

Who Are the “Attendants of Helios”?

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INTRODUCTION

The learned Roman emperor, Julian (332–363 C.E.), stated that the inhabitants of Edessa worshipped a pair of gods called Monimos and Azizos as *páredroi* or “attendants” of the sun god Helios:

The inhabitants of Edessa, a place from time immemorial sacred to Helios, associate with Helios in their temples Monimos and Azizos. Iamblichus . . . says that the secret meaning to be interpreted is that Monimos is Hermes and Azizos is Ares, the assessors of Helios who are the channel for many blessings to the region of our earth.¹

In addition, Julian revealed that “Ares, who is called Azizos by the Syrians who inhabit Edessa, precedes Helios in the sacred procession.”² That Monimos and Azizos represented celestial bodies is reasonably clear from their association with the sun god, yet the identity of these bodies has never been satisfactorily resolved.³ The only two useful clues contained in Julian’s account are the identification of the pair with the Greek gods Hermes and Ares, and Azizos’ cultic role as a forerunner of the sun.

MONIMOS AND AZIZOS AS

INTERPRETATIONES GRAECAE OF SYRIAN GODS

On the assumption that Monimos and Azizos represent planets, the most straightforward approach has been to link these deities to the respective planets “owned” by Hermes and Ares in Greek astronomy. From at least the fourth century B.C.E. onwards, Hermes and Ares signified the planets Mercury and Mars,⁴ and it was these that Drexler advanced as the objects of the solar cult in Edessa.⁵ However, this solution does not lead to an astronomically

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1. Julian, *Orations*, 4: *Hymn to King Helios*, 150D, tr. W. C. Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian* 1, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 2002), 412–13, with substitution of the unanimous reading of the manuscripts, “Edessa,” for Spanheim’s unnecessary emendation “Emesa,” see H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 147–50, 159. Wright’s translation of *páredroi* as “assessors,” though allowed in H. G. Liddell & R. Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1332 s.v. “παρεῖρος,” obfuscates the clarity of the term, which in this context rather means “attendants, associates, companions, or assistants”; indeed, even the lexicographical alternative “in Magic, assistant divinity, familiar spirit . . .” seems appropriate.

2. Julian, *Orations*, 4: *Hymn to King Helios*, 154A–B, tr. Wright, *Julian*, 420–23.

3. See the discussion in Drijvers, *Cults*, 147–74.

4. E.g., Pseudo-Plato, *Epinomis*, 986E–87C; Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*, 2.15–31 (392a).

5. “Richtiger ist es wohl, in Monimos und Azizos die aramäischen Bezeichnungen der babylonischen Gottheiten Nabû (Nebo) . . . und Nergal zu sehen, die als Schirmherren über die Planeten Merkur und Mars walten . . .,” W. Drexler, “Monimos,” in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, 2.2, ed. W. H. Roscher (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1894–97), 3203.

meaningful connection with the sun and Teixidor objected that "neither the Edessenes nor Iamblichus could possibly have thought of Mars as an acolyte of the Sun because the planet does not accompany the sun."⁶ Moreover, in his ensuing discussion of Ares, Julian side-steps Ares' connection with the planet Mars entirely.

Evidently, Iamblichus' association of Monimos and Azizos with the Greek gods Hermes and Ares was based not on the planetary connotations of the latter in Greek astronomy, but on shared traits in the mythical prosopographies of these gods, as indigenous Syrian gods were matched to characters from the Greek pantheon with similar religious functions and attributes—except planetary identification. The native Syrian god 'Azizū, whose name is derived from the root 'zz and means "the strong one," was a well-established form of the god 'Aṭtar in his warrior aspect.⁷ Steuding, seconded by Cumont and Teixidor, opined that it was the derivation of 'Azizū's name that informed his link with Ares.⁸ "The identification of Azizos with Ares is rather obvious: Azizu's appearance with arms recalls the way Ares is depicted: with shield, lance and sword."⁹ Precious little is known about the prototype for Monimos—the god Mun'im, whose name can be translated as "the beneficent one";¹⁰ in keeping with the god's protective role for caravans, Drijvers plausibly suspected that the rationale for his connection with Hermes was the latter's aspect as *hódios* or *hēgemónios*, who protects travellers on their journey, or possibly Hermes *nómios* or *epimēlios*, the god entrusted with the care of flocks of sheep and goats.¹¹

