

APULEIUS' *THE GOLDEN ASS*:  
ANTI-CHRISTIAN OPINION CONCEALED AS AN ASS-TALE

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By

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## Abstract

The Latin novel *The Golden Ass* has mystified scholars for centuries. The first ten books of this eleven book work are presented by its second century North African author, Apuleius, as a ribald picaresque comedy written in a fashion reminiscent of the then popular ‘Greek romances’. It is, in particular, an example of an ‘ass-tale’: a comical story of the trials and tribulations suffered by a man who is transformed into an ass via magical means. However, the final book of *The Golden Ass* reveals to the reader that Apuleius had more than the retelling of an old tale in mind when he wrote this work. Instead, he appears to have had a distinctly religious aim as his goal given that the final book of his novel is dedicated to the salvific properties of the goddess Isis. By placing a book dedicated to Isis at the end of a ribald comedy suggests that Apuleius’ religious aim in writing *The Golden Ass* was more complicated than is immediately apparent. Modern scholarship has long struggled with this mystery, but discerning the religious aim of Apuleius becomes less of an enigma when it is studied in the light of its unique second century social context of anti-Christian tension. Following the lead of the eminent scholar P.G. Walsh, this particular study demonstrates that in writing *The Golden Ass* Apuleius was artfully expressing the anti-Christian opinion characteristic of the elite and traditionally-minded social class to which he belonged.

## **Acknowledgments** **For my family**

God has chosen the foolish things to shame the wise,  
the weak things to shame the strong.  
The insignificant and despised things – the things  
viewed as nothing – so He might bring to  
nothing the things that one viewed as something,  
so that no one may boast in His presence.  
1Corinthians 1:27-29 (A.D. 50-60)

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However, my greatest debt is to my family: my husband, Alfred, and my children, Marion, Miles, and Rance. They all had to sacrifice much in order to help me achieve my academic goals.

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## Introduction

Christian interpretations of classical Greco-Roman works are often avoided in current modern scholarship. This has been the case so as to avoid the many mistakes of the late 19th and early 20th century scholars who often added a Christian cultural gloss to everything they studied. This current trend in Classical scholarship should not go so far as to avoid the recognition of possible Christian subject matter in non-Christian works where it is applicable: for example when studying the relevant classical works authored during the height of the non-Christian versus Christian (and *vice versa*) social conflict of the first three centuries A.D. This is especially applicable to works which deal with the subject of religion and those that are connected to North Africa -- an area of the Roman Empire that was particularly dominated by the political and social tension caused by the advent of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Ass* is just such a work.

*The Golden Ass*, a work heralded as one of the world's first novels, is also known to us as by its alternate title the *Metamorphoses*. It was written in the latter half of the second century A.D. before the first imperially directed and systematic persecutions of Christians began under the emperor Decius in 250.<sup>2</sup> Before Decius

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<sup>1</sup>An excellent study of the religious climate in Roman North Africa is: J.B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage: From Augustus to Constantine*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (London: Penguin Books, 1993),

the nature of the persecutions against Christians had been sporadic and localized in nature. In many communities, non-Christians and Christians would have lived side-by-side. It was in this world of religious relationships that the well-known North African statesman and philosopher, Apuleius, penned his novel, *The Golden Ass*.

Apuleius was born c. A.D. 125 in Madauros, a colony near the present day city of Mdaurouch in Algeria. Little is known of his family other than his father once held the office of one of the two chief magistrates of Madauros. Apuleius was educated first in Carthage and then in Athens; consequently, he was fluent in both Latin and Greek. He traveled widely in Greece before taking up residence in both Rome and in Carthage. He won wide acclaim in his time as both a public speaker and philosopher. After falling ill on a journey to Alexandria in 155, he was forced to stay at Oea. At Oea he married an older widow, Prudentilla, who was the mother of a close friend. That Apuleius had married an older woman led some to believe that he must have used 'magic' to entice the good widow to marry him. Consequently, legal charges of practicing magic were brought against him, but Apuleius successfully defended himself against these charges. The extant *Apology* is Apuleius' own account of his defence, and he is also the author of many other, mostly philosophical works, of which *De Deo Socratis*, *De Platone*, and *De Mundo*, are extant. Nevertheless, it is *The Golden Ass* that he is most famous for.

*The Golden Ass* was written in a style reflective of common narrative prose and it tells the story of Lucius, a young man traveling about Greece who is keenly interested in both philosophy and magic. Due to Lucius' association with a local witch, he is magically, yet mistakenly, transformed into an ass. As an ass Lucius

endures many hardships, but later his asinine life is transformed by the power of the goddess Isis and Lucius returns to his human form. The story concludes with Lucius' ongoing initiations into the various levels of the priesthoods of Isis. Many religious themes of all types are present in this often comedic and ribald story, and Apuleius' audience (both ancient and modern) have often struggled to ascertain his literary aim in writing such a raunchy yet religious tale.

The analysis of the text of *The Golden Ass* has been the subject of an immensely vast amount of scholarship throughout the modern period. It seems all who have read it recognize that Apuleius has provided his readership with a religious mystery to solve, but there has been very little consensus on the exact nature of this mystery. There exists a general agreement on the centrality of certain themes such as magic, curiosity, sexuality, and religion, as well as a generalized recognition of the elements of parody and/or satire and of the role of folktale and Greek tradition in the work. However, there is very little agreement concerning the relationships of these elements to the novel and of the author's aims. Moreover, other arguments concerning the apparent disunity between Books I-X with Book XI, and what Apuleius meant when he used the phrase "*Milesio... fabulas*" (Milesian tales),<sup>3</sup> have at times also dominated the scholarship of *The Golden Ass*. A very short list some of some of the recent scholars who have been active in the scholarship of *The Golden Ass* over the years include: G. Anderson, J.G. Griffiths, S.J. Harrison, B.L. Hijmans Jr., J. Hilton, V. Hunink, J.K. Krabbe, H.J. Mason, B.E. Perry, B.P. Reardon, G.N. Sandy, C.C. Schlam, A. Scobie, N. Shumate, J. Tatum,

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<sup>3</sup> Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, 1.1.

P.G. Walsh and J.J. Winkler.

Despite the fact the scholarship of *The Golden Ass* has been dominated by a few select topics, in 1968 P.G. Walsh introduced the idea that *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius "was written in strong reaction to the diffusion of Christian ideology...".<sup>4</sup> Walsh later comments that, "This suggestion has been sceptically received..."<sup>5</sup> but it appears that no major rebuttal of his argument has ever been published. What has been published concerning Walsh's article are two articles that lend their support to Walsh's argument. The first article to come to Walsh's defence was "*Reaktionen Auf Das Christentum In Den Metamorphosen Des Apuleius*," by Victor Schmidt in 1997.<sup>6</sup> This was followed by "Apuleius, Pudentilla, and Christianity," by Vincent Hunink in 2000.<sup>7</sup> Schmidt's approach is to use the passage in *The Golden Ass* known as 'The Baker's Wife' (9.14), a passage that has long been argued as anti-Christian,<sup>8</sup> as employing language that had been widely used in Christian and non-Christian dialogue of the time. Hunink's approach is to examine Apuleius' other works in

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<sup>4</sup>P.G. Walsh, "Lucius Madauranis," *Phoenix*, Vol. 22 (1968), 143-157. See esp. p.152. Walsh uses this particularly in context with Apuleius' own and distinct climax and resolution of *The Golden Ass* (Book 11), which was added to an adaptation of the pre-existing traditional folktale known to us as Pseudo-Lucian, *Lucian or the Ass*.

<sup>5</sup>P.G. Walsh, "Introduction," in *Apuleius: The Golden Ass*, translated by P.G. Walsh (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994), xi-xlix. See esp. xxxviii.

<sup>6</sup>Victor Schmidt, "*Reaktionen Auf Das Christentum In Den Metamorphosen Des Apuleius*," *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 51 (1997), 51-71.

<sup>7</sup>Vincent Hunink, "Apuleius, Pudentilla, and Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 54 (2000), 80-94.

<sup>8</sup>A good discussion concerning the passage 'The Baker's Wife' can be found in Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women And Pagan Opinion*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 67-74.

order to show that *The Golden Ass* contained anti-Christian sentiments. Moreover, just as Hunink “intended [his study] as a sequel to Schmidt’s study”, it is my hope that this thesis will continue in the tradition of both Schmidt and Hunink and add to as well as support Walsh’s original aim of revealing an anti-Christian opinion in *The Golden Ass*. It is interesting to note that both Schmidt’s and Hunink’s articles were published by *Vigiliae Christianae*, a journal dedicated to early Christian studies, whereas Walsh’s original argument was presented in *Phoenix*, a journal representing the scholarship of Classics or Classical studies. Although certainly not conclusive in itself, that the articles which defend Walsh’s claim of an anti-Christian aim in *The Golden Ass* were published by a journal concerned with early Christian studies and that the argument has been ignored since 1968 by journals representing Classical scholarship may illustrate that the two disciplines have been divided on this issue.

However, the scepticism Walsh received concerning his study may stem from the fact that a large part of Walsh's thesis is not conclusively supported. His thesis relies on the idea that the intended audience would have easily recognized the theme of transformation (man into ass/ass into man) as reflective of a conversion/apostasy experience with Christianity. To support his argument Walsh refers to both the volatile religious social context of North Africa and to a select passage of Tertullian's *Apology*, the *Onokoites* passage,<sup>9</sup> which describes a non-Christian depiction of Christ with the head of an ass. Yet, Walsh does not subject the critical passage of the *Apology* to a careful analysis -- he only refers to the description made by Tertullian, and therefore he does not firmly establish that the view of Christianity

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<sup>9</sup>*Apol.* 16.

as a faith that involved the figure of an ass was a commonly held view in antiquity.

In order to more fully accept the argument that *The Golden Ass* was written as a reaction against Christianity, in this thesis I have demonstrated that other primary themes of the novel, namely magic and sex, also had strong associations with Christians -- before illustrating that the figure of the ass was popular enough to be used as an element of satire in the time of Apuleius. Furthermore, the *Onokoites* evidence from Tertullian is not limited to a reference of it alone. Instead, this evidence is strengthened by providing both a careful examination of and a comparison of the passage in Tertullian's *Apologeticus* (*The Apology*) with a similar passage in Tertullian's *Ad Nationes* (*To The Nations*) so as to confirm the second century popularity of the view of Christianity as an 'asinine' religion.

