

The invention and demonization of an ascetic heresiarch:

Philoxenus of Mabbug on the ‘Messalian’ Adelphius

In the late fifth or early sixth century, Philoxenus, miaphysite bishop of Hierapolis-Mabbug, wrote a long letter in Syriac replying to Patricius, a monk at Edessa.¹

Patricius’ original letter does not survive, but it appears that he had questioned the need for ceaseless ascetic labour as a route to contemplation. Philoxenus responded by exhorting Patricius to follow his particular interpretation of Evagrian ascetic practice, illustrated by a number of stories about both successful and failed monks; among the notable failures was Adelphius, described as the founder of the heresy of ‘the praying ones’ (ܡܫܝܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ, ‘Messalians’). According to Philoxenus, Adelphius had spent time in

An early version of this article was presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the North American Patristics Society; my thanks to my co-panellists and audience for extremely helpful discussion and suggestions. I am also very grateful to Chip Coakley for teaching me Syriac and introducing me to the wealth of Syriac literature, which has made the research for this article possible.

¹ Philoxenus’ letter survives in two Syriac recensions, one long and one short. The longer Syriac text, which is older, is studied in this article. It was edited by René Lavenant from eight manuscripts: René Lavenant, ‘La lettre à Patricius de Philoxène de Mabboug’, *Patrologia Orientalis* 30.5 (1963), 725-894. The shorter recension has still not been edited, but appears - attributed to different authors - in two manuscripts, Vat. syr. 125, fol. 145r-158r, and Sinai syr. 24, fol. 147v-164v; on these, see Grigory Kessel, ‘Sinai syr. 24 as an important witness to the history of some Syriac ascetic texts’, in Françoise Briquel Chatonnet and Muriel Debié, eds, *Sur les pas des Araméens chrétiens: mélanges offerts à Alain Desreumaux*, Paris 2010, 207-18. The shorter recension was translated into Greek and circulated under the name of Isaac of Nineveh: ed. Angelo Mai, *Nova Patrum Bibliotheca*, Rome 1871, vol. 8, 157-87. On all these texts, see David Michelson, ‘A bibliographic clavis to the works of Philoxenus of Mabbug’, *Hugoye* 13.2 (2010), 273-338 at 304-5.

Edessa, and then travelled to the Sinai and Egypt with Julian Saba and met various desert fathers, including Antony the Great, before moving back to Edessa to devote himself to a life of ascetic hardship and continual prayer. However, vainglory burned in him, and when he received a Satanic vision in the form of a light which claimed to be the Holy Spirit, he failed to act with appropriate humility and reject it; instead, he worshipped it, and was filled with demonic hallucinations which convinced him that he no longer needed to exert himself in ascetic labours. Adelphius subsequently attracted a large following of monks who were condemned and chased out of Edessa, and Philoxenus reported that in his own day they were found in the monasteries of Iconium.²

This vivid story has no parallels in other surviving ancient accounts of Adelphius. The few scholars who have commented on it have variously doubted its credibility, and mined it for new information.³ However, this article is not principally concerned to retrieve fresh details about an ‘historical’ Adelphius from Philoxenus’ account. Rather, it seeks to establish the influences on, sources for, and resonances of Philoxenus’ anecdote, and to read it as part of a longer process of the invention and demonization of the so-called ‘Messalian’ heresy. It thus builds on the persuasive arguments of scholars like Columba Stewart and Daniel Caner that those first stigmatized as Messalians were in fact far from cohesive in their identity, beliefs, and practices beyond an ascetic drive and an origin in Syro-Mesopotamia, and were

² Philoxenus, *Letter to Patricius* 108-110 in Lavenant, ‘La lettre’, 850-55.

³ For example, Columba Stewart, *Working the earth of the heart: the Messalian controversy in history, texts and language to AD 431*, Oxford 1991, 39-41, is sceptical about Adelphius’ Egyptian connection, while Klaus Fitschen, *Messalianismus und Antimesalianismus: ein Beispiel ostkirchlicher Ketzergeschichte*, Göttingen 1998, 93-4, is open to it.

bestowed a group identity in large part by their opponents.⁴ It also draws on the current scholarly consensus that heresies in late antiquity were largely constructed through polemical processes of labelling and ‘othering’.⁵

The first section surveys the changing presentation of Adelphius by anti-Messalian sources, placing Philoxenus’ story in a longer process of the invention of a heresy. Initially, in the fourth and fifth centuries, he was presented as a spokesman for his group and one of its several early leaders; by the sixth century, he had emerged as a founder figure in the Philoxenian vein. The invention of Adelphius as sole ‘heresiarch’ is argued to be part of a long-standing heresiological tradition of constructing ‘genealogies’ and founders of heresies. The second part demonstrates a range of striking similarities between Philoxenus’ story about Adelphius’ fall, and cautionary tales about monks in a range of ascetic literature from the *apophthegmata patrum* (‘sayings of the fathers’) to Palladius’ *Lausiaca history* and Evagrian treatises. Whether Philoxenus himself was responsible for this confection, or drew on an existing tradition, the echoes of ascetic tales in his portrait of Adelphius suggest that it was more ‘imagined’ than historical. The final section proposes that Philoxenus’ story reflected hostility to practices long attributed to the Messalians, such as the possibility of seeing any person of the Trinity with bodily eyes. It also demonstrates how this story focussed in the

⁴ Stewart, *Working the earth of the heart*, 234-40; Daniel Caner, *Wandering, begging monks: spiritual authority and the promotion of monasticism in late antiquity*, Berkeley 2002, 83-104; Marcus Plested, *The Macarian legacy: the place of Macarius-Symeon in the eastern Christian tradition*, Oxford 2004, 16-27.

⁵ Eduard Irinischi and Holger Zellentin, ‘Making selves and others: identity and late antique heresiologies’, in eid, *Heresy and identity in late antiquity*, Tübingen 2008, 1-27; Averil Cameron, ‘How to read heresiology’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33.3 (2003), 471-92.

person of Adelphius long-standing ideas that the Messalians had misinterpreted their state of ecstatic inspiration as evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, when they were in fact possessed by demons. Overall, Philoxenus' tale is placed in a longer process of the invention of Adelphius as a Messalian heresiarch, and of the demonization of that heresy.

