

Building the Supernatural: The Cult of *Glykon* of Abonuteichos

From Lucian of Samosata to Cognitive Science

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We can argue that the making and the spread of the cult of *Glykon* of Abonuteichos can be explained through a cognitivist template. Lucian of Samosata's *Pseudomantis* booklet and the material evidence, which testifies to the building and the spread of *Glykon*'s cult by Alexander of Abonuteichos, belong to a historical context characterized by instability, deadly epidemics and military pressure. It is a historical context, therefore, in which people feel reality with anxiety; one of the reactions is the growing up of the belief in prophylactic and prophetic cults, capable to protecting and forecasting. Since Lucian had pointed out that fear and hope were the forces that dominated the lives of men, just as the same had denounced that Alexander of Abonuteichos was ready to exploit those forces to his advantage, the cult of *Glykon* could be labeled as a trick. However, cognitive science and specifically the hard-wired brain circuit research may offer an alternative explanation: the interaction between potential risk of low probability, but high impact events (unstoppable irruptions of the Germans, or generalized impotence against the spread of disease) can impact on the hard-wired brain circuit activity capable of keeping social and individual anxiety, implicitly conditioning mentality and behavior of a religious "entrepreneur" and consumers, both concerned about protection and forecasting, fear and hope.

Keywords: Supernatural, *Glykon* of Abonuteichos, Cognitive Science; Lucian of Samosata, *Pseudomantis*

In the *Philopseudeis* dialogue, the rhetorician Lucian of Samosata took the role of Tychiades, a rationalist who was a skeptical interlocutor with respect to belief in magical healings, premonitions, salutary apparitions of ghosts or self-propelled statues shared by his guest, Eukrates, and by his friends, philosophers of the peripatetic, stoic and academic schools. And the booklet began precisely with the escape, almost of Tychiades who is running across his friend Philokles anticipated the tenor of the story that would follow, wondering if there was ever an explanation of the behavior of those who were led to the desire to lie, to the point of taking pleasure in telling meaningless things, but above all of turning the mind to those who peddled things like that¹.

Also, Tychiades could not understand that whole cities and nations, publicly, remain rooted in patently false beliefs; specimens became the traditional sepulchre of Zeus for the Cretans or the myth of Erittonius for the Athenians or the founding myth of the Spartans for the Thebans so that the disconsolate conception of Tychiades, according to which whoever did not believe was judged ἀσεβής, proves that the size in the which

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¹ Luc. *Op.* 34(52), p. 1: "Ἐχεις μοι, ὦ Φιλόκλεις, εἰπεῖν τί ποτε ἄρα τοῦτο ἐστὶν ὃ πολλοὺς εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν τοῦ ψεύδεσθαι προάγεται, ὡς αὐτοὺς τε χαίρειν μηδὲν ὑγιὲς λέγοντας καὶ τοῖς τὰ τοιαῦτα διεξιούσι μάλιστα προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν; Lucian's writings are cited according to the numbering of the recensio γ in the oxon edition by M. D. MacLeod (1972-1987); in brackets, the numbering of the recensio β in the Teubner's edition by C. Jacobitz (1851).

Lucian dropped his dialogue touched the religious sphere². One of the most recent definitions of religion presents the latter as an extension of its environments beyond the immediately plausible social platform of men, in specific forms of power of action, identity definitions and communication (Rüpke, 2018)³; therefore religion also appears as a complex set of mental, conceptual, and cultural representations. While the attitude of Lucian, who does not seem to believe in the gods as supernatural, intentional agents, capable of violating ontological categories according to cognitivistically defined counter-intuitive modalities, appears if not irreligious at least open to a religious so to speak rational so to speak (Berner, 2014)⁴.

Lucian, in fact, perhaps used different religious conceptualizations, compared to the medium contemporary cultural trends, to formulate shared religious concepts: He rather criticized the process of anthropomorphization of the supernatural, so sticky in the human mind as to grow hardened in superstitious deviations (Berner, 2014; Boyer, 1996; 1998)⁵.

