Judaica: Neue digitale Folge 7 (2026)
https://doi.org/10.36950/jndf.2026.7

The *Life of Makarios the Roman* (*BHG* 1004–1005i) and the *Alexander Romance*: Truth, Fiction and the Paradoxographic

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Abstract: *Paradoxography and narratives of wondrous travels and adventure tread the borderline between truth and fiction. On the one hand, they lend importance to, for instance, eyewitness reports, while on the other, they portray distant, unknown and fantastic lands. This article discusses both aspects as they emerge in the* Life of Makarios the Roman*, a popular early Byzantine saint's Life and ego-narration about the fantastical journey of three monks to the end of the world, where they meet saint Makarios. The trip leads them through pitch-dark forests and over dangerous cliffs, along lands inhabited by dog-headed people, centaurs, and other terrifying creatures. To make sense of the* Life*'s contradictory features, the article takes stock of the* Life*'s relation to the paradoxographic tradition and particularly to Ps-Callisthenes'* Alexander Romance*, known for mixing truth and fiction. The latter relation serves as a stepping stone towards explaining the specific ways in which truth and fiction work together in the* Life of Makarios*, and for what purpose. The article argues that, in a typically paradoxographic fashion, the* Life*'s authenticating strategies and imaginative narrative elements are part of a coherent literary strategy to inspire wonderment. Yet, taking a Christian approach to the paradoxographic, the* Life *thus communicates the unfathomable and elusive aspects of the Christian faith and specifically sanctity.*

Travel narratives tread the borderline between truth and fiction.[1] They often incorporate narrative strategies that support a historicizing stance, such as the inclusion of eyewitness reports. Yet they also tend to portray obscure and fantastic lands, challenging their readers' sense of belief. This complex interplay of documentary and fictional strands is captured in the concept of 'armchair travelling.'[2] Travel narratives allow readers to cross great distances and explore remote places by enacting an imaginative journey.[3] Thus, the stories both open possibilities for unparalleled adventures and offer ways to mentally grasp the world's vastness.

This article is part of the Special Thematic Section *Nature Miracles and Paradoxography in Biblical Reception of the First Centuries CE* (2026); for the conceptual framework and an overview of the other contributions, see the introduction (https://doi.org/10.36950/jndf.2026.3).
This article was written with the support of a postdoctoral fellowship fundamental research of the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), grant nr. 1243125N.

1 Cf. von Martels, ed., *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction*; Carey, "Truth, Lies and Travel Writing."

2 Stiegler, *Reisender Stillstand*.

3 von Martels, "Introduction," xi: "Books could help [you] travel further than any living man could go."

A similar combination characterizes ancient paradoxographic literature. Paradoxography describes incredible wonders (*thaumata*) in far-off lands, relying on the audience's ability to *imagine* things; things they have never seen and probably will never see. *Thaumata* are beyond common experience and thus essentially unverifiable, while they can be described and imagined even by those who have not witnessed them directly. In ancient Greek this capacity is called *phantasia*: the human ability to represent mentally what has not been seen or is even beyond 'normal' human experience.[4] At the same time, paradoxographic accounts present themselves as factual, grounded in a scientific urge to collect knowledge about the world.[5] Paradoxography has a strong documentary aspect and is geared towards credibility.[6] Its stories of marvelous plants, monstrous races and other *paradoxa* are not designed as tales of fantasy but as handbooks of geographical knowledge; they are, in the words of Klaus Geus and Colin Guthrie King, "strange but true."[7] Paradoxography therefore exists between truth and fiction: it presents *reports* of things that must be *imagined* since they belong to an otherworldly reality. It focuses on what is unbelievable yet (presented as) real.[8]

Whereas scholars define paradoxographic texts as collections of short, self-standing descriptions of wonders, the genre's boundaries are fluid.[9] Ancient narrative genres also report *thaumata*, usually in a context of traveling.[10] *Paradoxa* appear in Greek novels, replete with travel to exotic places, and in romanticized biographies of illustrious figures who journey to the world's edges, such as Apollonius of Tyana or Alexander the Great.[11] The paradoxographic collections compile marvels from various sources including ancient epic and tragedy.[12] And they were likely meant as catalogues from which authors of other genres—narrative genres—could draw.[13] Thus, in terms of content, paradoxography cannot be sharply distinguished from other ancient literature, particularly narratives featuring wondrous journeys.

This article identifies paradoxographic aspects in the early Byzantine *Life of Makarios the Roman* (*LMR*), a hagiographic text of uncertain dating, likely produced between the

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4 Webb, "Sight and Insight," 216.

5 E.g., Pajón Leyra, *Entre ciencia y maravilla*; Geus and Guthrie King, "Paradoxography;" Yu, "Textualizing Wonders."

6 Schepens and Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography," 386–389.

7 Schepens and Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography," 434.

8 Cf. Cupane, "Other Worlds, Other Voices," 185: "A suitable vocabulary of amazement and astonishment, expressing what is incredible but nevertheless true, defines the sphere of the marvelous."

9 On paradoxography's compilatory form: Jacob, "De l'art de compiler;" Greene, "A Most Amazing Conversation," 28–29: "a compilatory form […] that collects and arranges reports on 'wonders.'" Nilsson, "To Render Unbelievable Tales Believable," argues for paradoxography's fluidity as a conceptual space crossing genre.

10 Schepens and Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography," 440–442.

11 Lateiner, "Recognizing Miracles;" Cobb, "Apollonius in India;" Stoneman, "The *Alexander Romance* and the rise of paradoxography."

12 Geus and Guthrie King, "Paradoxography," 434.

13 Pajón Leyra, *Entre ciencia y maravilla*, 74–75.

fifth and seventh centuries.[14] It survives in multiple versions, and its complex transmission history remains obscure today.[15] *LMR*'s first-person narrator Theophilos recounts an adventurous journey with two fellow monks in search of the world's end. Their quest leads them through pitch-dark forests, along dangerous cliffs, and lands inhabited by dog-headed people, centaurs, and other terrifying creatures, until they find saint Makarios twenty miles from Paradise.