An inquiry into the character of the author himself is also useful to establish that Apuleius had an anti-Christian aim in mind when he wrote *The Golden Ass*, and I have included this evidence here. What is more, in his article Walsh chose to limit the anti-Christian evidence taken from the text itself to Book XI. Evidence from the books which precede Book XI is confined to the infamous episode of 'The Baker's Wife'.<sup>10</sup> This one episode on its own hardly supports the notion that the novel is a 'strong reaction' against Christianity, and therefore there is a real need to explore further passages of *The Golden Ass* to demonstrate the presence of any anti-Christian sentiment or aim. In this work other passages are revealed as illustrating an anti-Christian theme. The passages scrutinized here include "The Festival of Laughter" (3.1-3.12), 'Thelyphron's Tale' (2.21-2.30), and 'The Attack of the Wineskin

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<sup>10</sup>Walsh "Lucius *Madaurenis*," p.152.

Bandits' (2.31 -2.32). A further investigation into the focus of Walsh's work, Book XI or 'The Isis Book', has also been provided, as has an analysis of the subject of genre as it relates to *The Golden Ass*. This subject both compliments and completes this thesis.

It is critical to read *The Golden Ass* as a product of the unique social context to which it belonged. To meet this end, support and methodology from a variety of disciplines has been applied (Classics, History, Religious Studies, Art History, Archaeology, and Folklore), and both literary as well as archaeological evidence from the period have been subject to analysis. Latin sources have been primarily subject to my own translation; however, it has been impossible to improve on J. Arthur Hanson's translation of *The Golden Ass*,<sup>11</sup> and therefore all translations from *The Golden Ass* are taken from him. All sources in Greek have been consulted and taken from standard English translations.

Moreover, to more fully understand the tension between non-Christians and Christians of the age the term 'Roman Traditionalist' has replaced the generic term 'pagan' in this study. This follows the lead of Ernest Sihler who substituted the term 'Old Believer' to replace the term 'pagan' in his work, *From Augustus to Augustine*.<sup>12</sup> This has been done not to confuse the issue, but rather to more accurately describe how the people of the Roman Empire would have seen themselves. These were the

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<sup>11</sup>Apuleius (Latin with English translation by J. Arthur Hanson), *Metamorphoses Volumes I and II, The Loeb Classical Library*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>12</sup>E.G. Sihler, *From Augustus to Augustine: Essays and Studies Dealing with the Contact and Conflict of Classical Paganism and Christianity*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1923).

people who maintained the 'traditional' religious practices of Roman rule: worship of the gods and piety towards the emperor. For the elite, this was veneered with views from a variety of philosophical schools of thought, especially Stoicism and Neo-Platonism. Nevertheless, the traditional Roman religion was a fundamental piece of the social fabric that helped to hold the political structure of the empire in place. Therefore, understanding that the religious tension at the time was between 'traditional' practices and 'novel' practices helps us to appreciate the rather tongue-in-cheek view of Christianity that Apuleius and many of the Roman Traditionalists of his time would have harboured. It is no surprise that Apuleius would have chosen both the style of writing and genre that he did in order to lampoon Christianity.

## Chapter One: Magic, Sex and the Figure of the Ass in the Roman Traditionalist

### View of Christianity

The primary means needed to identify the anti-Christian aim of *The Golden Ass* is to recognize that the main character's transformation into an ass was an easily identifiable metaphor of the Christian experience in antiquity. However, there are two other themes which predominate in *The Golden Ass* beside that of an asinine metamorphosis. The first is magic and the second is sex. Obviously, these three elements are all closely connected: Lucius' interest in magic and his appetite for sex are, in fact, the direct cause of his transformation into an ass.<sup>13</sup> Curiously, these same three factors were also popularly associated with Christians in the time of Apuleius. Therefore, before moving to the main discussion of the symbolic representation of the 'ass-man', a brief examination of the ideological connections between magic and early Christianity, as well as between sexual promiscuity and Christianity will be considered in order to illustrate that the above elements of Lucius' characterization in *The Golden Ass* were also popularly associated with Christianity in the Roman Traditionalist worldview of Apuleius.

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<sup>13</sup>See Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, Bk. 3.24-25.

## Magic

Magic held an ambiguous position in Roman antiquity, and its ambiguity extended itself into the Christian context. Magic was both illegal and yet it was a widely practiced and consulted art. In *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine*, J.B. Rives has illustrated both the popular use of magic in Roman imperial antiquity, as well as its connection to the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>14</sup> The former is largely illustrated by the abundance of surviving *defixiones*,<sup>15</sup> and the latter is illustrated through the use of such names as those of the archangels Michael and Gabriel in these magical incantations. Rives also notes that the Jews had the reputation of being the greatest magicians in the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>16</sup> Apparently, there was a well forged connection between magic and the Judeo-Christian tradition in antiquity, and Morton Smith, in *Jesus the Magician*, has clearly illustrated the almost intrinsic nature of this relationship in ancient popular thought. Moreover, he has concluded that it was this perceived association that was the basis for the early Christian persecutions,<sup>17</sup> and the association between magic and Christianity was not without justification. For the Christians in many ways re-enforced this belief themselves, despite their clear opposition to characters

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<sup>14</sup>Rives, *Religion and Authority*, pp.193-203.

<sup>15</sup>On the evidence of *defixiones* which are, “literally ‘bindings’, [they] are small inscribed tablets, typically made of lead, intended to bring about some particular fate for a person or animal.” Rives, *Religion and Authority*, p.194.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p.196.

<sup>17</sup>Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

such as Simon the Magician.<sup>18</sup> In early Christian art (see appendix figures #1, #2, #3, #4, and #5) Christ is depicted with a *virgula* (a magical staff or stick) that the modern scholar Thomas Mathews has identified as having the same properties as a magic wand. Mathews states that "the [magic] wand is the most constant attribute of Christ...".<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Jesus wields this *virgula*, or 'wand', not only to perform miracles such as the cure of the haemorrhaging woman, the multiplication of loaves, and the water-to-wine miracle,<sup>20</sup> but also the raising of Lazarus.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Christ is also depicted as carrying a wand on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it appears that even in the Christian worldview there was a popular association between magic and Christianity. For the many Jesus was the ultimate and most divine master magician who performed miracles of body, mind and spirit.

If the early Christians saw Christ in some ways as 'the ultimate' divine magician, then consequently the Roman Traditionalists viewed Christ as a common or wicked magician who stupefied the minds of his followers and led them astray. For example, Origen reports that the second century Platonic philosopher Celsus

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<sup>18</sup> *Acts* 8.9-24. The interesting character of Simon the 'Magician' in Christian literature helps to establish that Jesus himself was perceived in a corresponding light, although it clearly sets the magical arts apart from the Christian tradition.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.54.

<sup>20</sup> From "The Trees Sarcophagus," c. 360, Musee Reattu, Arles, panels #1, #3, & #5. See also Mathews, p.55. Figure 34. Note that Mathews does not cite panel #1 although the use of the wand is clearly obvious.

<sup>21</sup> From "The Raising of Lazarus Sarcophagus," c. 340, Latern, Musei Vaticani, Rome. See also Mathews, p.55. Figure 35.

<sup>22</sup> From "Entry of Christ into Jerusalem Sarcophagus," c. 325, *Museo Nazionale delle Terme*, Rome. See also Mathews p.28 & p.29. Figure 11.

(c. fl. 150-180) propagated a view that Jesus learned magic in Egypt saying that, “He [Jesus] ... hired himself out as a workman in Egypt, and after having tried his hand at certain magical powers he returned from there, and on account of those powers gave himself the title of God.”<sup>23</sup> In the view of Celsus, Jesus was a wicked sorcerer and Celsus asserted that “these were the actions of one hated by God and of a wicked sorcerer.”<sup>24</sup> Celsus believed that Jesus performed miracles by magic and said that, “it was by magic that he was able to do the miracles which he appeared to have done ...”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the followers of Christ were attributed with similar malevolent characteristics, and Celsus believed that Christian preachers practiced sorcery and carried spell books stating that he “has seen among certain elders who were of our [Christian] opinion books containing barbarian names of daemons and magical formula. And he asserted that these men (the alleged elders of our opinion) profess nothing good, but everything that is harmful to men.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly in the *Passion of Perpetua*, the anonymous eyewitness reports that the Roman Traditionalists were afraid that the Christians may “*subtraherentur de carcere incantationibus aliquibus magicis*” (be withdrawn from [may breakout of] jail by use of incantations or other

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<sup>23</sup>Origen (translated by Henry Chadwick), *Contra Celsum*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1.38, and following Stephen Benko, “Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D. *ANRW* Vol. 23.2 (1980), 1055-1118, see esp. pp.1101&1105. The arguments of Celsus are preserved only in Origen’s refutation, *Contra Celsum*. The original work of Celsus has been lost.

<sup>24</sup>*Contra Celsum*, 1.71.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.6.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.40.

magic).<sup>27</sup> It is with these beliefs in mind that Christianity quickly became categorized as a *superstitio*.

The Latin term *superstitio*, a term that was often applied to early Christianity, seems to have been linked to the practice of magic through the conceptualization of a category of ‘bad religion’.<sup>28</sup> Steven Benko has illustrated that the term *superstitio* was often used by those of the imperial literary tradition in discussing Christianity. He cites that Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger all describe Christianity as a *superstitio*, and that “when the Roman of the late first or second century heard the word *superstitio* he probably thought, as Plutarch (46-120) did, of magic rites, processions, incantations, enchantments, weird music, beating of drums, ridiculous and sometimes brutal behaviour.”<sup>29</sup> The magical *superstitio* view may have been connected to the view that the Christians were either (or both) cannibalistic and/or incestuously promiscuous due to the association of *superstitio* with wild rites.

## Sex

The Roman Traditionalist view of early Christian sexual deviance is well documented by both ancient sources and modern scholarship. However, based on the evidence presented by the early Christian apologists, it appears that there may have

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<sup>27</sup>Translation by author from: S. Perpetua *et al*, “*Passio S. Perpetuae*” in *The Passion of S. Perpetua: Newly Edited From the MSS.*, edited by J. Armitage Robinson B.D. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 16.23-24.