MONIMOS AND AZIZOS AS MORNING AND EVENING STARS

If Iamblichus' interpretation of Monimos and Azizos had the character of an *interpretatio Graeca*, the role of Hermes and Ares receives a satisfactory explanation, yet the ritual relationship of these gods to Helios still requires elucidation. Which celestial bodies did the gods Mun'im and 'Azizū represent? A priori, the concept of morning and evening stars offers a meaningful context for a close association of planets with the sun. The morning star in particular eminently qualifies as an entity that "precedes Helios" in the course of the daily cycle and it has long been established that worship of the morning and evening stars thrived in cultures speaking Semitic languages. A modicum of independent evidence suggests that 'Aṭtar as well as his suspected alter ego, 'Azizū, represented the morning or evening star. A Minaean text invokes 'ṭtr šrqn wgrbn, or "Aṭtar of the east and the west."¹² As the most

6. J. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 69. The objection is perhaps not entirely valid, considering Mars' occasional role as morning star, discussed below.

7. Two Sabaeen inscriptions qualify 'Aṭtar by the epithet 'zz, "the strong one," suggesting a link with 'Azizū, W. Heimpel, "A Catalog of Near Eastern Venus Deities," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 4.3 (1982): 18f.

8. H. Steuding, "Azizus," in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* 1.1, ed. W. H. Roscher (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1884–86): 743; F. Cumont, "Le Culte de Mithra à Édesse," *Revue Archéologique* 3.12 (1888): 96; Teixidor, *Pantheon*, 69. Cf.: "... la qualité d'escorteur du Soleil que Julien reconnaît à Azizos ... convient bien mieux à Vénus qu'à Mars, planète supérieure qui n'est pas liée à la course du Soleil. L'assimilation de Julien s'expliquera par le caractère guerrier attribué à Azizos ...," J. Starcky, "Relief dédié au Dieu Mun'im," *Semitica* 22 (1972): 62.

9. Drijvers, *Cults*, 162.

10. Starcky, "Relief dédié," 57; Drijvers, *Cults*, 161.

11. Drijvers, *Cults*, 168. Earlier, Cumont ("Le Culte," 96) had explained Monimos' identification with Hermes through an Aramaic derivation of the name from a word for "seer."

12. Other southern Arabic texts often mention the gods 'Aṭtar and Ṣaḥar, "the dawn," in conjunction, suggesting a close association between the two, see M. Höfner, "Die vorislamischen Religionen Arabiens," in *Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer*, ed. H. Gese, M. Höfner, and K. Rudolph (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970): 271.

prominent morning star is the planet Venus, 'Aṭtar has commonly been understood to relate to this planet.¹³ This impression is confirmed in a number of Latin inscriptions from Apulum, in Dacia, dating from the time of emperor Commodus (161–192 C.E.) and later, that were dedicated to *deus Azizus bonus puer conservator*, "god Azizus, benevolent youth, preserver"; *deus bonus puer Phosphorus*, "god, benevolent youth, Phosphorus"; and *deo bono phosphoro Apollini Pythio*, "benevolent god, Phosphorus, Apollo Pythio."¹⁴

The title *Phosphoros* or "light-bearer," which is the literal equivalent of Latin *Lucifer*, was the common Greek appellation of the planet Venus.¹⁵ The connection between 'Aṭtar and the planet Venus is further supported by the etymological relationship of 'Aṭtar's name with *Ištar*, the Akkadian goddess who was associated with Venus since at least the late second millennium B.C.E.¹⁶ And an invocation of a goddess *dlybt 'zyzt'* or 'Dlībat 'Azīzā on an Aramaic incantation bowl,¹⁷ coupled with the Arabic designation of Venus as the goddess al-'Uzzā,¹⁸ confirms that the sobriquet 'zz, "the strong one," was usually applied to a deity of the planet Venus, albeit that this was a female deity in these cases.¹⁹ Although no evidence

