Hadrian, Eleusis, and the beginning of Christian apologetics

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According to the biographer of the *Historia Augusta* (*Hadr*. 22, 10) Hadrian's attitude on religious matters was marked by a fundamental duality: full of scruples in the care of Roman sacred duties, he was at the same time contemptuous of foreign cults. If one moves beyond Rome, Hadrian's religious policy did not fail to revive and accentuate some of the archaic traditions (especially the ideology linked to the figures of Romulus and Numa), as Augustus, whom Hadrian certainly looked at, had already done; however, the attitude towards foreign cults was different so there are, in my opinion, good reasons to question the second part of the biographer's statement.

There is no doubt that one of the most important religious events in which the Emperor himself had a prominent place was his initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries. A discussion of Eleusis, however, entails entering more generally into the relationship Hadrian maintained with Greece – of which the Villa at Tibur is a paradigm – and considering different forms of religion apart from the traditional ones which influenced Hadrian's religious policy. This policy was a consequence, as I try to show here, of the way the Emperor built his relationship with Christianity and, crucially, with Judaism.

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2 For a framework of Hadrian's religious policy see Beaufjeu 1955, 111–278. For Eleusis, and the panhellenic policy see Galimberti 2007, 126–139.

3 See Calandra in this volume and Calandra 1996, 179–277, with previous bibliography.
1. Hadrian and Eleusis

Hadrian cultivated his passion for Greek παιδεία from an early age to such a degree that he earned the name of Graeculus\(^4\). He visited Greece in his great journeys as Emperor and stayed in Athens three times (between 121/2 and 125, in 128/9 and finally in 131/2).

The value of the Eleusinian worship in Hadrian’s biography appears first in his attendance to it in all three visits to Athens: he participated in the ritual mystery as a mystes and later as an epoptes; he stated that the month of Boedromion, during which the Great Mysteries were celebrated, would be the first of the Athenian calendar, and he also rebuilt a bridge over the river Cefisus (previously destroyed by a flood) to connect Eleusis to Athens more quickly. He assigned names referring to Eleusis to the δολιο of Antinoopolis; for his Eleusinian initiation he chose the Sebasteios tribe – namely, the tribe that remembered Augustus; finally, according to Aurelius Victor\(^5\), Hadrian practiced the mysteries Atheniensium modo also in Rome. In fact, we have an issue from the year 121 with the symbolic representation of Άιών, which is certain to be placed in connection with the Natalis Urbis of that year which was solemnly celebrated by Hadrian, and the inauguration of the Temple of Venus and Rome, through which the cult of Roma Aeterna was promoted. It cannot be excluded that the appearance of Άιών also contains an allusion to the mysteries, since the latter indeed promised a form of immortality, aeternitas.

Eleusis and the mysteries also have a central role in Hadrian’s Panhellenion. An Athenian inscription that may be dated between 131/2 and 138 refers to the admission of the Lydian city of Thyatira in the Panhellenion according to Hadrian’s will. Here, Athens is identified not only as the seat of the new assembly, but also as “a benefactor releasing all the fruit of the Mysteries”\(^6\).

In Hadrian’s time two arches stood at Eleusis, copies of the arch in Athens’ Panhellenion which flanks the main entrance of the sanctuary; both copies were surmounted by a single dedication (τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορι οἱ Πανέλληνες)\(^7\): since Hadrian is placed on the same level as the goddesses (Demeter and Kore/Persephone) and the dedicators are the Πανέλληνες it is significant

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\(^5\) 14, 4: initia Cereris Liberaeque, quae Eleusina dicitur, Atheniensium modo Roma percoleret.


\(^7\) IG II\(^2\) 2958. CLINTON 1989a, 56–68, oppose the hypothesis of an allocation of entries to Antoninus and Marcus. The erection of the arches would have been at the end of Hadrians’ reign.
that the arches of Eleusis are dedicated to Hadrian as “programmatically” panhellenic through his participation in the Eleusinian ritual. The mystery cult was most likely enacted by Hadrian as a religious glue for his panhellenic plan: this appears to be confirmed by the fact that post mortem Hadrian is recalled at Eleusis as Ἄδριανος Ἐλευσινος. Eleusis therefore leads to Athens (and vice versa) and the key to this relationship is the Panhellenion that Hadrian wanted in 131/2.

2. Hadrian, the Jews, and the Christians

We have now to examine Hadrian’s attitude towards the Jews, comparing it with his attitude towards Christians. It should be said from the outset that we are considering an era in which the Jewish and the Christian questions are still closely related, not so much in terms of identifying who belonged to one or the other faith, but in terms of mutual interference.