<sup>28</sup>J. Rives, “Human Sacrifice Among Pagans and Christians,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* Vol. 85 (1995), 65-85, see especially p.79.

<sup>29</sup>Benko, “Pagan Criticism,” p. 1075 on Plutarch (Greek with English translation by Frank C. Babbitt), “Superstition,” in *Moralia Volume II, Loeb Classical Library*, (London: W. Heinmann, 1927), see esp. ch. 2.

been at least two different views concerning the role of sex in Christianity held by Roman Traditionalists. One view, which can be termed as the 'abomination' view, was based primarily on the belief that Christians practiced ritualistic infant cannibalism that was immediately followed by an incestuous orgy whenever they met together. The other, somewhat milder view, can be termed as the 'promiscuous' view. This view was a more moderate version of the 'abomination' view as it was characterized only by stories of incestuous orgies, and other obscene or disreputable sexual behaviour - it did not include a belief in Christian cannibalism. It is the 'promiscuous' view that was primarily associated with the figure of the ass, and it is the predominate view of Christianity put forth by Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*. This characteristic of *The Golden Ass* will be discussed later in this work. However, due to the overwhelming scholarly popularity of the 'abomination' view, this view needs to be considered in further detail before returning to the 'promiscuous' view.

The ancient Christian apologists, Tertullian (c.150/60 - 225/40)<sup>30</sup> and Minucius Felix (fl.150/60),<sup>31</sup> both denied that Christians practiced ritual infant

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<sup>30</sup>Tertullian, "Ad Nationes, Liber I," and "Apologeticum," in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina I, Tertulliani Opera, Pars I*, (Turnhout: Typographi Brepols, 1954), 11-40 and 85-171, see esp. *Ad. Nat.* Bk. I.2 & *Apol.* VII.

<sup>31</sup>Minucius Felix (translated by Rudolph Arbesmann), "Octavius," in *Tertullian Apologetical Works; and Minucius Felix, Octavius*, edited by Roy Joseph Deferrari *et al.*, (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950), 321-402, see esp. chapters 8 and 9. For Latin text see: Minucius Felix, *M. Minuci Felicis Octavius*, edited by Bernhard Kytzler, (Leipzig: B.G. Teuber Verlagsgesellschaft, 1982). Justin (second century) also makes mention of this view, but only in passing. Justin (translated by Rev. M. Dods), "The First Apology," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 159-187, see chapter 26 "And whether they [Marcionites] perpetrate those fabulous and shameful deeds -- the upsetting of the lamp, and promiscuous intercourse, and eating human flesh, -- we know not..."

cannibalism and/or Christian incestuous orgies. Modern scholarship has assumed that the most commonly held belief against Christians in antiquity was that the two acts of ritual infant cannibalism and incestuous orgies were believed to have been practiced in tandem by early Christians. This is the above described 'abomination' view. Based on the reference in Minucius Felix to an *oratio* made by M. Cornelius Fronto, Benko argues that the abomination view was the standard view of Christianity in the Roman Traditionalist mind.<sup>32</sup> It is generally accepted that Fronto, a former tutor of the imperial court to both the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, believed in the abomination view as *Octavius* 9.6 reads, "*Et de convivio notum est; passim omnes locuntur, id etiam Cirtensis nostri testatur oratio* (and their banqueting is notorious; it is spoken of far and wide by everyone, that even our fellow citizen of Cirta [Fronto was from Cirta] testifies to it in his speech)."<sup>33</sup> However, it is difficult to tell from a reading of *Octavius* whether "And their banqueting" includes the completed story of ritual cannibalism that this phrase follows, or if it simply refers to the next story of the incestuous orgy which this statement introduces. It may be that Fronto had spoken only of the incestuous 'love feast' and not of the initiation rite of infanticide and cannibalism. That Fronto spoke only about the practice of incestuous orgies is confirmed by an examination of chapters 30 and 31 of *Octavius*. Chapter 30 refutes the accusation of ritual cannibalism, "*Illum iam velim convenire, qui initiari nos dicit aut credit de caede*

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<sup>32</sup>Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 54-78 regarding *Octavius*, 9.6. Benko also refers to the account of the martyrdoms of Lugdunum to support M. Felix.

<sup>33</sup>Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 9.6.

*infantis et sanguine* (Now I would like to meet the man who says or believes that the rites of our initiation are concerned with the slaughter and blood of an infant.)"<sup>34</sup> and chapter 31 deals **only** with refuting "*Et de incesto convivio fabulam grandem ...* (And concerning the monstrous story of incestuous banqueting..."<sup>35</sup> It is only in this specific context that Fronto is cited again, "*Sic de isto et tuus Fronto non ut adfirmator testimonium fecit, sed convicium ut orator adpersit:* (On **this** [emphasis mine] point, your own Fronto, for instance did not substantiate his testimony, but expatiated upon it in rhetorical invective.)"<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it is clear from the use of the singular, "this point," and by contrasting the aims of chapter 30 and 31, that the belief in Christian ritual cannibalism and the belief in Christian incestuous promiscuity existed as two different rumours that were originally independent of one another. Moreover, the above quotation also further indicates that the nature of the allegation was as a jibe, a "rhetorical invective," rather than a *bona fide* assertion. Nevertheless, Tertullian related the two stories together in one abomination view,<sup>37</sup> yet there is good evidence to believe that Tertullian himself was using M. Felix as his source. If Tertullian was drawing only upon the *memory* of M. Felix's account, it is quite likely that he simply wove the two traditions together into one, either through error or as a rhetorical strategy.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it appears that the 'abomination'

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.1 (author translation in conjunction with Arbesmann translation).

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.1 (author translation in conjunction with Arbesmann translation).

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.2 (Arbesmann translation).

<sup>37</sup>See Tertullian *Apol.* 7 and 8, as well *Ad Nat.* Bk. 1.2 and Bk. 1.7.

<sup>38</sup>There has been much controversy over the years concerning who wrote first, Tertullian or Minicius Felix, and there is compelling evidence for both

view, which combined a cannibalistic view with an incestuous view, was a conglomeration of two separate traditions. However, if the incestuous or 'promiscuous' view was more of a popular jibe than a true belief, what was the origin of the cannibalistic view?

Stephen Benko and others believe that there must be a grain of truth in the cannibalism legend, and they have speculated that it was the bizarre rituals of the lunatic fringes of Christian Gnosticism that influenced the Roman Traditionalists' perception of Christian orthodoxy.<sup>39</sup> They have also further blamed the language of the Eucharist for generating this misconception, and others have insisted that the popularity of this belief led to the persecution of the Christians.<sup>40</sup> Yet, on the other

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positions. However, the arguments presented by V.M. Holmes, "The Date of *Octavius*," *The American Journal of Philology* Vol. 50, No. 2 (1929), 185-189, plainly illustrate that M. Felix preceded Tertullian, and that Tertullian used M. Felix as a source (for the opposite view see: T.D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.272 and citing J. Beaujeu, *Minucius Felix: Octavius* (1964), xlv ff.). Furthermore, if the opposite was true (that M. Felix used Tertullian as a source) I can see no reason why M. Felix would insert the new information that these beliefs were presented in a speech by Fronto. However, that Tertullian was using M. Felix from *memory* is supported by his mistakes when using Tacitus from memory. Compare *Ad Nat.* Bk. 1.6 where Tertullian wrongly cites Tacitus *Histories* Bk. 4 with *Apol.* 16 where it is corrected to Bk. 5. Working by memory alone also makes it is easy to understand Tertullian's omission of the Fronto speech from his argument, as well as his combination of the two traditions (cannibalism and incest orgies) into one.

<sup>39</sup>See discussion in Rives, "Human Sacrifice," p.66.

<sup>40</sup>Benko, "Pagan Criticism," pp.1085-1089. Moreover, this belief has in turn led to the modern belief that the early persecutions of the Christians were the result of a popular abhorrence rather than imperial intolerance of an anti-imperial religious rebellion. See Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians: From Herod the Great to about 200 A.D. Volume I* and *Imperial Rome and the Christians: From the Severi to Constantine the Great Volume II*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1989). Also Marta Sordi (translated by Annabel Bedini) *The Christians and the Roman Empire*, (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986). This argument is usually based on the account of the martyrdoms of

hand, more recent scholarship has suggested that the accusation of cannibalism was nothing more than an example of a genre of 'stock insults' of abhorrence in antiquity. Andrew McGowan in "Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism Against Christians in the Second Century," has illustrated that the horrendous insult of cannibalism was commonplace between opponents of the time,<sup>41</sup> and Rives has argued that it provided the Christians with a rhetorical strategy in terms of providing a "retorsion argument".<sup>42</sup> Rives also believes that Benko over estimates the popularity of a belief in Christian ritual cannibalism,<sup>43</sup> however, both Rives and McGowan concede that this almost legendary rumour may have been maintained by some Roman Traditionalists in the first century.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, Rives concludes that by the time of Tertullian and M. Felix this view was no longer widely accepted.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the total absence of any allegation of cannibalism against the Christians from the infamous second century anti-Christian Celsus must be recognized, and one

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Lugdunum. However, the Lugdunum martyrdoms occurred in a peculiar social context (i.e. a Gaulish province with an unusual religious and colonial context. It must also be considered that the account is told from the Christian perspective.

<sup>41</sup>Andrew McGowan, "Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism Against Christians in the Second Century," *Journal of Early Christians Studies* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1994), 413-442.