13. "Die Zuordnung des Planeten Venus zu 'A. ist anscheinend ziemlich alt und tritt auch in Sar. [Südarabien; MAS] deutlich hervor . . .," M. Höfner, "'Aṭtar," in *Götter und Mythen im Vorderen Orient*, Wörterbuch der Mythologie 1, ed. H. W. Haussig (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1961): 498; compare idem, "Religionen": 268; "In South Arabia the male god 'Aṭr was the star Venus . . . He has the epithet 'the Eastern One' (*Šāriqān*), which characterizes him as the Morning-star," U. Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 39; cf. idem, "Above the Stars of El; El in Ancient South Arabic Religion," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1970): 199 and n. 78; P. C. Craigie, "Helel, Athtar and Phaethon (Jes 14 12–15)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 85 (1973): 223; J. Henninger, "Zum Problem der Venussterngöttheit bei den Semiten," *Anthropos: Internationale Zeitschrift für Völker- und Sprachenkunde* 71 (1976): 131; Heimpel, "Catalog," 13f., 18f.; M. S. Smith, "The God Athtar in the Ancient Near East and His Place in KTU I. 6 I," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, ed. J. C. Greenfield, Z. Zevit, S. Gitin, and M. Sokoloff (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 635; J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 171. Heimpel ("Catalog": 13f.) regarded the evidence for 'Aṭtar's identification with Venus as slender and J. Gray's ("The Desert God Aṭtr in the Literature and Religion of Canaan," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8 (1949): 81) argument that a "cult of 'Aṭr-Mlk-the Venus Star . . . survived in Palestine to a late period in the monarchy and was, the writer thinks, localized particularly at Jerusalem . . ." is not well founded.

14. Cumont, "Le Culte," 96; E. Merkel, "Azizos ('Azizū)," in *Götter und Mythen im Vorderen Orient*, 428; Drijvers, *Cults*, 170; Heimpel, "Catalog," 18.

15. *Phosphoros* was also used as an epithet for Apollo as the sun god, and Apollo was identified either with the sun or, during the Hellenistic period, with Mercury, Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*, 2.15–31 (392); Achilles, *Isagōgē in Arati Phaenomena*, 17 (136/956); E. Riess, "Astrologie," in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 1, ed. G. Wissowa (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1896), 1811; A. Scherer, *Gestirnnamen bei den indogermanischen Völkern* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1953), 90ff. Nevertheless, it seems probable that Apollo Pythio served as an *interpretatio Graeca* of the morning star in these inscriptions, perhaps because the morning star's "announcement" of the sunrise was interpreted along the lines of Apollo's oracular function at Delphi, Drijvers, *Cults*, 171.

16. Day, *Yahweh*, 171; W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 232ff. In the older version of the *Great Prayer to Ištar* (late second millennium B.C.E.; 5, 11, tr. B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature; Volume II: Mature, Late* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1993), 508), Ištar is invoked as "the luminary of heaven" and "Planet for the warcry." On the antiquity of Ištar's connection with the planet Venus, see Heimpel, "Catalog," 11.

17. Heimpel, "Catalog," 19 n. 51.

18. "Just as al-'Uzzā has a militant warrior aspect, especially in her function as Morning Star, so has Azizu. The precursor of the Sun is his main protector just as the vanguard of a caravan is." Drijvers, *Cults*, 162; "That al-'Uzzā was both in the Arabian and in the northern context a planetary deity representing the morning star, Venus, is very clear from a wide range of sources . . .," J. F. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 117.

19. For the feminine gender of this deity, compare the Ugaritic phrase *k'trb 'ṭrt*, "when 'Aṭtart sets," Heimpel, "Catalog," 13–14.

unambiguously links Monimos to Venus, Drijvers, following Cumont,²⁰ identified the morning and evening aspects of Venus as the referents of Monimos and Azizos:

The most appropriate explanation of Iamblichos' identification of Azizos and Monimos with Ares and Hermes, respectively, therefore seems to be that just as Azizos and Monimos themselves are the two aspects of the Venus star, representing the Morning and the Evening star and at the same time Venus' militant and protecting qualities, so Ares and Hermes stand for the same two main aspects of Venus. These are expressed by a process of doubling, resulting in two gods, each one bearing one of Venus' most conspicuous characteristics.²¹

Azizos, the Sun's precursor, is the Morning Star (he goes before Helios in the procession), and Monimos consequently is the Evening Star, although this is not explicitly stated.²²

Despite the popularity of this analysis, it is not entirely convincing. As the astronomical identity of Venus as morning star and Venus as evening star had been known in the classical world since the sixth or fifth century B.C.E.,²³ it is unlikely that these two aspects would still be celebrated in the form of two distinct deities, flanking the sun god, in the fourth century C.E. Moreover, a widespread pattern in the Semitic world was that of a gender opposition between the morning and evening aspects of the planet Venus. In Mesopotamian traditions, "Venus was bisexual, changing her sex according to her position in relation to the sun . . . According to one tradition she was considered male (and malefic) as an evening star and

20. Cumont, "Le Culte," 96–97.

21. Drijvers, *Cults*, 168–69. 'Azizū and his alter egos Mun'im, Aršu, Ruḍa, Abgal, and others, were freely interchangeable as members of the divine pair, 165–67; Heimpel, "Catalog," 18.