The Romans appear to have had clear ideas for some time regarding the first aspect, as is shown by certain circumstances relating to the Jews and Christians under the Flavi and then under Trajan: Vespasian’s search for descendants of the family of David after the Jewish war, resumed under Trajan; the establishment of the fiscus Iudaicus, with its subsequent escalation by Domitian and its immediate abolition by Nerva in 9810; and Pliny’s rescript to Trajan11. However, in the first decades of the Second century the mutual interference between Judaism and Christianity seems to have become a mutual rivalry that depended on Hadrian’s desired order. That is, since his initiation at Eleusis, Hadrian seems to have opened new perspectives for the various cults of the empire, including Christianity as we will show, that did not hesitate to enter into this new framework with the first Christian apologists (Aristides and Quadratus) in order to emphasise aspects of identity to distinguish themselves from other religions, especially Judaism.

In 130, during his visit to Egypt, Hadrian travelled through Judea where the situation appears to have been of no concern. Indeed, until then, relations between the Jews and Hadrian seem to have been good: in 117 the Emperor had exiled from Palestine Marcius Turbo (Hadr. 5, 8), one of the protagonists of the bloody repression against the Jews of the Diaspora, which ended shortly before

8 IG II2 3386, on a base of a statue dating between 180 and 182 A.D.
10 Goodman 1989, 40–44.
the start of Hadrian’s reign. A rabbinic text (Bereshit Rabbah 64, 8) witnesses a personal friendship between Hadrian and Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah, to whom Hadrian promised to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Since Tertullian (Apol. 5, 7) writes that Hadrian was omnium curiositatum explorator, he was probably not lacking in interest for the Jews and Moses’ Law.

However, as is known, the Jews rebelled under the leadership of Simon Bar Kochba in the spring of 132, following either the ban on circumcision (Hadr. 14, 2) or the decision to build Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of Jerusalem, or the plan to erect a temple to Jupiter (Dio 69, 12, 1). Despite the fact that scholars disagree on the causes that triggered the revolt of 132–135, some evidence suggests that the rebellion had been carefully prepared. According to Dio (69, 13) the legions encountered great difficulties, as the rebels’ strategic positions in the region were equipped with tunnels and walls – that is, work that had taken time to carry out – and the rebels had weapons which they had built for the Romans and which that the Romans had refused because they were adulterated. The investigation into the military operations presents a clear fact: the revolt was particularly violent and, given the extension of the war, Hadrian had to commit his best generals with an extraordinary mobilisation of legions. According to Dio, together with the Jews there were also other peoples whose names are unknown (Dio 69, 13, 2): perhaps some of the Arabs recently subjected by Trajan, who saw in the revolt of Simon the chance that would free themselves as well from the yoke of the Roman Empire, were among them. Finally, the radicalism of the rebels was a serious obstacle: Simon gave a strong messianic mark to his action by proclaiming himself “Prince of Israel”, with the blessing of Rabbi Akiba, and then issuing coins bearing the legend “Freedom of Israel” and his assumed name – his previous name, Bar Kosiba, was changed to Bar Kochba or “Son of the star” which made explicit reference to the prophecy of Num 24, 17. Despite the bloody resistance, the uprising was finally quelled: Jerusalem was rebuilt as a Roman colony and took the name Aelia Capitolina, acquiring the appearance of a Greek city forbidden to the Jews, and the province of Judea became the province of Syria-Palestine.

If we turn now from the political to the religious and cultural aspects, there are a number of significant outcomes which can be explained, I believe, in connection with the collapse of the war in 135. The final dissolution of the

12 For an analysis of the sources relating to the relationship between Hadrian and Rabbinic Judaism, see Bazzana in this volume.
13 Status questionis in Isaac-Oppenheimer 1998, 220–256, and above all see Bazzana in this volume. For Hadr. 14, 2 see Fündling 2006, 675–679.
14 Eck 1999, 77–89. For a recent development on the state of studies on the revolt of 132 and a critical evaluation of them, see Isaac-Oppenheimer 1998, 220–256.
Jewish state marks, in fact, the cessation of Jewish messianic hopes, which had risen again after the end of the revolt of 66–73, and of various apocalyptic tendencies such as those found in texts like 4 Ezra, The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Fourth book of the Sibylline Oracles. Judaism at this point narrowed its horizons to concentrate on rabbinical speculation led by the Pharisees in connection with the Jewish disaster, and thus opened up new chances for Christianity.

