THE ANTECEDENTS OF ARIUS

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The problem of the antecedents of Arianism, both theological and philosophical, has been the subject of several studies during the past decade, without decisive agreement. On the one hand T. E. Pollard has argued that Arius' thought cannot be understood apart from Antiochene influence, exemplified by Lucian – an explanation in terms of an Alexandrian background being insufficient to account for Arius' literal type of exegesis, his extreme emphasis on the One-ness of God, and the distinction which he makes between Logos and Son. Professor Pollard's arguments were subjected to a critical evaluation by M. F. Wiles who concluded that the claim that Arianism could not be understood in terms of a purely Alexandrian heritage had not been established. A similar conclusion was reached by G. C. Stead who, in an important study of Arius' philosophical background, concluded that Arius drew on a Platonic tradition evolving within the Alexandrian Church – and, indeed, his theology may have been shaped by a dialogue with non-Christian Platonist contemporaries in the Egyptian metropolis. Both Professor Wiles and Mr. Stead underline the influence of an anti-Origenist and literalist tradition existing within the Alexandrian Church which was developed to an extreme degree by Arius. The purpose of this article is to study the Christian thinkers of Alexandria from the time of Athenagoras to Peter the Martyr, who was Arius' exact contemporary. My aim is to discover whether they witness to a common tradition on which Arius could have drawn; or whether it is more probable that Arius himself was a somewhat

1 Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius, Studia Patristica Vol. 2, T. und U. 65 (Berlin 1957) 282–7; The Origins of Arianism, J.T.S. 9 (1958) 103–11. Professor Pollard has kindly allowed me to read, in photostat, a further contribution of his on this subject.
eclectic thinker who picked up ideas from his predecessors which he then worked into a comprehensive and logical system of his own.

In discussions of Arian antecedents, Athenagoras, who wrote two works c. 176–180, the Πρεσβεία (or Legatio) for the Christians and a treatise on the Resurrection Περὶ Αναστάσεως (De Resurrectione), has usually been forgotten. This may be due to the fact that he was virtually unknown in Christian antiquity.

An Alexandrian origin for Athenagoras is, however, suggested by a notice in a fragment preserved by Nicephorus Callistus, or some other late Greek historian, and attributed to Philip of Side. This states that Athenagoras was the first head of the catechetical school at Alexandria and that Clement was his pupil, Pantaenus being the pupil of Clement. There are obvious mistakes in the passage which, to some scholars, render it suspect.

Yet Eusebius H.E. 5.10 suggests that Pantaenus had two periods as head of the school broken by a missionary tour to the East and India and it is possible that Clement may have taken over during this time. It is also noteworthy that Alexander of Jerusalem, in his letter to Origen (Eus. H.E. 6.14), speaks of Pantaenus and Clement as if they were both known to Origen and had each been his master. These notices suggest that Philip of Side’s account may contain elements of historical truth. Certainly, Philip’s knowledge of the Alexandrian School could have been more trustworthy than his knowledge about other periods of Church history, as the school had continued in existence to his own day when it was transferred to Side, his birthplace. Another small piece of evidence connecting Athenagoras with Egypt occurs in De Res. 12, where Athenagoras casually mentions a shelter for camels. The camel was unknown in Greece and Asia Minor (where Athenagoras has sometimes been located) but in Egypt it was a familiar sight, being used in the postal service.

I turn now to Athenagoras’ thought. This is strongly dualistic, God being radically distinguished from the world and matter. So Leg. 4: “Now when we make a distinction between matter and God and show

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4 For the view that De Resurrectione is from the hand of a third or early-fourth century writer, see R. M. Grant, H.T.R. 47 (1954) 121–9. I think this is unlikely, as both works are alike in style and thought and have many words in common; cf. E. Schwartz, T. und U. 4.2 (1891) Index Verborum.

5 The first and almost only Patristic writer to quote him is Methodius, De Res. Anim. 37.1.

6 Dodwell, Dissertationes in Irenaeum (1689) 488; P.G. 6.182.

7 So C. C. Richardson, Early Christian Fathers (London 1953) 290.

8 Noted by J. H. Crehan, A.C.W. 23.8. The camel was also known in Syria but this is an unlikely location for Athenagoras.
that matter is one being while God is quite other completely separated from the former – for the divine is unbegotten and invisible, beheld only by mind and thought, while matter is subject to generation and corruption – surely it is unreasonable of them to charge us with atheism?” God is separated from matter by a vast gulf and alone reigns in his unique Oneness. So in *Leg.* 10 Athenagoras accumulates phrases to emphasise the unique position occupied by the One God:

“I have given sufficient proof that we are not atheists, but hold God to be one, unbegotten, eternal, invisible, suffering nothing, comprehended by none, circumscribed by none, apprehended by mind and reasoning alone, girt about with light and beauty and spirit and power indescribable, Creator of all things by his Word, their embellisher and master.”

