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Document Title: Lucian of Samasota: Alexander the False Prophet

Written Assignments 3

Instructions: Use this guide to help you analyze the assigned primary source document. Answer as many of the questions as you can, **using evidence from the document**. Write your answers to as many questions as possible, based on **what you observe** (which may involve reading between the lines).¹

First Impressions

1. What are your first impressions? *Draw from your previous educational and personal knowledge.* In relation to the third crisis going on in Jerusalem with evidence of finding stability in the new empire this document was not a surprise to me. Since the topic that was being covered was Roman superstition, magic. The reason for that is because in seeing the instability of the region again I could understand why the Jewish people would seek help of a false prophet along with the region of individuals outside of the Jewish community seeking help from someone who claims to have divine powers. But what also strikes me is this it is that the fact that Alexander is described as someone who is ambitious and enterprising in essence he sees the problems of people and his ability to use magic to make a profit. To me this has so many similarities to many cultures around the world outside of the Greco-Roman world it is one that resonates with all of humanity. If you look at Native-Americans they use Shamans, in many countries in Africa they use herbalists or spiritualists, and it amazes me to see that the behavior of each is almost alike.
2. What kind of document is it (letter, prayer, historical account, apocalypse, testament, narrative, etc.)? How do you know? *Clues within the text will alert you to the literary genre the writer used to communicate this message.*

The document being used is one that is not only a testament but also a narrative in the sense that it starts off by clearly saying that this is an account of the false priest of Asclepius, right from the title of the passage you see that this is what that is.

Looking More Closely

1. Read through the document carefully. Make a list of any unusual words, phrases, or concepts. *Does a particular expression or concept strike you as strange? Does it jump out at you?*

¹ Adapted and expanded from "Engaging Students with Primary Sources," Smithsonian *Natural Museum of American History*. <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf> Accessed 12/21/2021.

While reading this article there was not any unusual phrases that jumped out at me however what did occur was the amount of schemes Alexander the false prophet used to try to gain an audience. It was almost as if the wider the superstitious belief the more theatrical his ceremonies and services would be in his service of the people. In this case I am inferring that this is a direct result of the fact that with the instability in the region coupled with the fact that the people were superstitious, believed in magic and most importantly drawing upon the fears and anxiety the third crisis overtaking the Greco-Roman world in the Jewish world this ultimately lead to that belief this form of prophet or soothsayer, or sorcerer was important in drawing in crowds and even solicitation of powers to keep the people drawn in and to make sure that certain issues were dealt with.

2. Is there a date on it? If so, what is it? If not, are there any other clues within the document that might indicate when it was written? *Documents may allude to a past well-known event as if it was happening now (a common device used to impact how the hearer-readers understand the message the author wants to convey). 2nd Temple writers tended to look back for precedents that provided analogies for the exhortations or messages they wanted their generation to consider.*

Yes there is a date on it according to the brief synopsis this takes place between A.D. 150-170.

3. Is there a location indicated? What is it? *Explicit locations could be Babylon or Jerusalem, for example. But the location may be veiled. Perhaps the author mentions customs or events that suggest the location is outside of Judea.*

Yes there is a location that is indicated on it and it is in Asclepieia which is located in Greece which shows that the belief of superstition and magic was rampant throughout that entire region and was quite popular amongst the locals.

4. Who wrote or created the document? How can you tell? *If the author is stated, is it the actual person identified or is it an anonymous writer using a famous name to give the message greater authority? 2nd Temple writers often used pseudonyms of well-known biblical characters to draw attention to the seriousness of the issues he is addressing. Is the author familiar with Jewish tradition? Is he familiar with Gentile values? There is much you can learn from the document itself even if you do not know the author's exact identity.*

Well from reading the document although this was the account of Alexander, the author was not Alexander but rather a friend of Alexander who documented his escapades and dealings with sorcery.

5. For whom was the document written or created? How do you know? *Is the document written to or for a specific group of Jews (or Gentile readers)? Do these Jews seem to live in Palestine or in other parts of the empires in control? Look for clues like the mention of the Torah, Temple, or Jewish customs. Maybe Gentile customs are mentioned (which may clue you into a group of Jews living outside Judea). Do the Gentiles live in parts of the empire—possibly a city—or does the document just have a general audience in mind?*

This document is historical in value I truly believe at the time it was created for the people living within the city who had a curiosity with Alexander of Abonoteichus and what his work was like but in hindsight it gave a much broader view of what life was like during that time period. What the diversity of polytheism was like for the Jews living in that time period if there were superstitions, this is what it would look like and the usage of not only charms but words, talismans this was done in detail to show what the region was immersed in.

6. What is the purpose of the document? What made you think this? *Are the documents written to people who are oppressed, need encouragement, need to be warned, etc.? It helps to imagine what life must be like in the era we are studying for a specific lesson.*

The purpose of the document was meant in essence to give greater context what was going on within the period of the New Testament in terms of the expansion of the church. What made me think this is; well for starters before taking this course when reading the bible I thought that when Christ came onto the scene proclaiming the way and challenging the old traditions and customs prevalent throughout Jewish society and Greco-Roman culture of the time that life was dead, there was no context, no history. The reason for that is because the way the gap between Malachi and Matthew is portrayed by many leaders in different churches it is shown as a dead period in history between God and mankind, because there are no prophets prophesying, there is no kingdom of ancient Israel and lastly many people think that history went unaccounted for. However when seeing this and coming to a conclusion one can realize that this is false what the document of Alexander the false prophet shows is that the Greco-Roman society was not dead but rather lively in both mysticism and sorcery and yes you can believe that this indeed did have an impact on everyday Jewish life. Now combine that with the teachings and passages found in the New Testament you can no realize that this document as told by Alexander through a friend highlights the activities that took place in terms of mysticism and magic during this time period.