Here we propose the analysis of the booklet entitled *Pseudomantis*, assuming that under the sulphurous and irreverent denunciation of the circumvention carried out, according to the perspective of the skeptic Lucian, by Alexander of Abonuteichos, accused of being the false prophet of the artifact idol *Glykon*, a mode of critical religious conceptualization has been activated with respect to the need to build an anthropized form of the supernatural religious concept of prophylaxis and protection; in a political, military, social and health context that around 170 AD, it loomed darkly on the inhabitants especially of the Danubian and eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.

The Cult of *Glykon* and Material Evidence

Regardless of Lucian himself narrated, the cult attributed to *Glykon* is documented by epigraphic dedications, coins, engravings on small objects or amulets, and statuary finds (Bordenache Battaglia, 1988). The epigraphical finds are limited to the two inscriptions from Apulum (Dacia), and to the recently known inscription through the discovery of an ovoid marble altar from the territory of Pleven in Bulgaria (Šašel Kos, 1991)⁶; specifically, these are two standard specimens probably the work of the same lapidary workshop active in the inhabited center at the Dacian legionary fortress between the II and III century AD: It is proof the homologated pagination of the text, structured according to the dedicated hypothesis (first line), dedicating (2nd-3rd line), dedicatory form (conjugation of the verb *ponere* and possible abbreviation of *libens*), as well as the formular occurrence of the identical solecism *iusso dei*⁷. Sociographically the two devotees seem to be

² Luc. *Op.* 34(52), p. 3.

³ Here, and according to the specific argument relating not to an “explanation” of religion (a theme that falls outside the scope of this research), but only to the particular hypothesis that a cognitive pattern can be taken as an interpretative tool for the construction of the cult of *Glykon*, recourse to the definition of religion formulated by Rüpke seemed to be useful; especially since in the form of “extension”—according to the lexicon chosen by Rüpke—the process of human cultural construction appears to be actively involved.

⁴ To Dinomachus’ suspicion about his irreligiosity, Tychiades replied that his reverence due to the gods did not remain entangled in the superstition of those who believed in miraculous healings, in spells or in the “humanized” animation of matter; he knew that the gods treated and procured good through the science of medicines and doctors [Luc. *Op.* 34(52), p. 10].

⁵ Berner (2014, pp. 136-138) and Boyer (1996, p. 95) about the so-called “attention-grabbing power” of the counter-intuitive concepts on which see Boyer (1998, pp. 881-882). Lucian seems to have foreshadowed something like this: Tychiades exclaims that he was willing to buy doses of forgetfulness at any price, so that the memory of what he listened to would not remain in his mind, almost adhesively, so as to cause damage [Luc. *Op.* 34(52), p. 39].

⁶ The dedication to Jupiter, Juno, Draco and Dracena and Alexander, placed by Epitynchanus servant of C. Furius Octavianus at Scupi (Upper Moesia), is to be excluded from the dossier related to *Glykon* (CIL III, 8238 = ILS, 4080 = IMS VI, p. 10).

⁷ CIL III, 1021 = ILS, 4079 = IDR III.5/1, p. 85: *Glyconi/M(arcus) Ant(oni)us/Onesas/iusso dei/l(ibens) p(osuit)*; cf. CIL III, 1022 = IDR III.5/1, p. 86: *Glyco(ni)/M(arcus) Aur(elius)/Theodo(tus) ius(so) dei p(osuit)*.

people of servile and oriental origin, an indicator of both the Greek surname of both (Onesas and Theodotus); while at least one of the two, that is Onesas, seems to belong to a social environment of more ancient romanization than the other as evidenced by the sequence of *praenomen*, *M(arcus)*, and *nomen*, *Ant(oni)us*, probably attributable to the activity of the *triumvir* M. Antonius superintendent of the eastern provinces after the battle of Philippi. As for the inscription from Novačene (Bulgaria), although the text is partially mutilated (1st and 2nd line), it appears unequivocally a dedication to *Glykon*, whose name stands out on Line 3, even if in an abbreviated form similar to that which was used in the elaboration of the dedication commissioned by Theodotus to Apulum (Guerassimova, 2008)⁸.