Hadrian may have had an initial “philosophical” notion about Christians during his meeting with Epictetus in Nicopolis in 112. For instance, in the Diatribai (4, 7, 6) we learn that Epictetus discussed the Γαλιλαΐων and their concept of martyrdom15.

In 115 Hadrian was in Antioch and the city was shaken by a violent earthquake16: he remained in the Syrian city during the following two years (since he had been entrusted with the legation of Syria during Trajan’s Parthian war)17, that is, during the years in which the martyrdom of Ignatius18, head of the Antioch church, took place in Rome.

This is evidence of the divergence between Judaism and Christianity. Ignatius, who is the first author to use the term Χριστιανός19 in an Epistula recommending unity and obedience to the Bishop addressed to the community of Philadelphia (Phil. 8) and sent while he was being taken to Rome, felt the need to emphasise how in Antioch he had acted “as a man who seeks to achieve the perfect union” because “where division is, where anger, there God dwells

15 Jossa 2000, 99–102, has no doubts on the equivalence between Γαλιλαίων and Christians (but see Meyer 1962, 530 note 1); contra Hengel 1996, 92–93. Epictetus, while recognising the courage of Christians, disapproves of it in terms of rational conduct. It is worth noting that in a letter found in the desert of Judah, Bar Kochba speaks of “Galileans” (Benoit-Milik-De Vaux 1961, 159–160) as potential enemies of the insurgents and that Justin 1Apol. 31, 6 speaks of the torments that Bar Kochba inflicted on Christians because they had not joined the revolt: καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ νῦν γεγεννημένῳ Ἰουδαϊκῷ πολέμῳ Βαρκοχβᾶς ὁ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ὑποστάσεως ἀρχηγός Ἀρχισπαρθενοῦς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ ἠρνοῦτο τὸν Ἰσραήλ καὶ βλασφημοῦν, ἐκέλευεν ἀπάγαγεῖν.

16 Malalas 11, 15: ‘Ο δὲ αὐτὸς Ἀδριανὸς βασιλεὺς πρὸ τοῦ βασιλεύσαι ἤν μετὰ Τραϊανοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως, ὡς γαμβρός αὐτοῦ, ὅτε ἔπαθεν ἡ αὐτὴ Ἁντίοχον πόλις ἢ μεγάλη ὑπὸ τῆς θεομηνίας, τότε συγκλητικὸς ὑπάρχον, ἤσον δὲ καὶ πολλοὶ συγκλητικοὶ ἤπε τοῖς ὁμόχως ὀντες ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ πόλει Ἀντιοχείᾳ ὀικίσκοις καὶ ἐκελέουσθησαν παρ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκτίσαν ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ οἰκίσκοις πολλοῖς καὶ λυτρά.

17 FGrHist 257 F36 IX; Amm. 22, 12, 8; Hadr. 4, 6. See Michelotto 1979, 324–338.

18 Malalas 11, 10: ἐμαρτύρησε δὲ ἐπὶ αὐτοῦ τότε ὁ ἄγιος Ἰγνάτιος ὁ ἑπίσκοπος τῆς πόλεως Ἰντιοχείας.

19 In Magn. 10, 1 and 3; Rom. 3, 3; Phil. 6, 1. See Corwin 1960, 31–51; Meeks-Wilken 1978, 13–24; Browne-Meier 1987, 49 e 93–105. Not forgetting, of course, the testimony of Acts 11, 26, that “at Antioch for the first time the disciples were called Christians”.
not” and (ibid. 10) how, thanks to his work, “the Church of Antioch in Syria has recovered the peace” – perhaps an allusion to the existence of a conflict with Judaism. Thus, turning to the Romans (Rom. 11), Ignatius recommends they “elect a pious messenger who goes to Syria to congratulate on the peace the community which has recovered its size and reconstituted its body”: in fact, Antioch was the seat of a major Jewish community (in both numerical strength and importance), and Ignatius does not fail to remind the Romans, who were more attentive to matters of public policy than to those of a religious order, that the Christians did not intend to stir up disorder and that his action was a work of pacification.

