tatios’ first-person narrative is unique among the romantic novels.

¹⁸ Ως ἐν παρεκβολῇ δὲ διηγεῖται καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ τῆς νησιδος... ‘As a digression, the story is told of the temple and the island...’ / Διάληψις περὶ Βερενίκης... ‘A digression about Berenike...’

¹⁹ See Haubold (2013). Cf. the double use of *Φοινικικά* for historiographical narratives (*BNJ* 783-790) and as the title of Lollianos’ fragmentarily preserved novel. On titles, see further Whitmarsh (2005).

²⁰ *Suda* s.v. Xenophon.

Greek novel. It features prominently in the *Ninos romance*, a fictitious story centered on the homonymous Assyrian king, as well as in the action of Chariton's *Kallirhoe*, who spends time in the Persian court as the King's captive.

As mentioned already, the names of the heroes and the geography of the story, which takes place in Mesopotamia, suggest an Eastern focus. Previous studies of Iamblichos' plot have drawn attention to numerous elements of probable oriental – especially Persian – origin.²¹ Indeed it is reasonable to expect that an author of Syrian (or Babylonian) background would have found inspiration in the narrative culture of his homeland, which then interacted fruitfully with the products of his Greek education. Similarly several Greek authors, who came in contact with Persia, are known to have included in their works erotic narratives of a Persian flavor (if not necessarily of Persian origin²²), mixed with Greek narrative elements. In fact, as a 'Persian' love-adventure story written in Greek, the tale of Rhodanes and Sinonis is in good company. Apart from the famous tragic story of Pantheia and Abradatas (in Xenophon's *Kyropaideia*), there is the tale of Zariadres and Odatis (mentioned in Athenaios 13,575 as recorded by the historiographer Chares of Mytilene), and Ktesias' story of Stryangaios and Zarinaia (known in many versions²³), to name but a few. All three authors (Xenophon, Chares and Ktesias) were familiar with Persia and its customs. Furthermore, the story of Chares, a courtier of Alexander the Great, has similarities to a tale found in Iranian literature,²⁴ and Ktesias may well have picked up tales at the Persian court.²⁵ Although not developed to the size of a full novel, these stories imply a fusion of Eastern material with Greek tastes, which we also find, in extant form, in the *Babyloniaka*.

In sum, whatever its root source, the *Babyloniaka* contains the basic ingredients of a Greek romance plot, its style – so far as we can judge from the surviving fragments – is close to that of the other Greek novelists, and its story is one of several tales that can be seen as amalgams of Greek and Eastern elements.²⁶ Iamblichos' self-presentation in Photios' summary – whether it is that of the real

²¹ Dowden (forthcoming 1) assumes the influence of Persian mythology on the *Babyloniaka*. Beck (2003, 132) argues for the derivation of Iamblichos' story from Iranian sources. Cf. Barbero (2015, viii-x), who lists Biblical parallels.

²² On the vexed question of origins of novelistic stories, see now Whitmarsh (2018, 49-58, with respect to Greek narratives containing Persian elements), who stresses the hybridity of these stories and the very limited amount of original Persian evidence.

²³ See Pignataro in Stramaglia (ed. 2000, 299-304) for full references.

²⁴ See *N. Pauly* s.v. Zariadres (M. Schottky).

²⁵ He also claims to have used Persian written documents (but see recently Whitmarsh 2018, 40-41, on the problematic nature of this claim).

²⁶ Cf. especially the digression on the history of Aphrodite's island (75a36-75b7), which brings Greek mythical echoes to a Mesopotamian setting, and the mention of both Zeus and Baal in fr. 61 (ll. 41 and 49).

author²⁷ or of an assumed *persona* – functions as just such an amalgam. The author claims to combine a Greek education with a Babylonian origin (alternatively, and perhaps more realistically, he was considered a Syrian²⁸) and positions himself within a Roman historical setting, which suggests a multi-cultural identity that reflects the mixing of Roman culture with oriental elements. This is a mixing which is also felt in the romance's plot and is typical of the Severan period.²⁹ Heliodoros was Syrian in origin, and Achilles Tatios may have been an Alexandrian Greek or a Phoinician.³⁰

Apart from the above general framework, scholars have researched specific similarities between the plot of the *Babyloniaka* and the plots of the Greek novels. An enriched summary of the relevant findings is in order here. First, Iamblichos and Greek romance authors employ dynamic female protagonists, who sometimes appear stronger than their male counterparts.³¹ Accordingly, Iamblichos' Sinonis is a strong-minded heroine (though unconventional in other ways, as we shall see), and Rhodanes appears more passive, until he leads a war by means of which he recovers her (78a39-40), like Chariton's Chaireas (book 7). Rhodanes is further characterised by his flirtation with the farmer's daughter (to which we will return below, in connection with Achilles Tatios' Kleitophon), and by his reading of the lion stele in the meadow scene (74a21-22), a scene that implies his wisdom, of which we find analogies in the fictitious biographies of Aisop, Alexander the Great and Philostratos' Apollonios of Tyana.³² Aside from the amorous couple, Iamblichos' cast, just like the cast of the extant romances, includes a variety of figures that interact with the protagonists, either as persecutors (some of them are more powerful than others) or as friends and advisors. A particularly close parallel for the constant persecution of Iamblichos' pair by the cruel king Garmos is provided by the function of the evil priest Paapis in Antonios Diogenes.³³ The most prominent helper of the *Babyloniaka*'s couple is one of Garmos' magistrates,

²⁷ Note the reservations of Stephens and Winkler (1995, 181); cf. Barbero (2015, xxi; 1). Our Iamblichos is in any case not to be confused with the later Neoplatonist author.

²⁸ Thus in an ancient *scholium* on Photios, which is perhaps preferable to Photios' version; cf. Whitmarsh (2011, 75), who notes that Homer becomes a 'Babylonian' in Lucian (*VH* 2,20). The name Ἰάμβλιχος is probably of Semitic/Arabic origin; see Stephens and Winkler (1995, 181) and Dowden (forthcoming 1).

²⁹ See Ramelli (2001b).

³⁰ See Schmid-Dümmler (2018, 39).