Adelphius as heresiarch

At the opening of his account of Adelphius' ascetic downfall, Philoxenus identified him as the sole 'inventor' (ܡܨܚܝܘܬܐ) of the Messalian heresy, and he concluded his narration by explaining that after Adelphius had given in to Satan, he had become the 'leader' or 'chief' (ܡܨܚܝܘܬܐ) of the heresy.⁶ However, the very names applied to these heretics in earlier sources suggest that they did not originally have a clear founder, and were rather identified by their own behaviour. ܡܨܚܝܘܬܐ in Syriac, transliterated into Greek variously as *μασσαλιανοί*, *μεσσαλιανοί*, and *μεσσαλιανοί*, and translated into Greek as *εὐχόμενοι* and *εὐχίται*, means 'praying ones'. It was a hostile term, characterizing the group by one of their supposed practices, perpetual prayer. Similarly, the labelling of this group as *ἐνθουσιασταὶ* ('possessed ones') evoked a behaviour rather than an origin (a notion to which we will later return).⁷ The first surviving polemics against the Messalians, which date from the late fourth century, also show that this was not a heresy whose identity was closely linked to a named leader. In the very structure of his *Hymn 22 against*

⁶ Philoxenus, *Letter to Patricius* 108, 110 in Lavenant, 'La lettre', 850 and 854.

⁷ On the various names for the group, see Jean Gribomont, 'Le dossier du Messalianisme', in Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser, eds, *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou*, Paris 1972, 611-25 at 620-1.

heresies, Ephrem implicitly distinguished between heresies associated closely with their founder, and those identified by their beliefs or behaviour: stanza 3 lists heresies from Valentinus to Mani which all took their names from their founders, while stanza 4 reels off a range of heresies - ending with the *مسيحيين* - which were all characterized by their errors.⁸ In his *Panarion*, an encyclopedic ‘medicine-chest’ of heresies, Epiphanius explicitly voiced his uncertainty about the origins of the *μασσαλιανοὶ* (glossed as *εὐχόμενοι*), writing that they had no ‘beginning nor end, nor head, nor root’ (*οὔτε ἀρχὴ οὔτε τέλος οὔτε κεφαλὴ οὔτε ρίζα*).⁹

Adelphius is first mentioned among multiple leaders or founders of ‘Messalianism’ in polemical texts of the mid-fifth century. In discussions of the heresy in his *Ecclesiastical history* and *Compendium of heretical fables*, Theodoret of Cyrhus seems to have drawn on accounts of anti-Messalian synods at Antioch and Side in the

⁸ Ephrem *Hymn 22 Against Heresies*, ed. Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra haereses*, CSCO 169 / Scr. Syri 76, 78-86, at 78-9. See Gribomont, ‘Le dossier’, 612; Fitschen, *Messalianismus*, 19-21; Stewart, *Working the earth*, 15-18. I differ from Stewart (15, n. 6) in seeing an organisational principle at work in this hymn; although stanza 4 admittedly includes heresies which took their names from their founder, it also includes three – Borborians, Cathars and Messalians – which did not, and characterizes all nine heresies by their error. Furthermore, the next two hymns in the series, 23 and 24, circle around the issue of heresies taking their names from their founder.

⁹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 80.3.2, ed. Karl Holl, rev. Jürgen Dummer, *Epiphanius Werke*, 1985, vol. 3, 487. See Gribomont, ‘Le dossier’, 613-14; Fitschen, *Antimesalianismus*, 21-4; Stewart, *Working the earth*, 18-24. Stewart (18) points out that Epiphanius’ puzzlement about the Messalians is in part because, ‘unlike so many groups, the Messalians were not named after a founder or controversialist.’

late fourth century, at the first of which Adelphius appeared.¹⁰ He listed the men who were ‘founders’ (ἀρχηγοὶ) of the heresy,¹¹ and ‘led’ (ἡγήσαντο) it:¹² Dadoës, Sabas, Adelphius, Symeon, Hermas and others.¹³ The order of the names listed is different in the two works, but neither places Adelphius first. However, both texts foreground the role of the elderly Adelphius at the synod of Antioch, recounting how he was tricked by Flavian, bishop of Antioch, into giving an account of the group’s beliefs and practices which secured the condemnation of him and his fellows. In the *Compendium*, he is even said to have ‘led’ (ἡγεῖτο) the heresy.¹⁴

The central role of Adelphius at Antioch is confirmed by later accounts which themselves drew on earlier records. Stewart argues that the ‘memoranda written against Adelphius’ mentioned in a treatise by Severus of Antioch refer to a record of the decisions of the synod of Antioch; this suggests that, in memory at least, the synod focussed its ire on Adelphius.¹⁵ Photius’ early-ninth-century *Bibliotheca*, an enormous collection of reports and summaries of earlier texts and documents, includes an account of the synod of Antioch which lists the various ‘begetters’ (γεννήτορες) of the heresy, starting with Adelphius (before Sabas, Eustathius, Dadoës and Symeon). Photius’

¹⁰ On the synods, see Gribomont, ‘Le dossier’, 614-16; Stewart, *Working the earth*, 24-5; Fitschen, *Messalianismus*, 25-37. On Theodoret and his sources, see Stewart, *Working the earth*, 25-29.

¹¹ Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.11, ed. and trans. Pierre Canivet, SC 530, Paris 2009, 222.

¹² Theodoret, *Compendium of heretical fables* 4.11, in M. Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, *Patrologia Syriaca* 3 (1926), cc.

¹³ Gribomont, ‘Le dossier’, 615-16; Stewart, *Working the earth*, 25-9; Fitschen, *Messalianismus* 25-9.

¹⁴ Theodoret, *Compendium* 4.11, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, cxcix.

¹⁵ Stewart, *Working the earth*, 34-6 at 35, citing Severus of Antioch, *Contra additiones Juliani* from René Draguet, *Julien d’Halicarnasse et sa controverse avec Sévère d’Antioche sur l’incorruptibilité du corps du Christ*, Louvain 1924, 129-31.

account also emphasized Adelphius' role at Antioch by focussing on his personal repentance and the council's condemnation of 'Adelphius and those with him' (κατεκρίθη δὲ Ἀδελφίος καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ).¹⁶

Adelphius eventually gave his name to a heresy. In a letter of the early sixth century, Philoxenus' ally Severus of Antioch described Lampetius (who had recently been condemned at the synod of Comana) as 'infected with the heresy of Adelphius', and referred to his followers as a 'flock of Adelphians'.¹⁷ In about 600, Timothy of Constantinople provided a rather jumbled list of names for the heretics as follows: 'Marcianists and Messalians and Euchites and Choreuts and Lampetians and Adelphians and Eustathians.'¹⁸ Before his summary of the synod of Antioch, Photius mentioned the Acts of the synod of Side in passing, described as held 'against the heresy of the Messalians, that is to say, Euchites or Adelphians' (κατὰ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Μεσσαλιανῶν ἤγουν Εὐχιτῶν ἤτοι Ἀδελφιανῶν);¹⁹ Photius may have been reporting the contents of the manuscript before him, in which case 'Adelphians' belongs

¹⁶ Photius, *Bibliotheca* 52, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, cclii-cclxi at ccliv. Gribomont, 'Le dossier', 614; Stewart, *Working the earth*, 29-34; Fitschen, *Messalianismus*, 25-34. Gribomont (614), locates the origin of Photius' canonical collection in sixth-century miaphysite milieu.