3. Hadrian and the beginning of Christian apologetics

According to the communis opinio both Aristides’ and Quadratus’ Apologies were addressed to the Emperor during Hadrian’s visit to Athens in 124/5. These two texts mark the birth of Christian apologetics. While we have nothing of Quadratus except a weak track in Eusebius, we possess a Greek and a Syrian version of Aristides’ text. Aristides argues in a large section of his writing (chapters 2–13) against the pagan religion and its false declaration, proclaiming the diversity of Christianity compared with Judaism and paganism (2, 2 [Greek]): “It is clear, King, that there are three types of people in this world, among these are the worshippers of those among you who are called gods, the

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20 For a different hypothesis, see below.
21 Jer. Chron. 199 Helm: Hadrianus sacris Eleusinae initiatus multa Atheninesibus dona largitut. Quadratus discipulus apostolorum et Aristides Atheniensis noster philosophus libros pro christiana religione Hadriano dedere compositos; Eus. HE 4, 3, 1: Τραίναυν δὲ εἵρ’ ὄλοις ἔπει δικαίος οὖν τὴν ἁρμὴν μην ἔφεσιν ἐκκυρίευε καὶ κακὶς ἔδεισεν κρατήσαντος. Ἀδιανὸς Ἀδριανὸς διακρέαται τὴν ἠγερμονίαν. τότε Ἐδώτας λόγον προσφυγήσας ἀναδίδοσαν, ἀπόλογον συντάξας ὑπὲρ τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς θεοσβείας, ὅτι δὴ τίνες πονηροὶ ἀνδρὲς τοὺς ἡμετέρους ένοχειάν ἐπειρῶν· εἰς ἐτί δὲ φέρεται παρὰ πλείστοι τῶν ἀδελφῶν, ἀπὰ καὶ πάρ ἡμῖν τὸ σύγχρημα. εἰς οὐ κατιδέαν ἔστιν λαμπρὰ τεκμῆρια τῆς τῇ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς διανοίας καὶ τῆς ἀποστολικῆς ὀρθοτομίας. Although there are those who think they should be addressed to his successor (see Birley 1997, 183), all the witnesses speak of Hadrian. See also Jer. De vir. ill. 20, Ep. 70, 4; G. Syncell. 658; Oros. 7, 13. Status quaestionis in Pouderon-Pierre-Outtier-Guiorgadzé 2003, 32–37.

22 To support the orthodoxy of Quadratus, Eusebius quotes these words of the apologist (HE 4, 3, 2): τοῦ δὲ σοφίτας ἡμῶν τὰ ἔργα ἐν παρη ἀληθὴ γὰρ ἦν, οἱ θεραπευόμενες, οἱ ἀναστάντες ὥς νεκρῶν, οἱ οὕς ἔφθασαν μόνον θεραπευόμενα καὶ ἐπιδημούντος μόνον τού σοφίτας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπαλαγέντος ἦσαν ἐπὶ χρόνων ἰκανον, ὡστε καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἡμετέρους χρόνους τίνες αὐτῶν ἀφίκοντο.

23 There are some other fragments in Armenian and Georgian translations, now collected by Pouderon-Pierre-Outtier-Guiorgadzé 2003.
Jews and Christians. Aristides feels the need to distinguish the Christian identity in the face of other religions and, therefore, in the second part of his writing dwells on the nature and content of Christianity, highlighting the originality and superiority of his faith. Though not judging the firmness and validity of any argument of the Apology, we must recognise that we are dealing with a good quality level of information, which shows that Christianity fits with dignity into the religious debate of Aristides’ time. In the manner of a philosopher – as he is designated by sources – Aristides is attempting to present Christianity as a doctrine based on scripture and rich in moral values, the more so when we consider that the writing was addressed to the Emperor.

The two Apologies had an impact within Christianity: Eusebius (HE 4, 3, 3) and Jerome (De vir. ill. 20) state that the Apologies were still read during their time, and fourth century papyrus fragments belonging to Aristides’ Apology confirm this.

In order to illustrate Hadrian’s attitude toward Christianity, we must connect the chronology of the writings of Aristides and Quadratus (to which we will return) with the most significant document of Hadrian’s reign, namely the imperial rescript to the proconsul Asiae Minucius Fundanus of 124/5. The rescript was requested by a petition of the provincials of Asia to the predecessor of Fundanus, Licinius (or Serenus) Granianus, regarding the measures to be taken against those Christians who were prosecuted for their beliefs. As has been observed, Hadrian built on Trajan’s approach, extending it in a manner more favourable to the Christians by strengthening the penalties against false accusers, on whom the burden of proof fell, and, above all – according to the interpretation of some modern scholars which is based on the distinction, already there in Pliny, between nomen and flagitia – stipulating that the accuser had to not only demonstrate adherence to Christianity (nomen), but also the existence of common crimes (flagitia); others, however, think that the rescript simply provides evidence that the accused were Christians.