In *Leg.* 6, Athenagoras states that Christians are not the only ones to confine God to a Monad (ἀλλ’ ἐπειδή ἀδύνατον δεικνύειν ἄνευ παραθέσεως ὄνομάτων ὅτι μὴ μόνοι εἰς μονάδα τὸν θεόν κατακλείομεν, ἐπὶ τὰς δόξας ἑτραπόμην). Plato too held that the unbegotten and unseen God is One.

This strong emphasis on the “Oneness” of God is also found in Arius. The letter of Arius to Alexander begins as follows: Ο��δαμεν ἐνα θεόν, μόνον ἁγέννητον, μόνον ἁίδιον, μόνον ἀναρχον, μόνον ἀληθινὸν, μόνον ἀθανασίαν ἔχοντα, μόνον σοφὸν, μόνον ἁγαθὸν, μόνον δυνάστην. This accumulation of phrases is similar to, although more emphatic than, the list in Athenagoras *Leg.* 10. Similarly, Arius uses μονάς of the indivisibility of the Godhead in the same letter: ἀλλ’ ὡς μονάς καὶ ἀρχὴ πάντων, οὔτως ὁ θεός πρὸ πάντων ἐστὶ (“God is before all things, as Monad and Beginning of all”).

Athenagoras’ emphasis on the “Oneness” of God and his use of the term μονᾶς might suggest that both he and Arius began with the “Absolute” of the philosophers – a “bare” Unity – and then introduced a veneer of Christianity into their systems. However, this would appear to be too one-sided a view. Athenagoras, while arguing for the Oneness of

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8a Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἄθεοι μὴ εἴναι, ἕνα τὸν ἁγένητον καὶ ἁίδιον καὶ ἁόρατον καὶ ἁπαθῆ καὶ ἁκατάλητον καὶ ἁχώρητον, νῦ μόνῳ καὶ λόγῳ καταλαμβανόμενον, φατὶ καὶ κάλλει καὶ πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει ἀνεκδηγήτωρ περιεχόμενον, νῦ οὐ γεγένηται τὸ πᾶν διὰ τοῦ παρ’ αὐτῶς λόγου καὶ διακεκόσμηται καὶ συγκρατεῖται, θεὸν ἁγιοντες, ἵκανος μοι δέδεικται.

9 Athanasius, *De Synodis* 16; Opitz, *Urkunden* 6.2.

10 The last five phrases are Scriptural (Jn. 17.3; 1 Tim. 6.16, 1.17; Mark 10.18; 1 Tim. 6.15) and the others are well established in tradition. G.C. Stead, *op. cit.* 17.

11 Cf. the further passage in *Leg.* 10: ἐξ ἀρχῆς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς.
God, also gives full recognition to his biblical attributes. So in the same chapter in which the accumulation of "Oneness" phrases occurs, he says: "The Father and the Son are One. The Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son by the powerful union of the Spirit ... for God was from the beginning, being eternal mind, and had His Word within Himself, being from eternity possessed of a Word."\(^\text{12}\) This may seem to be in conflict with the conception of God as μονάς and far removed from the position of Arius: yet is it? Arius, it is true, taught a bare Unity of God (μονάς).\(^\text{13}\) His criticism of Sabellius for asserting a γενόντορα\(^\text{14}\) and as τὴν μονάδα διαιρῶν is, however, mainly directed against economic trinitarianism.\(^\text{15}\) It does not mean that Arius excluded all distinctions through his emphasis on the bare Unity. Arius' Trinity in fact arises through the creation of distinct and subordinate beings by the original monad – a delegation of functions.

What reason is there for thinking that Arius was directly acquainted with Athenagoras or the tradition which he represents? The emphasis on the "Oneness" of God in both may of course simply derive from a common Middle Platonist background.\(^\text{16}\) Nevertheless, both differ from the more biblical monotheism of the Antiochene school and also from the graded system of Origen which emphasised different levels of the divine Being. Another point in common is that Athenagoras, unlike the other Apologists, carefully avoided applying the term "generation" to the logos in order to emphasise that the Godhead was not involved, like pagan deities, in procreative acts. Similarly, Arius violently reacted against any idea that God was involved in natural or physical processes. As we have no certain knowledge of a tradition about the "Oneness" of God (which avoided the idea of generation) running through Alexandrian thought to the time of Arius, is it altogether impossible that Arius may have known Athenagoras directly? Did Athenagoras' emphasis on "Oneness" and non-generation of the logos go against him after the time of Origen? Was this the reason why he was almost totally neglected within the Church, only being known to the Christian Platonist Methodius who also (perhaps) influenced Arius? Be that as it may, we find both in

\(^{12}\) Leg. 10. Note, too, the biblical attributes in Leg. 9 where Athenagoras quotes Exod. 20.2.f.; Isa. 44.6, 43.10f., 66.1.