22. Drijvers, *Cults*, 147, also 150ff.; compare Heimpel, "Catalog," 18; R. Harris, *Boanerges* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1913), 250, 259; W. Eilers, *Sinn und Herkunft der Planetennamen* (Munich: Verlag der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976), 56 n. 128; Merkel, "Azizos," 428.

23. This discovery is traditionally ascribed to Parmenides (fifth century B.C.E.), who "is believed to have been the first to detect the identity of Hesperus, the evening-star, and Phosphorus, the morning-star; so Favorinus in the fifth book of his *Memorabilia*; but others attribute this to Pythagoras, whereas Callimachus holds that the poem in question was not the work of Pythagoras." Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Parmenides* (9.3), 23, tr. R. D. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 432–33. For Parmenides, see further Aetius, *Placita Philosophorum*, 2.15.7, apud Stobaeus, *Eclogae Physicae*, 1.24.1; Sir Th. Heath, *Aristarchus of Samos; The Ancient Copernicus; A History of Greek Astronomy to Aristarchus Together with Aristarchus's Treatise on the Sizes and Distances of the Sun and Moon: A New Greek Text with Translation and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 66, 75; idem, *Greek Astronomy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991 [1932]), 20. For Pythagoras or the Pythagoreans, see Apollodorus, *Peri Theōn*, 2.244, apud Arius Didymus (first century C.E.), *Epitome of Stoic Ethics*, 32; Aristoxenus, apud Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Pythagoras* (8.1), 14. Achilles (third century C.E.), *Isagogē in Arati Phaenomena*, 17 (136/956), ed. E. Maass, *Commentariorum in Aratum Reliquiae Collegit Recensuit Prolegomenis Indicibusque Instruxit* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898), 43, fingered the lyric poet, Ibycus of Rhegium (sixth century B.C.E.) as the originator: "prōtos dē Ibykos . . . eis hēn synēsteile tās prosēgorias." The scholiast on Basil of Caesarea (*Hexaemeron: Oratio in Genesim*, tr. D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric III: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and Others*, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991], 282–83) did the same: "The Dawn-bringer (Morning-star) and Hesperus (Evening-star) are one and the same, although in ancient times they were thought to be different. Ibycus of Rhegium was the first to equate the titles." R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 270, concluded that Ibycus was the first among poets, while Pythagoras and Parmenides pioneered the idea among philosophers. While that may be so, Ibycus' sojourn on Samos (G. O. Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001], 228–33) raises the possibility of direct dependence on Pythagoras himself.

In Babylon, the identity of Venus as morning and as evening star was recognized since the early third millennium B.C.E., D. Brown, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology* (Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000), 67; K. Szarzyńska, "Offerings for the Goddess Inana in Archaic Uruk," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 87 (1993): 7–8, 14; Heimpel, "Catalog," 11–12; J. C. Kahn, "On Early Greek Astronomy," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 90 (1970): 105; Albright, *Yahweh*, 134; U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, "Phaethon," *Hermes* 18 (1883): 417 n. 1.

female (and benefic) as a morning star . . . ; according to another she was male as a morning star and female as an evening star . . ."²⁴ For example, the authoritative compendium, *Enūma Anu Enlil* (seventh century B.C.E.), asserted: "Venus is seen in the west, she is male. . . . Venus is seen in the east, she is female."²⁵ Based on these Mesopotamian data, Dahood and Roberts, followed by other authorities, surmised that, in the Levant, the male 'Aṭtar representing Venus as the morning star was originally complemented by the female 'Aṭtart denoting Venus as the evening star.²⁶ That Monimos and Azizos were both of the same sex counts as a circumstantial argument that they were not primarily polarized in terms of their morning and evening qualities.

