THE CULT OF GLYKON AS A 'NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT'

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Abstract: This essay explores the integration of eastern religions into the Roman world during the early Empire by examining one particularly successful example, the Cult of Glykon, which became popular during the later second century and following. Drawing on the characteristics that social scientists have identified as most significant in contributing to the success of New Religious Movements (NRMs) in the recent past, the presence of these features in the Cult of Glykon is considered from the surviving evidence, including the satire *Alexander or the False Prophet*, which was written by Lucian of Samosata. As this discussion makes clear, the Cult of Glykon appears to have achieved some measure of success as a New Religious Movement in the Roman world because it possessed many of the same characteristics. They are, therefore, a useful starting point for exploring the integration of other religious groups in the Roman world.

Keywords: Glykon, Alexander of Abonouteichos, New Religious Movement (NRM), Lucian of Samosata, *Alexander or the False Prophet*, charismatic authority, strategic management, social legitimacy, religious marketplace

The following discussion explores the subject of the proliferation of foreign, particularly eastern, religions in the Roman Empire. This development, although it had already begun during the Republic, has been recognized as a central characteristic of the religious landscape of the Roman world during the empire, when the great civic cults venerating the ancestral gods were joined by a myriad of private and local associations, and religions tied to particular ethnic groups inhabiting the Roman world, as well as religious options that could be described as purely elective, that is, not as a result of origin or rank within the community, but through personal inclination.[1] In examining the growth and spread of these new religious options within the Roman world, the circumstances of their integration then becomes a major concern. How, we might ask, and by what means did some of these emergent religions come to be embraced by persons living within the Roman world? What factors enabled

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[1] Beard, North, Price 1998, 245-312.

them to find success among peoples with different traditions? These are questions that cannot be answered easily. However, by examining one particularly successful example we may begin to be able to draw insights into how one religious group did just that and, by association, how some others might have accomplished this same task, while others failed. Along the way, this examination will draw on the contributions of many scholars who have explored the religious world of the Roman empire, as well as social scientists who have investigated the reasons for the growth and spread of new religious movements in the recent past and the competitive strategies that have enabled these religious organizations to find success in a marketplace suffused with old and new, native and foreign religious options.

The group I shall examine is the Cult of Glykon, an eastern religion founded by a certain Alexander of Abonouteichos, a city in the Roman province of Paphlagonia in Anatolia, during the later second century of the Common Era. According to Lucian of Samosata, who is our principal source of written information concerning the Cult of Glykon, this religious group came in a short span of time "to infest not just some of the more deserted districts of Asia, but to fill the whole Roman Empire."[2] (Luc., *Alex*. 2.) As such, the Glykonists represents a tremendous opportunity for examining a successful emergent religious group, one where we might begin to address some of the questions I have already raised and, perhaps, come to some conclusions, tentative as they may be. We shall begin by briefly discussing Lucian, the author of our principal source of evidence for this cult and the other sources of evidence for its growth in the Roman Empire. We shall then turn to the subject of new and emergent religious movements and derive some insights from studies in the social sciences concerning how they spread and the competitive strategies they employ to gain adherents. Thereafter we shall turn to the Cult of Glykon and examine it in relation to these insights with the goal of determining whether this ancient religion exhibits any of the characteristics that have been identified as critical to the success of new religious groups and what that might suggest for others seeking to understand the growth and spread of religions in the Roman world.