<sup>42</sup>Rives, "Human Sacrifice," p.74. A 'retorsion argument' refers to an argument from retorsion. It bends back on its opponent the accusations that the opponent has made against the defence. It has been described as an "argument which refutes a statement by showing that the statement is self-refuting", J.M. Finnis, "Scepticism, Self-Refutation, and the Good of Truth," in *Law, Morality and Society: Essays in Honour of H.L.A. Hart*, edited by P.M.S. Hacker and J. Raz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 247-267, see esp. p. 250.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p.65 see note #4.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p.65 and McGowan, "Eating People," p.421.

must assume that if this view had been current in the time of the Celsus, he would have used it to his advantage in his argument. Consequently, the Christian apologist, Origen, would have not missed the chance to contest it in his *Contra Celsum*. However, the only mention of this alleged accusation, as well as of incestuous orgies, in the Greek *Contra Celsum* are the two very similar passages of 6.27 and 6.40:

He [Celsus] *seems* [emphasis mine] to have behaved in much the same way as the Jews who, when the teaching of Christianity began to be proclaimed, spread abroad a malicious rumour about the gospel, to the effect that Christians sacrifice a child and partake of its flesh, and again that when the followers of the gospel want to do the works of darkness they turn out the light and each man has sexual intercourse with the first woman he meets.<sup>46</sup>

It appears that in the third century Origen had to almost invent an excuse to bring up the old abomination allegation. Thus, although the accusation of ritualistic cannibalism many have been taken literally by a gullible few in the second century, it was not widely believed by many. Tertullian even concedes in *Ad Nationes* that "most [people] are slow to believe such things, ...",<sup>47</sup> and it takes only the application of common sense to deduce that if the prevailing attitude towards Christianity had been rooted in beliefs of ritual infant cannibalism then the ongoing and continuous conversion to Christianity in the second and third centuries could have never taken place. The 'promiscuous' view of Christianity is not nearly as repugnant, and the

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<sup>45</sup>Rives, "Human Sacrifice," p.65.

<sup>46</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.27. Notice the repetition of 'he seems to me ...' in 6.40.

<sup>47</sup>"*Nam et plerique fidem talium temperant...*" Tertullian, "*Ad Nationes, Liber I,*" Bk. 1.2.

notion of an incestuous 'love feast' (*agape*) between the brothers and sisters in Christ would have provided excellent fodder for poor jokes among the Roman Traditionalists.<sup>48</sup> However, the belief in infant cannibalism would have been no jest, and fear and horror would have kept conversion to Christianity at bay. There must have been a more benign negative view of Christianity that would have allowed for both a milder animosity and for a potential convert's curiosity.

### **The Figure of the Ass and the Case of *Onokoites***

The image of Christians as personifications of stupid 'asses' and of Christ as an 'ass-man' is the type of view that could have provided for a potential convert's curiosity. It is both insulting and comic, and thus it accounts for a certain level of popular tolerance and conversion, as well as it provides the perfect conditions for writing satire. Moreover, the Christians themselves were not opposed to the figure of the ass: an unassuming servant subjugated under the yoke of hard labour and social ridicule. The Christians themselves believed that their saviour was the prince of peace who rode on a 'humble' ass in a triumphal inversion of imperial power,<sup>49</sup> and the pious respect given to the ass in early Christianity was not limited to its role as Christ's 'triumphal' steed. The 'donkey' of Mary's transport and the donkey as an

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<sup>48</sup>See M. Felix, *Octavius* 9.2 "[The Christians] indiscriminately call each other brothers and sisters, so that even ordinary fornication, under the cloak of a hallowed name, becomes incest." (Arbesmann)

<sup>49</sup>See Klaus Wengst (translated by John Bowden), *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) on the triumphal inversion of imperial power. Also see Paul Brook Duff, "The March of the Divine Warrior and the Advent of the Greco-Roman King: Mark's Account of Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 3, No. 1 (1992), 55-71.

early witness to the nativity are other well known examples, yet there is further evidence which reveals that the early Christians also associated the figure of an ass with Christ himself. Thomas F. Mathews has noted that “the story does not end here, for there is also evidence that Christians venerated the ass. Amulets and gold glass bowls of the Early Christian period survive carrying the ass alone, in emblematic fashion ...”<sup>50</sup> The two prime examples that Mathews offers as evidence are a gold glass bowl and an amulet (see appendix figures #6 and #7). The gold glass bowl depicts a single ass in a lively prancing manner. It was found in a Christian provenance and is housed in the Musco Sacro Vaticano.<sup>51</sup> The bowl itself is inscribed simply with the label “*asinus*”, but the other example, an amulet with an ass and suckling foal, is inscribed with “*Dominus Noster Iesus Christus Dei Filius* (Our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God)”.<sup>52</sup> In the case of the amulet there is certainly no ambiguity, and when the value of the bowl’s workmanship and material are seen in association with its Christian context it reveals the venerable nature of the figure of the ass to early Christianity. Thus, the image of the donkey, which became symbolic of the Christian ideals of humility, also helped to inspire the Roman Traditionalists’ view of Christianity as an asinine superstition. For the ass, in the mind of the Roman Traditionalist, was not a humble beast of burden, but a beast that was associated with rampant sexuality and simple stupidity, as well as a traditional representation of malice in the realm of the gods.

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<sup>50</sup>Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods*,” p.48.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, see figure 31- Gold glass with ass. Musco Sacro Vaticano.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, see figure 32 - Amulet with ass and foal, c. 400. From *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*.

In the Roman Traditionalist worldview the ass had already long been symbolized with the 'negative' divinities of Saturn and Seth, and furthermore these divinities were also associated with Judaism and Christianity. Within the widely revered practice of (ancient) astrology, Saturn was connected with the figure of an ass and with the religion of the Jews.<sup>53</sup> Tacitus relates a belief that the Jewish faith was connected to Saturn in Book Five of his *Historiae*,<sup>54</sup> and in addition he notes the commonly held belief that the Jews venerated the ass. Tacitus writes, "In their holy place they have consecrated an image of the animal [an ass] by whose guidance they found deliverance from their long and thirsty wanderings."<sup>55</sup> Apion,<sup>56</sup> a contemporary of Tacitus, seemed to have held a similar belief and hence, the Jewish historian Josephus defended his faith and relates that, "Apion hath the impudence to pretend that 'the Jews placed an ass's head in their holy place;' ... As for us Jews, we ascribe no honor or power to asses ...."<sup>57</sup> Clearly Judaism had a strong association with the figure of the ass in the minds of the Roman Traditionalists, and the Jewish heritage of Christianity was also recognized. Tacitus clearly saw the relationship;

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<sup>53</sup>C.G. Jung (translated by R.F.C. Hull), *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp.75-76.

<sup>54</sup>Tacitus (translated by Clifford H. Moore) *Historiae*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press), 1937, Bk.V.2-4.

<sup>55</sup>Tacitus, *Historiae*, Bk. V.4 Although Tacitus in this short passage names only 'the animal', the animal is in reference to an earlier passage in the same section that cites that the Jews followed an ass out of the desert.

<sup>56</sup>Apion (*fl.* 1st cent. A.D.) was a Greek grammarian who taught rhetoric in Rome and who had studied at Alexandria.

<sup>57</sup>Flavius Josephus (translated by William Whiston), "Against Apion," in *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1998), 926-950, see esp. pp.956-957, 2.7.

this is made obvious when he described the condemnation of Christ by the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate.<sup>58</sup> Epictetus used the locative name ‘Galileans’ in reference to the Christians,<sup>59</sup> and in Lucian’s *Passing of Peregrinus* the Christians are found in a well known location of the Jews: “It was then that he learned the wondrous lore of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Celsus was so well versed in Christianity that he understood the Jewish heritage of Christianity not only in the terms of a shared geography and a common ethnicity, but also in the terms that Christians believed Jesus to be the manifestation of the Jewish ‘Messiah’.<sup>61</sup> However, the connection between Christians and the ass was not limited to Christianity’s Jewish heritage and its alleged asinine association. The nefarious Egyptian deity, Seth (or Set), also had a sacred association with the ass and, like the connection between Saturn and Judaism, he was astrologically associated with the Christians. Seth was the traditional enemy of Isis and was often depicted with the head of an ass.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, associations

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<sup>58</sup>Tacitus, (translated by Michael Grant), *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, (London: Penguin Books, 1989), XV.44.

<sup>59</sup>Epictetus (c. 50 - 130) was a Stoic philosopher who was established in Athens after living and working in Rome. The reference is from *The Discourses*, 4.7.1-6.

<sup>60</sup>Lucian of Samosata (c. 115-c. 200) was a famous satirist who in later life was appointed a legal post in Egypt. Lucian (Greek with English translation by A.M. Harmon), “The Passing of Peregrinus,” in *Lucian V, Loeb Classical Library*, edited by A.M. Harmon (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921), 1-31, see esp. p.13, section 11.

<sup>61</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 1.28 and 1.57.

<sup>62</sup>Jung, *Aion*, pp.76-78. The relationship between Jesus, Seth, and Isis in terms of *The Golden Ass* will be discussed further in Chapter Four of this work.

with the deities of Saturn and Seth were not the only ways in which the ass and Christianity were linked in the Roman Traditionalist mind.

It was the more commonly held perceptions of asinine characteristics that were popularly applied to the Christians. These asinine characteristics were very ancient and some of them still resonant in modern folklore today. They are best related by the sixth century B.C. Greek satirist Semonides of Amorgos from his poem *On Women*:

Another woman is from the stumbling and obstinate donkey, who only with difficulty and with the use of threats is compelled to agree to the perfectly acceptable things she had resisted. Otherwise in a corner of the house she sits munching away all night long, and all day long she sits munching at the hearth. Even so she'll welcome any male friend who comes around with sex on his mind.<sup>63</sup>

For Semonides, the donkey was both lazy and gluttonous, as well as an especially obstinate, stupid, and oversexed animal.<sup>64</sup> This view of the donkey was continued by the Romans and is reflected in remarks peppered throughout Latin literature.<sup>65</sup> In Latin after the first century B.C., these stereo-types were strengthened by the use of the term '*asinus*' instead of the more commonly used term '*asellus*', which was

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<sup>63</sup>Semonides of Amorgos (translated by Marilyn Arthur) "On Women," in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, by Sarah B. Pomeroy (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 49-52.

<sup>64</sup>Obstinate and stupid are characteristics are also represented in Aesop's fables, and that the ass represented an oversexed attitude or life style was due to the large size of his penis and due to its association as the traditional beast of burden in Dionysiac processions as well as of Dionysus himself. See "Donkey" in *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World: NewPauly*, edited by Hubert Cancik and Helmut Schneider (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2004), 664-670. It is also important to note that both *The Golden Ass* and its literary predecessor incorporate many of Aesop's ass fables into their narratives.