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24 The opposition between Christians as tertium genus and the Jews and Gentiles is in the Kerygma Petri (Clem. Alex. Strom. 6, 5, 41, 5–6), see Jossa 2000, 122–123. In the Syriac version there are four families: “This is manifest to you, King, that the race of men in this world are four: the Barbarians and the Greeks, the Jews and the Christians”. See also Alpigiano 1988; and Rizzi’s Conclusion to this volume.

25 Just. IApol. 68, 3–10; Eus. HE 4, 9, 1–3.

26 For the first interpretation, see Sordi 1984, 74–75, for the second, Keresztes 1967, 54–66; 1967a, 120–129; 1979, 287; Jossa 2000, 106–115, who emphasises the power of discretion of magistrates and the Roman social and political responsibilities of the accused.
Hadrian also showed a particular interest in Christianity. If we believe the HA (Alex. Sev. 43, 5–6)\textsuperscript{27}, he had temples built empty of sacred images dedicated to Christ, among the other gods, but had to abandon the project after meeting with resistance from traditionalists.

Finally, it does not seem to be a coincidence that during the Jewish revolt, Christians did not want to turn against Rome: so Justin, who writes under Antoninus Pius, says (1Apol. 31, 6) that: “In the war that the Jews waged recently, Bar Kochba, leader of the Jewish revolt, commanded to direct to terrible torments only Christians, unless they had denied Christ and had not blasphemed”, and Jerome (Chron. 199 Helm) confirms that, “Kochba, head of a Jewish sect, killed Christians with persecution of all kinds when they refused to help him against the Roman armies”\textsuperscript{28}.

4. Hadrian’s Eleusinian initiation, the first Christian apologists, and the Jews

Under these circumstances I believe it is finally possible to reconstruct a coherent path within Hadrian’s religious policy that relates to its focus on the mystery religion of Eleusis and its relationship with Christianity and Judaism. Hadrian, as we have seen, became a worshipper of the Eleusinian mysteries in 124/5 and returned to Eleusis in 131; Aurelius Victor declares that in Rome Hadrian celebrated the *Initia Cereris Liberaeque, quae dicitur Eleusine, Atheniensium modo* (14, 4).

What is most striking, however, is that Jerome twice (De vir. Ill. 19 and Ep. 70, 4 [to Magnus]) connects Hadrian’s initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries, an anti-Christian persecution and the presentation to the emperor of first the *Apology* of Quadratus and then that of Aristides: “And when Hadrian passed the winter at Athens to witness the Eleusinian mysteries and was initiated into almost all the sacred mysteries of Greece, those

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\textsuperscript{27} Capitolium septimo quoque die, cum in urbe eset, ascendit, tempula frequentavit, Christo templo facere voluit eumque inter deos recipere. quod et Hadrianus cogitasse fertur, qui templo in omnibus civitatibus sine simulacris iussisset fieri, quae non habent numina, dicuntur Hadriani, quae ille ad hic parasse rependerat omnes Christianos futuros, si id fecisset, et tempula reliqua disserenda. See below for a discussion of this text.

\textsuperscript{28} The passage of Justin is quoted by Eus. *HE* 4, 8, 4; Jer. *Chron*, 201 Helm: Chochebas, dux Judaicae factionis, nolentes sti Christianos adversum romanum militem ferre subsidium omnimodis cruciatibus necat; see also Oros. 7, 13, 4: Iudaesos sane, perturbatione scelerum suorum exagitatos et Palaestinam provinciam quondam suum depopulantes, ultima caede perdomunt, ultusque est Christianos, quos illi Cocheba duce, cur sibi adversum Romanos non adserantur, excruciatant.
who hated the Christians took opportunity without instructions from the Emperor to harass the believers. At this time he presented to Hadrian a work composed on behalf of our religion, indispensable, full of sound argument and faith and worthy of the apostolic teaching, in which, illustrating the antiquity of his period, he says that he has seen many who, oppressed by various ills, were healed by the Lord in Judea as well as some who had been raised from the dead. Aristides, a most eloquent Athenian philosopher and a disciple of Christ while yet retaining his philosopher’s garb, presented a work to Hadrian at the same time that Quadratus presented his. The work contained a systematic statement of our doctrine, that is, an Apology for the Christians, which is still extant and is regarded by philologians as a monument to his genius” (*De vir. ill.* 19–20)\(^{29}\).