\(^{13}\) Cf. Clem. Alex. Strom. 5.71.2 where God is compared to a point without location.

\(^{14}\) Athan. De Synod. 16; Hil. De Trin. 4.12.

\(^{15}\) G.C. Stead, op. cit. 18,19.

\(^{16}\) Philo, Leg. All. 2.3; Clem. Alex. Paed. 1.71.1.
Athenagoras and Arius an emphasis on “Oneness”, “Monad”, “Priority” applied to the Divine Being – although both develop their Trinity in different ways.

Our next point of reference is CLEMÉNT and ORIGÉN. We shall have little to say about them as Arius reacted strongly against Origen’s allegorism and his doctrine of the Eternal Generation of the Son. Nevertheless, his main debt to Origen is his subordinationist doctrine of the Son which he intensifies and divests of the qualifications made by Origen. It would appear to be uncertain whether, in Origen’s day, there was a definite tradition which asserted that “there was when the Son was not” as Professor Wiles argues from Origen’s explicit repudiation of the phrase. More likely, Origen was merely underlining his theory of the Eternal Generation of the Son against earlier Dynamic Monarchian theories. Similarly, Origen’s antipathy to those who think the logos is made up of syllables may simply be exasperation with those members of the Alexandrian Church who could not follow his speculations rather than as a witness to such a tradition which continued among the simpliciores from the time of Origen right down to Arius’ day (for which there is no other evidence).

When we turn to DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA (head of the catechetical school 231–2, 247–8), we are on firmer ground. Dionysius is clearly important for Arian antecedents. Arius himself appealed to Dionysius in support of his views, especially those contained in the letter πρὸς Εὐφράνορα καὶ Άμμώνιον, and this was the cause of the not altogether happy defence of Dionysius by Athanasius in De Sent. Dion. Dionysius’ opinions, which later appealed to Arius, were to result in a celebrated controversy with Dionysius of Rome concerning Sabellianism. It was in 257 that Dionysius called the attention of Bishop Xystus II to this trinitarian deviation which has now arisen at Ptolemais in the Pentapolis. He appears to be unaware that Sabellianism had an older history. In Libya, in the mid-third century, it had gained such a hold that certain bishops had become infected with it such that “the Son of God was no longer preached”. Dionysius became active in attempting to counteract

17 De Princ. 4.4.1. Wiles, op. cit. 341. Cf. also Athenagoras, Leg. 10: ὁ χ ο γενόμενον.
18 Comm. Jn. 1.24.38. Athanasius, Contra Gentes 41 should not be used as evidence for a pre-Arius tradition as this work may date from as late as 335–7. See J. Roldanus, Le Christ et l’homme dans la théologie d’Athanase d’Alexandrie (Leiden 1968).
19 Hence the remark of Gennadius, De Eccl. Dogm. 4: Dionysius fons Aritii.
20 Athan. De Sent. Dion. 5.
Sabellianism and apparently wrote a number of letters on the subject. Dionysius made use of certain expressions about the Son of God which were seized on by certain members of the Church, either in Alexandria or in the Pentapolis, as heretical. Dionysius’ critics formally complained to Dionysius of Rome, Xystus II’s successor as bishop, and accused him of falling into five errors while correcting the views of the Sabellians:

(1) he separated the Father and the Son (διαιρεῖ καί μακρύνει καί μερίζει τὸν υἱὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρός: Athan. De Sent. Dion. 16);

(2) he denied the eternity of the Son (οὐκ ἦν ὁ θεὸς πατήρ, οὐκ ἦν ἕν ὁ υἱὸς, ἄλλ’ ὁ μὲν θεὸς ἦν χωρίς τοῦ λόγου, αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ υἱὸς οὐκ ἦν πρὶν γεννηθῇ, ἄλλ’ ἦν ποτὲ ὅτε οὐκ ἦν· οὗ γὰρ ἁίδιός ἐστιν ἄλλ’ ὑστερὸν ἐπεγέγονεν: De Sent. Dion. 14);

(3) he named the Father without the Son and the Son without the Father (πατέρα λέγων οὐκ ὄνομαζε τὸν υἱὸν καί πάλιν υἱὸν λέγων οὐκ ὄνομαζε τὸν πατέρα: De Sent. Dion. 16);

(4) he virtually rejected the term ὁμοούσιος used of the Son (προσφέρουσιν ἐγκλημα κατ’ ἐμοῦ ψεύδος ὃν ως οὐ λέγοντος τὸν χριστὸν ὁμοούσιον εἶναι τῷ θεῷ: De Sent. Dion. 18);

(5) he spoke of the Son as a creature of the Father and used misleading illustrations of their relationship (ποίημα καί γενητόν εἶναι τόν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, μήτε δὲ φύσει ἰδίον, ἄλλα ἔξον κατ’ οὐσίαν αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῦ πατρός, ὡσπερ ἔστιν ὁ γεωργός πρὸς τὴν ἀμπέλον καί ὁ ναυπηγός πρὸς τὸ σκάφος· καί γὰρ ὃς ποίημα ὅν οὐκ ἦν πρὶν γένηται: De Sent. Dion. 4).