¹⁷ Severus of Antioch, *Letter to Entrechius of Anazarba*, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, ccxii-ccxxi. Severus refers to having seen the minutes and records of the synod at Comana.

¹⁸ Timothy of Constantinople, *On the reception of heretics*, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, ccxxi. See Stewart, *Working the earth*, 52-68.

¹⁹ Photius, *Bibliotheca* 52, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, cclii-cclxi at cclii.

to an older tradition, or it may be his own gloss on ‘Messalians’, explaining an unfamiliar group by recourse to a more familiar one.²⁰

At some point between the fourth and sixth centuries, then, Adelphius came to be known not just as a leader of and spokesman for the Messalians, but as its founder. Philoxenus’ passing prefatory remark to his account of Adelphius - ‘as it is said about him’ (ܩܘܠܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܦܝܘܣ) - has been read as a nod to his oral or other sources, but no single *Vorlage* for his account can be identified.²¹ His sources would likely have been in Syriac, given the apparent limitations of his Greek,²² and Philoxenus’ hostility to Theodoret means he cannot have taken inspiration from either of his works.²³ However, since most of the texts examined above themselves drew on earlier sources, it is possible that Philoxenus also had access to, or some mediated knowledge of, those sources. Indeed, he may have had access to the same kind of synodal records as his close ally Severus of Antioch.²⁴ Considering that Adelphius had spent time in Edessa, it

²⁰ Gribomont, ‘Le dossier’, 621, suggests that ‘Adelphians’ was invented by heresiologists like ‘Lampetians’ and ‘Marcianists’, inspired by remarkable personalities.

²¹ Fitschen, *Messalianismus und Antimessalianismus*, 93.

²² André de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie*, Louvain 1963, 20-22; John Watt, ‘Philoxenus and the Old Syriac version of Evagrius’ *Centuries*, *Oriens Christiana* 64 (1986), 65-81 at 74-5. A recent article on Philoxenus’ developing enthusiasm for Greek christological polemics might complicate this view; see Dana Viezure, ‘Argumentative strategies in Philoxenus of Mabbog’s correspondence: from the Syriac model to the Greek model’, *Hugoye* 13.2 (2010), 149-75.

²³ Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbog*, Oxford 2014, 124-5 and de Halleux, *Philoxène*, 179-82.

²⁴ Michelson, *Practical Christology*, 13-16 and 33-60; de Halleux, *Philoxène*, 76-92.

is also possible that Philoxenus had heard local stories about him during his own time in the city.²⁵

In casting Adelphius as the founder of ‘Messalianism’, Philoxenus and others drew on the ‘genealogical’ approach of heresiology, a technique which typically enumerated the succession of teachers of a particular heresy in a perverse version of the philosophical *diadochē*, almost always leading back to a single founder figure.²⁶

Identifying notorious heresies like ‘Manicheism’ and ‘Marcionism’ by the names of their founders conferred a useful unity on disparate groups and undermined the claim of their members to be ‘Christians’ by foregrounding their adherence to another leader.²⁷

We have already seen this naming technique in Ephrem’s *Hymns against heresies*; it also features at the end of the early-fifth-century Syriac catalogue of heresies by Marutha of Maipherqat in a list of the fundamental elements required to write a proper history of heresy, including origins, region, and founders’ names.²⁸

²⁵ De Halleux, *Philoxène*, 22-30.

²⁶ Susanna Elm, ‘The polemical use of genealogies: Jerome’s classification of Pelagius and Evagrius Ponticus’, *Studia Patristica* 33 (1997), 311-18; Hervé Inglebert, *Interpretatio Christi; les mutations des savoirs (cosmographie, géographie, ethnographie, histoire) dans l’antiquité chrétienne 30-630 après J.-C.*, Paris 2001, 413-4; Caroline Humfress, *Orthodoxy and the courts in late antiquity*, Oxford 2007, 217-23.

²⁷ Richard Lim, ‘The *nomen Manichaeorum* and its uses in late antiquity’, in Irinischi and Zellentin, *Heresy and identity*, 143-67. See Ephrem, *Hymns against heresies*,

²⁸ Marutha of Maipherqat, *On the heresies*, ed. Arthur Vööbus, *The canons ascribed to Marutha of Maipherqat and related sources*, CSCO 439 / Scr. Syri 191, 22-27 at 27, trans. CSCO 440 / Scr. Syri 192, 17-24 at 23.

Philoxenus would have been familiar with the heresiological tradition in Syriac; among others, he clearly knew Ephrem's *Hymns against heresies*.²⁹ He can be seen practising the 'genealogical' approach to heresy himself in numerous polemics against Chalcedonian Christology.³⁰ For instance, his brief *Catalogue of all heresies* linked the doctrines of Mani, Marcion and Eutyches in its very opening paragraph.³¹ In a letter to Abu Ya'fur, he wrote a sweeping history of the identification and condemnation of heresies from Sabellius to Nestorius, studded with telling vivid anecdotes about heresiarchs of a kind that resemble the Adelpian episode.³² Another genealogy of heresy culminating in Nestorius appeared in his second letter to the monks of Beth Gogal.³³ After he had been exiled, in a letter to all the monks of the Orient, he described the history of the origins of the Novatians and Audians, before moving on to more

²⁹ Philoxenus wrote at least two *florilegia* which cite Ephrem's *Hymns against heresies*: see his *Testimonies of the fathers*, ed. Maurice Brière and François Graffin, *Patrologia Orientalis* 41.1, Turnhout 1982, 58-129; see also the florilegium embedded in his *Letter to the monks of Senun*, ed. André de Halleux, 'Lettre aux moines de Senoun', *CSCO* 231 / Scr. Syri 98, 1-96, *CSCO* 232 / Scr. Syri 99, 1-80.

³⁰ Lucas Van Rompay, 'Bardaisan and Mani in Philoxenus of Mabbog's *mēmre* against Habbib', in Wout Van Bekkum, Jan Willem Drijvers and Alex Klugkist, eds, *Syriac polemics: studies in honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, Leuven 2007, 77-90.

³¹ Philoxenus, *Catalogue of all heresies*, ed. and trans. François Nau, 'Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'église Nestorienne', *Patrologia Orientalis* 13.2 (1919), 248-9, at p. 248.