Lucian was arguably the most famous son of Samosata, a fortified city that sat astride the banks of the Euphrates River in Syria's extreme northeast corner. It had been home to the kings of Commagene until it came under Roman influence during the first century BCE and was finally annexed by the Romans due to its strategic

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[2] All translations follow with minor alterations A.M. Harmon's *Alexander the False Prophet* in Harmon 1925.

importance in 72 CE, a mere fifty years before Lucian's birth. Lucian was an accomplished author during the literary period of the Second Sophistic, when declamation – the composition and presentation of persuasive speeches, was the most highly-regarded form of literary activity in the Greek-speaking world. Little is known for sure about Lucian. Almost none of his contemporaries mention him, and so his own writings are the best evidence we have for his life. Lucian was probably a native speaker of Aramaic rather than Greek, but in spite of this he acquired a considerable mastery of the Greek language and literature, which enabled him to pursue a career as a lawyer, rhetorician, and itinerant lecturer. He traveled widely across the Roman world – to Italy, Gaul, and Greece, where he lived for a period of time, and to Egypt, where his talents enabled him to secure a minor administrative position later in life.[3]

Among the nearly eighty writings that have survived that are attributed to Lucian is a scathing account purporting to expose the many frauds of the cult's founder, entitled Ἀλεξάνδρος ἢ ψευδόμαντις, *Alexander or the False Prophet*. This work endures as the most important source of information about the foundation of this religious group and its daily workings in second-century Paphlagonia. Its highly-polemic nature compels us to consider whether we can rely on Lucian's word about an individual he clearly despises and a cult he regards as an outright sham. Lucian's avowed Epicurean sympathies made him an opponent of the cult in principle. (Luc., *Alex*. 1 and 61.) Some degree of personal enmity must have also existed between Lucian and his subject Alexander: Lucian reports that he once traveled to its religious center in Abonouteichos and that during their brief meeting Lucian bit Alexander's hand! (Luc., *Alex*. 55.) He even accuses Alexander of attempting to have him killed. (Luc., *Alex*. 55-57.) Lucian's proximity to his subject, however, provided him with incomparable first-hand information about the cult and its founder. Additionally, Lucian spoke with others who shared their knowledge with him. He also notes that he consulted other documents, such as recorded oracular responses, for additional information. (Luc., *Alex*. 4, 5, 33-35, 54, and 55-57.) Modern scholars have generally regarded Lucian's account to be accurate and highly valuable.[4] Outside of the pages of Lucian, the existence of this cult is confirmed by images of its god Glykon in stone and bronze, which have been brought to light in excavations – most famously in Tomis on the Black Sea in modern Romania, and in the Athenian

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[3] For an overview of Lucian's life and historical context, see Jones 1986.

[4] On this point, see Weinrich 1921, 129-51; Caster 1938; Robert 1980, 393-431; Jones 1986, 133-48; Branham 1989, 182; Clay 1992, 3446; Victor 1997, 8-26, and Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 44-60.

Agora, and elsewhere.[5] Beginning during the reign of Antoninus Pius in the 160s and continuing into the 3rd century, civic coins were struck in bronze at Abonouteichos/Ionopolis and elsewhere in Asia Minor bearing the likeness of Glykon, attesting to his popularity, even among officials.[6] I shall have more to say about these findings and about the spread and impact of this religious group as we proceed.

Now, the term 'cult' has been among the most frequently used categories in contemporary public discourse on religion.[7] By this term, I do not refer to its narrow and precise application to a particular form of worship (for example, the cults of Isis or Mithras), but rather as an implicitly comparative rhetorical formulation, whose "meaning and accuracy are both self-evident and widely shared."[8] In this folk taxonomy, the term 'cult' has come to be recognized as a pejorative term, "a powerful tool for enforcing social conformity," fraught with implicit assumptions and comparisons.[9] In an effort to avoid its baggage, academics have come to prefer and to make use of the neutral classification 'New Religious Movement' or NRM, and in what remains of this discussion we shall think of the Cult of Glykon in this same way.[10] This change in terminology has been part of a broader effort to define precisely what constitutes a new religious movement and to determine what can be said about how people become interested in NRMs, what sorts of people tend to become attracted to them, and why they join.[11] This work can serve as useful comparative material for our own endeavors. Models of the process of conversion have been proposed and critiqued at length in academic circles and some key conditions for conversion have come to be recognized as having empirical support. One point such

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[5] Concerning the stone image of Glykon unearthed in 1962 at Tomis, see the images and discussion of the discovery in Canarache, Ariescu, Barbu, Radulescu 1963.