³¹ See, primarily, Haynes (2003), and cf. the conclusions of De Temmerman's study (2014, 321-322) for a more nuanced picture of the male-female equilibrium in the novels.

³² See now Kanavou (2018, 235-236).

³³ See especially Borgogno (1979). Cf. Dowden (forthcoming 1), who considers Antonios Diogenes 'a significant predecessor' of Iamblichos.

Soraichos, who was initially an enemy but then became a friend (75a32-36) – a comparable conversion to that of the robber Hippothous in Xenophon Ephesios.

The general framework of the love-adventure plot is home to a number of particular themes, which are common to novelistic narratives. Ramelli³⁴ drew attention to the themes of *Scheintod*, tomb robbery and crucifixion (which also has a Christian relevance). In Iamblichos, Rhodanes experiences the cross twice (74a12 and 78a11), as does the hero of Xenophon Ephesios, Habrokomes (4,2) – both, of course, are saved.³⁵ The popular theme of tomb robbery, which is also present in declamation,³⁶ is prominent in Chariton, where it is committed by pirates on Kallirhoe's tomb, and is connected with a necessary event (the reemergence of the heroine in the novel's plot after she was falsely assumed to be dead). In the *Babyloniaka*'s macabre spirit, it is the heroine herself who is accused of this grave offence (75a18-20). Incidentally, the tomb in question is that of a woman who, like Kallirhoe, proves to be alive; but unlike Chariton's main offender, Theron, who stands trial and is punished by crucifixion (3,4), Sinonis is spared. *Scheintod*, a universal Greek novelistic theme, features in the *Babyloniaka* several times, in connection with the hero and heroine together (74b3-8, 75a15), Sinonis alone (77a29-b5) and an unknown maiden (74b41-75a2). Another death-related motif is suicide, which is committed by a number of secondary characters (74b29-30; 76b13; 77a36) and contemplated by Soraichos (77b2), Garmos (78a32), Sinonis (75a23-25; cf. fr. 61) and most often by Rhodanes (75a23-25; 77a7-8; 77a41-b4). He also wishes to die on the cross when he believes that he has lost Sinonis towards the end of Photios' summary, 78a31-34). Both Achilles' Kleitophon and Chariton's Chaireas engage in similar thoughts,³⁷ as do Kallirhoe, Heliodoros' Charikleia (1,2; 1,4), and Xenophon's Anthia. In particular, Xenophon of Ephesos narrates how Anthia asks the physician Eudoxos for a poison to help her take her own life and thus escape an unwanted marriage, but he provides her with a sleeping potion instead, without her knowing (3,5-8). This is similar to the manner in which Rhodanes and Sinonis attempt to die but are saved (by Soraichos, 75a32-36). Sometimes the themes of *Scheintod* and suicide are combined. In the novel of Antonios Diogenes, a secondary character (Throuskanos) actually

³⁴ (2001a, 63; 74-80).

³⁵ But Rhodanes' salvation is no miracle, unlike Habrokomes', who is saved by divine intervention. Cf. Chariton's Chaireas, who avoids crucifixion after another character (Mithridates) intervenes (4,2,7-4,3,6). See also Whitmarsh (2011, 47-48), who sees Habrokomes' case as an 'exception from the realist rule'.

³⁶ Sen. *Contr.* 4,4: The offender is a hero who is prosecuted for stealing weapons from a grave, although he puts them back after fighting.

³⁷ Chariton 3,3,1; 5,10,9; 2,11,3 (Kallirhoe). Ach.Tat. 3,17,1-4; 7,9,2. The theme of suicide in the Greek novel has been studied at length by MacAlister (1996).

commits suicide over the seemingly dead heroine, Derkyllis (Photios *Bibl.* 110b). In Iamblichos, the father of Sinonis meets a similar fate (77a33-38). Heliodoros' Theagenes thinks of killing himself with his sword while holding the body of a dead woman, whom he believes to be Charikleia (2,4,1-5,1).

The suffering of hero and heroine is a novelistic *topos*. Sinonis' appearance in chains early in the novel's summary (74a9-10) is quite striking, and may be paralleled with the imprisonment of Leukippe (in Achilles Tatios' book 6). The sufferings of novelistic heroines are largely caused by the unwanted desire of powerful men. Iamblichos' Sinonis is held prisoner by the Babylonian king Garmos, who wants to marry her. Chariton's Kallirhoe catches the eye of no less than the Persian king (at the beginning of book 6). But Garmos' infatuation with Sinonis (74a7-9) is further reminiscent of the desire of Dionysios, the Milesian dignitary, for the unwilling Kallirhoe in Chariton. Their different attitude to the heroines (Dionysios is respectful and considerate, Garmos not so) shows them to be very different characters,³⁸ but both suitors – both widowers – are aligned in their passion, and after losing their objects of desire, both are consoled by 'souvenirs' of the heroines (Garmos by Sinonis' garland of flowers, 74a24-26, and Dionysios by Kallirhoe's εικόνα [likeness] in Miletos, 8,5,15).

Another theme of pronounced importance in Iamblichos, which is repeatedly found in other novels too, is that of mixed identity and character 'doublets'. In the *Babyloniaka*, twin brothers Tigres and Euphrates are often mistaken for Rhodanes (76a30-31, 77b26). Misrecognition happens to the main pair of protagonists in Xenophon Ephesios a few times (4,3; 5,10; 5,12). In Achilles Tatios' novel, the hero's half-sister Kalligone is abducted in Leukippe's place (2,16-18), and later a prostitute is mistaken for Leukippe at the moment when the heroine falsely appears to be killed by her abductors (5,7). Similarly (if more gruesomely) in Iamblichos, the body of a young woman (Trophime), which is consumed by a dog, is mistaken for Sinonis by her own father and by Rhodanes and Soraichos (77a29-b5). In Heliodoros, Charikleia is mistaken for Thisbe (the latter's corpse is also misidentified, 2,3; cf. 1,30,4-31,1). In some cases the confusion between characters is promoted by specific external similarities. Sinonis appears with a shorn head (74b9), and so does the heroine's 'doublet', the farmer's daughter (76b1; cf. fr. 61,6), who is mistaken for Sinonis (Achilles Tatios' Leukippe has cut her too, when she assumes the false identity of Lykaina, 5,17). Mesopotamia, sister of

³⁸ Garmos appears as a 'barbarian despot' (Morales 2006, 90), in contrast with Dionysios (a Miletian Greek), but Chariton's Persian king Artaxerxes (another admirer of the heroine), too, is more refined than Garmos.