³² Philoxenus, *Letter to Abu Ya'fur*, ed. and trans. Paul Harb, 'Lettre de Philoxène de Mabbūg au phylarque Abū Ya'fūr de Hīrta de Bētna'mān', *Melto* 3.1-2 (1967-8), 183-222. This letter has probably been interpolated with a section about the history of the Turks; for further bibliography, see Michelson, 'A clavis', pp. 298-9.

³³ Philoxenus, *Second letter to the monks of Beth Gogal*, ed. and trans. André de Halleux, 'La deuxième lettre de Philoxène aux monastères du Beit Gaugal', *Le Muséon* 96 (1983), 5-79, at paragraphs 5-16, pp. 31-9. De Halleux dates this letter to between 486 and 500: *ibid.*, 6-11.

recent heresies.³⁴ The first fragment of this letter tantalisingly shares details with Socrates' *Ecclesiastical history* and Epiphanius' *Panarion*, showing that he may have had access to Greek histories of heresy, presumably in Syriac translation.

Adelphius as an ascetic anti-exemplum

Philoxenus described Adelphius almost incidentally as a 'Messalian' heresiarch, and the sources for this notion can not easily be identified. By contrast, his construction of Adelphius as ascetic anti-exemplum is meticulous, detailed, and vivid, and can be shown to draw on a rich tradition of ascetic instructional literature. In particular, Adelphius' downfall is presented as the reverse of an earlier salutary tale about a successful monk, sounding a warning note about the terrible consequences of arrogance and lack of persistence. The 'historical' Adelphius consequently recedes further from view.

Overall, the letter to Patricius contains nine stories which seem to draw on the *apophthegmata*, an amorphous body of sayings and stories about holy (and not so holy) monks in circulation in various languages in late antiquity.³⁵ Syriac translations of the *apophthegmata* are preserved in a number of manuscripts, the earliest of which date back to the sixth century, and 'Enanisho', who translated various monastic texts including *apophthegmata* into Syriac in the seventh century, made use of existing

³⁴ Philoxenus, *Letter to the monks of the Orient*, ed. and trans. Joseph Lebon, 'Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug', *Le Muséon* 43 (1930), 175-220. Lebon (199) dates this letter to between 520 and 522, after Philoxenus' exile to Philippopolis.

³⁵ Graham Gould, *The desert fathers on monastic community*, Oxford 1993, 1-25; Samuel Rubenson, id., 'The formation and re-formations of the sayings of the desert fathers', *Studia Patristica* 55 (2013), 5-22.

translations of these texts.³⁶ Unfortunately, there is as yet no critical edition of the Syriac sayings, and so we must rely on Bedjan and Budge's compilations from late manuscripts, supplemented by important recent work on earlier manuscripts, to identify possible echoes of the sayings in Philoxenus.³⁷ Philoxenus seems to allude to both the oral and written transmission of sayings in his letter. In paragraph 36, he writes: 'I am going to tell you as an example of the sayings that I have heard (ܐܘܢܝܢܐ) on the subject of certain saints ...', and at paragraphs 19 and 52 he writes that 'I have heard (ܐܘܢܝܢܐ) a saying of the saint ...'; however, at paragraph 53 he introduces a story by saying that the fathers 'have written (ܚܘܬܘܢ) on these subjects', and adduces a particular example by exclaiming: 'See what is written (ܚܘܬܘܢ) on the subject of a saint ...!'. Lavenant suggests that his abbreviated reportage of some sayings reveals him to be recalling them from memory. In the case of the story about Adelphius, it is possible that Philoxenus – or an intermediate source – actually engaged in some creative expansion or amalgamation of different sayings.³⁸

³⁶ Sebastian Brock, 'Saints in Syriac: a little-tapped resource', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.2 (2008), 181-96 at 195-6; Samuel Rubenson, 'The *apophthegmata patrum* in Syriac, Arabic and Ethiopic: *status quaestionis*', *Parole de l'Orient* 36 (2011), 305-13 at 307-9; Peter Toth, 'Syriac versions of the "Historia monachorum in Aegypto": a preliminary investigation on the basis of the first chapter', *Oriens Christianus* 94 (2010), 58-104.

³⁷ Paul Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, Paris 1897, vol. 7; Ernest Wallis Budge, *The book of paradise*, London, 1904, 2 vols; Bo Holmberg, 'The Syriac collection of *apophthegmata patrum* in MS Sin. syr. 46', *Studia Patristica* 55 (2013), 35-57.

³⁸ Lavenant, 'La lettre à Patricius', 785, fn. 93.

The sheer number of allusions to the *apophthegmata* in the letter to Patricius is striking, for Philoxenus rarely alluded to them elsewhere in his surviving works.³⁹ Of course, this pattern can be explained by the hortatory thrust of most of his letters, which aimed to shore up his correspondents' miaphysite faith and condemn their 'heretical' Chalcedonian opponents; only a few, shorter letters provided direct guidance on matters of ascetic practice, where the examples of the *apophthegmata* were germane.⁴⁰ In the letter to Patricius, allusions to the *apophthegmata* cluster at particular points in his argument. In paragraph 19, Philoxenus cited three sayings to teach lessons about practices such as hospitality, solitude, and seclusion in one's cell. In paragraphs 37, 38, and 39, he cited three sayings - attributed to Poemen and Benjamin - to teach the lesson of fleeing important people. In paragraphs 52 and 53 he reported a further two sayings which taught that the monk should consider himself a sinner and act with consummate humility, the latter of which included an exemplary story of an anonymous monk who refused to accept a Satanic vision of Christ:

Here is what is written on the subject of one of the holy men: Satan came and stood before him in the form of an angel (ܩܘܪܒܐܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ) from whom shone forth a great light. Now the saint, as soon as he saw it, shut his eyes. And Satan said to him, 'Open your eyes and see the light, for this I have come to show you the light.' But [the saint] held firm and did not want to open his eyes; and Satan

³⁹ It is unlikely that the ascriptions to Philoxenus of commentaries on *apophthegmata* in Arabic and Ethiopic manuscripts are genuine; see de Halleux, *Philoxène*, 291-3, and Michelson, 'A clavis', 315.

⁴⁰ Philoxenus, *Letter to a lawyer-turned-monk tempted by Satan*, ed. and trans. François Graffin, 'Une lettre inédite de Philoxène de Mabboug à un avocat, devenu moine, tenté par Satan', *L'Orient Syrien* 5 (1960), 183-196, at 192 (paragraph 18) refers to an as yet unidentified saying.

said to him, ‘I am Christ and I have come to appear to you.’ He responded, ‘I do not want to see Christ here, but in his place.’

