Miracula, Myth, and Memory in L. Ampelius' *Liber Memorialis*

The *Liber Memorialis* is an obscure pedagogical work of disputed date, perhaps as early as c. 200 CE and as late as 400 CE (Assmann 1976; Arnaud-Lindet 2003). The prologue informs us that its author was Lucius Ampelius. His goal, to satisfy the curiosity of his pupil Macrinus, sometimes identified, without factual basis, as the Roman emperor of the same name. The work offers a collection of summaries compiled from sources both known and unknown, ranging in topic from cosmology and mythology to history. Each section is presented in list form, and the contents more closely resemble notes than a formal narrative.

Scholarship on the *Liber Memorialis* has been largely confined to matters of textual criticism, due to the many interpolations in the manuscript tradition. We aim to shift perspective on this work by applying to it the critical tools that have been used to examine other mythographic works like Hyginus' *Fabulae* and the Ovidian *Narrationes* (Fletcher 2013; Cameron 2004). We do not ignore the problem of transmission. Instead, we adopt an approach that acknowledges the text's difficulty, while also recognizing that there is much to learn from these layers of scribal activity. The surviving text of the *Liber Memorialis* is certainly not wholly original, but it nonetheless has much to offer.

We focus on the presentation of "wonders" in the text (8.1–25), which Ampelius sets up with the question: "What wonders are there in the world?" (*miracula quae in terris sunt?)* We frame our discussion around one of the longer sections, Ampelius' treatment of the Temple of Apollo at Sikyon (8.5). Ampelius describes several artifacts on display there, including weapons attributed to mythic figures (Agamemnon, Ulysses, Teucer) and other objects that relate to famous myths, including the skin of Marsyas and the pot in which Pelias was cooked. The

language reflects a decidedly Roman sensibility, similar to the way that places and myth-historical figures are described in Hyginus to appeal to an audience of Latin readers. We argue that this list, fanciful on first blush, relates to the ways that some communities in antiquity collected and interpreted materials in sacred settings. The inventory of Athenia Lindia, which dates to 99 BCE, includes descriptions of objects that, similarly, could be interpreted as proof not only of the historicity of famous heroes and heroines but of their connection to the local landscape – a leather helmet worn by Paris, bracelets dedicated by Helen (Shaya 2005).

Scheer (1996) treats this section in isolation, interrogating it as a witness to the historical site of Sikyon. In contrast, we focus on how this episode relates to the full list of wonders. We argue that there is an organizing principle uniting this section of the work, reflecting the collective interest of the text's contributors: it features sites, built and natural, in which people could experience first-hand the power of the gods. Many of the descriptions place the reader in the role of observer; more rarely, the reader is positioned as an actor. The *Liber Memorialis* prioritizes information about the wonders that highlights interactions with the human senses, supreme artistic achievement, and, crucially, connections with mythology or legendary history. Awareness of this goal helps us understand the presentation of individual sites, including our case study of the Temple of Apollo at Sikyon. Pausanias also writes about the temple, which he mentions had burned in a fire before his time – well before even the earliest possible date of the *Liber Memorialis* (Paus.2.7.9). Thus, the *Liber Memorialis* continued to immortalize the temple's contents even as it was no longer a real, knowable place.

This text allowed Roman youths and scholars to 'visit' wonders of the world—even those long since destroyed—and positioned them as participants in the creation and instantiation of Roman historical and literary memory. The treatment of *miracula* in the *Liber Memorialis*, in

sum, reveals how a network of scholars, scribes, teachers, and students viewed the "wonders of the world" from their uniquely Roman perspective: as proof of ownership over a mythical past.

Bibliography

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