Indirectly, however, the epigraphic drafting of an oracle with which Apollo Clarios instructed institutions and inhabitants of the Lydian city of Caesarea Troketta refers to the cult lent to the serpent-god; the purpose of the instructions was to eradicate what is said in the oracular text λοιμὸς δυσεξάλυκτος (Robert, 1980, pp. 405-408; Busine, 2013, pp. 175-196: 191; Malay & Petzl, 2017, pp. 53-54)⁹. Certainly Caesarea Troketta also suffered an epidemic infection, perhaps that which spread under the name of “Antonine plague” (Capuzza, 2014, pp. 22, 36); but above all to financially subsidize the erection of the statue consecrated to Apollo Soter was the priest Miletus son of *Glykon* the *Paphlagonius*. Moreover, Lucian, denouncing the sexual practice held by Alexander of Abonuteichos with young people and with women of Paphlagonia, had stigmatized the foolishness of those who were deceived by the false prophet of *Glykon* to the point of confirming the pride of their own wives of having conceived and generated from him a son¹⁰; and concluding his pamphlet Lucian was forced to recognize both the entrances enjoyed by Alexander of Abonuteichos, and the broad prominence that this new entrepreneur in religious matters had reached in numerous provinces not only Anatolian, so much so that the same small city of Abonuteichos was renamed Ionopolis by concession of Marcus Aurelius—in fact, the coins of Ionopolis celebrated *Glykon* as epicorium god (Marek, 2003; Sfameni Gasparro, 2017)¹¹. A bronze issue from the age of Severus Alexander is characterized by a seated character (perhaps female) with long robes and long hair on his shoulders, surrounded by a crown and wrapped throughout the body by a snake, while holding a patera in the right: The legend Ἰωνόπολις seems to imply even a personification of the city, home of the new god (Robert, 1980; Dalaison, Delrieux, & Ferrière, 2015).

The public aspect of the cult of *Glykon*, and implicitly the recognition of the religious authoritativeness of Alexander of Abonuteichos, also shines through a marble statue of the serpent-shaped god, probably placed, between the Antonine and the Severan age, in a structure of great size with columns and Corinthian capitals, functional to the worship, in turn inserted within the power of the public space of the Moesian city of Tomis (Culcer, 1967; Alexandrescu Vianu, 2009; Covacef, 2011)¹².

⁸ AE 2008, 1183: *I[uli vel Iuni]us/V[aler vel Viper]ius/Glyco(ni)/c(ompos votes) i(n) a(gro) s(uo)*. Text and chronology (2nd-3rd century AD) according to Guerassimova (2008, pp. 197-198, 205-206); the restoration on Line 4 is contested by Sharankov in AE 2008, p. 459 who proposes to read *I[ul] a(ram) p(osuit)*.

⁹ IGRR IV, 1498a.

¹⁰ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 42.

¹¹ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), pp. 57-58. Apart from the family relationship built through the marriage of his daughter and the consular Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus, governor of the province of Asia (*PIR*² M 711), Lucian also explicitly evoked Lollianus Avitus, *legatus Augusti* consular of the province of Pontus and Bithynia. Coins documenting the cult of *Glykon* come not only from Abonuteichos or Ionopolis, but also from Germanicopolis, Nicomedia, Tieion, Pergamum and Callatis; they belong to a chronological gap open between the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Trebonianus Gallus. See Marek (2003, pp. 51, 116-117). Finally on the admixture, in the imperial society of middle and late age, between high socio-cultural profile and magical practices, see Sfameni Gasparro (2017, p. 49).

¹² Sculptural specimens also come from Amastri, from Gadara in the territory of the Decapolis, from Gangra and from Athens.