[6] Images of Glykon appear on coins from Abonouteichos/Ionopolis, as well as from Nikomedia, Tieion, and Ganagra-Germanikopolis. Abonouteichos, Ionopolis: Waddington, Babelon, Reinach 1925, 8, pl. XVII, 12 (rev.); Head 1932, 85, no. 2, pl. 47, fig. 2 (BM 1844-4-25-1283 (Devon)); Nikomedia: Waddington/, Babelon, Reinach 1925, I 3, 545, nos. 225-7, pl. XCIV, 12-14 (Caracalla), 562, no. 353, pl. XCVII, 14 (Maximinus); Tieion: Waddington, Babelon, Reinach 1925, 54, pl. CVII, 27 (rev.); Ganagra-Germanikopolis: *SNG* 6820 (Julia Domna).

[7] Gallagher 2007/2008, 212.

[8] Gallagher 2007/2008, 206.

[9] Gallagher 2007/2008, 209, and passim.

[10] For a discussion of the term 'New Religious Movement,' see Barker 2004 and Gallagher 2007/2008.

[11] Dawson 1996.

studies have made clear is that these conditions and their significance vary tremendously depending upon the particular religion in question and the circumstances or context. As Lorne L. Dawson has argued, studies of conversion into contemporary NRMs and of specific religious groups have revealed that recruitment into NRMs tends to occur through pre-existing social networks and interpersonal bonds and that the affective ties that recruits develop with members induce them into more sustained interaction and deeper commitments.[12] Holding fewer and weaker social ties to individuals outside the organization seems to be another factor that increases the likelihood for involvement in an NRM. So too, possessing fewer and weaker external ideological alignments seems to correlate to an increased likelihood for joining an NRM. Lastly, as studies have stressed, NRMs offer a variety of positive inducements or rewards to their members, such as "affection and heightened self-esteem, esoteric and exoteric knowledge that provides a sense of power and control over one's life, as well as simple material and social aid, security, new career opportunities and forms of prestige" that attract new members and draw them into the religious group.[13] Other factors are possible but disputed. Some studies have suggested that there are proportionally higher numbers of women who decide to join NRMs. Some studies have also indicated that the so-called "unchurched" and those from more secularized backgrounds may be more open to involvement in NRMs. The degree to which these conditions are universal in recruitment to NRMs is, at present, ambiguous, and they shall continue to be subject to further scrutiny.[14] Such insights suggest that, in the Roman world, new religions that exploited existing social networks to identify individuals and groups who might be open to recruitment for the purpose of attracting new members and that offered potential recruits all manner of positive inducements in order to appeal to them might have been more likely to achieve success in establishing a large and lasting religious movement.

One particular factor that has also been addressed in studies of NRMs is the role of charismatic leadership in such groups. According to Dawson, "Charismatic authority is widely held to be a defining mark of new religious movements."[15] In examining the behaviors that appear to produce attributions of charisma, Dawson found that charismatic leaders were adept at managing the impressions of their followers, and in cultivating the impression that they have, for example, "performed

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[12] Dawson 1996, 147-49.
[13] Dawson 1996, 150.
[14] Dawson 1996, 155-61.
[15] Dawson 2006, 3. See also Weber 1964, 358.

extraordinary and heroic feats, and possess uncanny, even supernatural, powers."[16] They do so, according to Dawson, by strategically invoking cultural myths and symbols through their gestures, words, and actions. Because charismatic authority is situationally generated in the social relationship between leaders and their followers, it is dynamic and inherently unstable, even volatile. As has been frequently discussed in the literature, the mismanagement of charismatic authority can lead some religious groups to see violence as an appropriate response to their concerns.[17]