Dionysius of Rome appears to have convened a Synod to consider the complaint which duly condemned the expressions used. He then addressed a formal letter to the Alexandrian Church on the subject of Sabellianism while writing privately to Dionysius for an explanation. Dionysius’ reply was the “Ἐλεγχος καί Ἀπολογία in four books referred to by Eusebius, which contains some special pleading. His defence of the five points listed above, was as follows:

(1) Dionysius denies he separated the Father and the Son: “Each of

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22 De Sent. Dion. 9,10.
23 Athan. De Synod. 43, 45.
the names mentioned by me is inseparable and indivisible from its neigh­bour” .... “Thus each is each, the one being different from the other: and being two, they are one.”

(2) God was always the Father, and therefore Christ was always the Son, just as, if the sun were eternal the daylight would also be eternal. The Son derives his being from the Father and is related to the Father as the rays are to the light.

(3) Already refuted under (1).

(4) As to the non-employment of the term ομοούσιος Dionysius admits that he did not use it as it was non-scriptural. Nevertheless he maintains that he has employed figures suggesting a similar relationship between the Father and the Son, e.g. the figure of parent and child who are ομογενεῖς and seed and root and plant which are ομοφυή, and source and stream, and ὁ ἐν καρδίᾳ λόγος and ὁ διὰ γλώσσης νοῦς προπηδῶν. Dionysius is here following the East in envisaging three personae of the same genus and natura rather than the Western tradition of one substantia existing in three personae.26

(5) Dionysius’ defence of his use of ποίημα, illustrated by the γεωργός with his vine and the ναυπηγός with his boat, is that these were undoubtedly unsuitable figures used somewhat casually – yet they were not the only ones used. Others more apposite had been used ((4) above) yet his critics had fastened only on these in order to assail him.27

How far was Arius justified in appealing to Dionysius? In the mid-third century there was clearly much theological fluidity in the Alexandrian Church. Dionysius held that the use of a variety of illustrations in describing abstruse concepts was not only permissible but desirable. His opponents did not agree with this and felt that statements, even about the Godhead, should bear a plain literal meaning. Further explanation of his views on Dionysius’ part apparently satisfied his critics at the time. It is, however, significant that Dionysius, in his defence of his use of ποίημα, does not withdraw the term – neither does he withdraw γεωργός nor ναυπηγός. Athanasius, in defending Dionysius,28 is clearly embarras­sed and at times is reduced to special pleading; so he attempts to explain away Dionysius’ doubtful expressions by referring them to the

27 According to Athan. De Sent. Dion. 14 this was the substance of Dionysius’ complaint – that his critics did not take his utterances as a whole.
28 De Sent. Dion.
human nature of Christ — an explanation which has no support elsewhere in the Ἐλεγχος καὶ Ἀπολογία and which is inherently unlikely. He will not see anything in Dionysius which could support Arianism. St. Basil is however much cooler in his defence of Dionysius. In Ep. 1.9 addressed to Maximus the philosopher, who had consulted him about the orthodoxy of Dionysius, Basil says: “We do not admire all the man says, some things indeed we distinctly contradict. For he is, so far as we know, the first man who sowed the seed of the impiety now prevailing as to τὸ ἀνόμοιον. Yet I do not think wickedness of purpose is the cause but his vehement desire to oppose Sabellius.” St. Basil then proceeds to compare Dionysius to a gardener who, in trying to straighten the branch of a tree, pulls it too much the other way: “the result is that he exchanges one evil for another and misses the ὀψόντης τοῦ λόγου. Consequently he is very variable in his compositions, sometimes rejecting τὸ ὁμοούσιον, because his opponent had used it to disprove the υποστάσεις, and sometimes adopting it where he is answering his namesake. And moreover about the Spirit also he has uttered words which are by no means becoming to the Spirit, banishing Him from the adorable Godhead and reckoning Him in a lower rank with created and subject nature. Such therefore is the man.”

Arius’ appeal to Dionysius for support for his views would appear to have been legitimate. There is little doubt that Dionysius used language which suggested that the Son was distinct from the Father and that he was a ποίημα — although this was but one term among a number of images and qualifications which could be used to deal with abstruse concepts. It is significant that Arius held that the Son is a creature “but not as one of the creatures” which suggests a similar use of qualifying language. So Basil was therefore quite justified in seeing in Dionysius a forerunner of Arianism. It is interesting that Basil notes that Dionysius was “very variable in his compositions”, although he does not grasp that this was inherent in Dionysius’ theological method of applying variable imagery to the Father and Son. It is, I think, in theological method, rather than in exact correspondences, that Arius approaches Dionysius most closely. In this sense he can regard himself as a traditionalist.