The widespread diffusion, however, of a prophetic and prophylactic cult, such as that of *Glykon*, explicitly associated by Alexander of Abonuteichos with Asclepius (Mastrocinque, 2010), remains well documented by the small bronze statuettes of the snake, found in the excavation area that insisted on the Athenian agora and in a layer corresponding to the context of the third century AD attributable to the gothic incursion of 267 AD, and interpreted as amulets to be worn personally (Robert, 1981)¹³; the same diffusion remains well documented from an Egyptian agate gem, in the obverse of which the stereotypical figure of *Glykon* was engraved—whose name appears associated with those of Iao and Chubis (Mastrocinque, 1999; 2014; Bordenache Battaglia, 1988)¹⁴. Finally, and above all, the same diffusion remains well documented from a mutilated inscription, reported by Antiochia of Syria, as well as from a long Greek inscription, partly metric, engraved on a thin rollable pewter strip and destined for an amulet case, coming from London. The first support consists of a small round marble plinth, chipped to the left; the surviving portion of the inscription reveals the magical nature of the text, which ends with the enumeration of the seven vowels of the Greek alphabet, while the foregoing receives a valid supplement in the conjecture that it reproduced an oracle made by Alexander of Abonuteichos himself (for to be later sold): The oracle, written on door jambs or lintels, had the prophylactic function of warding off epidemics, also in this case—as in that of the oracle of Apollo Clarios to the inhabitants of Caesarea Troketta, exposed to expenses of Miletus son of *Glykon* the *Paphlagonius*—the λοιμός par excellence (Perdrizet, 1903; Robert, 1980)¹⁵. The London amulet that belonged to a certain Demetrius instead enumerated a formulary of magical invocations, but above all, it was articulated in an hexametric section which, in turn, reproduced a variant version of the same unmistakable oracle prepared by Alexander of Abonuteichos: long-haired and bowman Apollo acted to cancel the poetic cloud of the same λοιμός (Tomlin, 2013; 2014; Jones, 2016)¹⁶.

Alexander of Abonuteichos and the Making of the God *Glykon*

Lucian in the pamphlet entitled *Pseudomantis* illustrated, in detail, the construction of the new god by Alexander of Abonuteichos, insisting on the mantic character of the cult of *Glykon* and on the role of hierophant held by the alleged false prophet¹⁷. The figure of the latter falls within those of the new entrepreneurs and experts in religious matters, whose action is placed in the late Hellenistic cultural context characterized by the need to provide new techniques and new contents of religious communication (Rüpke, 2018); the theatricality of the theogonic episodes, the origin of the new Asclepius and the epiphany of *Glykon*, emulates real stage pieces; the making of a mystery system complete with a scenic and ritual apparatus; the visibility of acting and visionary constantly in relation to an emotional horizon; finally the filiation from Podalirio, the son of Asclepius, and the consequent authoritativeness of Alexander of Abonuteichos as healer, elude the limited phoney contours in which Lucian would have wanted to imprison his figure; it appears to be enlisted among those who now receive characterization as religious entrepreneur (Bremmer, 2017).

The current novelty lies in interpretative template suitable for explaining in neuro-cognitive terms, the inverse relationship between intuitive “ontology” and counter-intuitive concepts, the result of which is the

¹³ See Luc. *Op.* 42(32), 18 about small personal items (ξόανα), related to the cult of *Glykon*

¹⁴ The small features of *Glykon* and Asclepius are also juxtaposed on an anepigraphic oval gem in red jasper, perhaps from Antiochia.

¹⁵ Perdrizet (1903, p. 63) and Robert (1980, pp. 404-405) ([Φοῖβος ἀκερσοκόμης λοιμοῦ νε]φ<ε>λην ἀπερύκει/Α Ε Η Ι Ο Υ Ω); see the identical text transcribed by Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 36.

¹⁶ AE 2013, 946 = SEG LXIII, 832 (19-22 lines): Φοῖβε/ἀκερσικόμα το/ξότα λοιμοῦ νε/φέλησι ἀπέλαν/νε.