LMR belongs to a genre not traditionally associated with paradoxography.[16] Nonetheless, the genres overlap in Late Antiquity.[17] They also share a common focus on extraordinary events.[18] In the Christian tradition those are called 'miracles,' designated *thaumata* in Greek, just as paradoxographic wonders. Moreover, hagiography has a strong penchant for depicting travels, and it presents a paradoxical blend of historical posing and invented content.[19] This blend contributed to *LMR*'s neglect by modern scholars, who long dismissed it, along with many other hagiographical texts, as too romanticized.[20] This is despite *LMR*'s popularity among late antique and medieval audiences, as demonstrated by its large manuscript tradition and wide reception.[21] Recently, however, *LMR* has come to attract scholarly interest precisely for its puzzling combination of historicizing and fantastical elements.[22]

By disclosing paradoxographic features in *LMR*, this article explores the text's ambivalent status between truth and fiction in a new light. It also seeks to explain the role of paradoxographic elements in a hagiographic context. It focuses on *LMR*'s intertextual relation with Ps-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance* (*AR*), another work known for mixing truth and fiction with paradoxographic features. Previous studies have already noted

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[14] Ainalis, *De l'Eros et d'autres démons*, 329–239 dates the earliest Greek redactions to the fifth century. Angelidi, "La *Vie de Macaire le Romain*," 169–170 points to the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century, with the end of the tenth century as a certain *terminus ante quem* given the entry on Makarios in the *Menologion of Basil II*. Papaioannou, *Saints at the Limits*, xvii–xviii suggests that the Greek *LMR* may derive from a fifth- or sixth-century source in another language.

[15] In this article, citations and translations are from Papaioannou, *Saints at the Limits*, who edits four witnesses, which he considers to represent the earliest surviving Greek version. Where relevant, I refer to variant readings from the single-witness edition by Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, 135–164, left column, which is characterized by a shorter ending. *LMR*'s different versions are identified in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca: Novum Auctarum* by numbers 1004–1005i, but these require revision, as noted by Papaioannou, *Saints at the Limits*, xviii.

[16] Exceptions are Frank, "Miracles, Monks and Monuments;" Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, ch. 4. The connection has recently been revived; see Constantinou and Andreou, eds., *Storyworlds in Short Narratives*, esp. the chapters by Christian Høgel and Julia Doroszewska.

[17] Cf. Photios' mention of the lost paradoxographic works of Damascios (5th–6th cent.): Pajón Leyra, *Entre ciencia y maravilla*, 159–161.

[18] Another is the prominent depiction of animals: Gilhus, "Animals in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity;" Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*.

[19] On travel, see Mitrea, ed., *Holiness on the Move*. Discussion of *LMR* in this context by Angelidi, "Εμπορικοί και Αγιολογικοί Δρόμοι." On credibility and fiction, Van Pelt and De Temmerman, eds., *Narrative, Imagination and Concepts of Fiction*.

[20] De Temmerman, "Saints, Narratives, and Hero(in)es."

[21] Angelidi, "La *Vie de Macaire le Romain*," 167–168.

[22] E.g. Roilos, "*Phantasia*."

the intertextual relation between *LMR* and *AR*.[23] This article approaches it through the lens of paradoxography, to think more deeply about the specifically Christian methods and purposes of combining truth and fiction.

Of course, the terms 'truth' and 'fiction' encompass a range of meanings. 'Truth' can refer to historical authenticity, factuality, and verifiability, but also to plausibility, and authority. In Byzantium, truth had a broad epistemological scope, including ethical and metaphysical commitments, as Anthony Kaldellis notes: hagiographies, in particular, "could be essentially true […] primarily because they reiterated and bore witness to ideals that were held to be abstractly true."[24] 'Fiction' can indicate untruth or non-historical discourse, but also untruth meant to be recognized as such, relying on a mutual understanding between authors and readers. Kaldellis describes this as "the mode of writing and reading in which it is understood on all sides that a particular work is not meant to be evaluated by criteria of historical accuracy."[25] This understanding of fiction, though not excluded from hagiography, is generally difficult to reconcile with this genre's religious commitment.[26] Yet, the term fiction also relates to the cognitive act of imagination.[27] In this understanding, adopted here, the concept denotes the result of a creative mental process. While this process is a privileged mechanism of fictional literature (which appeals to readers' imagination by its very invitation to enter a contract of make-believe), it is not exclusive to it. Fiction as 'that which has been imagined' is thus not inherently defined by untruth. Comparable to the concept of *phantasia*, which scholars have deemed relevant to hagiographic production and particularly *LMR*,[28] it aligns with the Byzantine conceptualization of truthfulness outlined above, the paradoxographic, and the notion of armchair travelling, all of which require imaginative engagement from readers.

The first section below explores the paradoxographic features of *LMR* and *AR* and highlights their intertextual connection—two closely related aspects. The following section demonstrates that *LMR* exploits the connection to the world of Alexander the Great to anchor the narrative in historical time and space. Accordingly, various other authentication strategies are interpreted as tools to enhance the reader's belief in the narrative's truth-status. At the same time, as argued next, *LMR* engages the reader's imagination to depict what is beyond common knowledge/experience. The notion of the paradoxographic, activated through *LMR*'s intertextual relation with *AR*, allows us to read these seemingly contradictory tendencies as part of a coherent literary strategy to inspire wonderment. Finally, I argue that Makarios' hagiographer taps

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[23] Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, XXXV–XXXVI; Gero, "The Alexander Legend in Byzantium," 85–87; Angelidi, "La *Vie de Macaire le Romain*;" Roilos, "*Phantasia*," 21; Cupane, "The Heavenly City," 65; Ainalis, "From Hades to Hell," 277; Papaioannou, *Saints at the Limits*, xix and 317–325.

[24] Kaldellis, "The Emergence of Literary Fiction," 118.

[25] Kaldellis, "The Emergence of Literary Fiction," 115.

[26] Van Pelt, "Focalization, Immersion and Fictionality," 154–155.

[27] E.g. Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 18–21; Matravers, *Fiction and Narrative*, ch. 4; Jackson and Langkau, "Literary Fiction and Imagination."

[28] Roilos, "*Phantasia*;" Roilos, "The Cultural Politics of Imagination."

into the paradoxographic to express God's unfathomable power and the incredible and indescribable aspects of the Christian faith. Since Makarios represents the culmination of the monks' journey and is thus presented as the ultimate marvel, *LMR* specifically employs the paradoxographic to portray the mystery of sanctity.

1 *LMR* and *AR*

LMR opens with Theophilos persuading his companions to search for the world's end. They secretly leave their Mesopotamian monastery and travel to Jerusalem to visit the holy sites. Next, they cross Persia and arrive in India, a turning point in the narrative, where they are captured by local androgynes and eventually released. Their journey continues through the lands of the dog-headed people and the apes, dangerous mountains, desolate regions populated by terrifying and exotic creatures, such as giant snakes and unicorns, and pitch-dark forests. They then traverse hell, where they encounter the lake of judgement, and pass the river of fire and the fountain of life. Eventually, they reach an enormous river (presumably Ocean) where they survive what appears to be a pygmy attack, before crossing the river to arrive at the world's end, twenty miles from Paradise.[29] There, they meet Makarios, who explains where they are and recounts his own story of fleeing a forced marriage, succumbing to the Devil's temptations in female disguise, and spending three years buried alive as penance, emerging in perfect health. After hearing Makarios' tale, the monks return home, retracing their journey and sharing the story of the holy man.

