Source Analysis 1: Analysis Text A

Shalin Lathigra

101036399

I believe Analysis Text A to be the written notes for, or transcription of, an Ancient Roman Philosopher's speech about the nature of the Heavens written at the start of the fall of the Roman Republic. I arrived at this conclusion incrementally, collection more information with repeated analyses. First I established a likely time period based on connections made and language used within the piece and generated several possibilities based on the time period and structure of the piece, then I gradually eliminated scenarios using the structure of Analysis Text A and my existing knowledge.

My preferred method to narrow down a likely time period for this piece was to establish as tight an upper and lower bound as possible. Starting with the upper bound, the most precise date information I could find was in repeated references to earlier works, such as the philosophical god "the Good" described in Plato's Res Publica and the "Fifth Substance" originating in Plato's Timaeus, works written in 380 and 360 BCE respectively. With the upper bound set at around 360 BCE, the next task was to establish a likely lower bound without the crutch of other references to rely upon, which led me to analyze the language used. In the opening paragraph, the author writes,

*"... I am a Follower of King Helios. And of this fact I possess within myself alone, proofs more certain than I can give. But this at least I am permitted to say without sacrilege..."*

This line tells us two things, first that this likely takes before Rome's conversion to Christianity was finalized by the Edict of Thessalonica around 380 CE as after the Edict came worship of the traditional Roman gods was outlawed. After the edict, this text would have been easily recognizable as sacrilege, negates the phrase, "*...without sacrilege…*" In addition, the author dedicates themselves to “King Helios,” however in ancient Rome, especially during the time of the Republic, dedicating oneself to a specific deity was a very uncommon practice, even priests of certain gods were still expected to take part in the worship of the entire pantheon. During the descent of the Roman Republic, however, Christianity gained popularity in part due to the transition from having multiple figures in power to having a single Emperor. Because of these points, I believe this text was originally written early during the fall of the Roman Empire, between 360 BCE and the start of the Common Era (CE)

After establishing a fitting era, I proceeded to analyze what this writing would have been originally­­ based on its structure and language used. At a high level, the text begins by expressing the importance of, and the writer’s personal connection to the idea they are arguing, before going on to “prove” their argument by using likely commonly accepted information and referring to previously established works.

*“This divine and wholly beautiful universe, from the highest vault of heaven to the lowest limit of the earth, is held together by the continuous providence of the god, has existed from eternity ungenerated, is imperishable for all time to come, and is guarded immediately by nothing else than the Fifth Substance* *whose culmination is the beams of the sun;”*

In one passage, the writer confirms information concerning the eternal nature of the universe, and the existence of “*the Fifth Substance”,* which I believe to be referring to the Fifth Substance described in Plato’s Timaeus based on the existing references to Plato’s “Good” which lends to their words the weight of past ideas. At the same time, they begin linking these ideas to Helios by connecting the Fifth Substance to the sun. The writer then proceeds to create connections between Helios and “the Good,” identifying Helios as *“the offspring of the Good which the Good begat in his own likeness,”* and equating “the Good’s" relation to reason with the relationship between the sun, Helios, and the visible world. In addition, the writer states that, *“his light has the same relation to the visible world as truth has to the intelligible world”*, which extends the idea of Helios being the greatest god even further by equating his light to truth. After slowly advancing to further extremes, the writer drives home the idea that Helios is to the intellectual gods what “the Good” is to the intelligible gods, by describing him as the cause for *“…beauty, existence, perfection, and oneness, connecting these and illuminating them with a power that works for good…”* to cement Helios’s position as the head of the gods, stating that “the Good” appointed Helios as the ruler for the intellectual gods so that the one that most closely resembles “the Good” would guide the intellectual gods. The structure of, and language used within this text is deliberately designed to state and prove the writer’s stance as a follower of Helios, and to connect their personal beliefs with traditionally accepted information and Plato’s works as a method to grant legitimacy by association. From this, we can say that, despite how it may appear due to the biased lens modern society views ancient societies, religion in ancient Rome was not static, individuals may have had wildly differing points of view regarding the order of the pantheon, and religion was very much a topic of some debate.

The final most difficult question to answer was simply, “Why does this text exist?” My modus operandi up until this point was to analyze the text, look for any possible hints in the structure, language, or at the works referenced to discern likely answers to the various questions I had about this text, however for this final task that method was insufficient. Without that resource, and with no information as to the conditions in which it was found, I was forced to rely upon speculation to determine why this text would have been made. Based on the structure of Roman Society, and the regular use of active language to indicate speaking, I believe this text was written by a philosopher to practice a speech they would give at a public forum. Ancient Rome did not have newspapers or other more modern methods for addressing the masses, and so public address was the primary method for disseminating information. Speaking in public, especially when one’s ability as an orator is critical to successfully convince others of an idea, can be an uncomfortable situation for even the most practiced orators. When taking into account the nature of this particular text, attempting to spread religious alterations to an existing pantheon in a strictly traditional society as ancient Rome would have compounded these issues, and encouraged preparation when discussing religious matters in a public forum.

In conclusion, I believe Analysis Text A to be the personal copy of a Roman Philosophers speech on the relation between Helios and “the Good”, written between 360 BCE and the Common Era. This text shows us that despite modern bias, religion in the Roman world was not wholly uniform, and differences could appear even between individuals. These differences were a topic of debate during the time of the Roman Republic, and people could attempt to lend legitimacy to their claims by integrating their ideas into an existing structure, not unlike how the Aeneid was inserted into the Trojan Cycle to lend Rome the legitimacy of Greek Culture.