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 ***Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's
Demonstration 20***

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Journal of Early Christian Studies

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 10, Number 3, Fall 2002

pp. 305-327

10.1353/earl.2002.0031

ARTICLE

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Abstract

While various scholars have written on the subject of Aphrahat and the Jews, no one has introduced *Demonstration 20, On the Care of the Poor*, into the discussion. In this work Aphrahat exhorts his community to care for the poor, while he simultaneously attacks Judaism, which he construes as the spiritual equivalent of the rich man's greed. However, Aphrahat at times conflates the two sides of this analogy, thus rejecting the very possibility that Jews could engage in charity. I would like to set the argument of *Demonstration 20* within the context of the Sassanian persecution of Christians, when those Christians who did not understand Christianity as a distinct faith from Judaism may have been flocking to the synagogue to receive charity and perhaps, to Aphrahat's chagrin, something more.

Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's Demonstration 20

ADAM H. BECKER

While various scholars have written on the subject of Aphrahat and the Jews, no one has introduced *Demonstration 20, On the Care of the Poor*, into the discussion. In this work Aphrahat exhorts his community to care for the poor, while he simultaneously attacks Judaism, which he construes as the spiritual equivalent of the rich man's greed. However, Aphrahat at times conflates the two sides of this analogy, thus rejecting the very possibility that Jews could engage in charity. I would like to set the argument of *Demonstration 20* within the context of the Sassanian persecution of Christians, when those Christians who did not understand Christianity as a distinct faith from Judaism may have been flocking to the synagogue to receive charity and perhaps, to Aphrahat's chagrin, something more.

INTRODUCTION¹

Little is known of Aphrahat, the so-called Persian sage, aside from what can be gleaned from the corpus of twenty-three *Demonstrations* he has left us.² These texts have been used not only as key sources for the inquiry into early Syriac Christianity in general,³ but also as evidence for a

1. I would like to thank Leyla Aker, Peter Brown, Annette Yoshiko Reed, the Princeton Program in the Ancient World Graduate Student Seminar, and my three anonymous readers for their comments. I very much appreciate the many suggestions of the anonymous readers and regret that I was not able to follow up on all of them.

2. For an overview of the sources concerning his identity and a general discussion of his work, see the introductions to the two complete translations of his corpus: Aphrahat, *Unterwägungen*, tr. Peter Bruns, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1991) 1:35–71; Aphraate, *Les Exposés*, tr. Marie-Joseph Pierre, 2 vols., SC 349, 359, 1:33–199.

3. Most noteworthy are the numerous discussions of the indigenous Syriac ascetic tradition as represented particularly in *Demonstration 6*. For example, see Sidney H.



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