Tigres and Euphrates, is another 'doublet' (77b27-28).³⁹ These 'doublets' seem to function as foils for the hero and heroine to some extent, and they suggest analogy as an important factor in the conception of characters. They also activate plot lines based on the presumably popular element of recognition. The segment of Sinonis' chain in Iamblichos can be paralleled with such objects in Heliodoros as the piece of cloth, the ring and the necklaces that reveal Charikleia's identity (10,14); but in a reversal of the ideal function of recognition tokens, Sinonis' chain, which is given to the farmer's daughter, leads to a misrecognition (76b1-10; 20-21).

The common pool of novelistic themes, on which Iamblichos also draws, further includes the trial theme (at 74b26-30, on the *πάθος* 'adventure' of the two brothers, who are accused of murder and acquitted; the long fr. 35 is a court scene), dreams (75a30-31; fr. 34; fr. 35), and magic (75b18-34). It is finally worth mentioning the role of animals in the *Babyloniaka*, which is consistent with Iamblichos' 'sophistic' taste. There is the camel, which Damas' informer rides (76a14-20), and the mysterious bull of fr. 9 (a real animal or a ghost?). In the last book of Heliodoros' novel, his hero, Theagenes, struggles with a bull (10,28-30), right after the memorable appearance of a giraffe (10,27).

III. A Comparison: The Novels of Achilles Tatios and Iamblichos

Following from the above summary of the links between Iamblichos' *Babyloniaka* and other novels of a mainly romantic interest, this section will proceed to argue for a special relationship between Iamblichos' novel and Achilles Tatios' *Leukippe and Kleitophon*,⁴⁰ whilst also considering the broader novelistic tradition when relevant. The two authors' shared penchant for digressions has been mentioned already; we might add to this a liking for gnomic statements (*Babyloniaka* frs. 4, 34, 60, 85, 86, and 96; Achilles Tatios' *gnomai* have received

³⁹ See also Stephens and Winkler (1995, 184-185). The 'doublet' of Sinonis' father and Soraichos (77a33-77b3; cf. fr. 61,44-45 on Soraichos' paternal feelings for the heroine) reminds us of the pair of Charikles and Kalasiris as Charikleia's protectors in Heliodoros. Note that here I am only concerned with character doublings based on similarity; on duplication as a narrative strategy more broadly, including contrasted character pairs, see Morgan (1998) on Heliodoros.

⁴⁰ Despite Dowden (forthcoming 1), who doubts a connection between the two (his comparison is limited to the presence of meadows and shepherds in both novels, but these elements are used widely in this genre).

considerable attention⁴¹). In addition, the two novels, which are chronologically very close,⁴² arguably share a number of further notable peculiarities pertaining to their characters, plots, and ideology.

Despite the numerous differences between the two plots in context and setting, the dynamics of characterisation of the two pairs of protagonists reveal some clear points of correspondence. Achilles Tatios' hero, Kleitophon, is a fraudulent lover, as he indulges in pre-marital relations (with prostitutes, 2,37) and infidelity (in the Melite episode). Longos' hero, Daphnis, is also no longer a virgin at the time of his union with Chloe, but his experience is framed within a coming-of-age process and is not linked with fondness for another woman, frivolity or fraud. In Iamblichos, Rhodanes' brief disrespect of the chastity/fidelity rule is more similar to Kleitophon's trespass than to Daphnis' erotic initiation. Iamblichos' hero kisses another woman, a young widow, who is presented as 'the farmer's daughter' and (strangely) as a κόρη 'maiden' (76a41; 76b5; cf. fr. 61,33), and who looks similar to Sinonis (76b6-7; as mentioned above, they have both cut their hair). Addressing Sinonis with reference to this rivalry, the wise Soraichos utters a reminder of the non-exclusive nature of erotic attraction – a lurking premise also in Achilles Tatios: οὐ σοὶ μόνῃ, τέκνον, Ῥοδάνης ἐστὶ καλός. 'You are not the only one, my child, who finds Rhodanes attractive' (fr. 61,51-52). Although Rhodanes appears more restrained than Achilles' hero (he does not have sex), his encounter with the farmer's daughter is still reminiscent of Kleitophon's affair with the Ephesian widow Melite. We do not know Rhodanes' motive, but it may have been his fondness for a woman who looked like his beloved. Notably both Melite and the farmer's daughter are described as beautiful (76a42; 76b5; Ach. Tat. 5,13,1), and Melite is described by no other than Kleitophon, who presumably found her attractive.

Iamblichos and Achilles Tatios further have in common that they portray the heroine's rival in positive moral terms, against the novels' general tendency to portray secondary female characters negatively.⁴³ The young widow in the *Babyloniaka* is a benevolent character and assists the amorous couple before sleeping with Euphrates and helping him escape from the executioner's compounds (78a6-9). Her combined function with regard to these two different men (Rhodanes and

⁴¹ See De Temmerman (2014, 176-187). On Iamblichos' fragments in question, there is a *caveat*: these fragments are not explicitly assigned to Iamblichos' novel.

⁴² Some scholars see Achilles Tatios' novel, which cannot be dated more accurately than the 2nd c. AD, as a little earlier (Dowden, forthcoming 1), but it would be dangerous to speak in terms of 'influence'. On Achilles' date, see Henrichs (2011, 306-312) concerning the evidence from the papyri; Morales (in Whitmarsh and Morales 2001, xiv-xv) for the (rather tenuous) internal clues.

⁴³ On these minor female characters, see Haynes (2003, 101-136).

Euphrates) reflects Melite's attitude towards Kleitophon (6,1-2; she sleeps with him, then helps his escape from prison and his reunion with Leukippe).