Other social scientists have sought to examine new and long-existing religious organizations from the perspective of strategic management. As Kent D. Miller has argued, "Viewing religious organizations as market competitors <provides> insights into their strategic behaviors," and, in particular, what factors determine the viability of new religious organizations and how religious organizations achieve and sustain advantages against their rivals in a competitive, unregulated religious marketplace.[18] As Miller's study makes clear, several conditions affect the success of religious organizations. Among these conditions, what Miller terms "credible commitment" and the social perception of a religious organization's legitimacy are key determinants of the success of religious start-ups.[19] "The key to marketing religion," as Miller states, "is creating the perception of credibility."[20] Indicators of religious commitment can include the existence of a professional staff whose financial compensation is minimal, the reliance on part-time and volunteer workers, the existence of a congregational structure, and testimonials from trusted individuals. Credible commitment by the religious organization's founder or founders, expressed by acts such as martyrdom, also appeared to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the initial success of an NRM. All of these factors can help to provide evidence that establishes the credibility of a religious organization and can "foster the perception that religious experiences are broadly shared."[21] "Social legitimacy is a key external

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[16] Dawson 2006, 17.

[17] On this, see Dawson 2002. As Dawson's analysis highlights, the violent behavior of certain new religious movements seems to arise out of endemic problems associated with maintaining the legitimacy of charismatic authority. "When leaders, trying to preserve their authority, make the wrong choices in the face of these challenges, they can set off a cycle of deviance amplification that greatly increases the likelihood of violent behavior." Dawson 2002, 81.

[18] See Miller 2002, 435. Cf. Beck 2006.

[19] Miller 2002, 440-1.

[20] Miller 2002, 441.

[21] Miller 2002, 441.

determinant of success at founding."[22] Religious movements that achieve the perception of legitimacy, at least within a segment of the population sufficient to support the group, are more likely to sustain the organization and grow beyond the initial group of adherents. The need to satisfy this condition of legitimacy imposes constraints on the practices and beliefs of new religious movements. Rodney Stark has asserted that retaining cultural continuity with established religions increases the perception of legitimacy and therefore increases the likelihood of success for a new religious movement.[23]

With these observations in mind, we shall now turn to the new religious movement centered on Glykon and its founder, Alexander of Abonouteichos. Alexander was endowed with many qualities that would make him well-suited to become a charismatic leader, whose presence has been emphasized as a defining characteristic of successful NRMs. According to Lucian's description of Alexander, he was graced by a remarkable physical appearance. He was tall and handsome, with eyes that shone with a great glow of fervor and enthusiasm and a voice that was both sweet and clear. "In short, nothing worthy of blame could be found in him in any way as far as all that went." (Luc., *Alex*. 3.) He was likewise endowed with a keen intellect. As Lucian describes, "In quick comprehension, readiness of mind, and keenness he surpassed everyone else; and mindfulness, readiness to learn, retentiveness, and natural aptitude for learning – all of these qualities were his, in every case to the utmost." (Luc., *Alex*. 4.) His skill at impression management was noted by Lucian, who summarized his description of Alexander thusly: "Indeed, there is nobody who, after meeting him for the first time, did not depart with the notion that he was the most decent and honest man in the world – yes, and the most simple and genuine. And beyond that he had the quality of magnificence, of forming no petty designs but always fixing his mind upon the most admirable purposes." (Luc., *Alex*. 4.) Again and again, Alexander's ability to manage the impressions of others brought new members, young and old, humble and powerful, to the organization, as well as their talents and resources.

Alexander put these abundant natural gifts to work along the fringe of Graeco-Roman religious belief and practice, serving in his youth as the assistant to an itinerant public physician who was steeped in the lore of Apollonios of Tyana and in Neopythagorean doctrines and he took up this practice when his teacher died. (Luc.,

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[22] Miller 2002, 441.
[23] See Stark 1987, 11-29; Stark, Bainbridge 1985.