MONIMOS AND AZIZOS AS THE PLANETS MERCURY AND VENUS

Although Venus is admittedly the most conspicuous crepuscular star, it is often overlooked that the astronomical reality is more complicated than a simple equation of Venus with the morning and evening stars. As Venus is the brightest natural object in the night sky after the moon, mention of the "morning star" or "evening star" in mythical and cosmological traditions of all ages is generally explained in reference to this planet. Insofar as these designations imply no more than that the planet is seen during twilight hours, however, the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn all potentially qualify as "morning stars" and "evening stars." Because the two inner planets, Mercury and Venus, orbit around the sun in circles smaller than that of the earth, they always appear in close proximity to the sun from a terrestrial vantage-point, disappearing with it when the sun is too far below or above the horizon; they are, in other words, "full-time" morning and evening stars, although they cannot always be made out against the light of the sun. Thus, while Venus is far brighter than Mercury, the latter nonetheless qualifies as another morning or evening star, one that alternately appears together with Venus as a pair of morning stars or evening stars, or in the opposite phase, serving as morning star while Venus is evening star and *vice versa*. This much had apparently already been known to the Egyptians of the New Kingdom period: "The recognition that both Mercury and Venus can appear either in the morning or in the evening probably antedates the Rameside period (1295–1069 B.C.E.), since we have a statement that Mercury is 'Seth in the evening twilight, a god in the morning twilight' . . . It seems highly probable that brilliant Venus would also have been interpreted analogously, although no written record of that exists until considerably later in Egyptian history."²⁷ The

24. U. Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian Astrology: An Introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1995), 125; also Brown, *Mesopotamian*, 67; F. X. Kugler, *Sibyllinischer Sternkampf und Phaëthon in naturgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1927), 14.

25. *Enūma Anu Enlil*, 50 IV.6a, 7a (K. 6997 + 79-7-8, 210), tr. E. Reiner and D. Pingree, *Babylonian Planetary Omens; Part two: Enūma Anu Enlil, Tablets 50–51* (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1981), 46–47.

26. R. du Mesnil du Buisson, "Origine et Évolution du Panthéon de Tyr," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 164 (1963): 157–58; Albright, *Yahweh*, 134; Oldenburg, *Conflict*, 41; H. Gese, "Die Religionen Altsyriens," in *Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer*, ed. H. Gese, M. Höfner, and K. Rudolph (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970), 138–39; Heimpel, "Catalog," 14; Smith, "The God Aṭhtar," 629 n. 7, 630; H. R. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 53, 56; Day, *Yahweh*, 172.

27. G. DeYoung, "Astronomy in Ancient Egypt," in *Astronomy Across Cultures*, ed. H. Selin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 506–7, citing *Štš m wh(3) nṯr m dw3(y)t*, "Seth in the evening twilight, a god in the morning twilight," O. Neugebauer and R. A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts, III: Decans, Planets, Constellations and Zodiacs* (Providence, R.I.: Brown Univ. Press, 1969), 180.

remaining, outer planets can be observed at any time of the night and at any position on the ecliptic band between west and east. Occasionally, any of these planets may appear as a—"part-time"—morning or evening star, often in the same quarter as the sun and together with Venus or Mercury. Actual confusion with Venus may occur during the phase of Venus' invisibility or when the light of Venus is drowned out entirely by that of the sun, allowing only Mars or Jupiter to be seen in its stead.

Natural philosophers have recognized the multivalent identification of morning and evening stars since antiquity.²⁸ A text that may have been written anytime between the fourth century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. attributes an exposition of this to the Pythagorean teacher, Timaeus of Locri (fifth century B.C.E.), whose works exerted such a great influence on Plato:

Two others have courses equal to that of the sun, the star of Mercury and the star of Hera, which people call the star of Venus and the Lightbringer. For shepherds and all ordinary people are not wise about what concerns sacred astronomy, nor do they understand the evening and morning risings. For the same star is now the evening star, when it follows the sun at such a distance that it is not hidden by the rays of the sun; and now the morning star, when it precedes the sun and, about dawn, rises before it. Therefore, the star of Venus is often the Lightbringer because it has the same course as the sun; but this is not always so. But many of the fixed stars, as well as many of the planets, in fact any heavenly body of a certain size when it comes over the horizon before the sun, announce the coming of the day.²⁹

The medieval scholiast Pseudo-Bede (twelfth century C.E.) even commented on the occasional joint appearance of Venus and Mercury in the matutinal and vespertine skies:

These two planets are also sometimes both above the Sun or below it, or both before or after it. Thus we seem to have two Lucifers and in the same way two Hesperus's. For when Mercury precedes <the Sun>, it assumes the name Lucifer. Venus is the natural name; that is, wherever this star is, it is naturally called Venus. When it precedes the Sun in rising it is called Lucifer; when it appears when the Sun is setting it is called Hesperus or Vesper, and this is its name according to function.³⁰