While Rhodanes' affection for the farmer's daughter disappoints ideal romantic conventions, the depiction of the heroine of the *Babyloniaka* is even more unconventional. The stereotypical novelistic heroine is first and foremost characterised by her chastity (examples are not limited to the extant novels, but are also extended to fragmentary contexts, including the Assyrian queen Semiramis, who is represented as a shy maiden in the *Ninos romance*, although she is far from it in other sources⁴⁴). Sinonis appears chaste and committed for most of the plot, but ends up marrying someone other than her beloved (the king of Syria, 78a3-5) out of jealousy and spite (Chariton's Kallirhoe, enters a second marriage too, but her motives are very different⁴⁵). In fr. 61, which is a very important text for Sinonis' characterisation, she has a manic attack that is reminiscent of Leukippe's (4,9). But while in the case of Achilles' heroine this is a result of the threat to her chastity,⁴⁶ Sinonis, who is 'passionate and murderous' (κόρη ἐρῶσα καὶ φονῶσα, fr. 61,26), experiences manic jealousy, which leads to her aforementioned marriage and peaks in criminal actions. She signals her intention to kill her rival (twice, at 76b28-30 and 77b9-13; cf. fr. 61 and 70) and condemns her to sleep with an executioner/priest (78a5-6). She further threatens Soraichos (fr. 61,56-57), the couple's trusted friend, and commits an actual murder (76b30-35: the victim is a profligate man, Setapos, whom she kills with a sword when he is drunk, and after she pretends to reciprocate his love) – in fact almost two murders, if one counts her murderous intention towards the farmer's daughter. It may be said that *Leukippe and Kleitophon* brings on stage an anti-hero, the *Babyloniaka* an anti-heroine.

Admittedly Sinonis is not the only novelistic heroine to find herself guilty of a murderous act. But Anthia's killing of Anchialos in Xenophon Ephesios (4,5) is an act performed in defense of her precious chastity, while Sinonis' actions betray a violent and vengeful woman, especially given the kindness and innocence of her second potential victim. Incidentally, both Anthia and Sinonis use a ξίφος ('sword') as a murder weapon (swords feature in all extant novels), but the murder committed by Sinonis seems to have been portrayed as exceptionally violent: τὸ στόμα τῆ χειρὶ φιμώσασα τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου, μήτινα τῆ ψυχῆ συνεκπέμψει φωνήν. 'She muzzled the slain man's mouth with her hand lest he emit, along with his

⁴⁴ Semiramis is a fierce warrior woman in Diodoros' account of Babylonian history; see Kanavou (2016, 280, with bibliography).

⁴⁵ See further Kanavou (2015).

⁴⁶ Cf. Anthia's epileptic seizure in Xenophon Ephesios (5,7,4) – hers is a pretended one, to avoid the brothel.

soul, some sound' (fr. 68). Sinonis' attack on the farmer's daughter can be further compared to the attack of the jealous wife Rhenaia on Anthia (Xenophon Ephesios 5,5). In such a situation, one would indeed expect a main heroine to appear as the innocent victim and not as the perpetrator; with Sinonis, this situation is reversed. The only other main novelistic character to (almost) become guilty of a similarly grave offence, is male: Chaireas, who is tried for the supposed murder of Kallirhoe, which was, however, accidental, not intentional (Chariton 1,4-6).⁴⁷

The novels of Iamblichos and Achilles Tatios are aligned in their indulgence in horror and gore. It is true that references to violent and scary events are ubiquitous in the novel genre – not just in stories of the 'Phoinikian' spirit of Lollianos' narrative, or in the irreverent Roman novel,⁴⁸ but also in the canonical five romances. The wounding of Kleitophon by pirates, which produces a lot of blood (5,7,1), and his equally nasty encounter with Thersander (8,1), may be paralleled with such blood-filled images as Xenophon Ephesios 2,6,3 (the torturing of Habrokomes until his blood drained out), Chariton 3,10,2 (the barbaric attack on a Greek trireme) and many scenes in Heliodoros (e.g. the opening scene, which is one of death and devastation, 1,1-2; the robbers eating raw meat with dripping blood, 2,19,4-5). Threats to the heroes' lives are a consistent feature of the plot, and the disagreeable figure of the 'executioner' (δῆμιος), which seems to have been of significant importance in the plot of the *Babyloniaka* (76a20; 77b38), is also present in Achilles Tatios (7,10,4; 8,8,5), Heliodoros (8,9,11; 14), and Chariton (4,3).⁴⁹ One may add to this the horror inherent in Habrokomes' meeting with Aigialeus and his mummified wife in Xenophon Ephesios (5,1-2), which verges on necrophilia,⁵⁰ and in Heliodoros' necromantic scene (6,14).⁵¹ Even Longos indulges in gore briefly (in the mythical story of the dismembering of Echo, daughter of a mortal and a Nymph, at Pan's orders, 3,23,3).

By comparison, the *Babyloniaka* would seem to induce exceptionally frequent reactions of horror. Early in Photios' summary, after the account of Sinonis' barbaric imprisonment, we read of two eunuchs whose ears and noses are cut off (74a14-16); more cruel punishments are also inflicted (the burial of living people,

⁴⁷ Even more ironically, Kleitophon is found guilty of plotting the murder of Leucippe after his own false confession and is later acquitted (Ach. Tat. 7,7; 16).

⁴⁸ See Cueva (2018, 369-372).

⁴⁹ Notably Iamblichos' executioners are largely unwilling characters who try to avoid the task (which suggests the low esteem associated with this role; Stephens and Winkler 1995, 401). A more 'impious' executioner is a central figure in the small *Tinouphis* fragment.

⁵⁰ Perhaps the ἔκθεςμοι ... πράξεις 'unsanctified activities' (76b13) of the *Babyloniaka*'s slave who killed the maiden Trophime refers to necrophilic acts (thus Danek 2000, 114 n. 6).

⁵¹ Cueva (2018, 366-369). Even Longos includes a fright-inducing description (2,25-26).