We turn now to THEOGNOSTUS (head of the catechetical school 247/8—

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29 Dionysius himself held that ποίημα-ποιητής could have a variety of meanings.
30 This is inaccurate. Dionysius never used the term.
31 Dionysius does not use the term κτίσμα.
32 Opitz, Urkunden 6 (12.9f.).
33 Wiles, op. cit. 343–5.
282) of whose life almost nothing is known. Only four fragments survive of the work of this most interesting man, although Photius\textsuperscript{34} has preserved an account of a work consisting of seven books with the title τοῦ μακαρίου Θεογνώστου Αλεξανδρέως καὶ ἐξηγητοῦ Υποτυπώσεις — apparently a comprehensive account in outline of Christian doctrine. From Photius it would seem that the account dealt with such subjects as the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Angels and demons, the Incarnation of the Saviour and the Creation. Theognostus apparently had Origenist sympathies. He denied the eternity of matter; he regarded the Son as a creature (κτίσμα) and confined his authority and operation to rational beings; he distinguished between the teaching of the Son and the teaching of the Spirit; attributed a bodily existence to angels and demons; and limited the personal presence of the Son to the incarnation. All of these ideas can be paralleled in Origen. For our purposes, most significant is the fact that, according to Photius, Theognostus referred to the Son as a creature (υίόν δὲ λέγων κτίσμα αὐτὸν ἀποφαίνει). Whether Photius was quoting an exact word of Theognostus or merely giving the gist of what he taught cannot be determined. But it is clear that Theognostus did use κτίσμα, or something similar, from the fact that Photius is very embarrassed and does his best to give Theognostus the benefit of the doubt — so he may have been stating an argument rather than laying down a doctrine; or accommodating himself to the lower level of a hearer unfamiliar with the Christian religion; or perhaps he held back part of the truth in the belief that any sort of knowledge of the Son was better than absolute unfamiliarity and ignorance. Photius, however, had no exact knowledge of the meaning of κτίσμα-κτίζω in Theognostus’ day — or, for that matter, in Arius’ time. Origen \textsuperscript{35} may have used the term κτίσμα before Theognostus but it is too facile a procedure to read a clear-cut meaning into the term in the third and early-fourth centuries. Κτίσμα for Theognostus meant what ποίημα did for Dionysius. It was a metaphor, capable of being used in various senses, which was used of the basic relationship of the Father and the Son. Arius took up this term in describing the relationship between the οὐσία of the Father and the οὐσία of the Son. The Son was essentially the expression of the Father’s Will and κτίσμα-κτίζω expressed this.

Athanasius\textsuperscript{36} appealed to the “learned Theognostus” as using the phrase

\textsuperscript{34} Cod. 106. Routh, Rel. Sac. 3.412–14.
\textsuperscript{35} De Princ. 4.4.1.
\textsuperscript{36} De Decret. 25.
εκ τῆς οὐσίας of the Father in reference to the Son which, in Athanasius' opinion, excluded Arianism. This, however, is to read later ideas into the more fluid thoughts of Theognostus. It is significant that the Arians themselves appealed to Theognostus as an authority on their side. Gregory of Nyssa remarks that the extreme Arian Eunomius was not alone in describing the Son as an instrument in the work of creation, for the like error is found in the writings of Theognostus, who says that "God, wishing to frame this world, first set the Son before Him as a kind of standard of creation".\textsuperscript{37} These words, if genuine, undoubtedly could suggest that the Son was created as the preparation for the creation of the Universe, an idea which Arius developed.

Arius distinguished between the Logos and Son and Pollard sees in this a direct contradiction to the teaching of Origen and the Alexandrian tradition.\textsuperscript{38} Wiles, however, has shown\textsuperscript{39} that the drift of Arius' thought is not so far removed from that of Origen as is sometimes imagined. The same may be said of Theognostus. "The Scriptures", writes Theognostus, "give the Son the names Logos and Wisdom. He is called Logos as issuing from the mind of the Father of the Universe, for it is plain that Logos is the noblest offspring of mind. But Logos is also a image (είκών), for Logos alone is entrusted with the outward conveyance of the thoughts that exist in the Mind. Words, however, in us men are but a partial enunciation of such things as are capable of enunciation, and they leave some things unspoken, treasured in the mind alone. But the living Logos of God (interprets all the Mind of God). Wherefore (Logos) is also called Wisdom, as that name is better able to indicate the multitude of thoughts contained in Him."\textsuperscript{40} The entrusting of the Logos with the work of revelation may be an echo of Origen's subordinationism. Λόγος, for Theognostus, denotes the offspring of the Father's mind, while σοφία is used to denote the Son as the complete expression of the Father's mind. The words, in Theognostus, fall into pairs:\textsuperscript{41}