<sup>65</sup>Kathleen Freeman, "Vincent, or the Donkey," *Greece and Rome* Vol. 14, nos. 41-2 (June 1945), 33-41. See esp. p.35, p.38 and p.41.

applied in reference to the simple beast of burden without invoking the negative stereo-types. This usage is analogous to the modern English use of the term ‘donkey’ rather than the term ass with its association of boorish behaviour.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, these characteristics of obstinacy, stupidity, and an oversexed disposition were also attributed to the Christians in antiquity. That obstinacy was also associated with the Christians is evidenced by both Pliny the Younger (61-113) and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180). Pliny wrote in his famous letter to Trajan concerning the legal trials of Christians that “*pertinaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri.*” (stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy must surely be punished).<sup>67</sup> Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* repeats this attitude and states that death should be accepted “not from mere obstinacy, as with the Christians...”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, critics of Christianity believed stupidity to be another Christian characteristic, and in *The Passing of Peregrinus* Lucian describes Christians as “folk who are easily duped by any type of sorcerer or trickster.”<sup>69</sup> Celsus also believed the Christians to be stupid and claimed “they drive away every intelligent man from arguing about this faith, and invite only the stupid and low-

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<sup>66</sup>A.E. Housman, “The Latin for Ass,” *The Classical Quarterly* Vol.24, No.1 (1930), 11-13, see esp. p.11.

<sup>67</sup>Pliny (Latin with English translation by Betty Radice), *Letters and Panegyricus*, *Loeb Classical Library*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 10.98.

<sup>68</sup>Marcus Aurelius (translated by George Long), *Meditations*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), 11.3.

<sup>69</sup>Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus*, 13.

class folk."<sup>70</sup> and that "the love to mankind shown by the word, which even extends to every soul from the rising of the sun, is vulgar, and that it is successful only among the uneducated because of its vulgarity and utter illiteracy."<sup>71</sup> Asses were also thought to represent an oversexed attitude or lifestyle. That Christians were thought to be oversexed is, of course, reflected in the promiscuous view of Christians and sexuality discussed earlier. However, the promiscuous view has another reflection in *Octavius*. In chapter 9.2, before the character Caecilius begins his accusation of ritual cannibalism and Fronto's account of 'love feasts', he recounts that "they [the Christians] recognize each other by secret marks and signs and fall in love before they scarcely know each other. Everywhere they practice among themselves, a kind of cult of lust, ..." <sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Tertullian defended Christian chastity with the vigour of one so accused,<sup>73</sup> and the accusation of Christian promiscuity is also reflected in the attitude that Christian women were not respectable women. Margaret Y. MacDonald, in *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion*, has illustrated through an examination of the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* that "it appears that rumours of sexual promiscuity were hovering over relationships between believing [Christian] men and the daughters and wives of unbelievers."<sup>74</sup> Also, through a close

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<sup>70</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.18

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.27.

<sup>72</sup>M. Felix, *Octavius*, 9.2. (Arbesmann)

<sup>73</sup>Tertullian, *Apol.* 9.19.

<sup>74</sup>Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.71 for quote.

assessment of *Contra Celsum*, MacDonald postulates that it is possible that Celsus had accused Jesus and his followers of living off the avails of prostitution,<sup>75</sup> but, if it is unclear whether or not Celsus made this specific allegation explicit, he was clear about locating the origins of Christianity "in the adulterous behaviour of a disreputable peasant woman."<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, it is obvious from a reading of *Contra Celsum* that Celsus continually referred to Christian women in a derogatory manner consistent with promiscuity.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the promiscuous view of Christianity is also consistent with an outsider view of the tenets of Christianity to "love one another and to love their enemies", the inclusion of women in church leadership, as well as an often communal lifestyle. Therefore, to the Roman Traditionalist mind, the Christian, like the woman in Semonides poem, "only with difficulty and with the use of threats is compelled to agree to perfectly acceptable things [is obstinate and stupid]", and "she'll welcome any male friend who comes around with sex on his mind [is promiscuous or oversexed]."

Thus, there was a long-standing cognitive parallel between the figure of the ass and Christianity in the minds of the Roman Traditionalists. Jews were thought to have worshipped the head of an ass and their recognized splinter group, the Christians, venerated the ass on their own accord. Astrologically the ass was both a symbol of Saturn and therefore a symbol of the religion of the Jews for Roman

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<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p.102. MacDonald is primarily addressing *Contra Celsum* 1.65.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p.122. See *Contra Celsum* 1.28.

<sup>77</sup>It is interesting to contrast this opinion with the doctor Galen who referred to the chastity of Christian women. See Galen, (translated and edited by Richard Walzer) *Galen on Jews and Christians*, (London: Oxford University, 1949), 15, taken from note #70 in MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, p.82.

Traditionalists. Astrologically the ass-headed man was symbolic of Seth who, not unlike Christ, was an enemy of Isis. Asses were stubborn, or obstinate, and Christians were also so obstinate as to freely accept death rather than submit to the will of the emperor. Asses were stupid just like the Christians who seemed opposed to reason and who were easily duped by the arts of magicians. Also, in popular thought asses were oversexed and Christians freely 'loved one another'. Asses were often dismissed and comically despised as simple, lowly, stupid beasts and, in the minds of the Roman Traditionalists, Christians were simple, lowly, stupid people.

These common and comic associations in antiquity of anything Christian with asinine characteristics are strongly supported by the now famous *Palatine Graffito* (see appendix figure #8). The *Palatine Graffito* is a crude etching that was discovered on the ancient Palatine Hill of Rome in 1857. The provenance is reported to have been of a school for youth training in imperial administration and apparently it was one of many graffiti found in that location.<sup>78</sup> However, most of the other graffiti simply celebrate the students' departure from the school. Due to the structure of the wall and the type of plaster used, the graffito in question dates to c. 150 - 200.<sup>79</sup> It depicts two figures accompanied by a caption. The first figure is a frontal

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<sup>78</sup>Rodolfo Lanciani, *Ancient Rome in the Light of Recent Discoveries*, (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), pp. 121-122. Interestingly in the same school house location another graffito was discovered of a donkey turning a mill. The caption read "*Labora aselle quomodo ego laboravi et proderit tibi* (Work donkey as I have worked and you will be rewarded)." Note the use of *aselle* (donkey) instead of *asinus* (ass). For more information on the graffito see also Giuseppe Lugli (translated by Gilbert Bagnani), *The Classical Monuments of Rome and Its Vicinity*, (Roma: G. Bardi, 1929), p.294-296. See esp. fig.73, p.295.

<sup>79</sup>Rodolfo Lanciani, *Pagan and Christian Rome*, (London: Macmillan, 1892), note #2, p.12.

view of a standing young man, who has his left arm raised upwards seemingly in veneration of the second figure. The second figure is a reverse view of a crucified human figure, which has the head of an ass - complete with long ears and muzzle. The caption below these two figures reads (in transliterated form):

*ALE*

*XAMENOS*

*SEBETE*

*THEON*

In the light of the earlier examination of the association between asinine characteristics and Christianity, it appears that the intention of this graffito was as a comic insult directed at an early Christian named Alexamenos. The date of the graffito is consistent with late second century Roman Traditionalist/Christian tension and it is unlikely that this crucified figure could refer to anything else.<sup>80</sup> However, the caption is usually translated as "Alexamenos worships his god." This translation must be based on the assumption that the original author was a poor speller, as the verb clearly appears to be either a second person plural imperative or indicative -

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<sup>80</sup>It may be suggested that the donkey-headed figure is a representation of Seth, however, the tradition that Seth was 'crucified' relies on a much earlier and not well known Egyptian tradition depicted in the Temple of Horus at Denderah. It shows the ass-headed Seth tied to a 'slave post' awaiting execution by a knife wielding Horus. See: "Egyptian Hieroglyphic: Grand Temple: *Chambres de la terrasse: Osiris du sud Chambre No.2.*" In *Denérah*. By Auguste Mariette, T.IV. Pl.56a. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1981). Yet more interesting is that the name '*Alexamenos*' is also the aor. part. mid. masc. nom. sg. form of '*alexo*': 'ward off'. Also interesting is that the verb '*sebeta*' is related to '*sebastos*' (a term most often used in reference to imperial divinity), and that the figure of the man has his left hand raised rather than his right. All of this would seem to suggest an elaborate pun was the primary comic context, and that it was a jibe against Roman Traditionalists by Christians. However, what is important here is that Christ is portrayed as an ass and that a comic element was involved.

rather than a third person singular indicative. Thus, it could also be loosely translated as "Alexamenos you [people] [go] worship God." However, regardless of verb mood and person, this graffito still maintains the comic insult of its genre. Alexamenos and his chosen deity are being made fun of by the original author. This graffito, whose very genre reflects both the popular context and an attitude of comic mockery, provides physical evidence that the specific figure of the 'ass-man' was a well-known symbolic representation of Christ. However, it is Tertullian who provides the most conclusive literary evidence of the ass-man view and its popularity in the Roman world of the second century.

In both *Ad Nationes* 1.XIV.1-4 and the *Apologeticum* XVI.12-14 Tertullian gives a description of a Roman Traditionalist jibe similar to the *Palatine Graffito*.