This hagiographic narrative follows a familiar pattern, famously evidenced by Jerome's *Life of Paul of Thebes*, where an anchoret's autobiographical story is embedded within a circular frame narrative about a monk setting out into the wild and discovering there a great solitary ascetic.[30] In *LMR*, this structure is combined with the hagiographic motif of a pious man's journey to Paradise.[31] At the same time, *LMR* innovates these paradigms through distinctive elements including a cosmographic quest and a Christian *katabasis*.[32] Scholars have commented on its unconventional character, particularly noting that the central story about the saint is structurally embedded within "a kind of

[29] The monks' itinerary corresponds to medieval conceptions of the world as a circle, with Jerusalem in the center and the earthly Paradise in the far East, represented in the so-called T-O map: see Mauntel, "The T-O Diagram." On ancient Christian discussions about literal and allegorical interpretations of Paradise, Maguire, "Adam and the animals," 363–365; Cupane, "The Heavenly City," 56.

[30] Further examples from Greek hagiography are the *Life of Mark the Athenian*, the *Life of Onouphrios* and the *Life of Mary of Egypt*.

[31] On this motif in Byzantine hagiography, already present in the late fourth-century monastic travelogue *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, see Cupane, "The Heavenly City;" Penskaya, "Hagiography and Fairytale."

[32] Angelidi, "La *Vie de Macaire le Romain*," 172–173 points to *LMR*'s exceptional deviation from the standard structure: "[l'auteur] a substitué le 'récit-cadre' conventionnel par une longue narration qui met en scène trois héros […] partis à la recherche de l'endroit où le ciel repose sur la terre." On the motif of *katabasis* in early Christian literature, see Ainalis, "From Hades to Hell."

marvellous travelogue."[33] But they have largely overlooked its connection to paradoxography.[34] Depicting a wondrous journey Eastward to the world's end, encompassing the bizarre inhabitants and natural features of India, *LMR* also presents concrete paradoxographic *topoi* such as *kunokephaloi* or dog-headed people (§ 9),[35] a land of apes (§ 9),[36] exotic animals like unicorns (§ 10),[37] and a dwarfish race, possibly pygmies, living near the waters of the world (§ 20).[38] While other saints' Lives shaped by the travel-and-discovery paradigm also feature marvels and *thaumata* to various extents (particularly the *Life of Paul*, featuring a hippocentaur and a faun as part of Antony's journey), they do not go nearly as far as *LMR* in developing this aspect.[39] Furthermore, certain manuscript witnesses of *LMR* explicitly label the story a "wondrous narrative (διήγησις παράδοξος)" alongside the hagiographical designation of "life and conduct (βίος καὶ πολιτεία)."[40] Finally, in *LMR* the trip is initially motivated by curiosity.[41] It is presented as a spontaneous idea stemming from a sheer desire for discoveries: "The following thought came into my mind (εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῷ νοΐ μου λογισμὸς τοιοῦτος) […] all the years of my life I have wanted (ἤθελον) to walk until I could see (περιπατεῖν ἕως οὗ ἴδω) where the heaven rests." (*LMR* § 3)

One explanation for *LMR*'s paradoxographic character is that the depicted journey is modelled on the so-called 'wonder-letters' from the Greek *AR*.[42] This work is no-

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[33] Roilos, "*Phantasia*," 19–20. Compare Gero, "The Alexander Legend in Byzantium," 85–86: "The designation βίος καὶ πολιτεία is somewhat misleading; though the text does include an autobiographical account of the hermit Macarius, it is, for the most part, a description of the travels of three monks from Mesopotamia." Moennig, "Literary Genres," 170 calls the text "anything else but a Saint's Life."

[34] An exception is Cupane, "The Heavenly City," 65, who mentions paradoxography in passing when discussing *LMR*.

[35] On *kunokephaloi*, see Lecouteux, "Les Cynocéphales;" White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*; Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*.

[36] Traditionally located in Libya: cf. Diodoros of Sicily, *The Library of History* 20.58.

[37] See Beagon, "Wondrous Animals." The unicorn is already described by Ctesias (*Indica* in Photios, *Bibliotheke* cod. 72, 48b), an important precursor of paradoxography as Nichols, "Ctesias' *Indica*," shows.

[38] "Their height was about one cubit (ὡσεὶ πῆχυν ἕνα), and some were even shorter." (*LMR* § 20) Cf. Ctesias' remark that pygmies measure between one and two cubits (*Indica* in Photios, *Bibliotheke* cod. 72, 46a–46b), and evidence that ancient historians and geographers located them along the river Ocean encircling the world: Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, 175–182.

[39] The hippocentaur in the *Life of Paul* (§ 7) is echoed in *LMR* by donkey-centaurs (§ 10). In addition, these texts share two specific motifs: a God-sent raven provides the saint and his guest(s) with bread, bringing double/triple the portion than usual (*Life of Paul* § 10, and *LMR* § 34; cf. 1 Kings 17:4–6), and two lions assist in the saint's burial by digging a pit (*Life of Paul* § 16, where Antony buries the deceased Paul, and *LMR* § 40, where Makarios is buried alive as part of his repentance).

[40] This element does not feature in Papaioannou's edition, *Saints at the Limits*, followed in this article, but in Vassiliev's edition, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, 135, left column.

[41] On the curiosity motif as a typically paradoxographic element, see Kirichenko, "Satire, Propaganda, and the Pleasure of Reading," 342–343.

[42] Note that *AR* is not the only relevant intertext: as Angelidi, "La *Vie de Macaire le Romain*," 173 notes, the hagiographer evidently had recourse to "une pluralité de sources d'inspiration," and she points i.a. to the *Apocalypse of John* (at 175), the Ὁδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδὲμ τοῦ παραδείσου and the *Vision of Zosimas* (at 176). On *LMR* and the *Life of Paul of Thebes*, see above, n. 39.

toriously difficult to capture in terms of genre.[43] Presenting itself as a biography of a historical figure, it features large parts describing the (natural) wonders in the East encountered on Alexander's adventurous campaigns. Alexander's first letter to his mother Olympias (*AR* II. 32–44) reports encounters with bizarre races, including lion-faced giants and Fish-eaters, and Alexander's explorations of a dark land during his search for the Isles of the Blest. The *Letter to Aristotle about India* (which survives in Latin, known as the *Epistola*, cf. *AR* III. 7–16) recounts among other things the 'night of terrors' during which wild creatures attack Alexander's men. Finally, the second letter to Olympias describes further marvels including dog-headed people and architectural marvels (*AR* III. 27–29). Richard Stoneman identifies these letters as evidence of *AR*'s paradoxographic character.[44] And while he argues that the wondrous material serves a narrative of fear and adventure rather than of scientific curiosity, these motivations need not be mutually exclusive.[45] Indeed, Alexander's first letter to Olympias portrays his travels as driven by exploratory desire, while the *Letter to Aristotle* is framed as a report at the service of scientific knowledge, explicitly connecting Alexander's wish to explore India to the possibility of witnessing "something incredible (*aliquod incredibile*)." (*Epistola* § 47)[46]