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\lambda\nu\gamma\nu\zeta \left\{\ ι\pi\rho\rho\rho\iota\alpha \, ι\pi\alpha\upsilon\gamma\alpha\zeta\mu\alpha \right\} = \text{origin and distinctness}
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\textsuperscript{37} C. Eunom. 3.3: τὸν θεόν βουλόμενον τόδε τὸ πᾶν κατασκευάσαι πρῶτον τὸν υἱὸν οὗν τινα κανόνα τῆς δημιουργίας προϋποστήσασθαι.
\textsuperscript{38} J.T.S., op. cit. 106-11.
\textsuperscript{39} Op. cit. 341-3.
\textsuperscript{40} Fragment of Hypotyposeis, published by F. Diekamp, T.Q. (1902).
\textsuperscript{41} L. B. Radford, Theognostus, Pierius and Peter (Cambridge, 1908) 24.
Theognostus makes Son the personal name of the second hypostasis in the Godhead. Logos and Sophia are titles of the "Son". This may not be far removed from Arius’ thought. Arius said that the Son could only be said to be Logos “in a lesser, relative sense” (καταχρηστικώς), and treated the concept Logos as one of the many ἐπίνοιαι of the Son, parallel to Wisdom and truth. This could be merely an extension of Theognostus’ belief that Logos, Sophia are *titles* of the Son. In some ways, Arius is nearer to Theognostus than to Origen and may have found support for his views in Theognostus’ use of κτίσμα, his idea of the Son as “the standard of creation”, and in his use of Logos as a title of the Son and, in that sense, derivative. However, there is much in Theognostus which does not fit into Arius’ system. Nevertheless, it is possible that, as with Dionysius, Arius picked up one strand in Theognostus’ thought and developed it with remorseless logic within his own philosophical scheme.

We now turn to Pierius who was distinguished alike as an ascetic, teacher and preacher. He was a presbyter of the Alexandrian Church under Theonas (bishop 281/2-300). Although we know more about his life and work than we do of Theognostus, the fragments of his writings which have survived are few and make the reconstruction of his theology difficult. Pierius was called “Origen the younger” and apparently talked mysteriously about “the pre-existence of souls”. Although, according to Photius, his language about the Father and the Son was “reverent” there was one exception: he spoke of two οὐσίαι and two φύσεις of the Father and Son and also asserted that the Spirit was inferior in glory to the Father and the Son. Pierius clearly followed Origen’s subordinationism. The lineaments of the later Semi-Arian denial of the deity of the Spirit may also possibly be found here. Too little, however, is known of Pierius to draw any firm conclusions as to any possible debt of Arius to him. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that Arius may have developed further the somewhat fluid terminology found in Pierius’ extant fragments.

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42 Athan. Or. c. Ar. 1.5.
44 Eus. H.E. 7.32.
45 Jerome, De Vir. Ill. 76: ut Origenes iunior vocaretur.
46 Photius, Cod. 119.
47 Cod. 119.
into a system in which the “Oneness” of God is contrasted with the creativity and “other” status of the Son.

With Peter, the Martyr, Arius’ exact contemporary, we are on firmer ground. He was head of the catechetical school, probably in succession to Serapion, although we do not know whether he resigned that office when he succeeded Theonas as bishop of Alexandria in 300 A.D. Eusebius praises his piety and biblical knowledge and describes him as “a splendid example of a teacher of the Christian Faith”.48 The exact order of events in Peter’s life is not clear, but it seems that, at one stage, he had to flee from Egypt and only returned c. 305–6 after a long absence.49 Eventually, he was martyred on 25 November 311 during Maximinus’ persecution, possibly in retaliation for the insubordination of the Christian populace.

Peter represents a reaction against Origenism such as is exemplified by Pierius. He repudiated Origen’s teaching on the allegorical interpretation of Scripture;50 the belief in the pre-existence of souls;51 and Origen’s denial of the material identity of the resurrection body with the earthly body52 – in this approaching the pre-Origen tradition of Athenagoras. Of particular interest for our purpose is Peter’s evidence that in his day, i.e. contemporary with Arius, there was strong opposition to Origen in Alexandria. In the Acta Martyrum of Peter, there is one notice which at least witnesses to the prevalent impression of Peter’s theological attitude. In his farewell address, in which he foretells tribulation for the Church and recalls its past troubles, Peter refers, in these words, to the time of “the blessed bishops Heraclas and Demetrius” ... “What trials they endured from the madness of Origen, who gave rise to schisms in the Church which stir up strife here unto this day.”53 If this is an authentic notice, then there was strife between Origenist and anti-Origenist factions in the Alexandrian Church in Peter’s time. This cannot refer to Meletianism which was a rigorist, not a doctrinal, schism. Most probably Peter