“Did not Quadratus, a disciple of the apostles and bishop\(^{30}\) of the Athenian church, deliver to the Emperor Hadrian (on the occasion of his visit to the Eleusinian mysteries) a treatise in defence of our religion. And so great was the admiration caused in everyone by his eminent ability that it stilled a most severe persecution. The philosopher Aristides, a man of great eloquence, presented to the same Emperor an Apology for the Christians composed of extracts from philosophic writers” (*Ep.* 70, 4)\(^{31}\).

How can such a combination of Hadrian’s Eleusinian initiation, the persecution, and the *Apologies* of Quadratus and Aristides be explained? According to Jerome’s statement, Hadrian’s Eleusinian initiation of 124/5 – *dedisset occasionem his qui Christianos oderant absque praecepto imperatoris vexare credentes* – which was not an isolated incident, had negative consequences for Christians. I do not exclude the perspective that the *Apologies* of Aristides and

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\(^{29}\) *Cumque Hadrianus Athenis exegisset hiemem, invisens Eleusinam et omnibus paene Graecis sacris initiatus, dedisset occasionem his qui Christianos oderant absque praecepto imperatoris vexare credentes, porrexit (scil. Quadratus) ei librum pro nostra religione composito valde utilem plenamque rationis et fidei apostolica doctrina dignum. Aristides Atheniensis, philosophus eloquentissimus et sub pristino habitu discipulus Christi, volumen nostri dogmatis rationem continens eodem tempore quo et Quadratus Hadriano principi dedit, id est Apologeticum pro Christianis, quo usque hodie perseverans apud philologos ingenii eius indicium est.*

\(^{30}\) It is a confusion of Jerome: the bishop Quadratus lived later than our apologist. See *Bardy* 1949, 75–86 (who, however, denies the value of Jerome’s entire testimony); *Zangara* 1983, 2957–2958 (the bishop Quadratus probably lived in the age of Marcus Aurelius); *Graindor* 1973, 172–173 and *Alpigiano* 1988, 268, accept the identification of Jerome without question.

\(^{31}\) *Quadratus, apostolorum discipulus et Atheniensis ecclesiae pontifex, nonne Adriano principi Eleusinae sacra invisiens librum pro nostra religione tradidit et tantae admirationsi omnium fuit, ut persecutionem gravissimam illius excellens sedaret ingenium? Aristides philosophus, vir eloquentissimus, eodem principi Apologeticum pro Christianis obtulit contextum philosophorum sententiarum.*
Quadratus should be read as an initial reaction of Christianity in the face of the “competitiveness” now presented by the mystery cults after Hadrian’s initiation. Hadrian’s intention to build temples without sacred images which were dedicated to Christian worship and which, considering Hadrian’s great attention to the mystery cults, i.e. their soteriological nature, could reveal a very interesting point of contact with Christianity (whose dimension of salvation needs no explanation), was first suggested by HA Alex. Sev. 43, 5–6. The Christian “reaction” can be detected, in my opinion, also from other evidence. Aristides intends to give Christianity a philosophical dignity; Jerome, who brings together Hadrian’s Eleusinian initiation and the presentation of the Apologies of Quadratus and Aristides, said that Quadratus’ Apology was valde utilem plenumque rationis et fidei apostolica doctrina dignum. A passage from Eusebius, also on the presentation of Quadratus’ Apology, states that in 124/5 (the year of Hadrian’s rescript to Minucius Fundanus) the climate for Christians was not favourable, and the rescript certainly proves the existence of an anti-Christian persecution in the province of Asia. When Jerome says that the Apology of Quadratus weakens a gravissimam persecutione...qui Christianos oderant abseque praecepto imperatoris (“contrary to the Emperor’s will”) vexare credentes he could be alluding to the rescript to Fundanus, which the Chronicon (199 Helm) reported immediately after the news of the presentation of the Apologies of Quadratus and Aristides to the Emperor. The rescript imposes more restrictions on the prosecutors of the Christians: Jerome therefore qualifies the persecution as gravissima because it represents a serious abuse contrary to imperial provisions.

However, the chronology of Jerome’s news opens the possibility for a different hypothesis that I intend to suggest here.