77a26-28); bees with poisonous honey attack both the fleeing couple and their persecutors (74a40-74b8); Rhodanes rides with Sinonis through corpses (74b22-24); they feast and sleep in a tomb (75a6-8); Sinonis wounds herself in the breast with a sword (seemingly as an attempted suicide, 75a31-32, cf. fr. 61,11-13, 58-59); a priest is turned into a public executioner (76a27-28); a slave girl's story involves more splatter, after which we immediately hear of a bloody kiss between Rhodanes and the farmer's daughter (76b22-28). These elements are perhaps felt to be at home in the context of an orientalisising narrative that presumably allows an extra dose of barbarism.⁵²

Among the extant romances, only *Leukippe and Kleitophon* comes close to Iamblichos in this Tarantino-esque flair. There is the ecphrastic description of Te-reus' painting that pictures the myth's gruesome details (5,3,8), and above all, Leukippe's false deaths. These include Achilles' account of what appears to be Leukippe's headless corpse (which turns out to be that of another woman, 5,7) and, earlier, her sacrifice by pirates, a ceremony that involves the maiden's disembowelment and the consumption of her entrails after roasting (3,15-16; the scene later proves to have been a staged imitation – in reality Leukippe did not die, 3,20-22). Cannibalism features in the *Babyloniaka* in the form of a cannibalistic brigand (74b31-32) and a man-eating dog (77a29-33). It was a theme that caused fascination, judging by its place in Lollianos' *Phoinikika* and the fact that it also occurs in declamation,⁵³ but *Leukippe and Kleitophon* is the only extant romance to include a scene of this kind (the fact that it later proves to be false does not expel the horror of the description, even if experienced readers might have thought that another woman, not Leukippe, was probably being sacrificed). Another significant area of comparison pertains to erotics, which in Iamblichos and Achilles Tatios appear to be spicier than in any of the other extant romantic narratives. We have already commented on the idiosyncratic attitude of the four protagonists towards the stereotypical novelistic chastity. *Leukippe and Kleitophon* further treats its readers to two bold erotic encounters (between the hero and

⁵² Barbero (2015, xvii-xix) reads in the novel's initial scenes an echo of the cruelty of Asian monarchs (Herodotos has similar descriptions, e.g. in his account of the Scythians' habit of blinding war captives, 4,2). It is rather harder to agree with Beck (1982), who, exploring the mystagogic dimensions of the novel, saw the emphasis on death in particular as an allegory ('for the yearning of the individual ... for radical spiritual change') – though not necessarily of Mithraic relevance, as Merkelbach thought.

⁵³ As a supposed response to famine (Ps.-Quint. *Decl.* 12). The fear of a potentially man-eating lioness defines the outcome of Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe story (*Met.* 4,55-166) and its Greek version (?) as preserved in P.Mich. inv. 3793 (<http://www.trismegistos.org/text/64323> LDAB ID: 5544) (one wonders whether the θηριόβρωτον of the last surviving line refers to a real instance of a human being eaten by a beast).

Melite at the end of book 5, and earlier the near-defloration of Leukippe in book 2). One has reason to suspect that the original *Babyloniaka* too had its share of salacious eroticism. The fourth-century medical author Theodorus Priscianus (*Euporiston* 2,11) mentions Iamblichos (together with Philip of Amphipolis and Herodian) as authors whose works are conducive to the generation of erotic pleasure.⁵⁴ Although the remains of the *Babyloniaka* contain no explicit erotic scenes, Photios' summary implies that there might have been some. At 77b he mentions the woman 'who slept with the executioner' (presumably as a traditional function), and a sexual encounter between the farmer's daughter and Euphrates. The erotic content of the *Babyloniaka*'s plot seems to have extended to one lesbian incident, which may have been recounted with some explicitness. Photios speaks of the 'seething, unnatural passion' of an Egyptian queen Berenike, who 'consorted with Mesopotamia' (... τῶν ἀγρίων αὐτῆς καὶ ἐκθέσμων ἐρώτων· καὶ ὅπως Μεσοποταμίᾳ τε συνεγίνετο, 77a21-22; cf. the ambiguous reference to the two women and marriage at 77b36-37).⁵⁵ The use of the name Berenike may evoke the deviant (at least for the Greeks) sexual practices which were associated with the Ptolemies.⁵⁶ Homosexuality is not unusual in the romantic novels, but it is Achilles Tatios who shows the greatest interest in the theme,⁵⁷ and it is only Iamblichos who refers to lesbianism.

IV. Iamblichos' *Babyloniaka* and *Satire*

The numerous plot similarities between the extant Greek romances and Iamblichos' novel affirm their closeness in various ways, and especially Iamblichos' closeness to the novel of Achilles Tatios. To summarise, shared 'peculiarities' of the *Babyloniaka* and *Leukippe and Kleitophon* include a tendency for digressions, *gnomai*, and gruesome descriptions, the theme of transvestite prison escape and probably also explicit eroticism. Both novels feature a highly idiosyncratic central character. For Achilles Tatios it is the deliciously unchaste Kleitophon, for

⁵⁴ See Stephens and Winkler (1995, 476) for an English translation of the relevant passage (it is unclear who is meant by Herodian). Philip of Amphipolis is listed in the *Suda* as a historian, author of a *Ῥοδιακὰ* ('Rhodian story'), τῶν πάντων αἰσχροῶν.

⁵⁵ See further Morales (2006, 78-82). On the ambiguity regarding Mesopotamia's marriage, cf. Wilson (1994, 112 n. 31). Zobaras, a eunuch, is said to be in love with her too (77b32-34), a fact which is also mentioned in the *Suda*'s very brief entry s.v. *Ἰάμβλιχος*.

⁵⁶ As noted by Stephens and Winkler (1995, 196 n. 31).

⁵⁷ See Whitmarsh (2011, 159-163) on homosexuality in the novels. Achilles Tatios includes two homosexual tales (1,7-14; 2,34), and an inconclusive debate about the relative merits of women and boys as lovers at the end of book 2.