LMR particularly recalls the first letter to Olympias from *AR*'s late antique beta recension.[47] Reporting Alexander's travels to the Land of the Blest or *makaroi* (*AR* (β) II. 39, 132.8: ἡ καλουμένη μακάρων χώρα), this letter suggests a salient parallel with the monks' destination: Saint Makarios.[48] Moreover, several similarities between the monks' and Alexander's travels imply a meaningful relation between the texts. For instance, the goal of the monks' journey is the same as Alexander's: to find the end of the world.[49] Certain desolate regions featured in *LMR* mirror those described in Alexander's first letter.[50] A landmark near the world's end in *LMR*, the fountain of life, echoes the letter's mention of a translucent spring which turns out to be a source of life-giving water when Alexander's cook throws in a dried fish that comes to life.[51] Finally, the monks cannot

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[43] Compare Jouanno, "The *Alexander Romance*," who calls the *Romance* a patchwork of heterogeneous elements.

[44] Stoneman, "The *Alexander Romance*," 49–61. On the relation between *AR* and Ctesias' work, see also Gunderson, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, 18–19; Stoneman, "Romantic Ethnography."

[45] Stoneman, "The *Alexander Romance*," 54. For fear in the wonder-letters, cf. *AR* (β) II. 36, 129.10–11 and 38, 132.5–6; and *AR* (L [β]) II. 38.11.

[46] E.g. *AR* (β) II. 32, 125.6–8; 37, 131.5–7 and 39, 132.8–9; and *AR* (L [β]) II. 38.2 and 38.7. Cf. Aerts, "Alexander the Great and Ancient Travel Stories," 31–33; Jouanno, "The *Alexander Romance*," 214. Cf. *Epistola* § 1, trans. Gunderson, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, 140: "And since I know that you are devoted to philosophy, I thought that I should write to you about the regions of India, […] so that through the acquisition of new knowledge (*novarum rerum cognitionem*) it might be possible to contribute to your interest in knowledge."

[47] For details on the Greek *AR*'s different recensions and how *LMR* relates to each, refer to Van Pelt, "Intertextuality and Open Texts."

[48] Citations of *AR* from: for β, Bergson, *Der Griechische Alexanderroman*; for L (β), van Thiel, *Leben und Taten Alexanders*. Translations from Dowden, "Pseudo-Callisthenes, The Alexander Romance."

[49] *LMR* § 3: ἤθελον [...] περιπατεῖν ἕως οὗ ἴδω, ποῦ ἀναπέπαυται ὁ οὐρανός ‖ *AR* (β) II. 37, 131.6–7: θέλων ἰδεῖν τὸ τέλος τῆς γῆς ‖ *AR* (L [β]) II. 41.8: πάλιν οὖν διενοήθην ἐν ἑαυτῷ λέγων εἰ [...] ὁ οὐρανὸς ἐνταῦθα κλίνεται.

[50] *LMR* § 11 ‖ *AR* (β) II. 38, 131.8.

[51] *LMR* § 19: ἡ ἀθάνατος πηγή ‖ *AR* (L [β]) II. 39.13: τῆς ἀθανάτου ἐκείνης πηγῆς. This anecdote has a long afterlife: Jouanno, *Histoire merveilleuse*, 15. The motif of the mythical fountain of life situated close to the

reach their goal since, as Makarios explains, they are denied entrance to the terrestrial Paradise beyond which the heaven rests. Alexander, too, is denied access to the Land of the Blest.[52]

These similarities are not a coincidence. When the monks lose their way in the darkness (*LMR* § 12; cf. *AR* (β) II. 37, 130.3), a God-sent dove guides them to an arch. The inscription on the arch reads: "Alexander, the king of the Macedonians, erected this arch," and adds that, "these are the dark lands which he went through (Ταῦτα δέ εἰσιν τὰ σκοτεινὰ ἃ διῆλθεν)." (*LMR* § 12) This explicitly links *LMR*'s storyworld to that of *AR*: the monks are literally travelling in Alexander's footsteps.[53] The inscription also offers directions:

> Anyone who wishes to go any further should walk to the left (εἰς τὰ ἀριστερὰ μέρη περιπατείτω); for all the waters of the world come from the left […] But to the right are all mountains, cliffs (Τὰ δὲ δεξιά, ὄρη εἰσὶ πάντα καὶ κρημνοί), and an enormous lake, full of snakes and scorpions (ὄφεων καὶ σκορπίων μεμεστωμένη).

This mirrors events from Alexander's first wonder-letter. When Alexander is lost in the darkness, he decides to explore the region. He first travels leftward but turns back, finding the area impassable. Turning to the right, he discovers a large murky plain, where the life-giving spring is situated. Convinced that he has found the world's end, Alexander erects an inscribed arch offering directions: "You who wish to enter the Land of the Blest (οἱ βουλόμενοι εἰσελθεῖν ἐν τῇ μακάρων χώρᾳ), travel to the right (δεξιᾷ πορεύεσθε) and avoid destruction." (*AR* L [β]) II. 41.7) Although the inscriptions do not match (see *infra*), *LMR* suggests that this is the arch found by Theophilos and his companions.

While not a case of direct stylistic borrowing, the thematic parallels and concrete intertextual connection suggest that Makarios' hagiographer knew, drew from and referenced *AR* (possibly from memory).[54] Moreover, *LMR* itself may have influenced later Byzantine versions of *AR*.[55] This places *LMR* within the broader reception history of *AR*, which underwent progressive Christian reworking in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Interestingly, this tradition also displayed a growing interest in the marvelous.[56]

Isle of the Blest is already found in Herodotos (III. 23). Discussion and further references in Angelidi, "La *Vie de Macaire le Romain*," 175 and n. 36. Note that the marvel also recalls a miracle from the *Apocryphal Acts of Peter* (2nd cent.), where the apostle resurrects a smoked fish by throwing it in a pond (§ 13).

[52] *LMR* § 25: οὐ δυνήσῃ γὰρ ἔτι διελθεῖν τὸν τόπον τοῦτον ‖ *AR* (β) II. 40, 133.12–13: μακάρων γῆν πατεῖν οὐ δυνήσει.

[53] For more on storyworld theory and its relevance for paradoxographic literature: Nilsson, "To Render Unbelievable Tales Believable."

[54] Cf. Van Pelt, "Intertextuality and Open Texts," for more details.

[55] Moennig, *Die spätbyzantinische Rezension *ζ*, esp. 234–251, on hagiographic influence and interpolations from *LMR* in a lost late Byzantine version of *AR* known as *ζ and preserved in a Serbian translation. Cf. Gero, "The Alexander Legend in Byzantium," on *LMR*'s influence on a late Latin version known as J^3.