Thinking Further

1. What do you think the writer thought was the most important information to convey? Why?

Think theologically and/or practically.

In line with theological thinking the most important information the writer I believe was trying to convey was how much of everyday life his services were required to deal with the problems his clients had. However keeping in line with how the article went it can be safe to say that he was seen as a con-artist more so than an actual person with powers. I think that he was showing how polytheistic the Greco-Roman world was and how a person of his stature was able to gain some of the popularity that he did with his 'works'. I think this shows theologically that the time period when it came to religion or seeking out powers was not only a common phenomenon in both the Greco-Roman world and Jewish world, but at times without thinking they sometimes intertwined.

2. Does the document convey a certain tone? *For example, is it entertaining, humorous, encouraging, warning, etc.?*

For starters the document does convey a certain tone and it is somewhat entertaining and humorous not because of the lack of seriousness in the testament but more so because it was informative on what was going on during that time period.

3. Can you tell the point of view of the writer? Is it objective? *No writer is purely objective, but the document may want to portray a sense of being objective (usually historical documents such as the writings of Josephus). Yet even Josephus has a clear bias in how he tells the story of Israel's history. The point of view could be something as simple as favorable to some aspects of a foreign culture or completely disapproving of pagan culture.*

The writer of the testament was more objective in the sense that they were showing exactly what it is they were doing but also at the same time subjective because of the opinionated slant of the writer towards Alexander.

4. What is the writer's attitude about Israel's God or the nations' gods? How can you tell?

From reading this article it is safe to say even though it does not fit the overall narrative of a Jewish story the attitude about Israel's' God is not a very high opinion. For starters you can tell

just from the overall writing this is from the perspective of someone who knows they are a false prophet so in certain regards you can say that he is almost mocking God.

5. What is the writer's attitude toward "Jews"? *Pay particular attention to whether the writer distinguishes between Jews (for example, Jews who are faithful and those who are disobedient to the Torah). Does he disapprove of some Jews?*

The writer's attitude toward Jews it was nonexistent, his audience wasn't Jews but rather it was towards the at large Greco-Roman world, if I can make an inference since this period also deals with the multiple philosophies saturated within that society at that time. Since the Jews were minority in relation to the teaching that was given I don't think that the attitude toward Jews was all that high I believe it was almost laughable to Alexander that they only worshipped one God, whom we already was Yahweh.

6. What is the writer's attitude about "non-Jews" or those ruling over them? How can you tell? *The most pressing issue for Judaism during the 2nd Temple period was the relationship of Jews with Gentiles. Their experiences vary throughout the centuries and with different writers. How is this writer relating or thinking about non-Jews?*

The writer's attitude about 'non-Jews" or those ruling over them was seen as one that one that was beneficial because throughout the reading Alexander was able to finesse a large portion of the Greco-Roman society.

7. What does the writer believe about the Torah (the Law)? *2nd Temple Judaism was unified in their common interest in the Mosaic Law and the idea that all forms of Judaism related to it in one way or another. The law is discussed to some degree or another throughout the Jewish corpus of 2nd Temple literature. Think about such issues as whether the author thinks the Mosaic covenant is eternal. Does he see a connection between the law and wisdom or perhaps between the Mosaic Law and the unwritten law of nature? To what extent is the Law applicable to the nations?*

From the reading I don't think the writer was at all concerned about the Torah.

8. What other customs or institutions of Judaism do the writers mention? What is his attitude toward these customs or institutions? *These can include such things as dietary laws, marriage, the Temple, the priesthood, etc.*

The inference that can be made from the customs of Judaism is that even though Alexander was a false prophet there was a respect for Judaism because it was an established religion that was around for a very long time.

9. What is the attitude of the writer toward morality or natural law? How can you tell? *The writer may have a general audience in mind, or he may have a specific group he is addressing. Does he expect these groups to demonstrate morality?*

There is no attitude of the writer toward morality or natural law and it is quite simple the behavior and the actions of Alexander was deplorable he was ripping people off to make a prophet.

10. Does the document remind you of any biblical event, character, or book of the Bible? What made you think of those events, characters, or biblical books?

This document does indeed remind of a biblical character and book if you can remember Acts and of course Simon the sorcerer you can see who the apostle Paul with the help of the Holy Spirit disarms a great deal and exposes him for who he is.

Summary Statement: How does this document give insight into the beliefs and concerns of Jews for the historical period being investigated? How does it add to what the textbooks say about the period?

This document gives insight into the beliefs and concerns of Jews for the historical period being investigated because what this shows is the multi-faceted nature of the societies they live in. The Greco-Roman culture was immersed in deep paganism and the belief of magic along with various superstitions shows that. What is also important to note is that the polytheism within each society made the belief in magic and mysticism real, it was a way of life for the various people who lived there during that time period. So it is understandable to see how and why anxieties being what they were allowed these beliefs to seep into the consciousness of the people. I guess control over circumstances were so rare that individuals placed their beliefs in these powers to ascertain some form of control over the reality that they were living in.