Iamblichos the ruthlessly unromantic Sinonis. One crucial question remains, namely whether the *Babyloniaka* also shared in the satirical spirit of *Leukippe and Kleitophon*. Is Sinonis, with her bold, manly aggressiveness,⁵⁸ an extravagant, ironic version of the stereotypical prude and shy maiden figure of the romance, just as Kleitophon, with his frivolous and unchaste behaviour, pokes fun at the conventional romantic male hero? Is the *Babyloniaka*'s apparent exaggeration of melodramatic romance motifs (*Scheintod*, suicide) meant as a satire of the 'ideal' novel? Do this novel's sadistic descriptions leave a humorous aftertaste, similar to that of Kleitophon's (and Kleinias') reaction to the false deaths of Leukippe?⁵⁹

The events of Iamblichos' novel as recounted by Photios have been read under a satirical lens before.⁶⁰ But it is possible to add more details to this reading. To begin with, the remaining fragments of the *Babyloniaka* do not preclude a satirical spirit. The digression about the master who accuses his slave of adultery with his wife (fr. 35) draws inspiration from an offence (cf. the Roman legal *Digest* 48,2,5; 5,25 [24]; 5,34 [33]), whose treatment in literature includes humorous contexts. Aisop's affair with his master's wife in the bawdy *Life of Aisop* (*W* 74-76) leaps to mind,⁶¹ and so does the steward who is caught with his master's wife in Petronius (*Sat.* 45,8-9); the case of the adulterer slave in Seneca the Elder (*Contr.* 2,1,34-36) takes an almost comic turn when it is claimed that it was the master who called the slave to his wife's bedroom.⁶² Moreover, the claim made in fr. 35,10-11, that adultery is 'an intolerable crime' (ἀφόρητόν ἐστιν ἀδίκημα

⁵⁸ Cf. Johnes's interpretation of Sinonis as both manly and barbaric (2003, 185).

⁵⁹ See Heiserman (1977, 123-124). For further discussion of humour and parody in *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, see Chew (2000) and the relevant chapter in Brethes (2007). Cf. Reardon (1994, 80): 'to the taste of the late twentieth century, the story is some sort of comedy'.

⁶⁰ See Anderson (1982, 51-54). He notes (ibid., 89) that in terms of 'playful intent', Iamblichos stands close to Achilles Tatios. Cf. Swain (1999, 10: 'a satirical rewriting of the ideal novel').

⁶¹ Interestingly, the *Suda* s.v. Ἰάμβλιχος presents our author as descended from slaves, and Aisop is famously fashioned as a slave in his fictitious *vita*.

⁶² On the variety of influences that are possibly at work in fr. 35, see the brief commentary of Stephens and Winkler (1995, 228-229) and, more extensively, Dowden (forthcoming 2), who discusses the legal background of the fragment's adultery theme, as well as its declamatory features (declamation had an amusement value, as Russell notes [1983, 88]). A non-negligible detail is that the adultery in fr. 35 is presented as occurring in the guilty woman's dream at Aphrodite's temple; this must be linked with the passage in Photios' summary about women visitors to that temple having to announce their dreams (*Bibl.* 75b8-11). See Whitmarsh (2018, 54) on the motif of 'lovers meeting in dream', but the parallels in Stephens and Winkler (1995, 229) for the 'nexus of dreams and trials' seem more relevant. On the husband's reluctance to believe that his wife's adultery was just a dream, cf. a folktale type from the Arne-Thompson-Uther catalogue (1364: An adulterer tries to save himself by saying it was all a dream).

μοιχεία), sounds ironic (indeed almost comic) in view of the behaviour of the protagonistic pair. It is harder to identify humorous elements in fr. 1, an *ekphrasis*, but we can suspect fr. 61, a dramatic peak of the action which is characterised by melodramatic excess, to contain some satire (see below). We may assume that the original novel had a varied rhetorical coloration, a fact which is true of Achilles Tatios' novel. After all, how would we assess *Leukippe and Kleitophon* if the only surviving parts were, for example, the *ekphrasis* of Europa's painting (at the beginning of book 1) and Leukippe's apology to Thersander (at the end of book 6)?

Some details of Photios' summary of the *Babyloniaka* may imply that this novel had a humorous dimension. One such detail is the repeated occurrences of the theme of death in the forms of *Scheintod* and (attempted) suicide, and in conjunction with the appearance of characters who look like the protagonistic pair. As a romantic *topos*, this theme (and its repeated manifestations) is turned into an object of satire in Achilles Tatios through Kleitophon's almost comic reactions (3,15; 5,7; 7,4), and most explicitly in Kleinias' comment to Kleitophon, which simultaneously mocks the romantic hero's tendency to suicide: "Τίς γὰρ οἶδεν, εἰ ζῆ πάλιν; μὴ γὰρ οὐ πολλάκις τέθνηκε; μὴ γὰρ οὐ πολλάκις ἀνεβίω; τί δὲ προπετῶς ἀποθνήσκεις; ὃ καὶ κατὰ σχολὴν ἔξεστιν, ὅταν μάθῃς σαφῶς τὸν θάνατον αὐτῆς." ('Who knows whether she [Leukippe] has come back to life? Has she not died many times before? Has she not been resurrected many times before? Why are you so keen to die? You will have plenty of leisure to do so when you discover for sure that she is dead', 7,6,2).⁶³ In Iamblichos, the repetition of the *Scheintod* motif every time the pair are tracked down by their persecutors (who take them for dead, 74b3-8, 75a15) may appear comic; in one instance, the soldiers' throwing of bread and meat as an offering to the 'dead', which are then collected by the very much alive hero and heroine (74b12-24), adds further irony. One of the pair's false deaths, which is brought about by Soraichos' fake poison (75a32-36), finds a parallel in no other than Apuleius.⁶⁴ *Scheintod* is also an echo of a philosophical and religious theme (death followed by resurrection), prominent in Christian narratives, which is parodied by Lucian (*Philops.* 11), the great derider of irrationality and superstition. Iamblichos may well have had this background in mind; indeed the readiness of Tigris' mother to believe that her dead son came back to life, accompanied by Persephone no less (76a3-5), after she has performed a magical ceremony to give her son hero status (75b18-20), must include a hint of parody of Lucianic vein. A parodic tone may also permeate the author's *excursus* on

⁶³ See Brethes (2007, 234-245).