Thus, while 'Azizū's association with Venus seems secure enough, it is worth entertaining the possibility that Mun'im represented the planet Mercury—not so much because

28. If it can be allowed that classical mythographers acknowledged the possibility of different planets serving as morning and evening stars, respectively, they can in some cases be exonerated from misplaced accusations of stupidity. When Nonnus of Panopolis (fifth century C.E.), in a poetic description of cosmic upheaval, tells that the giant Typhon dragged "first Phosphoros, then Hesperos and the crest of Atlas" from the sky (*Dionysiaca*, 1.206, tr. W. H. D. Rouse, *Nonnos; Dionysiaca* 1, Loeb Classical Library [London: William Heinemann, 1995], 18–19), his translator (p. 43 note) too rashly concludes that "Nonnos did not know, or had forgotten, that the two are one and the same." Considering that at least the planet Mars, too, could be called *vesper*, "evening star" (Isidore, *De Natura Rerum*, 3.2; 23.2, 4), Nonnus may well have patterned the scene on an astrological model indicative of the supposed date of the event, in which, e.g., the pair of Venus and another planet served as the twilight stars. For parallels in other cultures, see M. A. van der Sluijs, "Multiple Morning Stars in Oral Cosmological Traditions," *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 56 (2009): 459–76.

29. Timaeus, *De Natura Mundi et Animae*, 26–27 (96e–97a; 214), tr. Th. H. Tobin, *Timaio of Locri, On the Nature of the World and the Soul* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 44–45. The phrase "the star of Mercury and the star of Hera . . . the star of Venus and the Lightbringer" translates *Herma te kai Hēras, tōn Aphroditas kai phōs-phōron*, "many of the fixed stars" and "many of the planets" *polloī . . . tōn aplanēōn and polloī . . . tōn plazomēnōn*.

30. Pseudo-Bede, *De Mundi Celestis Terrestrisque Constitutione*, 237–40, tr. Ch. Burnett, *Pseudo-Bede: De Mundi Celestis Terrestrisque Constitutione: A Treatise on the Universe and the Soul* (London: Warburg Institute, 1985), 38–39.

Iamblichus associated him with Hermes, but because Mercury is an astronomically meaningful "attendant" of the sun, along with Venus. The identification of Mun'im with Mercury was first proposed by Starcky in 1972, though partly on the doubtful grounds that Monimos was another form of Arṣu, who supposedly stood for Mercury, and that his link with Mercury traced back to early Arabic tradition.³¹ Teixidor concurred:

Thus Monimos is the planet Mercury, whereas Azizos is Venus . . . most probably a male personification of Venus, which as a morning star seems to have acquired a warrior character among the Bedouin. . . . The name Monimos . . . stands for Mercury, the planet that precedes the sunrise.³²

That Azizos and Monimos referred to Venus and Mercury receives an acceptable defense in the observation that classical astronomers consistently portrayed these two planets as a pair of "companions" or "satellites" of the sun, using language that is very close to Julian's phrase and lacks an analogue in the paired morning and evening aspects of Venus, which are never thus described. In Greek astronomy, it was common practice to group Mercury and Venus with the sun as a triad travelling at approximately the same speed. Plato situated these two planets higher than the sun, the "Chaldeans" placed them below the sun,³³ and Heraclides of Pontus (387–312 B.C.E.), with admirable prescience, reasoned that they revolve around the sun in a sort of miniature heliocentric system.³⁴ All agreed that Mercury and Venus "are almost equal to the sun in speed, and on the whole are neither slower nor swifter."³⁵ The author of the Platonic tract, *Epinomis*, specifically referred to these two planets as *toûs syndrómous* or the "satellites" of the sun.³⁶ Cicero's designation of them as the sun's *comites*, "companions," is a similar close approximation of Julian's *páredroi*:

31. "Le lien entre Arṣû et Mercure me paraît toujours assuré par l'identité entre Arṣû et Monimos, par l'équation entre Arṣû et al-Kutbâ, le Mercure arabe et par le fait que Mercure et Vénus, en tant que planètes inférieures, sont par excellence les parèdres du Soleil," Starcky, "Relief dédié," 62–63. Al-Kutba' was really another form of al-'Uzzâ, Drijvers, *Cults*, 154–55. Certainly, Henninger's assertion that "the planet Mercury is totally unknown in Northern and Central Arabian cultures and religions" (in Drijvers, *Cults*, 164 nn. 88, 165) is weakened by the fact that modern knowledge of Pre-Islamic Arabic astronomy is highly defective. The early Arabs will almost certainly have known Mercury, considering that this planet had long before been recognized by the Babylonians as a form of the god Nabû.