*Noua iam de deo nostro fama suggestit, et adeo nuper quidam perditissimus in ista ciuit<ate>, etiam suae religionis desertor, solo detrimento cutis Iudaeus, uti<que> magis post bestiarum morsus, ut ad quas se locando quot<idie> toto iam corpore decutit<ur> et <cir>cumcidit<ur>, pictura<m> in nos pro<posuit> sub ista proscriptione: "Onocoetes". Is erat auribus cant<heinis>, in toga, cum libro, altero pede ungulato. 2. Et credidit vulg<us ... > Iudaeo. Quod enim aliud genus seminariu<m> e<st> infamiae nostrae? <Inde> in tota ciuitate Onocoetes praedicatur. 3. Sed et hoc tam<etsi> hesternum et auctoritate temporis destitutum et qualitate a<uctoris> infirmum libenter excipiam studio retorquendi. Videamus igitur, an hic quoque nobiscum deprehendimini. 4. Neque enim interest qua forma, dum deformia simulacra curemus. Sunt penes uos et canino capite, et leonino, et de boue et de ariete et hirco cornuti dii, caprigenae uel anguini, et alites plan<t>a, fronte et tergo. Quid itaque nostrum unicum denotatis? Plures Onocoetae penes vos deprehenduntur! (Ad. Nat. 1.XIV.1-4).<sup>81</sup>*

Now a fresh report concerning our God has been put forth not so long ago in that city of yours. A certain most forsaken man, indeed a deserter of his own religion, a Jewish man whose only injury [was] of the flesh, and as being all the more so after the attacks of the beasts, which he [usually] contracts himself out to everyday, now with a fit

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<sup>81</sup>Tertullian, "Ad Nationes, Liber I," pp. 32-33 for XIV.1-4.

form he has been made shameful and lessened by having carried [about] a picture of us with this inscription: 'Onocoetes'. It had the ears of a nag, wore a toga, with a book, [and] one foot was hooped. 2. And the crowd believed the Jew. For what other race is the growing ground of all the infamous reports against us? From then on throughout the entire city *Onocoetes* is the talk. 3. However, although this was [just] yesterday and was lacking in the authority of time and by the quality of its infirm author, I will cheerfully take up the refutation [of the above] with enthusiasm. Therefore, let us see whether this is also found among yourselves. 4. For it makes no difference what form [it is], provided that we [even] care about a deformed image. There are in your possession both gods with the head of a dog and lion, and with horns of a cow, a ram, and a he-goat, as well as [in the form of] a goat or a snake, and with wings [spouting] from the heel, the front, and the back. And so why has our one [God] been stigmatized? Many an *Onocoetae* can be found among yourselves.

*12. Sed noua iam Dei nostri in ista ciuitate proxime editio publicata est, ex quo quidam frustrandis bestiis mercenarius noxius picturam proposuit cum eiusmodi inscriptione:*

*DEVS - CHRISTIANORVM - ONOKOITHS.*

*Is erat auribus asininis, altero pede ugulatus, librum gestans et togatus. Risimus et momen et formam. 13. Sed illi debuerant adorare statim biforme numen, qui et canino et leonino capite commixtos, et de capro et de ariete cornutos, et a lumbis hircos et a cruribus serpentes et planta tergo alites deos receperunt. 14. Haec ex abundantia, ne quid rumoris inrepercussum quasi de conscientia praeterissemus. Quae omnia conuersi iam ad demonstrationem religionis nostrae, repurgabimus. (Apol. XVI.12-14).<sup>82</sup>*

12. But now a new edition of our God is recently being published in that city of yours, started by a certain criminal hired to cheat the beasts [in the arena] who displayed a picture of his with this inscription:

THE GOD OF THE CHRISTIANS - *ONOKOITES*

He had the ears of an ass, one foot was hooped, he carried a book and wore a toga. We have laughed at both the name and form. 13. But those [against us] ought to have immediately adored a bi-formed divinity, [those] who have harboured gods combined from a dog and a lion head, and made up from the he-goat and from the horned ram, and with goatish loins and lizard legs and with wings [spouting] from heel and back. 14. These things are [put forth] in abundance, so that we might not pass over any rumour without refutation as if [it were]

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<sup>82</sup>Tertullian, "Apologeticum," pp.116-117.

common knowledge. Turning now to a demonstration of our religion, we will clear up all these things.

The above two descriptions of the *Onokoites* insult, although appearing in two different works, are most often viewed as a single piece of evidence to illustrate that there was some kind of association between the figure of the ass and early Christianity.<sup>83</sup> The two are usually viewed as one because they both describe the same event by the same author. This notion is further reinforced by the modern belief that *Ad Nationes* was a 'rough draft' of the *Apologeticum*.<sup>84</sup> Although this explanation seems reasonable, due to Tertullian's reuse of much of the same evidence in the two works, Simon Price advocates that the two works have distinct and separate rhetorical aims and must be viewed independently of each other. Price argues that "the differences between these two works becomes clearer if one looks at the addressees of each work," and he illustrates that this in turn reveals a difference in the overall aim of each work.<sup>85</sup> In fact, it does become clear through a comparison of the two works that the primary aim of *Ad Nationes* was to convert non-Christians via refutation, whereas the primary aim of the *Apologeticum* was to defend Christianity from unjust persecution.

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<sup>83</sup>Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, p.62; Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p.48; and Jung, *Aion*, p.76.

<sup>84</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp.104-106.

<sup>85</sup>Simon Price, "Latin Christian Apologetics: Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Cyprian," in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, edited by Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price in association with Christopher Rowland, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105-129, see esp. p.108.

Moreover, the recognition of the separate natures of these two works illustrates that the two *Onokoites* passages provide more than just another example of a depiction of Christ with donkey characteristics to stand along side the *Palatine Graffito*. The two passages taken in comparison and contrast build a body of evidence that attests to the widespread popularity of this view and confirms that the specific figure of an ass-man was an easily recognized metaphor for Christ and the Christian experience in the second century Roman world. Furthermore, the comparison reveals that in the Roman elite society of Apuleius this association of Christ as an ass was considered somewhat comical, whereas the comical aspect of this animal association was viewed with less humour among the general populace of the empire.

To begin the two different works address two different audiences. The intended primary audience of *Ad Nationes* was the common body of non-Christians throughout the empire, whereas the *Apologeticum* was a work more specifically directed toward the political elite of the Roman Empire. This is illustrated somewhat modestly by the assigned title of *Ad Nationes* (To the Races of People) and the opening lines of the *Apologeticum* are explicitly addressed to the “*Romani imperii antistites* (rulers of the Roman Empire).”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the differences in the primary audiences are also clearly reflected within the two *Onokoites* passages themselves. For example, in *Ad Nationes* the gladiator villain is specially identified as a Jew - in particular a 'bad' Jew. He was “a deserter of his own religion, a Jewish man ... and the crowd believed the Jew. For what other race is the growing ground of

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<sup>86</sup>See Price, "Latin Christian Apologetics," pp.108-110 for a more developed explanation.

all of the infamous reports against us?"<sup>87</sup> Thus, in *Ad Nationes* Tertullian strove to separate the Christians from the Jews for his pluralistic primary audience. He tried to illustrate that the Christians and the Roman Traditionalists shared a common ground - a dislike or distrust of the Jews. On the other hand, even though Tertullian is not unknown for his anti-Semitic bias,<sup>88</sup> the nationality of the gladiator villain was completely removed from this passage of the *Apologeticum*. The *Apologeticum* only describes the villain as "a certain criminal who is hired to cheat the beasts [in the arena]." There is no mention anywhere in the passage of this man's nationality or heritage. Jews did experience some acceptance within imperial policy from the time of Augustus (although this was punctuated from time to time with episodes of intolerance) and they were never legally compelled to recant their faith.<sup>89</sup> It would have been a folly for Tertullian in this particular passage to call attention to early Christian anti-Semitism and provide evidence that Christians did, in fact, disturb the peace of the empire.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Many feel that Tertullian's anti-Semitism is softened by the fact that he identifies the Jew as 'being a deserter of his own religion', however, Tertullian saw all Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah as being deserters of their own religion. See Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos*, in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina II, Tertulliani Opera, Pars II*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), 1339-1396.

<sup>88</sup>See Barnes, *Tertullian*, p.91 and the above note #84.

<sup>89</sup>For a brief description of Rome's relationship with Judaism see Tessa Rajak (T.R.), "Jews," in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*, edited by Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 380-383, see esp. p.382.

<sup>90</sup>In fact throughout the *Apologeticum* Tertullian's references to the Jews are not harsh, and even in chapter 21, where he addresses Jewish/Christian relations, he is not overly critical.

Another difference between the two accounts can be found within the specific description of the *Onokoites* caricature itself. In the *Ad Nationes* account the caricature of Christ is described as having the ears of a '*cantheinis*'. This was a Celtic term for a gelding or nag, or any type of generic equine beast of burden. The anthropomorphic connotations of this term seem to suggest infirmity or impotence more so than anything else. Tertullian chose his words carefully and avoided the Latin term *asininus*; a term that was loaded with the stereotypes previously discussed. Instead, Tertullian chose a term that appealed to the pluralistic audience of the empire and invoked images of a weaker nature. This was not the case in the *Apologeticum*. Here Tertullian embraces the term *asininus* and in so doing he illustrates that he was aware of the connotations of comic slander attached to this term.

In fact, it is only in the *Apologeticum* that Tertullian acknowledges the intended humour of the caricature, "*Risimus et nomen et formam* (We laughed at both the name and form)." The element of intended humour is totally absent from the *Ad Nationes* account. The caricature was funny to the elite crowd because it was satirical and recognizable. Just as G.W. Elderkin has suggested that it is reasonable to believe that Christ was often depicted in art as carrying a book and wearing a toga (the form of a philosopher) in order to account for the humour of this caricature,<sup>91</sup> it is also reasonable to believe that the asinine attributes, in both name and form, were also often associated with Christ in order to more fully account for the humour. This ancient caricature is funny (such as is modern political satire is) only if it was

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<sup>91</sup>G.W. Elderkin, "Shield and Mandorla," *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 42, No. 2 (1983), 227-236. See note #11 on p.234.

recognizable in both form and format. It was humorous because the provincial divine 'ass-man' was in the garb of an aristocratic 'philosopher'. Furthermore, due to the comic recognition of the asinine person in the *Apologeticum*, Tertullian's reply in this work, no matter how similar in form it is to his retort in *Ad Nationes*, changes in meaning. His reply in *Ad Nationes* is more like an appeal to accept a shared characteristic than it is a true chastisement, "*Videamus igitur, an hic quoque nobiscum deprehendamimi ... Quid itaque nostrum unicum denotatis? Plures Onocoetae penes uos deprehenduntur* (Therefore, let us see whether this is also found among yourselves... And so why has our one [God] been stigmatized? Many an *Onocoetes* can be found among yourselves)!" Here Tertullian asks the non-Christian world how they could find fault with a religion based on the worship of an asinine divinity when they do the same, but in the *Apologeticum* Tertullian implicitly asks how the Romans could laugh at a depiction of Christ with the ears and hoof of an ass when "*canino et leonino capite commixtos, ... deos receperunt* ([they] have harboured [presumably from the subjugated nations] gods combined from a dog and a lion head,.."). Furthermore, Tertullian acknowledged the humour of the caricature only in the *Apologeticum* further illustrates that the *Apologeticum* and *Ad Nationes* were never two versions of the same work. They have always been two different works directed at two different primary audiences. That Tertullian chose to discuss the *Onokoites* caricature in two different ways to two different audiences gives evidence to the widespread popularity of the association between Christians and asinine characteristics.