⁶⁴ *Met.* 10,11-12: a boy seemingly dead – from the poison intended for his older half-brother – and already buried is revived from his grave after it emerges that a wise doctor had provided the murderer with a soporific instead.

magic that follows immediately afterwards, with its mention of magicians of comic-sounding expertise, including those of locusts and of mice. Soraichos' manipulation of the naïve Alanoi, whom he convinces that he is conversant with the gods (78a19-22), mocks religious credulity.

A parody of the irrational is perhaps inherent in Iamblichos' use of ghost apparitions. The fake ghosts of 74b37-41 (the hero and heroine escape their persecutors by pretending to be ghosts of the brigand's victims) may well have had a comic effect. The same may be true for the incident of the pursuit of Sinonis by a supernatural *erastes* (the ghost of a ram, 74a22-23; cf. perhaps fr. 10).⁶⁵ Apuleius' use of the ghost theme, in the instance of robbers who pretend to be ghosts (*Met.* 4,22), is clearly satirical,⁶⁶ and Lollianos' ghosts (including bandits disguised as ghosts, P.Köln inv. 3328 B1 verso 23-31 [www.trismegistos.org/text/61432] LDAB ID: 2577]; cf. P.Oxy. XI 1368) may also have comic overtones.⁶⁷ As we have seen, Lollianos and Iamblichos – and Achilles Tatios – further have in common the excessive use of gore, which in all three must be indicative of satire and a sort of macabre humour. In fact, exaggeration,⁶⁸ as seen in the very frequent use of themes that are not necessarily comic in themselves, is a pointer to satire. Thus the multitude of death-related incidents, the excessive violence in Sinonis' character and the overacting of passions in fr. 61 make us suspect a satirical mood. Similarly, Iamblichos' crowding of the plot with character doublets may be meant to pour ridicule to this novelistic habit.

Another plot element used by Iamblichos, the seriousness of which is precarious by definition, is cross-dressed prison escape (a variation of the masked or confused identities theme). This theme is unique to Iamblichos and Achilles Tatios among the novelists. Euphrates, a 'doublet' for Iamblichos' hero, escapes

⁶⁵ There is not much reason to assume that Sinonis had a nightmare, *pace* Stephens and Winkler (1995, 203 n. 48). Cf. the allusions to demonic and bestial love in Philostratos' *Life of Apollonios*, where, however, the context excludes satire (see now Kanavou 2018, 160-161).

⁶⁶ But Charikleia's identification of the Egyptian brigands as 'the ghosts of the slain' (Hld. 1,3) is less likely to be read as comic, and rather more likely to suggest the trauma which the heroine has suffered. The return of the dead, recently married young woman, Philinnion, in the famous ghost-story by Phlegon of Tralleis, which has connections with the novel (Morgan 2013), evokes both mystery and emotional trauma.

⁶⁷ Cf. Anderson (1982, 57; 143 n. 72). On the broad appeal of the ghost theme, see Stramaglia's survey of relevant texts (1999); some of its manifestations were certainly comic.

⁶⁸ On the much-discussed link between exaggeration and satire, see now particularly Ludlow (2018), with examples from the ancient Jewish novel. Ludlow focuses on the texts' rhetorical means (e.g. verbal allusions to weeping), which in the case of the *Babyloniaka* are not fully known, but cf. Sinonis' double emotional outburst in fr. 61. See also Fusillo (1999, 362-365) on Lucian's use of the technique of amplification in his *True History* as a means of parodying historiography.

compulsory executioner service by dressing in the clothes of the farmer's daughter, after he has slept with her (78a6-9), and Achilles' Kleitophon escapes prison in Melite's clothes after their erotic encounter (6,1-2). The theme is not given an explicit comic dimension in Photios' summary, but it is in Achilles Tatios, who has Melite mock her lover's feminine apparel. Cross-dressed escape has an inherent comic value, which is clearly exploited by Apuleius, in the story of a brigand who once escaped death dressed as a woman (*Met.* 7,5-8), and perhaps also in declamation (Quintilian, *Decl.Min.* 282: tyrannicide in woman's clothing).⁶⁹ The *Babyloniaca* might have offered further humorous moments, as is suggested by the belching (βορβορονγμός) of the camel rider in fr. 51 (the attribution of the fragment is not explicit, but it may well refer to the holy camel which is meant to carry Damas' informer across the river, where the informer eventually drowns, 76a14-20) and by the poetic language of fr. 12, which is uttered in the darkness of the cave, where the pair are hiding: 'ἄρά γε ὀρθῶς ζῶμεν καὶ ὑπὸ φωτὶ δέ, ἢ ἐν ἀσελήνῳ καὶ ἀνάστρῳ πλέομεν;' 'Are we truly alive and neath the light? Or do we sail in a moonless and starless night?'

To conclude, it appears very possible that the *Babyloniaca* played with humour and satire. A number of plot features as revealed in Photios' summary, the phrasing of some of the fragments and comparisons with other novelistic literature, especially Achilles Tatios, all serve to suggest this. The extent of Iamblichos' humorous practice cannot be decided, but its purpose could have been similar to that of *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, whose irreverent characters, plot, and rhetoric raised a laugh at the expense of novelistic and social conventions.

It is worth now revisiting Photios' verdict. As we have seen, he places Iamblichos as a novelist in groups of authors that include not only the solemn Heliodoros, but also the irreverent Achilles Tatios and the satirist Lucian. He further provides a qualitative assessment that places Iamblichos between the two other romantic authors: Ἔστι δὲ τῇ αἰσχρολογίᾳ τοῦ μὲν Ἀχιλλέως τοῦ Τατίου ἦττον ἐκπομπεύων, ἀναιδέστερον δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ ὁ Φοῖνιξ Ἡλιόδωρος προσφερόμενος ... ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν Ἡλιόδωρος σεμνότερόν τε καὶ εὐφημότερον, ἦττον δὲ αὐτοῦ ὁ Ἰάμβλιχος, αἰσχρῶς δὲ καὶ ἀναιδῶς ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἀποχρώμενος. 'He does not flaunt indecent language to the same degree as Achilles Tatios, but his attitude is rather more