Lavenant noted that this story has parallels in various collections of *apophthegmata*, including a Syriac saying that recounts the story of an anonymous old man labouring in his cell, striving against demons, to whom Satan appeared ‘in the form of a man’, and declared ‘I am Christ’; the old man immediately shut his eyes and mocked him, and when asked by Satan why he had shut his eyes, answered: ‘I do not desire to see Christ here.’ The devil duly departed and did not appear again.⁴¹ Recent work on earlier manuscripts of the Syriac *apophthegmata* than those used by Bedjan and Budge allows us to establish that this particular story is preserved in almost identical form in Sinai syr. 46, providing concrete evidence for the circulation of the story in Syriac close to Philoxenus’ time.⁴²

Lavenant did not note that Philoxenus’ story also evinces parallels with another saying, only so far attested in later Syriac manuscripts, which provides some of the variant details. In this episode, Satan appeared to an anonymous old man ‘in the form of

⁴¹ Lavenant, ‘La lettre’, 801, n. 19, cites parallels with *apophthegmata* edited in various collections: Paul Bedjan, *Acta martyrum* vol. 7, 716 (*recte* 716-17); *PL* 73, 965; François Nau, ‘Histoires des solitaires Egyptiens’, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 17 (1912) 206 and id., ‘Histoires des solitaires Egyptiens’, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 18 (1913), 144. He does not cite Budge, *Book of paradise* 824-5. The two relevant *apophthegmata* from the Greek systematic collection (15.87 and 15.89) can now be consulted in the up-to-date edition by Jean-Claude Guy, *Les apophthegmes des pères*, Paris 2003, 343-3).

⁴² This saying can be found in Sinai syr. 46, fol. 40v. The *apophthegmata* in Sinai syr. 46 are helpfully tabulated and correlated with those in Bedjan, Budge, and the Greek collections by Holmberg, ‘The Syriac collection of *apophthegmata patrum*’, 41-57.

an angel of light’, and said ‘I am the angel Gabriel, and I have been sent to you.’ The holy man said to him: ‘Surely you have been sent to another, because I am a sinner’; Satan again disappeared, routed.⁴³ Both sayings play on Paul’s famous comment at 2 Cor xi.14, ‘for Satan disguises himself as an angel of light’ (ܠܝܡܘܫܐ ܕܥܠܝܘܬܐ). This was a particularly appropriate phrase to evoke in describing a heresiarch, as its bigger context alluded to the dangers of false apostles disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, and thus yoked together false teachers and leaders with Satanic illusions.

Later in his letter, in the cautionary story of Adelphius’ downfall in paragraph 110, Philoxenus referred back to the earlier salutary story, and in lamenting Adelphius’ ignorance of the apotropaically effective works of the humble monk, he powerfully commended their value to Patricius:

...then Satan found [Adelphius] lacking in the science of practice, and coming he appeared to him and showed himself to Adelphius under the likeness of a light (ܠܝܡܘܫܐ ܕܥܠܝܘܬܐ) and said to him, ‘I am the Spirit, the Paraclete and I have been sent to you by Christ as a reward for your labours in order to render you worthy of seeing the contemplations which you desire, and to give you impassibility and rest from your labours.’ And in return [Satan] asked him for worship (ܠܝܡܘܫܐ ܕܥܠܝܘܬܐ). And Adelphius, like a fool, not well practised in the art of combat, did not know the words of the monk which I reported above, ‘I do not want to see Christ in the here and now, but I pray to see him in his world’, which would have made him, the demon trickster, disappear at once from his presence, as was the case for the saint, Adelphius, then, desiring the glory of extraordinary

⁴³ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum* vii, 714-15. This story does not appear in Sinai syr. 46.

things, worshipped him (ܡܠ ܝܫܘܥ) and accepted his coming. [Satan] then took him into his power and, in the place of divine contemplations, filled him with demonic hallucinations, and he made him stop completely his earlier labours and held him suspended in the hope of impassibility, as if he had no more need of labours, nor of bodily mortifications, nor of the struggle against desires ...

The story of Adelphius looks like a mirror image of the tale which Philoxenus had earlier related about the anonymous monk, suggesting some manipulation of the tradition. However, rather than demonstrating a reverse invention on the part of Philoxenus, another possible source for it can be found among the Syriac versions of Palladius' *Lausiac History*. Draguet's delicate work on this complex material had not been published before Lavenant's preparation of his edition of Philoxenus, explaining why he did not note these parallels.⁴⁴ A cautionary tale about a monk who was tricked by a Satanic vision survives only in a Syriac fragment of the *Lausiac History*, not in any Greek version, and offers a striking parallel to Adelphius:

One night Satan appeared to Eucarpus in the form of an angel of light (ܐܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܠܘܚܐ) and said to him: 'It is I who am the Christ.' Eucarpus, then, when he saw him, thought that the vision was true. He fell down, worshipped him (ܡܠ ܝܫܘܥ), and said to him: 'What does my Lord command his servant?' ... Eucarpus, then, exalted himself still more and became proud in spirit. He was

⁴⁴ René Draguet, *Les formes syriaques de la matière de l'Historie Lausiaque*, Leuven 1978, CSCO 389-90 and 398-9; Scr. Syri 169-70 and 173-4.

convinced and believed in the deceiver's lie, for his reason was taken away from him; and he was harmed in his mind as soon as he worshipped the adversary.⁴⁵

In its structure and scriptural allusions, Palladius' story about Eucarpus tallies with Philoxenus' account of Adelphius being deceived by the disguised Satan. In Palladius, the devil appears 'in the form of an angel of light', in Philoxenus, 'in the likeness of a light', both in keeping with 2 Cor xi.14. Eucarpus and Adelphius both accepted their visions by worshipping Satan, using the same verb for 'worship' (ܐܘܪܫܘܢ) as in the temptation scene in the gospels (Matt. iv.9; Luke iv.7), where the devil promised Christ power and glory if he worshipped him. The end result of their obedience to Satan was a kind of diabolical maddening: Eucarpus was deranged while Adelphius was filled with demonic hallucinations.

There may be a second allusion to one of the Syriac versions of the *Lausiac History* in the very next paragraph of Philoxenus' letter to Patricius, describing the downfall of the fourth-century monk Asuna. Asuna was tricked by Satan into leaving his cell, taken to a mountain, shown a shape of chariot and horses, and told that 'God has sent to seek you to lift you up like Elias on the chariot'. He went to mount the chariot, but the fantasy dissolved and he was thrown down and killed. This tall tale resembles a demonic *merkabah* episode in Syriac Palladius where a monk variously called Elias or Valens was deceived and deranged by a Satanic vision in which demons appeared as angels bearing lamps and on a fiery chariot, accompanied by Satan 'in the

⁴⁵ Fragment HL 73, ed. Draguet, *CSCO* 398, 368-72, with comments on this episode at 364; trans. *ibid.* *CSCO* 399, 239-41.

form of Christ' (ܠܫܘܢܐ ܡܢ ܥܘܨܘܪܐ).⁴⁶ Palladius included both Eucarpus and Valens in the list of monkish anti-exempla about whom he, Evagrius, and Albanus had sought further enlightenment in a visit to the desert fathers Cronius and Paphnutius.⁴⁷ It is suggestive that Philoxenus narrated in quick succession two stories which were also yoked together by Palladius.

