

PART III

FAKING THE GODS

The discussion of Parts I and II largely focused on instances where technology was helpful to bridge human and divine spheres in Greek religious contexts. As a mode of visual epiphany, for example, mechanical technologies manifest the divine before the worshipper in contexts ranging from the theatrical to the dedicatory and divinatory. Technical knowledge also helps authenticate divine space (e.g. through mirror reflections or subterranean experience), it proves useful as a method to organise divinatory material which gives access to the supernatural (as in the cases of astragalomancy and catoptromancy), and it even serves to perform the symbiosis between divine benevolence and human political power (e.g. through the use of processional automata).

Yet one of the last pieces of evidence presented in Chapter 6, the Socratic Epistle, raises the possibility of tension instead of cooperation in the relation between technology and religion, human and divine. The letter clearly describes Apollo's indignation at arriving in Delphi only to see a little wagon whizzing round the hippodrome of its own accord.¹ The paternal imagery used to describe Apollo's reaction (ὁ Ἀπόλλων οὐχ ὡς πατήρ διατεθῆναι) conjures up a finger-wagging god who insists that this is a naïve misuse of what should be reserved for sacred occasions and not, as here, squandered on mere *theōrēmata*, 'spectacles'. Apollo is cast as a reputable deity justified in his attempt to discipline a mischievous child. At the same time, however, the epistle exposes the wounded ego of a god who sees this powerful technology being pulled dangerously far into the exclusively human realm. The epistle both captures the general ambivalence of the divine temperament in ancient Greece and, critically, places religious technologies and the human capacity to create these right at

¹ Socratic Epistle 35 Hercher; compare pages 208–9.

the centre of this issue. Already in Part I, we have seen that at the very same time that the tragic *mēchanē* was captivating its audience, the *kradē* was being used by comic authors to point to the fragility of the mechanical mode of epiphany which relied on the human *mēchanopoios*.² In the Imperial period, this discourse finds a different breadth of life in and it is to that period that Part III largely turns.

Studies of ancient religious mentalities have increasingly focused on the inconsistencies, uncertainties, dissension, and cognitive dissonances that underscored the Greek religious experience over the past thirty years.³ From this vast, heterogeneous scholarship two complementary observations are most relevant to the present discussion. The first is that ancient Greek worshippers were cognisant of the fact that access to their gods relied on humanly constructed channels.⁴ The second is that in the ancient Greek tradition, a critical stance towards the gods and what they mean for humans appeared as early as discussions of the gods themselves. Religious technologies have important contributions to make to the conversations on the constructed nature of divine mediators and the ensuing potential both to make the gods seem manufactured when they were not, and to enable the creation of ‘fake’ gods outright. But they have been left out of the account since because the ‘positive’ role of technology in religious contexts has not been properly unearthed, the opposite side of the coin has remained buried too.

The following discussion will be presented in two parts. Both parts take as points of departure texts attributed to the second-century CE author Lucian of Samosata. Although Lucian is unique as an author, and the stylistic and generic interplays of his prolific corpus are complex, the vision(s) of Greek culture under the

² See pages 40–44. See too the discussion on Euripides *Orestes* and simulated epiphanies on pages 88–91, and the discussion of meta-theatricality in *Prometheus Bound* (pp. 159–65).

³ Versnel 1990, 1993, 2011; Parker 2011; Kindt 2012; Harrison 2015; Whitmarsh 2015; Larson 2016; Eidinow 2019; Mackey 2022. These discussions should be seen as coming off the back of earlier conversations on the Greeks and their (ir)rationality in the works cited in the discussion on pages 21–23.

⁴ Compare page 59n41 for relevant scholarship on this issue specifically from the material perspective.

Roman Empire that he presents and satirises and with which he fantasises and philosophises are very useful. Lucian's own religious beliefs have been the source of much modern debate. Scholars have identified in his works both moments of adherence to traditional religious structures and modes of thought, and sharp critiques of contemporary religion.⁵ We must, I think, content ourselves with recognising that Lucian manipulates his authorial persona, and consequently his religious positioning, within his texts. In fact, this is what makes Lucian a valuable author to open up questions of technology and religion in the Imperial period specifically with regards to the paradox of mechanics being able to 'forge' a religious connection in both senses of the term. Because of Lucian's authorial fluidity as he switches between perspectives and between historical and literary representation, relishing in the metaphors of the theatre of life, we can gain new insights into the straight uses of and anxieties around the mechanical miracle in this period.

The place of the technical in the discourse on religious fraud will be discussed first (Chapter 7), taking Lucian's *Alexander* as a case study read not only with (and against) other Lucianic texts concerned with the mechanisms of cult, but also taking into account contemporaneous Christian critique of pagan affinities towards technology and religion. Chapter 8 will then look at the issue of fighting against, or at least threatening, the power of the gods through the technological, staying, in the first instance, in the imperial context with Lucian's *Icaromenippus*. This text works as a nice foil to the *Alexander*. While the *Alexander* is concerned with the real-world issue of the place of technology in cult, the *Icaromenippus* is a wild work of fantasy and Menippean satire. Yet the fact that the two can be read together along the theme of technology and religion attests, I think, to the topic's relevance to the Imperial Greek context, both in the period's history and within the imaginative disposition of its authors. *Thauma*-inducing technologies float around in the texts as an issue to 'deal with' and Lucian does so in two different ways in these two different texts. The *Icaromenippus*' deep intertextual

⁵ Caster 1937; Bompaire 1958; Decharneux 2006; Karavas 2006, 2009; Dickie 2010; Berdozzo 2011.

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references – to early science, philosophy, fable, and theatre to name a few – also offers a springboard from which we will take one final chronological hop backwards to test how much of the Lucianic picture is a result of Imperial circumstance, and how much appears as an earlier theme in ancient Greek religious discourse, as old as the myth of Prometheus itself.