¹⁷ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), pp. 9-18; 19-23; 38-39; 40.

violation of the normal expectations of intuitive psychology; it is a psychologically aggressive violation (attention-grabbing power) and culturally acceptable in the limited area of religion (Boyer, 1996; 2003). Among the counter-intuitive concepts (animation of matter, humanization of plants or animals, materialization of entities, such as ancestors, spirits, demons, interaction between entity and structure of reality, supernatural communication), it appears evident, from the pages of Lucian's writing, that Alexander of Abonuteichos insisted on his superhuman ability to predicting the future (treasure huntings, premature healing of diseases not yet recognized or manifest, unmasking of thieves and fakers) through the autophony of oracles vocally emitted by the snake's head¹⁸; and the voice was human, the Greek language sometimes confused with expressions belonging to the Scythians or the Syrians. The aggressive grip on the psychological vulnerability of typical consumers of this type of religious content is demonstrated by Lucian, even if the fame of his action spread to Italy, through the description of the new type of oracle invented by Alexander of Abonuteichos, that μεταχρόνιος, that is functional to rectify the previous ones, evidently denied by the normal course of events¹⁹. Exemplary what was vaticinated to the consular P. Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus, regarding the future teachers destined for his son: According to the *Glykon*'s prophecy, they would have been Pythagoras and Homer; when the young disciple died prematurely, Rutilianus personally relieved Alexander of Abonuteichos from embarrassment, justifying the oracle because in reality his son would have listened to his teachers in the afterlife. The oracle, in fact, had allusively predicted the premature death of Rutilianus' son²⁰!

After all, Lucian himself, illustrating the constructive path operated by Alexander of Abonuteichos, had initially focused his attention on the exploitation of simple psychological mechanisms capable of triggering the construction and use of representations based on counter-intuitive concepts: Alexander of Abonuteichos knew well which they were the two forces that tyrannized the lives of men, ἐλπίς and φόβος²¹.

The entire Chapter 8 of the *Pseudomantis* booklet deserves a particular focus:

ῥαδίως καενόησαν τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίον ὑπὸ δυεῖν μεγίστοις τυραννούμενον, ἐλπίδος καὶ φόβου, καὶ ὅτι ὁ τούτων ἑκατέρῳ ἐξ δέον χρήσασθαι δυνάμενος τάχιστα πλουτήσειεν ἄν· ἀμφοτέροις γὰρ, τῷ τε δεδιόσι καὶ τῷ ἐλπίζοντι, ἑώρων τὴν πρόγνωσιν ἀναγκαιοτάτην τε καὶ ἰποθεινοτάτην οὔσαν, καὶ Δελφοῦς οὔτω πάσαι πλουτήσαι καὶ ἀοιδίμους γενέσθαι καὶ Δῆλον καὶ Κλάρων καὶ Βραγχίδας, τῶν ἀνθρώπων αἰεὶ διὰ οὓς προεῖπον τυράννους, τὴν ἐλπίδα καὶ τὸν φόβον, φοιτῶντων ἐς τὰ ἱερὰ καὶ προμαθεῖν τὰ μέλλοντα δεομένων καὶ διὰ αὐτὸ ἐκ αὐτῶν ὁμβας θυόντων καὶ χρυσᾶς πλίνθους ἀνατιθέντων.

Alexander and Coccona of Byzantium understood very easily that the life of men is tyrannized by two great forces, hope and fear, and they also understood that whoever managed to master them both to his advantage would be enriched very quickly; in fact, providing, to those who fear or who hope, the most unavoidable or reliable precognition, since ancient times the Delphi had been enriched and also the oracle of Delos, that of *Clarios* and the Branchids had become famous, always thanks to those two predicted forces that tyrannize men, hope and fear. Because men who need to know in advance what will be go up and down shrines and celebrate massacres and dedicate gold donations.

Fear and hope, and consequently the trigger of the need to anticipate the knowledge of what will be, they receive collective synthesis in the Lucian's text in the framework of the spread of the so-called "Antonine

¹⁸ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), pp. 22, 24, 26.