Nevertheless, the widespread understanding of the more generalized common association of the form of Christ with asinine characteristics is further reinforced in another passage of *Ad Nationes*. This passage (Bk. 1. XI.3-6) seems to have remained unexplored in other modern discussions of non-Christian views of Christians in antiquity. Its context concerns Tacitus' description of the Jews venerating an ass and it is placed well in advance of the *Onokoites* passage. However, Tertullian relates that Tacitus' believed it to be only the head of ass and not the entire figure and further states, "3.*Inde, opinor, praesumptum, nos quoque, ut Iudaicae religionis propinquos, eidem simulacro initiari....* 5. ... *<Creda>tur deus noster asinina aliqua persona ...* (Therefore, I suppose, it is taken for granted that we also, on account of our proximity to the Jewish religion, worship this same image. ... If it is to be believed that our God is some sort of an **asinine person** [emphasis mine]....).<sup>92</sup> This passage demonstrates not only that Tertullian was aware that other nations were knowledgeable of the connection between Judaism and Christianity, but also that the notion of Christ symbolically depicted, or thought of, as an asinine person (an ass-man) was well accepted throughout the Roman world.

It is interesting to note that even though Tertullian employs the term "*asinus*" in its various forms within the above mentioned passage there seems to be a lack of any comedic element associated with it. If anything, Tertullian appears to be simply using the same term as Tacitus did in his *Histories*. However, by doing so Tertullian

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<sup>92</sup>Tertullian, "*Ad Nationes, Liber I,*" XI.3-5. Note also that Minucius Felix also gives evidence of this view that Christians worshiped the head of an ass, "*Audio eos turpissimae pecudis caput asini consecratum inepta nescio qua persuasione venerari: digna et nata religio talibus moribus* (I hear that they deify the head of, the most disgraceful of animals, an ass, I do not know by what absurd belief they worship [this]: a religion dignified and sprung from such customs!)" *Octavius*, 9.3.

has clearly separated Tacitus' description of the Jews from the *Onokoites* description of Christ in *Ad Nationes* by both position and language. This separation distances the term "asinus" from the figure of Christ and instead it is seen in association with the Jews. This separation does not occur in the *Apologeticum*. In the *Apologeticum* the reference to Tacitus' description of the Jews leads directly into the comical *Onokoites* passage with no separation of position or language.

Moreover, in the *Apologeticum*, Tertullian also provides further proof of the popularity of the ass-man view. This is recognizable by the overall position in which he placed the *Onokoites* account. Tertullian's purpose in the section that contains the *Onokoites* passage (*Apologeticum* 16) was to list the various misunderstandings that Roman Traditionalists actually held concerning Christians, beginning with the least popular assumption and then moving toward the most popular assumption. In 16.1-5 Tertullian begins with the view that Christians worshipped the head of an ass. In 16.6-8 he then examines the belief that Christians were worshippers of crosses (an instrument of punishment and death). Tertullian's argument begins to build momentum within this section, and he goes on in 16.9-11 to address the belief that Christians worshipped the sun as their god. It is at 16.12 that Tertullian presents his rhetorical grand finale, his 'last but not least', his refutation of the most current popular view of Christians: the view of Christ characterized as the philosopher-ass, the *Onokoites* passage.

The above analysis of Tertullian's *Onokoites* passages in *Ad Nationes* and the *Apologeticum* has shown not only that these two works have two distinct and separate natures, but also that in the second century the figure of the ass-man as a

metaphor for Christianity was extremely widespread both geographically and throughout the entire social strata of the Roman Empire. It was perceived as comical in the eyes of the literate elite, but for the average inhabitant of the pluralistic Empire, the notion of the Christian ass-man was not a religious concept out of the ordinary. In fact, the ideology was in-line with other religious traditions, and therefore nothing to be feared or rejected. However, this same popular concept of bi- and de-formed divinities brought a smile to the faces of the philosophical and well educated imperial elite. This was an educated audience who enjoyed the comical elements of the notion of a divine 'asinine' man, especially in the context of Christianity as a philosophical contender. It was to this very same audience of educated elites that Apuleius addressed when he wrote of the transformed Lucius in *The Golden Ass*.

Moreover, the connection between the figure of the transformed Lucius in *The Golden Ass* to that of the *Onokoites* caricature is strengthened by the fact that Tertullian and Apuleius shared the same physical, temporal, and social context. Both Tertullian and Apuleius were North Africans, and the dates for both men are relatively close. Tertullian began his literary career in his native North Africa in the late second century and many believe that Apuleius ended his days in North Africa in these same closing years of the second century shortly after writing *The Golden Ass*.<sup>93</sup> They also shared a similar social context as both Tertullian and Apuleius were

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<sup>93</sup>Dating for *The Golden Ass* has been hotly contended among scholars. However, S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2000, has clearly demonstrated a late date for the composition of *The Golden Ass*. See esp. pp.9-10 with note 35 p.9 "I agree with Holford-Strevens (1988), 17 n. #59, who suggests that the *Metamorphoses* was written under Commodus (after 180)." See also pp.249-252. However, Gerald Sandy supports a much earlier date of

educated men, they were both interested in religion, and they were both born into Roman Traditionalist families. T.D. Barnes has noted that “Tertullian cannot have remained unaware either of Apuleius’ activities as a sophist (which included politics) or of his writings.”<sup>94</sup> It also stands to reason that if Apuleius enjoyed a long enough life he may have been just as equally aware of Tertullian as Tertullian was of him. However, the differences between the two men must be noted. For example, in the time and space they shared Tertullian would have been a young man and Apuleius would have been an old man. One was a Christian convert who defended the new Christian faith and the other maintained the Roman Traditionalist ways. Nevertheless, for a time they shared a similar social context which included a Roman Traditionalist view of Christianity as an asinine superstition. Thus, the *Onokoites* caricature (as well as the *Palatine Graffito*) and the transformed Lucius in *The Golden Ass* are all reflections of the same anti-Christian jibe.

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162/163 for *The Golden Ass*. See Gerald Sandy, *The Greek World of Apuleius: Apuleius and the Second Sophistic*, (New York: Brill, 1997), p.6.

<sup>94</sup>Barnes, *Tertullian*, p.257.

## Chapter Two: Apuleius and *The Golden Ass*

### Apuleius

There is further evidence to reinforce the idea that the transformation of Lucius is a reflection of the same anti-Christian jibe as *Onokoites* when one considers the personality and reputation of the author of *The Golden Ass*. Apuleius of Madaura was a man deeply concerned with the religious climate of his day. He was certainly interested in the metaphysical or philosophical constructs of the divine, as the nature of the remainder of his literary legacy attests,<sup>95</sup> but he was also a man interested in experiencing the physical realities of the religious expression of his time. Apuleius himself declared that he had been "initiated into many mystery cults in Greece,"<sup>96</sup> and he was a priest of either Ceres or Aesculapius and/or of the imperial cult.<sup>97</sup> Thus, Apuleius was not simply a priest by political appointment; he

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<sup>95</sup>Most esp., *De Deo Socratis, De Platone, and De Mundo*. For the texts of these works in their original Latin and Greek with translations in French see: Apuleius, *Opuscules philosophiques (Du dieu socrate, Platon et sa doctrine, Du monde) et fragments Apulée, Texte établi, traduit et commenté par Jean Beaujeu*. Paris: *Les Belles Lettres*, 1973.

<sup>96</sup>Apuleius (translated by Vincent Hunink), "Apology," in *Apuleius: Rhetorical Works*, edited by Stephen Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11-121, see esp. p.78.

<sup>97</sup>J.B. Rives, "The Priesthood of Apuleius," *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 115, No.2, (1994), 273-290. Through a careful analysis Rives has concluded that Apuleius was a priest of Ceres or Aesculapius rather than of the imperial cult. However, Augustine's *Letter 138.19* does offer strong evidence that he was a priest of the imperial cult.

was also a devoutly religious man. The latter is especially reflected in the construction and design of Apuleius' house at Ostia. Filippo Coarelli<sup>98</sup> and Roger Beck<sup>99</sup> have both illustrated that the site of *Casa di Apuleio* was once the Roman home of L. Apuleius Marcellus, and they have both argued that this householder was the same Apuleius as the author of *The Golden Ass*.<sup>100</sup> Although Coarelli's assertion has met with some opposition,<sup>101</sup> Beck's analysis of both the site and Coarelli's hypothesis has provided good support to this argument. The house itself was built to incorporate the "Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres" and was annexed to the pre-existing complex of the "Four Temples." Beck, while clarifying and advancing Coarelli's hypothesis, has clearly demonstrated that the design of the mithraeum has a clear connection to the discovery and salvation testament of Lucius in Book XI of *The Golden Ass*,<sup>102</sup> and that all of the other evidence which connects this site to

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<sup>98</sup>Filippo Coarelli, "Apuleio a Ostia?," *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 7 (1989), 27-42.

<sup>99</sup>Roger Beck, "Apuleius the Novelist, Apuleius the Ostian Householder and the Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres: Further Explorations of an Hypothesis of Filippo Coarelli," in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*, edited by Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins, (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2000), 551-567.

<sup>100</sup>Besides the evidence that links the plan/design of the house/temple complex with theological elements of Book XI in *The Golden Ass*, other evidence includes two lead pipes that bear the name L. Apuleius Marcellus, as well as an inscription on the base of an equestrian statue that names the person represented as Q. Asinius Marcellus. This is the same name as a devotee of Isis in Book XI.27 who is introduced at the same time that Apuleius the author equates himself with the protagonist Lucius. See Beck, "Apuleius the Novelist," pp.552-553.

<sup>101</sup>See Harrison, *Apuleius*, p.1.

<sup>102</sup>Beck, "Apuleius the Novelist," p.560 on the connection between Mithras and Isis in *The Golden Ass*.

Apuleius is simply too strong to ignore. This home was specifically built to incorporate a private mithraeum (the initiation space of Mithraics) with a pre-existing public temple complex dedicated to the goddesses Venus, Fortuna, Ceres, and Spes.<sup>103</sup> Religion was not simply a *stylus* and *charta* affair for Apuleius, nor was it a simple political necessity. Apuleius was interested in religion as a bridge between the world of men and the world of the divine. Moreover, he was interested in all expressions of the religious experience, from philosophical text to cultic ritual, and he was interested in both categories of religion: good and bad.