48 H.E. 8.13.7. For Peter’s remains A.C.O. 1.1.2.
49 Peter represented the more liberal wing in the conflict with Meletius over the restoration of the lapsi of the Great Persecution. See H. Achelis, Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten (1912) 2, 308–11 and W. Telfer, Analecta Bollandiana 67 (1949) 125, who points out that Peter’s flight goes far to explain the success of Meletianism.
50 Procopius, Comm. in Gen. 3.21.
51 Fragment in Routh, Rel. Sac. 4.48,49.
53 Viteau, Passions des Saints Ecaterine et Pierre d’Alexandrie (1897) 75.
represented a literalist, scriptural approach which was opposed by followers of Origen’s views. Not too much should be made of Peter’s supposed antagonism to Greek philosophy expressed in the second Greek fragment in this single sentence: “It is not possible for souls to sin in heaven before [their union with] bodies, since they have not even existed before bodies. This teaching belongs to Greek philosophy, which is foreign and alien to those who desire to live a godly life in Christ.”

However, in the last of the Syriac fragments edited by Pitra, Peter says: “it is the proper task of Christianity to give to each age in succession a knowledge free from error, and to lead to happiness of life those who are being perfected by that knowledge.”

Peter was therefore no bare biblical literalist with little or no interest in philosophy. Only he emphasised that learning must be true to its spiritual end – and he did not believe Origen’s was.

What then of any possible influence on Arius? Peter and Arius were associated for a time but Peter excommunicated Arius, probably for complicity in the Meletian cause, i.e. for supporting a rigorist conception of a “Church of the Martyrs” and the validity of its baptisms. Bishops loyal to Peter tried to win Arius from the hands of the Meletians and, just before Peter’s death, Arius made his peace with him; for this act of reconciliation the Meletians regarded Arius as a traitor and a few years later were to bring against him a charge of heresy.

Peter clearly could have influenced Arius at a formative stage in his theological development. What evidence is there to suggest that this was the case? Peter’s literalist biblicism, which was at the opposite extreme to the allegorism of Origen and his supporters, might have influenced Arius who appealed to LXX proof texts for his rather literalist exegesis. However, this is not quite certain. Peter was not the only early Christian to adopt a literalist attitude towards the Bible. This tradition had a long history in Antioch. More significant is Peter’s evidence that in his day there was strife between pro and anti-Origenist factions in the Alexandrian Church. The debate over the disposal of Origen’s effects still continued when Arius began to evolve his system.

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54 Routh, Rel. Sac. 4.46,47.
56 Peter had originally excommunicated Arius: Sozomen, H.E. 1.15. W.Telfer, H.T.R. 46 (1955) 231 connects this with Peter’s declaration of the invalidity of Meletian baptisms.
If, then, we look back on Arius' possible Alexandrian antecedents, we get the following picture:

**Athenagoras**: Strongly dualistic. Emphasises "Soleness", "Oneness", "Priority" of God (μονάς) who is himself separated from matter by a vast gulf. Avoids idea of "generation" in respect of the Logos, although develops his trinitarian thought in a different way to Arius. Arius may owe most to him among Christian Platonists.

**Origen**: Arius' main debt is to his subordinationist doctrine of the Son.

**Dionysius of Alexandria**: Used a variety of illustrations in describing the Godhead (e.g. γεωργός, ναυπηγός); language which suggested that the Son was distinct from the Father; and held that the Son was a ποίημα, although this was but one term among a number of images and qualifications which could be used to deal with abstract concepts. Main influence on Arius is in theological method, rather than in exact correspondences.

**Theognostus**: Origenist sympathies. The Son is a κτίσμα (a metaphor capable of being used in various senses) and also "the standard of creation" (possibly created as a preparation for the creation of the Universe?). Logos and Sophia are titles of the Son and, in that sense, derivative. Arius may have been indebted to Theognostus and may have extended further his subordinationism.

**Pierius**: Followed Origen's subordinationism. Used fluid terminology. Too little is known of him to draw any conclusion as to his possible influence on Arius.

**Peter**: Anti-Origenist. Used a literal, scriptural exegesis although not wholly anti-philosophical in outlook. Witnesses to the strife between Origenist and anti-Origenist factions in early-fourth century Alexandria. Influence on Arius uncertain.