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Alex. 5.) It was in this way that Alexander developed and conveyed a personal identity that retained continuity with the established image of the Hellenistic θεῖος ἀνήρ, or divine man.[24] Alexander not only identified himself with the quintessential holy man of his own era, Apollonios, but even with the great ancient sage Pythagoras. (Luc. *Alex*. 4) Before too long, according to Lucian, Alexander formed a partnership with a composer of choral songs from Byzantium who was known as Cocconas, and together they fashioned a plan to establish a prophetic shrine and oracle in Alexander's native city, which were founded on a new god, a "New Asklepios," known as Glykon, in the form of an enormous serpent. (Luc., *Alex*. 6-8.) As Lucian describes, Alexander set about establishing the shrine and unveiling his new god with great care to ensure that its legitimacy be unassailable. Prior to his return to Abonouteichos, they buried bronze tablets in the precinct of the temple of Apollo in Chalcedon, which, when fortuitously discovered, foretold the imminent arrival of Asklepios and his father Apollo in Abonouteichos to take up residence there. Word of this discovery spread throughout Bithynia and Pontus, including the city of Abonouteichos, where the inhabitants quickly resolved to build a temple and began to dig its foundations. (Luc., *Alex*. 9-10.) Cocconas stayed behind in Chalcedon and continued to compose oracles for their undertaking, and he later died there, while Alexander proceeded on to Abonouteichos to hatch their scheme.

As Alexander returned to his native city, he made careful effort to satisfy popular expectations for his role as holy man and prophet of this new god by his personal appearance and behavior. As Lucian describes him, "He now wore his hair long, falling down in curls, and was dressed in a multi-colored tunic of white and purple, with a white cloak over it, and he wore a falchion [a broad, slightly curved sword with the cutting edge on the convex side] (?) like that worn by Perseus, from whom he claimed descent on his mother's side. And although the wretched Paphlagonians knew that both his parents were obscure and humble folk, they believed the oracle. . . ." (Luc., *Alex*. 11.) To reinforce his status as divinely-inspired prophet, he periodically affected fits of madness, his mouth filling with foam from soapwort roots that he chewed. (Luc., *Alex*. 12.) On occasion, he would reveal his golden thigh, which directly associated Alexander with Pythagoras himself.[25] (Luc., *Alex*. 40.)

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[24] See Anderson 1994. On Alexander as a θεῖος ἀνήρ, see Sfameni Gasparro 1996 [1998]. On Alexander as a magician, see Mastrocinque 1999.

[25] As Lucian notes, Alexander claimed to be not just like Pythagoras, but even to exceed him. On the golden thigh of Pythagoras, see Ael., *VH* II 26.

On the night that Glykon was to make his first manifestation, Alexander appeared in the marketplace of Abonouteichos wearing only a loincloth, with his hair disheveled "like a devotee of the Great Mother in a frenzy," states Lucian. (Luc., *Alex*. 13.) Climbing a high altar, he addressed the assembled crowd of startled onlookers, saying that they were at once to receive the god in a visible form. Proceeding to the site of the future temple, Alexander sang hymns and entreated the god loudly to come into their presence. Finally, asking for a libation dish he bent down at the side of a pool of water that had collected in the foundations of the place and drew from it an egg that he had previously hidden. Breaking the egg he received into his hands a tiny snake. When the crowd witnessed this miraculous appearance among them, they immediately raised up a great cry welcoming the god and congratulating themselves and their city for this blessing. This appearance of Glykon, although it is described by Lucian in the most lurid manner, is in keeping with ancient custom for establishing shrines of Glykon's father, Asklepios, who was transferred to new shrines in the form of actual living snake on numerous occasions, such as at Sikyon, Athens, and Rome.[26] Having accomplished this epiphany, straightaway Alexander returned home again with his new god, and the people, "all full of religious fervor and driven mad with expectations," as Lucian describes them, began to spread the news throughout the region. (Luc., *Alex*. 14.)