It is known that in 128/129 Hadrian was in Athens: while an Ephesian inscription (SIG 3 838) reports that Hadrian sailed from Eleusis to Ephesus in 129, the Armenian version of Eusebius’ Chronicon (166 Schöne) says that Adrianus Athenis hiemavit et vidit Eleusinas res. Both in De viris illustribus and in the Epistula, Jerome says that Hadrian invisit sacra Eleusina (invisens Eleusinam; Eleusinae sacra invisenti). In the Chronicon under the year 125, Jerome writes that Hadrianus sacris Eleusinae initiatus multa Atheniensibus dona largitur. After

32 In the year 124 Hadrian was probably initiated also into the Samotracian mystery cult. See Galimberti 2007, 130.
33 Schmid 1964, 298–315; Angiolani 1994, 23–25 believe (in my opinion, wrongly) the news to be unfounded; for the historicity see Sordi 1984, 98–102.
34 HE 4, 3, 1–2: τοῦτο (scil. Ἀδριάνο) Κωδράτος λόγον προσφωνήσας ἀναδίδωσι, ἀπολογίαν συντάξεις ὑπὲρ τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς θεοσεβείας, ὃς δὴ τινες ποιημοί ἀνδρεῖς τοὺς ἑνοχλεῖν ἐπειρῶντο.
35 Quadratus may be identified with the homonymous prophet who preached in Asia Minor (Eus. HE 5, 17, 2).
this follows the news of the presentation of the *Apologies* of Quadratus and Aristides. Nevertheless, the same *Chronicon* under the year 131 states that *Hadrianus Athenis hiemem exigens Eleusina invist*. The latter expression coincides exactly with that of *De vir. ill.* 19, according to which Hadrian spent the winter in Athens (*cumque Hadrianus Athenis exegisset hiemem, invisens Eleusinam*)\(^{36}\), but also with that of the Armenian translation of the *Chronicon* (*Adrianus Athenis hiemavit et vidit Eleusinas res*): so Hadrian’s attendance to Eleusinian rites mentioned by Jerome in the *De viris illustribus* and in the *Epistula* could be related to the winter 131/2, though the Armenian version and the *Chronicon* under 131 lack an important detail, that we have in both the *De viris illustribus* and the *Epistula*: namely the fact that in these two texts the visit to Eleusis is linked to an anti-Christian persecution. Therefore\(^{37}\), it follows that the submission of *Apologies* to Hadrian could not have taken place in 124/5 but could have done so in 131/2.

Consequently, the date of Aristides’ *Apology* would be 131/2: even though Aristides in Eusebius *HE* 4, 3, 3 and in Jerome’s *Epistula*\(^{38}\) is mentioned after Quadratus, in the *Chronicon* and in the *De viris illustribus*\(^{39}\) Jerome says that the *Apologies* of Quadratus and Aristides were simultaneously presented to Hadrian. Since a later chronology is more suitable for Aristides’ text (the Syriac version is dedicated to Antoninus Pius) it is permissible to assume that Aristides’ *Apology* was presented in 131/2.

If this hypothesis is correct, we can explain why Jerome in *De viris illustribus* and in the *Epistula* speaks of a *persecutionem gravissimam* and of *qui Christianos oderant absque praecepto imperatoris vexare credentes*. In 132 the revolt of Bar Kochba broke out, whose preparation, according to Dio (69, 12, 2–13, 1), was

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\(^{36}\) The same Jerome in *Chronicon* (198 Helm) places a visit to Athens by Hadrian in the winter of 123: *Cefisus fluvius Eleusinam inundavit, quem Hadrianus ponte coniugens Athenis hiemavit*. The *Versio Armenia* put it under 127: *Cephisus fluvius Eleusinam obruit, cuique pontem Adrianus fecit*. Besides the different chronology, in neither case is there any trace of the Hadrian’s initiation into the Eleusinian rites linked to the submission of *Apologies*.

\(^{37}\) Most probably Hadrian reached the degree of *epoptes* in Eleusis according to Dio 69, 11, 1: ύφυκόμενος δὲ ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐπώσπευε τὰ μυστήρια. This news is earlier than Hadrian’s visit to Egypt in 130.

\(^{38}\) *HE* 4, 3, 3 (no exact date): καὶ Ἀριστείδης δὲ, πιστὸς ἁνήρ τῆς καθῆμας ὀρμώμενος εὐσεβείας, τὸ Κορήτωρ παραπλησίως ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ἀπολογιὰν ἐπιφονήλας Ἀδριάνου κατακέλουην.

\(^{39}\) *Chron.* 199 Helm (under 125): *Quadratus discipulus apostolorum et Aristides Atheniensis noster philosophus liber pro Christiana religione Hadriano dedere compositus*. Pouderon-Pierre-Outtier-Guorgadzé 2003, 39, prefer to maintain the date of the *Chronicon* (125) for the defence of Aristides and exclude the second journey (128/129) as “rien n’autorise à désigner le second voyage de préférence au premier”.