¹⁹ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 28; further example of vulnerability is constituted by the observation by Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 30, that P. Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus—otherwise senator and irreproachable official—in matters of belief was νοσῶν and πεπιστευκός of ἁλλόκοτα.

²⁰ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 33.

²¹ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 8.

plague” (Bruun, 2012, pp. 127-128, 132-138)²², when Alexander of Abonuteichos spread an autophone oracle in all the provinces, consisting of only one verse (Φοῖβος ἄκερσοκόμης λοιμοῦ νεφέλην ἀπερύκει), which could be seen everywhere engraved on the doors and jambs as a talisman and antidote to the epidemic²³; and together within the framework of the war conducted by Marcus Aurelius against Quadi and Marcomanni, together with dramatic events, such as the loss of an army of 20,000 soldiers on the Danube and the Germans’ raid in Italy up to Opitergium (Oderzo) and Aquileia (Rosen, 1994)²⁴. When, in the same way, the false prophet would have prepared—perhaps at the request of the imperial environment himself—an oracle on the outcome of the war operations²⁵.

The triangulation constituted by fear, hope and precognition of the future refers to the area of specific predictions, proper to the preparatory theory of phobia. Human beings are biologically “programmed” to fear objects or situations that threaten, or have already threatened, the species in the course of its evolutionary history; in fact, automatic defense and security psycho-cognitive systems are an integral part of the human biological structure. In the first case, it deals with the evolution of ways of social coexistence, but defensive, in an environment characterized by intraspecific threat; in the second case, however, it concerns the evolution of ways of social, but collaborative, coexistence in an environment characterized by mutual reassurance. The (not necessarily balanced) interaction of environments and systems triggers the evolution of agonistic and defensive mentalities, rather than hedonic and reassuring. Consequently, humans are endowed with a set of innate repertoires, developed phylogenetically, functional to survival and evolution; once triggered, each repertoire will activate the most suitable processes of attention, perception, cognition, emotion, which in turn are capable of dictating the lines of behavior. In this context, the social anxiety—to which the aforesaid triangulation leads—flows behaviorally into inferences about what Lucian himself had defined τὰ μέλλοντα, through the urge, expectation and outcome mechanism (Trower, Gilbert, & Sherling, 1990, pp. 14-28; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990, pp. 375-424; 1992, pp. 19-136).

The Construction of the Supernatural and a Template of Cognitive Interpretation

The historical context in which Alexander of Abonuteichos operated was characterized by turbulence, such as the long and demanding wars on the middle and lower course of the Danube, against obstinate and combative Germanic and Sarmatic populations; or the spread of an epidemic—probably smallpox—which, if it did not have catastrophic results, marking the point of no return beyond which the empire would have entered into crisis, contributed at least to fueling the sense of insecurity of the population and to amplify the perception of the threatening potential (Mglierati, 2011; Bruun, 2007).²⁶

The psychological impact produced the conditions suitable for training, diffusion and taken on mind by contents and modalities of religious experience capable of providing believers with the actual achievement of

²² The phenomenon was undoubtedly serious, however, the real size and effect seem to escape compared to what the “Peste Nera” had in the Middle Ages; see Bruun (2012, pp. 127-28, 132-38), in particular regarding the religious aspects of the reaction induced by the epidemic in question.

²³ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 36.

²⁴ Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 48; see Amm. Marc. XXIX 6, p. 1.

²⁵ Lucian associated the diffusion of this oracle with the admittance that Alexander of Abonuteichos enjoyed at the same imperial court, thanks to Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus; Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 48: ἔχων γὰρ οὐ μικρὰν ἐπὶ τὰ βασίλεια καὶ τὴν αὐλὴν τὸν Ρουτιλιανὸν εὐδοκιμοῦντα πάροδον.