In the days that followed, Alexander and his god commenced receiving visitors from Abonouteichos and the surrounding regions who appeared to see Glykon with their own eyes and to seek his divine insight. As Lucian describes, Alexander came to employ many individuals – assistants, servants, collectors of information, writers of oracles, custodians of oracles, clerks, sealers, and expounders – who worked to assist him in his endeavors and to confirm the validity of the prophet and the god. (Luc., *Alex*. 23.) This activity is in accordance with the strategic behaviors of successful NRMs, which work to establish the social perception of legitimacy among the potential converts and to project the perception of a religious experience that is broadly shared. Agents were sent abroad to stir up rumors of the accuracy of the oracles given by Glykon and Alexander. (Luc., *Alex*. 36-8.) They also spread his

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[26] As Walter Burkert notes, "When his shrine at Sikyon was established in the fifth century, 'the god in the likeness of a serpent was brought from Epidaurus on a carriage drawn by mules.' In the chronicle of the Athenian Asklepeion the same process is described, but with somewhat more reserve: the god 'had the serpent brought from home' – from Epidaurus – on 'a chariot.'" See Burkert 1985, 214.

fame by producing paintings, statues, and cult images in bronze, in stone and in silver, similar to the ones that I have already mentioned. In keeping with his origins as a healer, Alexander did not limit himself to predicting the future, but also prescribed medical treatments and offered remedies to the sick. (Luc., *Alex.* 22-3.) This dual purpose of healing and prophecy was in keeping with practices elsewhere. It was through his oracles, however, that Alexander even gained the support of well-connected Romans, like Publius Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus, a senator and governor of the province of Cappadocia – "a man of birth and breeding," states Lucian, who became the foremost of the acolytes of Glykon after seeking an oracle from the god. (Luc., *Alex.* 30.) By courting such powerful and notable persons, Alexander and his god grew in stature and influence.

The worship of Glykon came to be adorned with familiar features that were strategically devised to appeal to new adherents based upon their cultural continuity to familiar religious precedents and to create the perception of credibility, as Lucian describes. As previously mentioned, the temple and the new god were first validated by an oracle from another, well-established cult center, the Temple of Apollo in Chalcedon. As the whole enterprise gained momentum, mysteries with torch-lit ceremonies were established, and were held annually for three days in succession. (Luc., *Alex.* 38-40.) As would be appropriate, these rites and even the setting in which they occurred were modeled, so far as Lucian's description allows us to understand them, upon those of familiar and revered mysteries, such as at Eleusis.[27] As at Eleusis, for example, the first day began with a proclamation and expulsion of non-believers.[28] Its mysteries, like those elsewhere, revealed the origins of the god and connected him and his hierophant, Alexander, to familiar gods and myths.[29] As with NRMs, which employ such strategic behaviors for the purpose of recruitment, priestly offices were also created to offer positive incentives to the membership. Alexander bid boys to be sent from throughout the cities of Paphlagonia and Pontus to

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[27] On the role of the adoption, modification, and combination of the rituals of other cults in the success of the Cult of Glykon, see Sfameni Gasparro 1999, Chaniotis 2002, and Chaniotis 2004. According to Wiebke Friese, the architecture of the sanctuary of Glykon at Abonouteichos was modeled upon other well-known contemporary oracular centers. See Friese 2015, 147-60.

[28] On the *προρρήσις* proclaimed by the hierophant at Eleusis, see Burkert 1985, 286, note 13.

[29] On the first day, the myths of the forebears of Glykon, Apollo and Leto, and Asklepios, were recounted. The second featured a re-enactment of Glykon's divine manifestation. The third day, known as the Day of Torches, concluded with the union of Asklepios' son, the healer Podaleirius, and Alexander's mother, the birth of Alexander and his own union with Selene. (Luc., *Alex.* 38-9.)