32. Teixidor, *Pantheon*, 68–69.

33. E.g., Plato, *Republic*, 10.14 (616D–17A); *Timaeus*, 38D–E; Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis Commentarius*, 1.19.1–2; 21.27; Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*, 2 (392a); Ptolemy, *Almagest*, 9.1 (H206f.); Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 2.84; Cicero, *De Re Publica*, 6.17 (17); J. Evans, *The History & Practice of Ancient Astronomy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 348–49.

34. Heraclides of Pontus, apud Chalcidius, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarius*, 108–10; Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, 9.1.6; Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, 8.880, 882; Heath, *Greek Astronomy*, 94f.; P. Duhem, *Le Système du Monde: Histoire des Doctrines Cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic; II: l'Astronomie Latine au Moyen Âge* 3 (Paris: Librairie Scientifique Hermann, 1954), 48–49.

35. Pseudo-Plato, *Epinomis*, 986E, tr. W. R. M. Lamb, *Plato* 8, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1964), 468–69. "Of these three, the one who has sufficient mind must be leader. So let us speak of them as powers of the sun and of Lucifer, and of a third, which we cannot express in a name because it is not known . . . For indeed they have received titles of gods: thus, that Lucifer, or Hesperus (which is the same), should belong to Aphrodite, we may take as reasonable, and quite befitting a Syrian lawgiver; and that that which follows the same course as the sun and this together may well belong to Hermes." 986E–87B, pp. 468–71. The Greek word used for "Lucifer," in the genitive, is *heōsphōrou*, for "Hermes" *Hermou*. Compare Plato, *Timaeus*, 36B–D; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarius*, 3.264.26–31; Plutarch, *Moralia: De Defectu Oraculorum*, 36 (430A). A more refined definition of the relative speeds of these planets was reached by Pseudo-Bede (*De Mundi Celestis Terrisque Constitutione*, 336, tr. Burnett, *Pseudo-Bede*, 46–47): "Venus completes its orbit in 349 days; Mercury, because it is swifter, in 9 days less."

36. Pseudo-Plato, *Epinomis*, 990B, tr. Lamb, *Plato* 478–79.

Below it and almost midway of the distance is the Sun, the lord, chief, and ruler of the other lights, the mind and guiding principle of the universe, of such magnitude that he reveals and fills all things with his light. He is accompanied by his companions, as it were—Venus and Mercury in their orbits, and in the lowest sphere revolves the Moon, set on fire by the rays of the Sun.³⁷

In his commentary on this passage of Cicero, Macrobius similarly styled Mercury and Venus *tamquam satellites* or “like satellites,” of the sun: “. . . Mercury and Venus accompany the sun at the same rate of speed and follow its course like satellites; they are thought by some students of astronomy to possess the same force, whence Cicero’s statement: *The other eight spheres, two of which move at the same speed, produce seven different tones . . .*”³⁸ That this tradition lived on and was commonplace among mythographers, too, can be gleaned from Nonnus’ poetical introduction of Hermes as one whose “own wandering star” was such a companion of the sun:

. . . my own wandering star . . . turned away from the heavenly chariot, beside which he always runs before it in the morning, and in the evening when Helios sets he sends his following light, and because he keeps equal course with him and travels with equal portion, astronomers have named him the Sun’s Heart . . .³⁹

MONIMOS AND AZIZOS AS MERCURY AND VENUS SEEN CONCURRENTLY

The interpretation of Azizos and Monimos as Venus and Mercury does not rule out the possibility that one signified the morning star, the other the evening star, but they would have done so as two planets in opposite aspects rather than one planet observed in different parts of the sky at different times. This seems to have been Starcky’s understanding when he assigned Monimos and Azizos “une fonction céleste (Aurore et Crépuscule).”⁴⁰ A more attractive hypothesis is that, with respect to the processions at Edessa, Monimos and Azizos represented Mercury and Venus as two concurrent morning stars. The “sacred procession,” of which nothing else is known, apparently celebrated the hallowed moment of sunrise in its fullest form, perhaps as a renewal of the appearance of the first light at the time of creation, when the emergence of the sun is preceded by the two inner planets, who dissipate the “enemies of light” and pave the way for the greatest luminary. When Julian acknowledges his awareness “that Ares, who is called Azizos by the Syrians who inhabit Edessa, precedes Helios in the sacred procession,” he does not at all exclude Monimos from the same role of acting as a morning star.