[56] Moennig, *Die spätbyzantinische Rezension *ζ*, esp. 113–119; Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses*, 265–280 and 377–388. Apart from the transformations the *Alexander Romance* itself underwent, its Christian reception is visible in the *Alexandri Magni Iter ad Paradisum*, a medieval Latin work of which versions must have circulated much earlier (see Stoneman, "The metamorphoses," 611–612) and which recasts Alexander's journeys Eastward to the Land of the Blest as a voyage to Paradise.

The hagiographer's specific choice to engage with the first letter to Olympias—one of *AR*'s most elaborate 'paradoxographic' sections—aligns with this trend. Thus, the hagiographer's intertextual approach to writing the life of saint Makarios illuminates the text's conception within a framework that inherently combined the (today seemingly contrastive) goals of historicizing life-writing and imaginative, marvelous storytelling.

2 *LMR* between History and Fiction

LMR is a prime example of the contradictory features traditionally associated with hagiography. It combines a series of authentication strategies, meant to establish the narrator's reliability and the account's accuracy, with wondrous and (from a modern viewpoint) fantastical contents, which have led scholars to treat it as entertainment literature without much religious or historical significance.[57] Of course, fiction—defined as untruth meant to be recognized as such (*supra*)—also features authentication strategies to enhance its reality-effect, without therefore precluding the simultaneous presence of fantastical elements.[58] But can *LMR* be considered fictional? Developing text-based arguments about authors' and readers' mutual understanding of how saints' Lives were to be read is inherently challenging. While certain contextual factors, particularly its religious function, have reasonably led to caution in applying the modern fictional paradigm to Byzantine hagiography, it is difficult to know how individual texts functioned.[59] The genre's hybridity is a warning against overgeneralization, and reader responses could always vary across time and space. To navigate these difficulties, I propose to interpret *LMR*'s authentication devices and fictive contents in light of the contemporary literary frameworks it engages, particularly the paradoxographic framework activated by its overt reliance on a narrative about Alexander's wondrous journeys Eastward.

Among the authenticating strategies operative in *LMR*, scholars have noted Theophilos' tendency to offer indications of distances, thus claiming "quasi-historiographical objectivity."[60] Theophilos mentions, for example, that they walked "for forty days (ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα)" (*LMR* § 9) or "for seventy days (ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ο᾽)."[61] (§ 12) Additionally, the narrative's circular structure emphasizes the act of reporting, as "the return journey recapitulates the inward trip with ritual thoroughness" since Theophilos "mentions in turn each of the places they passed on the way in."[62] Although the return journey is described much more briefly, its careful narration underlines the importance of the monks' homecoming and ability to divulge their experiences: "After we

[57] Angelidi, "La *Vie de Macaire le Romain.*"

[58] E.g., Cupane, "Other Worlds, Other Voices," 185 remarks that the marvelous functions as an "authenticating mark" in late antique fiction, specifically the Greek novel, where it invests the stories with "realistic credibility."

[59] Cf. note 26.

[60] Roilos, "*Phantasia*," 20.

[61] Cf. furthermore § 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 19 and 22.

[62] Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 124–125.

entered the monastery […] we told them in detail about the wonders of God (ἀπηγγείλαμεν αὐτοῖς καθ' ἑξῆς πάντα τὰ θαυμάσια τοῦ Θεοῦ) and the life of Saint Makarios." (*LMR* §49) The narrative's apparent authenticity is further reinforced through its choice of a homodiegetic narrator (a first-person narrator who participates in the story),[63] which allows for firsthand reporting, and through frequent references to direct observation (εἴδομεν, ἰδόντες, e.g. *LMR* §10, §14, §18, §20, etc.), underlining Theophilos' eyewitness-status. What is more, the text itself is presented as the written record of the first-person account of the narrator's journey: "And when we spoke about (ἐξηγησάμενοι) the great and incomprehensible power (ἀκατάληπτον δύναμιν) of God our Savior and the life of Saint Makarios, all those who heard glorified God and *recorded in books (συνέταξαν εἰς βίβλους) the whole life of Saint Makarios*." (*LMR* §48, my emphasis) As a result, *LMR* poses as documentary travel writing. Finally, although the monks never reach their destination, they receive a detailed description of Paradise and the world's end from Makarios, who was informed by an angel. Theophilos emphasizes the chain of transmission, from the angel, via Makarios, to him, highlighting his divine and therefore trustworthy source.[64]

While authentication strategies in general are common in Byzantine saints' Lives, several of the specific devices described are also found in *AR*.[65] Notably, the wonder-letters feature detailed spatio-temporal markers not found elsewhere in *AR*, such as Alexander's mention of traveling "for eight days (ἡμέρας ὀκτώ)" (*AR* (β) II. 32, 125.9–10) and arriving "in two days (διὰ δύο ἡμερῶν)" at a region where the sun does not shine.[66] (*AR* (β) II. 39, 132.7–8) Furthermore, *LMR*'s emphasis on reporting echoes the specific character of Alexander's letters, which are first-person travel reports posing as eyewitness testimony and frequently referencing vision.[67] This alignment reflects broader paradoxographic literary conventions.[68] Ancient accounts of the wondrous centralize testimony and credibility since "the unusual will not produce its proper effect on the reader unless this reader is brought to believe that the phenomenon described is part of reality."[69] Claiming *autopsia*, i.e. eye-witnessing, and including references to authoritative sources, strategies adopted by Theophilos, are common practice, not just in hagiography, but

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[63] Homodiegetic narrators are distinguished from heterodiegetic narrators, who do not participate, i.e. do not act as a character, in their own stories. These narrator-types are discussed by Genette, *Figures III*, 238–241 and 251–259.

[64] *LMR* §26: "When we heard these things from Saint Makarios, who related them to us after the divine angel had told them to him […] (ὃς διηγήσατο ἡμῖν εἰπόντος αὐτῷ τοῦ θείου ἀγγέλου)." I modified Papaioannou's translation slightly to reflect better the structure of consecutive retelling in the Greek.

[65] For common authentication strategies in hagiography, see De Temmerman and Van Pelt, "Narratives of Imagination and Fiction," 4.

[66] Jouanno, "The *Alexander Romance*," 211.

[67] In the first letter to Olympias, e.g. εἴδομεν (*AR* (β) II. 33, 127.13, II. 37, 131.5 and II. 40, 133.9; *AR* (L [β]) 33.5), ἰδόντες (*AR* (β) II. 33, 128.4; *AR* (L [β]) II. 38.5), εἶδον (*AR* (β) II. 40, 133.10) and ἰδών (*AR* (L [β]) II. 38.6).