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serve as a choir that sang hymns to the god.[30] (Luc., *Alex*. 41.) In this way, new members, possibly ones who held fewer and weaker external social ties and ideological alignments and were more likely to be induced into intense devotion, were brought into the fold of this second-century NRM. As has been noted by Attilio Mastrocinque, the doctrines of this religion were, likewise, based upon forms of theology that were widely accepted and current at the time.[31]

As Lucian takes stock of this new religion and its prophet's impact, he mentions what he feels to be its greatest accomplishment, to have influenced even the decision-making of a Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius. According to Lucian, when the emperor was already engaged in the protracted struggle with the Marcomanni and other tribes who had been displaced by the southward movement of the Goths, events known collectively as the Marcomannic Wars, the emperor sought every possible way of gaining advantage in this undertaking, and to that end he celebrated a sacrifice that had been issued in an oracle in the name of the god Glykon. The oracle prescribed that lions be cast into the Ister, or Danube River, which he had done. (Luc., *Alex*. 48.) These accomplishments, namely this religious group and its god gaining some measure of acceptance and support throughout the Roman world, did not meet with universal approval, as should be expected from the low opinion of our chief source Lucian. In fact, the Glykonists came to be opposed by other 'active' cults, including members of the local Epicurean and Christian communities, because of its methods of self-presentation and recruitment, which led to occasional acts of harassment, violence, and indeed, a pagan "holy war," whose conclusion, sadly, Lucian does not describe in detail, as he does with its founder's unfortunate but purely natural death.[32] (Luc., *Alex*. 25, 38, 44-5.)

As should be clear from this discussion, the Cult of Glykon appears to exhibit many of the same features that have been identified as critical to the success of New Religious Movements in the more recent past. As with contemporary NRMs, the

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[30] This practice was also in evidence elsewhere. Boy singers were sent to Delphi from Athens (*IG* II₂ 2336) and from Clarus (*SEG* 37.961-80).

[31] Mastrocinque 2010, 196. As Mastrocinque indicates, what can be surmised about the doctrines of the Cult of Glykon seem to suggest that there were points of contact between the cult and Gnosticism.

[32] The role played by Alexander in this chapter of the cult's existence, as a senior cult official who appears to be responsible for fomenting violence in the conflicts with rival groups and sects, has even led one scholar to diagnose Alexander as a malignant narcissist, an individual suffering from a narcissistic personality disorder, due to his willingness to employ violence to achieve his aims. See Kent 2007.

presence of charismatic leadership in the form of Alexander of Abonouteichos, whose appearance and actions mark him out as an individual endowed with great charismatic authority, was a factor that contributed to the movement's success and was also the source of many of its troubles. The Cult of Glykon also seems to have worked effectively to establish the social perception of legitimacy, which has been shown to be a key external determinant of the success of an NRM at its founding. By fostering the credibility of the god and prophet by associating them with well-established deities and religious figures, the cult achieved sufficient legitimacy to endure for more than a century beyond the death of its founder. This success was, in part, attributable to its religious doctrines, which contained elements that would have wide appeal at the time, given that they were derived from a number of religious traditions and were combined together into a novel and compelling whole. In this way, the Cult of Glykon provided what people were seeking, including oracles, healing, and mysteries. By offering these religious necessities in a location, the cult center in Abonouteichos, that would have likewise appealed to the expectations of the public, and by establishing what seems to be a well-organized core of assistants and attendants, including both professional staff and volunteers, the cult center successfully met the needs and wishes of visitors and provided visible confirmation of the credible commitment of many to Glykon. These features of NRMs, which were present in the Cult of Glykon, certainly contributed to the growth and spread of this religion in the period when it was still a new movement. It might be worth considering whether other emergent religious groups of the Roman era show the presence of these same characteristics that enabled the Cult of Glykon to spread and endure. In this way, we could come to a better understanding of why some new religious groups succeeded in achieving integration into Roman society, while others did not.

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