In the light of the above investigation, how far are we justified in speaking of an "Alexandrian tradition" to which Arius appealed? It is true that Arius himself claimed to be a conservative Christian. His letter to Alexander of Alexandria contains this statement: "This is our faith which has come down from our ancestors and which we have also received from you, blessed Pope."57 His profession of faith which he addressed to the Emperor Constantine contains a similar protestation: "Wherefore we entreat thy piety, most devout Emperor, since we are

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Churchmen and hold the faith and mind of the Church and the Holy Scriptures, to reconcile us through thy peaceable and devout piety to our Mother, the Church." Moreover, the opening verses of the *Thalia* read as follows: "According to the faith of the elect of God, the prudent of God, holy sons, right dividers of the word of truth who received the Holy Spirit of God, this I have learnt from those who partake of wisdom, cultured, taught of God and wise in all respects." This appeal to a conservative tradition might be justified if there was a strong "proto-Arian" tradition discernible in the writings of the Alexandrian thinkers we have examined. However, we have shown that this is doubtful. Arius was, in fact, an eclectic thinker who took elements from earlier thinkers and pushed them to extremes in working out his system. So his idea of God strongly resembles that of the Middle Platonist Athenagoras. His concept of the Son is Origenist, although divested of the qualifications which Origen introduced (so the most distinctive feature of Origen's thought, the Eternal Generation of the Son, is foreign to him). His theological method is similar to that of Dionysius. He extended further Theognostus' subordinationism. The influence of other Alexandrian thinkers is uncertain. This is hardly the use of an Alexandrian "theological tradition" but rather "eclecticism". Arius, in fact, took what he wanted from earlier thinkers, who themselves witness to the fluid state of Alexandrian theology in the third century, and worked them into his system with remorseless logic. He began with a concept of God as μονάς (which, however, did not exclude his biblical attributes) and fitted his soteriology and Christology into this. Arius' philosophical presuppositions determined the direction which his theological speculation took. At the most we can regard him as developing further a subordinationism found in several Alexandrian thinkers - although not exclusively in them. In this sense, Arius is correctly described as a left-wing Origenist.

What of other theological influences? Pollard has argued strongly for an Antiochene influence mediated by Paul of Samosata and Lucian to which Arius was heir. While there is nothing to connect Arius with

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59 Athen. *Or. c. Ar.* 1.5.
60 Similar appeals to tradition were made by other heretics and cannot be taken at their face value unless supported by convincing evidence.
62 *J.T.S.*, op. cit. 103, 104.
Paul, and our knowledge of Lucian's theology is woefully inadequate, there is no doubt that Arius found support in the group of left-wing Origenists known by the name of Collucianists. However, if the Lucianic creed underlies the formula ratified at the Dedication Council held at Antioch in the summer of 341, it seems unlikely that Arius would have found support for his theological views from Lucian himself, apart from his use of a literalist, exegetical method similar to that found in Peter of Alexandria. More to the point is the evidence of Eusebius of Caesarea, whose importance for an understanding of the origins of Arianism has often been underestimated. The keystone of Eusebius’ system, which had been worked out before the Arian controversy began, was the transcendence of the Father, the indivisible Monad, who is alone self-existent and without beginning. The Son, for Eusebius, is not co-eternal with the Father, who alone is ἀγέννητος and prior to the Son. The Son’s existence depends on a specific act of the Father’s Will. This is radical subordinationist Origenism, similar to that of Arius whose cause Eusebius embraced at an early stage of the controversy. Both Arius and Eusebius (prior to his theological rehabilitation at the Council of Nicaea) had an overriding interest in soteriology, although this did not exclude Christology.

To sum up the results of our investigation, Arianism was foremost a matter of philosophical dualism. In the early-fourth century, any attempt to construct a theological system which allowed a position for the Son, while keeping such an initial philosophical position intact, was bound to lead to something like Arianism. The latter’s roots were not. I think, primarily in Alexandria or in Antioch per se. Arius drew on no “proto-Arian” tradition already evolving within the Church. His system was simply philosophical dualism—although not without a biblical colouring in its idea of the Sole, Unoriginate God – and left-wing Origenism decked out with an eclectic mixture of elements taken over from various thinkers

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63 Paul contrasted the Wisdom of God with the human saviour Jesus, whereas for Arius even the lower, generated, Wisdom had existed from before the Creation. G.C. Stead, *op. cit.* 21. For the charge that Arius drew upon the teaching of Paul, see Alexander of Alexandria in Theodoret, *H.E.* 1.4.35.
66 While it is true that Arius shared with Athenagoras, Alexander and Athanasius this basic dualism, the latter three thinkers do violence to their philosophical dualism in order to establish a position for the Son which is theologically and devotionally adequate. Arius would have none of this.
mainly, although not wholly, Alexandrian. These were fused together by Arius into a logical whole. The result is a system which, while not lifeless nor a clear step back into heathenism,\textsuperscript{67} is nevertheless an inadequate account of the fullness of Christian truth.

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\textsuperscript{67} The classic criticism of H. M. Gwatkin, \textit{Studies of Arianism} (1882) 2,266.