[68] Schepens and Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography," 382–389; Beagon, "Wondrous Animals," 421.

[69] Schepens and Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography," 382. Cf. Geus and Guthrie King, "Paradoxography," 434 and 442; Yu, "Textualizing Wonders," 278.

also in paradoxographic literature.[70] Finally, the main intertextual element linking *LMR* to the paradoxographic tradition, Alexander's arch, anchors the narrative in historical time and space. Its presence suggests that the monks' journey takes place, not in some fantasy-land, but in the real world, in regions once conquered by Alexander the Great.

At the same time, *LMR* presents that world as the one created by the Judeo-Christian God, following Genesis. The inscription on Alexander's arch directs the monks to "follow the sound of the waters (τὴν φωνὴν τῶν ὑδάτων ἀκολουθείτω)." (*LMR* § 12) *AR*'s inscription (discussed above) does not mention water. The water-element aligns instead with Genesis 2:10, according to which the four rivers of the world spring from Paradise, suggesting one can reach earthly Paradise by following them upstream.[71] Thus, the historical framework of Alexander's explorations of the world's edges intersects with the truth of the biblical universe. Similarly, Theophilos' spatio-temporal markers are not just specific but also meaningful: they tend to be biblical numbers, imbuing the events with truthfulness. The monks walk for forty/seventy days in the examples above, and they have wept for precisely seven days before the dove appears who guides them to Alexander's arch.[72] Finally, while paradoxographic literature typically establishes authority through textual sources, *LMR* appeals instead to divine revelation by choosing an angel, God's messenger, as its authoritative source. Using these devices, then, the hagiographer blends the literary framework of paradoxographic travel accounts with a Christian approach, presenting *LMR* as a true story set in the real world, anchored both in historical and biblical time and space; as a narrative that invites its Christian audience to adhere fundamental belief to it.

The problem for modern interpreters is that this view of *LMR* seemingly conflicts with certain other parts of the narrative, e.g. those featuring the hybrid races of *kunokephaloi* and donkey-centaurs, or people measuring about a half meter. Today, such elements are clearly fictive because they do not correspond to our scientific notions about the natural world, which are sufficiently advanced to produce generally-held assumptions of the non-existence of these creatures. But they would arguably have seemed incredible even to a late antique audience. Of course, their understanding of the world was more limited than ours and therefore less constrained by preconceived notions about what is possible. Still, such creatures would defy their reasonable expectations of the plausible based on common human experience: readers may have seen mountains and rivers and doves, but never creatures that are half-human-half-animal. Yet, the sense that something is too strange to be believed is inherent to ancient paradoxographic literature, where it does not preclude an overall historicizing stance or the notion that an incredible phenomenon could in fact be true. Paradoxographers anticipated skepticism

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[70] On *autopsia*: Popescu, "Lucian's *True Stories*," 46–48, and cf. note 73 below. On references to authoritative sources: Schepens and Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography," 383–386.

[71] Cf. Moennig, "Literary Genres," 170.

[72] Cf. also "We stayed there for seven days (ἡμέρας ἑπτά)" (*LMR* § 11); "After we had walked for forty days (ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα)" (§ 13); and "And again we went on walking for forty days (ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα)" (§ 19).

among their readership.[73] In fact, they sought out the "unbelievable (*adoxon*)," to turn such "*apista*" into "*pista*."[74] The paradoxographic deliberately sparks the reader's imagination, capturing 'otherness,' while simultaneously requiring fundamental belief. It relies on the paradoxical combination of both, creating cognitive dissonance, to generate a sense of wonder.[75]

In light of *LMR*'s relation to the paradoxographic letter to Olympias, this framework is fruitful to explain its representation of the unbelievable as part of a true story. By depicting the marvelous, *LMR* likewise inspires wonderment in the reader. To that effect, it combines authentication with a tendency to exploit *phantasia*. Describing reality outside the *oikoumenē* and beyond the scope of normal human experience, *LMR* relies on the audience's capacity to imagine things—to visualize what they have never seen and will never see. For instance, twice the narrator strategically emphasizes his inability to fully describe certain elements: when encountering wild creatures like unicorns and donkey-centaurs (*LMR* § 10), Theophilos admits being unable to name all species, and when describing four holy men guarding the river of fire, he calls their appearance "indescribable (ἀνεκδιήγητον)." (§ 18) Although both passages contain explicit remarks of narratorial failure, in both, what follows is quite a detailed description of other aspects of the scene. Thus, these remarks appear a deliberate strategy to spark the audience's imagination, inviting readers to creatively fill in the blanks. This way, the described phenomena become potentially more grotesque.

Another strategy to spark the reader's imagination and enhance the otherness of described phenomena occurs when the monks cross a giant river, identifiable as Ocean, before discovering Makarios' cave (*LMR* § 20).[76] From its banks, they gain a unique vantage point of the world. Theophilos describes this entire setting as counterintuitive. The light is double its normal intensity (φῶς διπλάσιον τοῦ φωτὸς τούτου), and "the winds there do not blow (οὐκ ἔπνεον ἐκεῖ οἱ ἄνεμοι) like the winds here (οἱ ἄνεμοι τῶν ἐνταῦθα); for the winds there had a different way of blowing (οἱ ἄνεμοι τῶν ἐκεῖ ἄλλην πνοὴν εἶχον)." The colors of the cardinal points are partially reversed, with the north corner having "the hue of pure blood (χροιὰν αἵματος καθαροῦ)" and the south corner being "white like snow (λευκὴν ὡσεὶ χιών)."[77] Furthermore, the stars shine "brighter than lightning (λαμπροτέραν ἔχουσιν ἀκτῖνα λαμπηδόνος)," the sun is "seven times hotter than ours (θερμότερος ἑπταπλάσιον τούτου)," the mountains there (τὰ ὄρη ἐκεῖνα) are "higher and more beautiful (ὑψηλότερα καὶ εὐειδέστερα)," and the birds have "a different appearance (ἄλλην ἰδέαν) and they sing differently (ἄλλως κελαδοῦσιν)." Moreover, the earth is paradoxical, having "a double character, fiery as well as milky (διπρόσωπός, πυροειδὴς καὶ γαλακτίζουσα)." Here,

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[73] Cf. Ctesias' *Indica*, epilogue (in Photios, *Bibliotheke* cod. 72, 49b–50a): "These are the stories Ctesias writes and asserts that they are completely truthful (τἀληθέστατα γράφειν) […] He says that he omitted many other more incredible (θαυμασιώτερα) tales in order to not seem untrustworthy (ἄπιστα) to those who have not seen them personally." (Nichols, trans., *The Complete Fragments*, 116)

[74] Geus and Guthrie King, "Paradoxography," 441; Delattre, "Paradoxographic discourse," 222.

[75] Compare Yu, "Textualizing Wonders," 268–269 on the "ambivalent attitude" of paradoxographers.