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made some time before, because the Jews had already been preparing militarily for a long time and addressed (69, 13, 2) “many other foreigners, driven by lust for money, [that] they were providing aid, so most of the ecumene was agitated for this reason”. Justin (reproduced by Eusebius)\(^{40}\) said that Bar Kochba had unleashed a true anti-Christian persecution. Faced with such anti-Christian hate, Jerome could speak of gravissimam persecutionem because it was contrary to Hadrian’s rescript of 124/5, and because the torments inflicted by Bar Kochba against the Christians were neither intended nor endorsed by Rome which, in a difficult situation of warfare, had enjoyed Christian loyalty.

Finally, it is worth noting that the prologue of Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho, which reports the dialogue between a Jew and a Christian, closes with a reference to a conversation about the Jewish war of 132 which shows that the war was in progress at the time of the fictional dialogue; it was an argument which remained a hot topic for both the Jews and the Christians\(^{41}\).

Thus, Jerome, who alleges in his letter a serious anti-Christian persecution and who in De viris illustribus talks about anti-Christian hate, could allude to the rescript to Minucius Fundanus but also – as we have pointed out – to the divergences between Jews and Christians during the Bar Kochba revolt of 132.

5. Conclusions: Hadrian’s religious policy

Both the rescript to Fundanus and the Apologies of Quadratus and Aristides were born in a social climate in which Christians felt the need to gain protection: the addresses to the Emperor appear to have been successful as, on the one hand, Hadrian’s rescript shows a protective attitude towards the Christians and, on the other, during the Jewish revolt Christians felt the need to clarify their estrangement from Judaism. Whether the persecution cited by Jerome happened in 124/5 or in 131/2, the same link between an anti-Christian persecution and Hadrian’s participation in the Eleusinian mysteries remains an uncontroversial fact.

I believe that the years between 124/5 and 131/2 mark a significant turning point in Hadrian’s religious point of view, which showed new soteriological

\(^{40}\) 1Apol. 31, 6 = Eus. HE 4, 6, 2: ἐκστατίζετε δὲ τότε Ἰουδαίων Βαρχωρχεβάζεις ὅνομα, δὲ δὲ ἀστέρα δῆλοι, τὰ μὲν ἄλλα φονικός καὶ ληστρικός τις ἀνήρ, ἐπὶ δὲ τῇ προσηγορίᾳ, οἰά ἐπὶ ὀνόματι διάγκοιτε, ὡς δὴ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ φωστήρ αὐτοῖς κατεληλυθώς κακομυνεῖς τε ἐπιλάμψατε τερατεύμονας.

\(^{41}\) Just. Dial. 9, 3: ἐδοξέ καὶ τῷ Τρύφωνι οὗτος ἡμᾶς ποιήσαι, καὶ δὴ ἐκπέμπετε εἰς τὸ μέσον τοῦ ξυστοῦ στάδιον ἐμεθνὲν τὸν δὲ σὺν αὐτῷ δύο, χειροσάντες καὶ τὴν σπουδὴν ἡμῶν ἐπισκώπαντες, ἀπηλάμβανε. ἠμεῖς δὲ ὡς ἐγενόμενα ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ τόπῳ, ἔναι ἐκατέρωθεν λίθινοι εἰς θόκοι, ἐν τῷ ἐτέρῳ καθεσθέντες οἱ μετὰ τοῦ Τρύφωνος, ἐμβαλόντος τινὸς αὐτῶν λόγον περὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γεγομένου πολέμου, διελάλουν.
interests. Between 121 and 125 Hadrian made his first big journey to Greece that culminated with the initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries to which, along with the Delphi sanctuary\textsuperscript{42}, he fuses the establishment of a precise panhellenic project: the conclusion of such a project would be the establishment of the \textit{Panhellenion} in Athens in 131/2. These are the same years in which the conflict between Judaism and Christianity was increasing in Asia Minor and, more generally, in the East, as the two groups began to become aware of each other’s differences.

A defining moment in 124/5 could be also demonstrated by the evolution of the project phases of the Villa at Tibur\textsuperscript{43}. Between the years 118/121, 125/128 and the last years of Hadrian’s Principate (129–138), we can see different evolutionary phases: the break at precisely 125 coincides with Hadrian’s initiation to Eleusis and the inauguration of the “new course” of his religious policy.


\textsuperscript{43} See Calandra in this volume.