Although the history of the composition, translation, and transmission of the Greek and Syriac versions of the *Lausiatic History* are extremely complicated and still debated, we can surmise that some version of this text was available to Philoxenus, since the earliest Syriac manuscripts of it date to the sixth century, and since he also seems to have alluded to a Palladian episode in another letter.⁴⁸ However, it is also possible that Philoxenus and Palladius both made use of stories in more general circulation, whether oral or written, rather than Philoxenus borrowing directly from Palladius. Here, another possible common source for Philoxenus and Palladius was the oeuvre of the fourth-century Egyptian ascetic superstar Evagrius of Pontus, who had

⁴⁶ Palladius, *Lausiatic History* 25A.4-5, version R1, ed. and trans. in Draguet, *CSCO* 398, 213-5 and *CSCO* 399, 145-8. See Alexander Golitzin, “‘The demons suggest an illusion of God’s glory in a form’: controversy over the divine body in some late fourth, early fifth century monastic literature”, *Studia Monastica* 44 (2002), 13-43, esp. 33-37.

⁴⁷ Palladius, *Lausiatic History* 47B3, ed. and trans. in Draguet, *CSCO* 398, 308 and *CSCO* 399, 201.

⁴⁸ Philoxenus, *Letter to a lawyer-turned-monk tempted by Satan*, trans. François Graffin, *L’Orient Syrien* 5 (1960), 183-196, at 196 (paragraph 26) narrates a story about the devil sending a fire on to the mat on which Macarius was praying in his cell which resembles an anecdote about Macarius of Alexandria found in a Syriac version of Palladius’ *Lausiatic History* 18.13, ed. and trans. Draguet *CSCO* 389, 144-5 and *CSCO* 390, 102.

warned monks about demons appearing to them in the form of angels and flattering them into worshipping him and abandoning their ascetic labours. Proud monks who thought themselves worthy of a direct and sensible vision of God were particularly susceptible to this ploy, as he explained in a treatise offering guidance on the ascetic life to Eulogius:

So then, when the heart resounds with the glory of the thoughts and there is no resistance, he will not escape madness in the secret of his mental faculties, for his ruling faculty risks being shaken loose from its senses, either through dreams which are given credence, or through forms that take shape during vigils, or through visions seen in a change of light. For ‘Satan himself takes on the form of an angel of light’ (2 Cor. xi.14) to deceive us: he indicates perhaps that he will grant charisms so that you will fall down and worship him (Matt. iv.9) or he proclaims that he will take you up as another Elias; or he promises to sanctify some of those who having received the faith missed the mark regarding the truth and became mentally deranged.⁴⁹

It is notable that in this warning, Evagrius, like Palladius and Philoxenus, yoked together scriptural allusions to Paul on Satan appearing as an angel of light, to the

⁴⁹ Evagrius, *To Eulogius* 34, PG 79, 1137-40, adapted trans. from Robert Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford 2003, 12-59; his translation of the longer Greek recension of the text is based on a variety of editions and manuscripts. On Syriac versions of this text, see J. Muyldermans, *Evagriana Syriaca: textes inédits du British Museum et de la Vaticane*, Leuven 1952, 46-54.

gospel account of Satan's temptations of Christ, and to Elias' ascent. Scholars have long debated how thorough-going and sustained Philoxenus' adherence to Evagrian theology and ascetic ideology was, but it now seems clear that Philoxenus was the heir to a particular strand of the Syriac reception of Evagrius.⁵⁰ He made considerable use of Evagrian texts and ideas across his works, but they are particularly numerous and prominent in his letter to Patricius, which is part an attempt to provide an outline of what Evagrian ascetic practice should involve.⁵¹ We should also note that Palladius had himself been a disciple of Evagrius, and clearly knew many of his works, even alluding to them in his own, meaning there is considerably inter-penetration and theological and ascetic resonances between their works; if Philoxenus had read a Syriac version of Palladius, he would have imbibed Evagrius through it.⁵²

Adelphius as an epitome of 'Messalianism'

⁵⁰ P. Harb, 'L'attitude de Philoxène de Mabboug à l'égard de la spiritualité 'savante' d'Évagre le Pontique', in François Graffin, ed., *Mémorial G. Khouri-Sarkis*, Leuven 1969, 135-55; John Watt, 'Philoxenus and the Old Syriac version of Evagrius' *Centuries*', *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980), 65-81; Robin Darling Young, 'The influence of Evagrius of Pontus', in Robin Darling Young and Monica Blanchard, eds, *To train his soul in books: Syriac asceticism in early Christianity*, Washington 2011, 157-76; Michelson, *Practical Christology*, 82-112.

⁵¹ Michelson, *Practical Christology*, 109-11.

⁵² René Draguet, 'L'Histoire Lausiaque: une oeuvre écrite dans l'esprit d'Évagre', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 41 (1946), 321-64 and (1947), 5-49; Jeremy Driscoll, *Steps to spiritual perfection: studies on spiritual progress in Evagrius Ponticus*, Mahwah 2005, 94-122.

Although it is not possible to pin down a single source for Philoxenus' story about Adelphius, nor to establish if the apparent blending of different sources was his own or belonged to an intermediate, lost text, there is a clear 'family resemblance' between anecdotes from Philoxenus, the *apophthegmata*, Palladius and Evagrius. These tales often seem to have shifted slightly in the telling to suit particular audiences and polemical needs, and Philoxenus' story likewise displays some significant alterations and emphases which both further demonized the Messalians, and tackled theological ideas which were pressing in his own day.

One of the striking features of Philoxenus' story about Adelphius is that Satan presented himself to the hapless monk as a vision of the 'Holy Spirit and Paraclete', not as a vision of Christ; this differs from the various traditions discussed above about the devil coming in divine disguise to tempt monks, where he consistently appeared as an angel or as Christ. It seems likely that Philoxenus' variation on this trope was not incidental, but reflected long-standing anxieties about the special relationship claimed by Messalians with the Holy Spirit. This was an important component of the Messalian beliefs which Adelphius was apparently tricked into revealing at the synod of Antioch, reported by Theodoret in a way that suggests he was drawing on an existing list.⁵³ Adelphius apparently claimed that every man was born with an indwelling demon against which baptism had no efficacy and which could only be expelled by intensive prayer. After this exorcism, and in the same way that the demon had exited, the Holy Spirit came perceptibly (αἰσθητῶς) and visibly (ὀρατῶς), and this in turn freed the body from the impulse of the passions and the soul from its inclinations to the worse. Such a fortunate recipient of the Holy Spirit also received the gift of foresight, and was able to

⁵³ Stewart, *Working the earth*, 25-9, 32-4, 52-64.

behold the Trinity.⁵⁴ In his *Compendium*, Theodoret provided a more precise account of this last capacity: ‘to see the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit with bodily eyes’ (τοῖς τοῦ σώματος ὀφθαλμοῖς). This emphasized that the Messalian claimed to be able to see all the divine persons in physical and bodily, not intellectual or metaphorical, terms.