[76] Cf. note 29 and 38.

[77] The colors of the East (ochre) and West (green) are relatively unremarkable.

we sense that the monks have truly arrived in an otherworldly reality. The descriptions stress that the normal order of the inhabited world is reversed, an effect fueled by a 'here' vs. 'there'-structure and several comparatives. Thus, specific narrative choices again reinforce the otherworldly character of the narrated sights and events. Just as Theophilos' admissions of narratorial failure, the emphasis on the counterintuitive and fundamentally 'other' nature of what is described activates the readers' imagination by inviting them to visualize the abnormal or seemingly impossible. It is the combination of such imaginative elements with an historicizing narrative stance that induces the sense of wonderment generated by *LMR*, just as it does in Alexander's wonder-letters—a combination typical of paradoxographic literature in general. The framework of wonder-literature therefore explains *LMR*'s contradictory tendencies as part of one coherent narrative strategy.

This framework also sheds new light on a curious detail: the inscription on Alexander's arch in *AR* directs travelers to the right, whereas the inscription in *LMR*'s corresponding episode indicates the left. The difference has been explained as either an error or a deliberate correction of the hagiographer.[78] Yet, besides the discrepancy between source text and target text, an inconsistency arises within *LMR* itself. Its inscription clearly warns travellers that the right side is dangerous, due to mountains and a lake full of snakes and scorpions (*LMR* § 12: λίμνη παμμεγέθης, ὄφεων καὶ σκορπίων μεμεστωμένη), wherefore the monks wisely choose the left path. However, they quickly encounter a foul smell, signaling their entry into hell, and find a pool full of snakes (*LMR* § 14: λίμνη παμμεγέθης, γέμουσα πλῆθος ὄφεων): the lake of judgement. Although they chose the left, they have evidently ended up in the place that was described as being on the right. The description of the lake in § 14 matches the text on the arch closely and therefore invites readers to notice the mismatch.[79] Given the otherworldly character of the regions described afterwards (*supra*), the inconsistency can be read, not as an error or a correction of the source text, *AR*, but as a means to convey increasing disorientation and the alienating effect of what lies beyond the known world. Left and right are backwards to signal that the monks, by journeying beyond Alexander's arch, have crossed into some kind of 'other' reality.

Indeed, in the space between the arch and Makarios' cave, the monks pass apocalyptic scenes from hell, the river of fire guarded by holy men of indescribable appearance, and the fountain of life: having left the territory of earthly inhabitants behind, "the area of the Creation," they have entered a divine realm, "the territory of the Creator."[80] Moreover, on their return journey, Makarios' pet-lions escort the monks back to the arch, from where they can find their own way home. The arch thus functions as a critical

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[78] Gero, "The Alexander Legend in Byzantium," 87; Papaioannou, *Saints at the Limits*, 321.

[79] The phrasing is even closer in the version edited by Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, 142–143, left column, which does not mention scorpions: "λίμνη παμμεγέθης ὄφεων μεμεστωμένη […] λίμνη παμμεγέθης μεστὴ ὄφεων."

[80] I borrow these descriptions from Ainalis, "From Hades to Hell," 278, who remarks that the arch "marks the end of the known world" and "the end of the area of the Creation and the beginning of the territory of the Creator."

border, marking the boundary between the remote world, of which certain wondrous aspects may require imaginative visualization, and a divine reality, one that is entirely otherworldly and can only be conceived through imaginative contemplation.

3 *LMR* as Christian paradoxography

In *LMR*, historicizing and fictionalizing strategies emerge as part of a paradoxographic report of a wondrous journey to the world's end. Yet, this report serves as the frame narrative in a hagiographic text. Although the hagiographer has a Christian approach to specific authentication strategies (e.g. biblical numbers as spatio-temporal markers and the fusing of historical and biblical worldviews: cf. *supra*), superficial attempts to Christianize such techniques do not fully explain why he chose to embed a saint's story in a paradoxographic travel account. Nevertheless, additional elements suggest a more profound Christianization of the paradoxographic framework, shedding light on the author's broader purposes.

The Christian character of *LMR*'s paradoxographic account is evident in its differences from its model, *AR*'s wonder-letters. Both Alexander and the monks face numerous dangers on their exploratory journeys, and both texts emphasize the travelers' fear.[81] However, while the encountered races in *AR* tend to be violent, with Alexander and his men overcoming their attacks with physical force (cf. e.g. *AR* (L [β]) II. 33.2 and 33.6), in *LMR*, a recurring theme is the unexpected lack of violence from dangerous creatures, rendering physical force unnecessary (the androgynes in § 7–8 and the pygmies in § 20 are exceptions). For example, the dog-heads in *AR* are violent whereas in *LMR* they simply observe the travelers without causing harm (*LMR* § 9).[82] Similarly, to their own surprise, the monks are left alone by the apes (§ 9), the wild animals (§ 10) and the elephants (§ 11). They attribute their safe passage to divine intervention, repeatedly glorifying God for protecting them, e.g.: "We glorified the Lord, who saved us from their mouths (ἐδοξάσαμεν τὸν Κύριον, τὸν ῥυσάμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν)" (*LMR* § 9; compare also § 10: "At God's command (τοῦ Θεοῦ κελεύοντος), we suffered no harm from them").[83] The idea of divine intervention is further supported as the monks are not only portrayed as watching (*supra*) but also as *being* watched (e.g. *LMR* § 7: ἰδόντες ἡμᾶς, § 9: προσεῖχον ἡμῖν, § 15: ἰδὼν ἡμᾶς): this suggests a potential threat that does not materialize, a fact that is ascribed to God's will. And in another reversal of the expected paradoxographic dynamic, not the monks but the dog-heads are "in awe (ἐθαύμαζον)," staring intently (τρανίζοντες) at their human visitors. While the reader may be inclined to marvel at the strangeness of the encountered creatures, for the monks, the main cause for wonderment is that God's power protects them from these beasts.

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[81] E.g. "with much great fear (μετὰ φόβου πολλοῦ καὶ μεγάλου), we just made it to a plain" (*LMR* § 11); and "out of fear and terror (ἐκ τοῦ φόβου καὶ τοῦ τρόμου), we covered our faces, […]—for great fear and terror (φόβος καὶ τρόμος πολύς) had overcome us." (§ 15) For *AR*, cf. note 45.

[82] The latter image aligns with Ctesias' *kunokephaloi*, who are described as noble savages (*Indica* in Photios, *Bibliotheke* cod. 72, 48a–b).

[83] Similar statements in *LMR* § 10, 11 and 12.