During the Imperial period, pairs of youthful gods flanking the sun god were a common fixture of oriental mystery cults, seen on numerous Syrian bas-reliefs⁴¹ and including

37. Cicero, *De Re Publica*, 6.17 (17), tr. C. W. Keyes, *Cicero: De Re Publica; De Legibus*, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1943), 270–71, and repeated *verbatim* in Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis Commentarius*, 1.17.3.

38. Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis Commentarius*, 2.4.9, tr. W. H. Stahl, *Macrobius: Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1952), 198–99. Compare: “But the planet Mercury is so near Venus and the sun so near Mercury that these three complete their revolutions in the same space of time, that is, a year more or less. On this account Cicero called Mercury and Venus the sun’s companions, for they never stray far from each other in their annual periods . . . But the proximity of the three neighboring planets, Venus, Mercury, and the sun, was responsible for the confusion in the order assigned to them by astronomers, that is, with the exception of the skillful Egyptians, who understood the reason, here outlined,” 1.19.4–5, pp. 162–63.

39. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 38.385–92, tr. Rouse, *Nonnos* 3, 118–21. The term used for the “Sun’s Heart” is *Ēlētou kradiēn*. Mercury’s turning away from its normal course refers to the disruption of cosmic order caused by Phaethon.

40. Starcky, “Relief dédié,” 63.

41. Drijvers, *Cults*, 169.

Palmyrene representations of Bel and Ba'alšamên as *cosmocratores* surrounded by Malakbel and 'Aglibol, or by Yarhibol and 'Aglibol.⁴² A similar pair of gods called Šahr and Šalim, judging by the former's name associated with at least the dawn, appear as early as in the Ugaritic literature; these have been interpreted as the dawn and the evening twilight "oder es sind die entsprechenden Repräsentanten des Venusplaneten, Morgen- und Abendstern."⁴³ Two flaming torches placed on the shoulders of Helios on a sculpture from Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan, are taken by Glueck to "symbolize the morning and evening stars, respectively . . ."⁴⁴ And the Mithraic equivalent of these was the motif of the two torchbearers, Cautes and Cautopates, seen at the sides of Mithra, the sun god, who have often been interpreted similarly.⁴⁵ The contrasting vertical positions of the torches held by Mithra's flanking companions on Mithraic bas-reliefs reinforce the idea of an associated opposition between "light" and "darkness," yet this does not necessarily have to have been the polarity of morning versus evening, east versus west, or night versus day. From an earthbound perspective, Venus is the brightest of all planets, whereas Mercury is the least conspicuous. Accordingly, Greek astrologers, with Babylonian antecedents, treated Venus as benefic and Mercury as ambiguous, not necessarily malefic.⁴⁶ Perhaps, then, such pairs of solar companions, including Monimos and Azizos, represented Mercury and Venus as the "dark" and "bright" attendants of the sun at the time of its rising, and possibly also its setting.

42. Drijvers, *Cults*, 178. The latter are sometimes interpreted as sun and moon.

43. "Šahr und Šalim entsprechen 'Azizos und Monimos von Edessa und anderen Orten, d.h. 'stark' und 'gnädig', und 'Azizu und Aršu ('huldvoll') in Palmyra, die Götter von Morgen- und Abendstern," Gese, "Die Religionen," 80–81; see Gray, "Desert God," 73.

44. N. Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins; The Story of the Nabataeans* (London: Cassell, 1966), 464.

45. Cumont, "Le Culte," 97, but see idem, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 129, for a more neutral allowance for other pairs of logical opposites in the significance of the two, such as life and death, or summer and winter. M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, the Secret God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), 73, specifically associated the pair with east and west, sunrise and sunset: "Consequently Cautes represents the position of the sun in the morning (*oriens*), Mithras its course at midday . . . and Cautopates its setting (*occidens*)."

46. O. Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1951), 162; F. Rochberg-Halton, "Benefic and Malefic Planets in Babylonian Astrology," in *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs*, ed. E. Leichty, M. deJ. Ellis, and P. Gerardi (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1988): 324–25.

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