Philoxenus’ description of Adelphius is thus in some respects a biographically inflected epitome of ‘Messalian’ teaching. It also reflects some of his broader theological preoccupations. One context against which to view it is the anthropomorphite controversy of the late fourth century, revolving around questions of the visibility of the persons of God.⁵⁵ The later accusation of iconoclasm made against Philoxenus may have its roots in his apparent hostility to anthropomorphic images of Christ and the angels.⁵⁶ Later in the letter to Patricius, Philoxenus clearly explained that humans could no longer expect to receive direct visions of God, emphasizing the disjuncture between the previous dispensation of the Old Testament, in which God spoke with and ‘revealed himself’ (καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἀπέκλυσε) to man, and the present, when he no longer spoke to anyone in ‘bodily’ form (σώματι).⁵⁷ The Adelphius anecdote may also reflect something of Philoxenus’ own pneumatology. He rejected the possibility of receiving perceptible visitations of the Holy Spirit, developing the notion that the Holy

⁵⁴ Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical history* 4.11, in Pierre Canivet, *SC* 530, 226, and id., *Compendium* 4.11, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, cxcvi-cxcviii.

⁵⁵ Golitzin, “The demons suggest an illusion of God’s glory in a form”.

⁵⁶ Glen Peers, *Subtle bodies: representing angels in Byzantium*, Berkeley 2001, 71-4.

⁵⁷ Philoxenus, *Letter to Patricius*, 121-2, in Lavenant, ‘La lettre’, 862-5.

Spirit lived in the souls of the faithful like a light in the pupil of a human eye and was thus integral to the process of seeing rather than a mere external object of sight.⁵⁸

As well as ridiculing the very idea that a monk might see the Holy Spirit with his bodily eyes, Philoxenus' story about Adelphius provided a vivid aetiology for other 'Messalian' behaviours. The claim of the Messalians to have received the Holy Spirit was embedded in their preferred term for themselves as 'spiritual ones' (πνευματικοί).⁵⁹ In anti-Messalian texts of the fifth century onwards, one of the group's other names - 'possessed ones' (ἐνθουσιασται) - was explained as indicating their possession not by the Holy Spirit, but by a demon: Theodoret remarked: 'They are called 'possessed ones', receiving the energy of some demon and taking this to be the coming of the Holy Spirit.'⁶⁰ He suggested that a demon had stirred the Messalians to a frenzy: 'Having been deceived by the demon which makes them frenzied, they say they see revelations, and they attempt to foretell the things to come: they are convicted as frauds by the facts.'⁶¹ Timothy of Constantinople expanded on this: 'They say that after what is called by them *apatheia*, they give themselves over to much sleep, and the dreams which occur by the inspiration of the evil demon, energizing them they herald as prophecies;

⁵⁸ Roberta Chesnut, *Three monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug*, London 1976, 94-5; Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac fathers on prayer and the spiritual life*, Michigan 1987, 106-127 provides a translation of a fragmentary text of Philoxenus which deals with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. See Michelson, 'A clavis', 307-8.

⁵⁹ Theodoret, *Compendium* 4.11, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, cxcviii.

⁶⁰ Theodoret *Ecclesiastical history* 4.11, in Canivet, *SC* 530, 222.

⁶¹ Theodoret, *Compendium* 4.11, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, cxcviii.

and they teach that these things are to be believed as inspired by the Holy Spirit. These possessions they regard and name as holy; they are deceiving and deceived.’⁶²

While the Messalians were said to have believed themselves to be full of the Holy Spirit, those writing against them argued that they were in fact possessed, energized, and maddened by a demon. The Messalians’ claims for special experience and powers were thus reversed by their opponents, who provided another explanation for these phenomena: any powers or sensible experiences they had, or claimed to have, were in fact provided by demons, including their claims, on achieving a state of *apatheia*, to prophesy. Indeed, even the prophetic revelations which they believed they had received were illusory. The idea of demonic maddening, as old as tragedy but still current in the language of demonic seizure, was extended to their apparently fanciful demon-fighting: ‘And they undertake many deeds of a fevered brain. For suddenly they leap up and act hot-headedly, jumping over demons, and act as if their fingers were arrows, contending that they shoot the demons.’⁶³ The suggestion that the Messalians’ demon-fighting was in fact a fantastical illusion propelled by a very real demonic madness was both damning and neatly reflexive: the Messalians who claimed to have experienced the departure of their indwelling demons (in which their opponents did not believe) actually proved, in an ironic twist, that they had in fact been possessed by other demons (in which their opponents did believe).

⁶² Timothy of Constantinople, *On the reception* 14 in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, ccvxi.

The connection between dreaming, deceit and demons is of course well-established. See Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in late antiquity: studies in the imagination of a culture*, Princeton 1994, 63-5.

⁶³ Theodoret, *Compendium* 4.11, in Kmosko, *Liber graduum*, ccxxvi.

To accuse one's opponents of being inspired by Satan and his demons was a rhetorical ploy common to the earliest heresiological literature, as well as to anti-pagan and anti-Jewish works.⁶⁴ For example, Ephrem structured the whole of the first of his *Hymns against heresies* around the notion that 'the evil one' and 'the envious one' – that is, Satan – was responsible for the evils of the heresiarchs Bardaisan, Marcion and Mani.⁶⁵ In the opening preamble to his catalogue of heresies, Marutha of Maipherqat wrote that Satan 'spewed out factions and divisions and made contentions and quarrels and brewed many evil things through the multitude of heresies which he brought about over the church.'⁶⁶ Philoxenus frequently alluded to this idea of diabolically inspired heresy in works pugnaciously attacking Chalcedonian Christology and exhorting followers, mostly monks, to stand firm in their miaphysite faith. A few representative examples will give a flavour of his tone. In a series of anathemas, he characterized his opponent as 'filled with the malice of the devil', 'an embodied devil', and one in whom 'the evil spirit dwells';⁶⁷ in the opening of another letter, he cast heretics as 'servants of

⁶⁴ Elaine Pagels, *Origin of Satan*, ch 6 'The enemy within: demonizing the heretics'; Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe, 'Diabolical motivations: the devil in ecclesiastical histories from Eusebius to Evagrius', in Geoffrey Greatrex and Hugh Elton, eds, *Shifting genres in late antiquity*, Ashgate 2015, 119-31.