Similarly, the monks are amazed and glorify the Lord for guiding them through dangerous terrain. He sends animal guides to lead them, first, across a "huge and terrifying cliff (μεγάλου καὶ φοβεροῦ κρημνοῦ)" (§ 11) and, next, through the dark lands (§ 12). Each time, the monks prayed for help in their desperate situation. The animals' miraculous appearance therefore demonstrates the virtue of religious faith. The specific animals in this role are meaningful too: a stag, symbolizing Christ or baptism, and a dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit.[84] The animals embodying a hazardous presence are innate to India and the far East according to contemporary traditions about these regions: snakes, elephants, *kunokephaloi*, and unidentifiable creatures. But the hagiographer expands the typical Indian fauna with another animal type, a helping kind, recognizable as divine agents following Christian animal symbolism.

From the monks' arrival in India until their discovery of Alexander's arch, it is primarily God's guiding help through perilous adventures that causes wonderment. In the journey beyond, however, it is the terrifying and awe-inspiring divine territories themselves. In hell, the frightened monks call the punishments of those who have renounced God "strange and extraordinary secrets (ξένα καὶ παράδοξα μυστήρια)." (*LMR* § 16) Similarly, the location of Paradise and the end of the world, the kernel of knowledge sought by the monks and revealed by Makarios, is described as "all the wonders of God (πάντα τὰ θαυμάσια τοῦ θεοῦ)." (*LMR* § 26) Terminology related to extraordinary discoveries and amazement (ξένα, παράδοξα, θαυμάσια) now denotes the wonders and miracles of the Christian world order.

With this in mind, we can appreciate the position of the saint in the text. Makarios and his story are placed at the very center of the circular travel account, at the very end of the marvelous journey, and (almost) at the end of the world. This narrative structure suggests that the saint is the greatest marvel of all. Makarios is also portrayed as a marvel. A detailed description aligns his physical appearance with animalistic features:

> The nails of his hand and feet were long like those of a leopard (μεγάλοι ὡσεὶ παρδάλεως). And the hair of his mustache covered his mouth (ἐσκέπασαν αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα) and joined his beard […] And we saw his body, and it was extremely rough, like the skin of a turtle (οὕτως ἦν ἄγριον πλῆρες, ὥσπερ δέρμα χελώνης). (*LMR* § 24)

Also, Makarios does not wear clothes; instead, "we saw […] someone dressed in white hair (ἐνδεδυμένον ἀπὸ λευκῶν τριχῶν) […] the hair of his head covered his entire body, having grown over time." (*LMR* § 22) Hairy and wild-looking desert ascetics are a *topos* in early Christian and hagiographic literature. It has been connected to the goal of representing saints' liminality and otherworldliness.[85] But the saint's furry looks also challenge the human/animal binary, much like many paradoxographic creatures.[86] Moreover, Makarios' story is what inspires the monks to go back: they ask for his blessing, "so

[84] On animals in ancient Christian culture, cf. note 18. On the symbol of the stag, Ainalis, "From Hades to Hell," 283.

[85] Upson-Saia, "Hairiness and Holiness."

[86] E.g. *kunokephaloi*. Cf. Beagon, "Wondrous Animals," 428–430.

that we may return to the world (ἵνα ὑποστρέψαντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον), and tell your story (ἀπαγγείλωμεν τὰ περὶ σου), and make your holy life known everywhere (τὴν ἁγίαν σου πολιτείαν κηρύξωμεν πανταχοῦ)." (*LMR* § 46) In fact, the monks initially did not intend to ever return (*LMR* § 4: "we made the sign of the cross upon ourselves like people who did not expect to see this world again (ὡς μὴ προσδοκῶντες ἔτι ἰδεῖν τὸν κόσμον τοῦτον)"). Meeting Makarios triggers their return: he is the marvel that must be made known.

As such, the purpose of this Christian paradoxography appears connected to narrating holiness. Scholars have noted that sanctity is inherently paradoxical and highly elusive because it cannot lay claim to itself.[87] By embedding his story in a marvelous travel account, the saint is inserted into the paradoxographic framework, which, as explained above, combines elusive contents with truthful reporting. By virtue of imagination and wonderment, one may conceptualize what lies outside the norm, grasp the unknowable, and narrate the extraordinary.[88] The hagiographer exploits these aspects of paradoxographic narration to convey a Christian story of sanctity.

4 Conclusions

LMR has been described as "an imaginary narrative which permits its readers to travel mentally through real and fantastic places."[89] While most scholars acknowledge its literary and fictive character, few have explored what 'imaginary' means in the context of this *Life*, and how this quality relates to the text's 'historicizing' aspects. The latter have largely gone unrecognized, or, when considered, they usually lead to puzzlement over the presentation of obviously fabricated literary material as real.[90]

To make sense of *LMR*'s contradictory status between truth and fiction, I have approached it through the lens of paradoxography, a literary framework that is evoked by its intertextual engagement with *AR*'s wonder-letters. The combination of imaginative and historicizing dynamics is typical of paradoxographic literature: wonderment at the marvelous arises from the cognitive dissonance between a sense of disbelief and a recognition of truthfulness. Facts about strange lands beyond the inhabited world are by definition foreign and unverifiable for readers. For this reason, paradoxographic accounts (particularly paradoxographic *travel* accounts) are paradoxical: the audience is expected to rely on the authenticity of the report but also to engage with the imaginative quality of the otherworldly phenomena it describes, which remain a mental creation for the reader.

I have argued that *LMR* follows the paradoxographic model by combining concern for authenticity with creative imagination. Its 'imaginary' features must be understood, then, not as elements that signal invention or lack existence, but as elements that spark

87 Formisano, "Text, Authenticity, and Imitation," 123.

88 Compare Doroszewska, "Stunning with a List," who argues that the compilatory form of hagiographic miracle collections, which she claims is borrowed from paradoxographic collections, allows authors to convey the inexpressible, particularly limitless divine power.

89 Ainalis, "From Hades to Hell," 280.

90 Roilos, "*Phantasia*," 15–16.

readers' imagination in quite a literal sense: readers must imagine them because they have never experienced them directly. Such imaginative activity does not undermine the presentation of the events as authentic or real. Rather, it is the combination of otherness and authenticity that creates the desired effect of amazement. *LMR*'s intertextual engagement with *AR*, itself a text between truth and fiction, is an important part of this double dynamic. It anchors the story both in historical time and space and in the paradoxographic tradition. Moreover, combining this with a biblical framework and a Christian world order, *LMR* adopts a specifically Christian approach to the paradoxographic. As the narrative progresses, the focus shifts from a traditional motivation for travel, namely curiosity regarding the physical world, to travel as a means to recover a Christian spiritual truth: God's marvelous creation and the saint himself are the true wonders reported in this text. *LMR* is a true story that references the real world (both earthly and divine), some aspects of which require the reader's imagination. It is precisely by capitalizing on imaginative aspects that *LMR* can express the unfathomable character of God's creation, the Christian world order, and particularly the notion of sanctity.

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