²⁶ On war as a transformation factor see Mglierati (2011, pp. 557-558); still on the “Antonine plague” and the subsequent crisis of the third century AD, see Bruun (2007, pp. 201-217).

the expectation and outcome binomial; apparently superstitious, the form of that experience was fought by a contemporary intellectual, the religious conceptualization of which, with regard to the interaction between the undeniably plausible actors and our world, was connoted rationally on the contrary. In fact, Lucian did not explicitly deny the existence of a suprasensible plane; he only focused his interest on the deactivation of the counter-intuitive concepts, assuming his ὁρθὸς λόγος as the interpretative pattern²⁷. If Lucian's skeptical and rationalistic perspective represents the placing of the subject within a philosophical and cultural debate, it does not seem sufficient to satisfy the sarcastic perplexity, expressed elsewhere by Lucian himself about the *Philopseudeis*, about serious reliability—this instead visible from the perspective of consumers (Bremmer, 2017); epigraphic, numismatic, sculptural material and small finds testify to the reliability of the cult of *Glykon*, not unlike any other serious religious option.

From the perspective of consumers, the explanation of the relationship between vulnerability and appeal seems, we can elaborate through a further template of cognitive interpretation. Certain behavioral sets are organized in specific domains, corresponding to independent hard-wired brain circuits (or modules), addressed to certain problems of adaptation and functional to well-being; they rapidly process information relevant to the safety of individuals and species since they are innate and specifically tuned to capture only certain types of urge, having evolved according to relative isolation from the activity carried out by other modules. Human beings are equipped with such a hard-wired brain circuit: It is involved in the evaluation of the input-output processes which may be activated on the occasion not of the handling a real and concrete danger, but the perception of a potential risk. The emotional moods in which this brain activity is turned into are fear and anxiety, respectively (Szechtman & Woody, 2004; Boyer & Liénard, 2006; Tooby & Cosmides, 2006).

Schematically, some kinds of urges or stimuli (even subtle and indirect cues), in a certain context turn on the processes for assessing potential risks; the hard-wired brain circuit, tuned to the processing of information necessary to translate the reaction into emotional and motor behavior, simultaneously produces anxiety, safety responses and the feeling of complete accomplishment of all that was necessary for security purposes; the activation and deactivation speeds are inversely proportional: the slow deactivation responds to the need to guarantee the best prediction of a potential risk, without generating the false alarm mechanism (Szechtman & Woody, 2004; Boyer & Liénard, 2006).

Historically, we cannot exclude the hypothesis that this hard-wired brain circuit has had a significant influence on the formation of cultural, religious or security policy choices: It is specifically sensitive to the potential risk of low probability, but high impact events (Szechtman & Woody, 2013). The extended war efforts on the Danube, the epidemic infection spreading from the East after the expedition led by Lucius Verus against the Parthians fueled the sense of insecurity; also they amplified the perception of the threatening potential so as to trigger the circuit of social anxiety.

Perhaps the feeling of a catastrophic event of low probability, but of high impact (a second irruption of the Germans in Italy or the generalized impotence against the spread of the disease) implicitly conditioned the mentality and behavior of Alexander of Abonuteichos and his followers, of a religious “entrepreneur” and its consumers, the former capable of building a supernatural dimension, the others vulnerable to the counter-intuitive concepts religiously characterized by a new prophetic and prophylactic cult. Perhaps what Roger Beck noted, i.e., “same brain same mind” (Beck, 2006, p. 90), about the relationship between religion

²⁷ Luc. *Op.* 34(52), p. 40; related to φρόνησις see Luc. *Op.* 42(32), p. 61.

and cognitive science, it had already been intuitively overshadowed by Lucian of Samostata in the relationship between ἑλπίς and φόβος, i.e., the tyrannical forces that have always held the human life.

Conclusion

Historically, we cannot exclude the hypothesis that this hard-wired brain circuit has had a significant influence on the formation of cultural, religious or security policy choices: It is specifically sensitive to the potential risk of low probability, but high impact events (Szechtman & Woody, 2013). The extended war efforts on the Danube, the epidemic infection spreading from the East after the expedition led by Lucius Verus against the Parthians fueled the sense of insecurity; also they amplified the perception of the threatening potential so as to trigger the circuit of social anxiety.

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