⁶⁵ Ephrem, *Hymns against heresies* 1, ed. Edmund Beck, *CSCO* 169 / *Scr. Syri* 76, 1-5, trans. *CSCO* 170 / *Scr. Syri* 77, 1-6. See Phil Botha, 'The textual strategy of Ephrem the Syrian's *Contra Haereses I*', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 15 (2004), 57-75.

⁶⁶ Marutha of Maipherqat, *On the heresies*, ed. Vööbus, *CSCO* 439 / *Scr. Syri* 191, 22-27 at 22, trans. *CSCO* 440 / *Scr. Syri* 192, 17-24 at 17.

⁶⁷ Philoxenus, *First letter to monks of Beth Gogal*, ed. Arthur Vaschalde, *Three letters of Philoxenus, bishop of Mabbogh (485-519)*, Rome 1902, 146-62 at 155-7, trans. 105-17 at 112-14.

Satan' and 'temples of demons'.⁶⁸ He compared heretics 'in whom Satan works and who are the vessels of his ministry' to the serpent in Eden as a justification for anathematization of heretics, even after their death,⁶⁹ and described Arius as an implicitly Satanic 'serpent'.⁷⁰ He argued that the sacraments and altars of the 'Nestorians' were not sanctified by the Holy Spirit, but polluted by the spirit of Satan.⁷¹

The Satanic dimension of Philoxenus' story about Adelphius thus followed broader rhetorical strategies of 'demonization'. It was also very appropriate for the leader of a group whose members thought they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Such 'enthusiastic' Christians were particularly vulnerable to the reversal of their claim to divine inspiration, and were regularly accused of being deceived and inspired or possessed by a demon or the devil, as seen in the account by Apollinarius of Hierapolis, preserved in Eusebius, of the origins of the so-called 'Phrygian heresy' (otherwise labelled as 'Montanism').⁷² In this, Montanus, a recent convert to Christianity, gave 'the adversary' (the devil) an opportunity against him in his ambitions for leadership, and began to rave ecstatically and prophesy in tongues. Those who heard, responded in two ways. Some rebuked him 'as one that was possessed, and under the control of a demon and led by a deceitful spirit' and forbade him from talking. Others imagined themselves

⁶⁸ Philoxenus, *Letter to the monks of Senun*, ed. de Halleux, *CSCO* 231 / *Scr. Syri* 98, 1-96 at 3, trans.

CSCO 232 / *Scr. Syri* 99, 1-80 at 2. See Michelson, *Practical Christology*, 175-6.

⁶⁹ Philoxenus, *Letter to Maron of Anazarbus*, ed. J. Lebon, 'Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug', *Le Muséon* 43 (1930), 17-84 at 51-2, trans. 75.

⁷⁰ Philoxenus, *Letter to Abu Ya'fur*, ed. and trans. Harb, 189.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁷² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history* 5.16.1-22, ed. Eduard Schwarz, *Die Kirchengeschichte*, *GCS* Leipzig 1903, vol. 2.1, 458-68.

‘possessed of the Holy Spirit and of a prophetic gift’ and followed Montanus. There follows a description of the Devil stirring up two women (Priscilla and Maximilla) and filling them with a false spirit so that they prophesied and reviled the universal church. As we have seen, it was a common accusation that the Messalians were inspired by Satan, but thought themselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Such a notion was epitomized by Philoxenus’ story about the ‘founder’ and ‘leader’ of Messalianism himself giving into a Satanic vision of the Holy Spirit which filled him with demonic hallucinations and put him under Satan’s power. In casting Adelphius as the demonically deluded founder of Messalianism, Philoxenus was deploying a rhetorical strategy which he practised regularly against other doctrinal opponents, especially dyophysites.

In his story about Adelphius, Philoxenus interwove tales from the Egyptian monastic milieu with demonic insinuations typical of heresiological literature to provide a cautionary tale about the founder of ‘Messalianism’. In his account, Adelphius was a proud and vain monk who naively accepted a diabolical embassy as a sensible vision of the Holy Spirit, and was thus conquered by Satan and received demonic hallucinations in return, much as his followers’ claims to intimate relations with the Holy Spirit and special powers thereby acquired were dismissed as demonically inspired madness. Philoxenus clearly had some knowledge and understanding of stories about the Messalians, such that he could identify Adelphius as its heresiarch, and attribute to Adelphius a personal narrative of ascetic failure which epitomized the hostile accounts of his group’s beliefs and practices in circulation. He also knew something about the afterlife of the group. If Adelphius had spent time in Edessa and had garnered large

numbers of monastic supporters there before their expulsion and banishment to Iconium, then Philoxenus, who had also spent considerable time in the city, might have had access to lingering local memories about them. It is also possible Philoxenus chose to write about Adelphius and Asuna as individuals with a particularly piquant local relevance for his correspondent, Patricius: both were said to have been monks in Edessa, where Patricius was currently pursuing his own ascetic ambitions. Philoxenus' vivid anecdote did not mark the end of the invention of heresiarchs for the Messalians. In the later, shorter Syriac recension of the letter to Patricius, the name 'Adelphius' has been substituted by the name ܡܠܩܝܬܘܫ; this enters the Greek translation of the shorter recension as *Μαλπάτ*.⁷³ Fitschen suggests that the substitution may be a confused version of 'Lampetius', mentioned above as a more recently troublesome presbyter condemned according to Severus for 'Adelphianism' at a church council at Comana in the mid-fifth century.⁷⁴ Thus the genealogy of a demonized heresy continued to accumulate and shift, re-naming itself, and re-writing its foundation story as it went.

⁷³ The Syriac text of the shorter recension has not yet been edited, but can be found in two manuscripts dated between the eighth and tenth centuries. See Vat. syr. 125, fol. 156v-158r; the name ܡܠܩܝܬܘܫ is found on fol. 156v, 24. See also Sinai syr. 24, fol. 147v- 164v. See Kessel, 'Sinai syr. 24', and Sebastian Brock, 'Syriac into Greek at Mar Saba: the translation of St. Isaac the Syrian', in Joseph Patrich, ed., *The Sabaitic heritage in the Orthodox church from the fifth century to the present*, Leuven 2001, 201-8. For the Greek translation, see Angelo Mai, *Nova Patrum Bibliotheca* 8, Rome 1871, 157- 87; the name *Μαλπάτ* is on 184.

⁷⁴ Fitschen, *Antimessalianismus* 26, 92 and 280.