⁶⁹ This theme may well reflect historical practice (for a non-fictional modern example, see <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-37446558/a-six-foot-bloke-in-a-burka>), but it was clearly often used 'because it was so entertaining', as Winkler suspects (1980, 176, with reference to D.C. 72 [71] 2,4 – the cross-dressing of the *boukoloι* to cheat the Roman authorities in the context of a 2nd c. AD uprising). Cf. Polyainos' account of Theopompos' escape from the Arcadian prison in the clothes of his wife Cheilonis (8,34) and the Minyan escape (Hdt. 4,146, in the context of an aetiological legend).

shameless than that of the Phoenician Heliodoros ... but Heliodoros is very dignified and pure-spoken, Iamblichos less so, and Achilles is shameless and indecent' (73b30-32; to Achilles, whom he considers as the least 'dignified' of the three, he dedicates much less space than to Iamblichos). There is further critique of the *Babloniaka* in Photios' *Bibliotheka* which is ambivalent, and which may suggest that a satirical tone was present. Iamblichos, says Photios, excels 'in the arrangement of narratives that represent highly serious matters', but his style does create a 'tickle' and 'an undercurrent of languid excitement' (ἐπι τὸ γαργαλίζον, ὡς ἄν τις εἶποι, καὶ βλακῶδες παρακεκίνηται, 73b32-35). This metaphorical 'tickle' (cf. LSJ s.v. γαργαλίζω) might just be associated with mirth (one of the physical effects of tickling is laughter⁷⁰), and βλακῶδες ('indolent', 'fatuous') is not out of place in this context.⁷¹

As a final argument in favour of a satirical reading of the *Babloniaka*, we might mention the author's links with three novelists outside the romantic canon: Apuleius, Antonios Diogenes, and Lucian. Iamblichos' self-introduction in Photios' summary includes precisely the kind of features that are associated with the author of the satirical *Ass*, namely non-native knowledge of the language, in which he writes, and involvement with magic and divination (he claims to have predicted Verus' war, 75b27-40).⁷² We have seen that Photios groups together our Iamblichos, Antonios Diogenes, author of the fictitious Thoule travelogue, Lucian, author of the science fiction novel *True History*, and Lucius of Patras, author of the Greek *Metamorphoses*, a work that was clearly related to the (pseudo-)Lucianic *Onos* and to Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. According to the patriarch, Antonios Diogenes, a possible influence on Iamblichos, also called himself 'a poet of Old Comedy' and admitted his stories' lack of truthfulness, which he 'reinforced' using 'older authorities' as sources,⁷³ among which the notoriously unreliable geographical writer Antiphanes of Berga (112a4-6). These hints, which suggest obvious analogies with Lucian's satirical *True History*, have understandably led scholars to suspect that this novel, though not consistently parodic, had a satirical

⁷⁰ Γαργαλιζόμενοι τε γὰρ ταχὺ γελῶσι ... Ὁ δὲ γαργαλισμὸς γέλως ἐστί 'When people are tickled, they quickly burst into laughter ... tickling means laughter' (*PA* 673a3-4, 8-10). Cf. the noun γάργυλος 'tickle' in *Ar. Th.* 133 (the sensation there, which is caused in Euripides' 'Relative' by some choral lyrics, must be jointly laughter and a humorous erotic feeling).

⁷¹ Cf. esp. ἐπεγέλα βλακῶδες 'he laughed indolently' (*Hld.* 10,31,4, of the giant Ethiopian against whom Theagenes wrestles).

⁷² See Holzberg (1995, 64); cf. also Stephens and Winkler (1995, 182).

⁷³ Thus in his Letter to Faustinus, which was placed at the beginning of the novel according to Photios (111a30-40). Cf. Lucian's satirical comment on Aristophanes (*VH* 1,29), one of the 'truthful' authors *par excellence*.

aspect. Thus humour was a trait of the works of all novelists in his list, perhaps except Heliodoros,⁷⁴ but Photios only comments explicitly on the satirical spirit of Lucian, who in *Bibl. codd.* 128 and 129 is said to pour ridicule at various aspects of Greek culture (κωμωδῶν ‘satirising’, διαπαίζων ‘jesting’, σκώπτων ‘mocking’, διασύρων ‘ridiculing’; rather surprisingly, Lucius’ *Metamorphoses* is deemed serious). However, the adverbs αἰσχρῶς δὲ καὶ ἀναιδῶς ‘shamelessly and indecently’, which he applies to Achilles at 73b31-32, betray an awareness that this author did not operate within the usual constraints of chaste and serious writing (the connection of shamelessness with humour and laughter, which goes back to Old Comedy, is also found in the works of Photios⁷⁵), and he brands Iamblichos’ style as ἀναιδέστερον ‘more shameless’ than that of Heliodoros. Finally, let us not forget that Iamblichos was a contemporary (and if indeed a Syrian, a compatriot) of no other than the aforementioned satirist Lucian, whose work may have formed part of the literary context of the *Babyloniaka*. Further to his interest in the parody of the *Scheintod*/resurrection theme as was suggested above, Lucian thematises lesbian relationships; his Megilla, who claims to have ‘married’ Demonassa,⁷⁶ provides a rare parallel to the ‘marriage’ of Iamblichos’ Berenike and Mesopotamia. Perhaps this relationship was another facetious moment in the plot of the *Babyloniaka*, which even if not consistently parodic, can hardly have been thoroughly serious.⁷⁷

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⁷⁴ Thus Macleod (1994, 1396). Cf. Swain (1992; 1999, 10); Stephens and Winkler (1995, 107-109).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Lex. s.v.* κορδακίζειν· αἰσχρὰ ὀρχεῖται ‘dance shamelessly’, and κόρδαξ· ὄρχησις κωμική ‘comic dance’; also *Amph.* 13,117: ἀναιδεῖ πρόσωπῳ καὶ ἀπυλώτῳ στόματι διακωμῶδεῖ (τὸν θεόν) ‘with a shameless face and an ungated mouth he derides (god)’ (for ἀπύλωτο στόμα cf. *Ar. Ra.* 838).

⁷⁶ *DMeretr.* 5,2-3 (see Morales 2006, 79, with bibliography). The few references to female ‘marriage’ in ancient sources are ambiguous, as Morales notes (2006, 80-81).

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