A man so interested in all aspects of his religion and religious expression was also going to be interested in all the religious contenders of the time. No other religious expression challenged Apuleius' worldview more than Christianity and Christianity challenged the Roman Traditionalist belief on all fronts. As E. R. Dodds has stated,

It [the tension between Roman Traditionalist/Pagan and Christianity] engaged the energies of cultivated scholars like Origen and Porphyry; but it must also have been fought out, frequently and bitterly, in the council-chambers of Greek cities, in the market-places of North African villages, and in thousands of humble homes.<sup>104</sup>

Apuleius, as a religious man extraordinaire, could hardly have ignored this tension. Yet, as a literary man extraordinaire and as a well known *bon vivant*, his response would not be of an ordinary nature. Instead his answer was to create *The Golden Ass*.

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<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, p.558.

<sup>104</sup>E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p.103.

That Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* addresses an array of Roman Traditionalist religious experiences has never been questioned. Certainly, the dichotomy between 'good' religion and 'bad' religion is self evident - Lucius' curiosity in magic brings about his negative asinine transformation, which is followed by his positive salvation at the hand of Isis. However, any link between *The Golden Ass* and Christianity is often questioned because Apuleius seems to have gone to great pains to ignore any use of the terms 'Christian' or 'Christ' in his extant works.<sup>105</sup> This lack of reference to Christianity has led some to believe that Apuleius was unaware of the development of Christianity and the tension it was causing within the empire. Still, he may have avoided directly addressing Christianity in order to reduce the recognition it had already achieved, or a man as religious as Apuleius may have simply wanted to avoid 'invoking' the name of Christ. Whatever Apuleius' reason was for not naming Christ, Vincent Hunink, in his investigation of Apuleius' works and historical context, has postulated that "not only was Apuleius aware of the existence of Christianity, ... he did not feel much sympathy for it either."<sup>106</sup> Benko also notes Apuleius' implicit hostility towards Christians,<sup>107</sup> and he and Hunink both refer to the interesting case of Apuleius' *Apology* 90.6 where Apuleius may have actually made a passing reference to Jesus.

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<sup>105</sup>See Walsh, "Introduction," p. xxxviii for Walsh's acknowledgement of the scholarly scepticism toward any anti-Christian aim of Apuleius.

<sup>106</sup>Vincent Hunink, "Apuleius, Pudentilla, and Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 55.1 (2000), 80-94, see esp. p.80.

<sup>107</sup>Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity," p.1091.

The *Apology* is Apuleius' account of how he defeated charges of magic that were brought against him when he married Prudentilla. Prudentilla was the widowed mother of a close friend of Apuleius and many felt that this marriage was highly suspicious. Apuleius was brought to trial to defend himself against these charges and at 90.6 of the *Apology* there is a corruption in the text. The passage itself concerns a short list of known magicians that Apuleius cites in his defence:

*ego ille sim Carmendas uel Damigeron uel \_his\_ Moses uel Iohannes uel Apollobex uel ipse Dardanus uel quicumque alius post Zoroastren et Hostanen inter magos celebratus est.*<sup>108</sup>

I might be that well-known Carmendas or Damigeron or [corrupt 'his'] Moses or John or Apollobex or Dardanus himself or whoever else there were among the celebrated magicians after Zoroaster and Hostanes.

The corruption is presented as '*his*' and it has been suggested by Benko, Hunink and others that it originally was a reference to Jesus: either a corruption of *Hisus* or a corruption of the abbreviation *IHS*.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, the passage could read "Carmendas or Damigeron or Jesus or Moses or John ..." Although this may seem rather speculative, both Benko and Hunink point out that this interpretation is supported by both the context of the Jewish names and by the context of magic and magicians.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, it seems that linking the name of Moses with Christ was not an uncommon practice for non-Christian writers of the second century. The physician

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<sup>108</sup>Apuleius, *Apologia*, (Berolini: apud Weidmannos, 1864), 90.6.

<sup>109</sup>Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity," p. 1091 and Hunink, "Apuleius, Prudentilla, and Christianity," p.91.

<sup>110</sup>Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity," p. 1091 and Hunink, "Apuleius, Prudentilla, and Christianity," p.91.

Galen (c. 129-199) linked together the names “of Moses and Christ.”<sup>111</sup> However, whereas Galen accused the Christians of being poor philosophers of the same school of thought as the Jews, *Apology* 90.6 provides good evidence that Apuleius not only knew of the Christian religion, but that he thought of Christ in the same way that Celsus did: as a practitioner of the magical arts.

In contrast, with the advent of the Christian faith, the North African tradition began to remember Apuleius as the magician and not Christ, although it is not readily apparent why this is so. The North African church fathers, Lactantius (260 - 340) and later Augustine (c. 354 - 430) wrote that Apuleius was considered a magician whose magical arts were of such a calibre as to compete with the miracles of Christ in the minds of Roman Traditionalists. Lactantius states that,

*Item cum facta ejus mirabilia destrueret, nec tamen negaret; voluit ostendere, Apollonium vel paria, vel etiam majora fecisse. Mirum quod Apuleium praetermisit; cujus solent et multa, et mira memorari.*<sup>112</sup>

Also when he might have put down his [Christ's] miraculous deeds, he would not however deny [them]; he wanted to show that Apollonius had done either equal or even greater [deeds]. The fact that he passed over Apuleius is astonishing; whose many and miraculous [deeds] they were accustomed to recall.

This same idea is re-enforced a hundred years later in a letter written by Augustine to his friend Marcellinus in 412, "*Quis autem vel risu dignum non putet, quod Apollonium et Apuleium, caeterosque magicarum artium peritissimos conferre*

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<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, p.1099 and Galen, *Galen on Jews and Christians*, p.14 on passages 3.3 and 2.4.

<sup>112</sup>Lactantius, “Divine Institutes,” in *Lucii Coelii Lactantii Firmiani Opera Quae Extant, Ad fidem MSS. recognita ET Commentariis illustrata*, A Tho. Spark A.M. *ex Aede Christ*, (Oxonii: E Theatro Sheladiano, 1684), Book 5.3.7.

*Christo, vel etiam praeferre conantur?"* (However, who for example, would think it suitable for ridicule that they try to compare or even prefer all those experts in the magical arts to Christ, because of Apollonius and Apuleius?)<sup>113</sup> Later, in the same letter Augustine simply states that "*fuit magus...*" (he [Apuleius] was a magician...)<sup>114</sup> From all of the above, it appears that it was a commonly held tradition in North African that Apuleius had been a magician whose acts competed, perhaps deliberately, with Christ's. This was a very serious allegation in ancient Christian times, and Apuleius could have hardly maintained this extremely negative and posthumous characterization through his interest in philosophy alone or simply due to the allegation that he had once used 'magic' to entice the older Pudentilla to marry him. Augustine was well aware that Apuleius had once defended himself against charges of magic, and although he refers to Apuleius' *Apology* upon occasion, he does not seem to view it as evidence that Apuleius had been a magician.<sup>115</sup> Apuleius must have set himself up as an enemy of the faith in a more direct manner to deserve the reputation that both Lactantius and Augustine attributed him with.

Augustine offers good evidence in his *City of God* which illustrates that Apuleius' role as a magician and an enemy of Christ had its roots in *The Golden Ass*. Consider passage 18.18 of *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*:

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<sup>113</sup>S. Aurelii Augustini, *OPERA OMNIA: Patrologiae Latinae Elenchus*, (Rome: Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, 2003), *Epistula* 138.18. <<http://www.augustinus.it/>>

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.19.

<sup>115</sup>S. Aurelii Augustini, *OPERA OMNIA: De Civitate Dei contra Paganos libri XXII. Patrologiae Latinae Elenchus*, (Rome: Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, 2003), *Liber VIII*.19. <<http://www.augustinus.it/>>

*Nam et nos cum essemus in Italia audiebamus talia de quadam regione illarum partium, ubi stabularias mulieres inbutas his malis artibus in caseo dare solere dicebant quibus uellent seu possent uiatoribus, unde in iumenta ilico uertentur et necessaria quaeque portarent postque perfuncta opera iterum ad se redirent; nec tamen in eis mentem fieri bestialem, sed rationalem humanamque seruari, sicut Apuleius in libris, quos asini aurei titulo inscripsit, sibi ipsi accidisse, ut accepto ueneno humano animo permanente asinus fieret, aut indicauit aut finxit.*<sup>116</sup>

For when we were in Italy we used to hear of these kinds of things [happening] in a certain region of these parts, where women innkeepers [who] were steeped in these evil arts were accustomed to give, so it is said, [doctored] cheese to travellers whenever they wished or whenever they were able to. Immediately, whence, they [the travelers] were turned into beasts of burden and used to carry every kind of necessary thing. And, after performing their work they once again returned [back] into themselves; however their minds did not become like an animal, but remained rational and human. Just as Apuleius either gave evidence of or fabricated in his book, which he inscribed with the title *Of the Golden Ass*, befell him - that having taken a drug in order to become an ass his mind remained human.

The lewd stories and magical themes in *The Golden Ass* alone would have been enough to upset Christians and their leadership, but it would seem from the above that one reason why Christians believed that Apuleius was a magician was because they believed *The Golden Ass* was an autobiographical account of Apuleius' travels.<sup>117</sup> The early Christians may have viewed *The Golden Ass* as a story along the lines of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*: an account of how the young Apuleius, the would-be magician, eventually finds his way to Isis (who is also known as Proseпина

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<sup>116</sup>S. Aurelii Augustini, *De Civitate, Liber: XVIII.18.*

<sup>117</sup>For further evidence from Augustine that the exploits in *The Golden Ass* were believed to be true see S. Aurelii Augustini, *Epistola*, 102.32 "Et tamen si hoc quod de Iona scriptum est, Apuleius Madaurensis, vel Apollonius Tyaneus fecisse diceretur, quorum multa mira nullo fidei auctore iactitant..." (However, if what is written about Jonas were told as having happened to Apuleius of Madaura, or Apollonius of Tyre, whose many miraculous deeds no worthwhile supporter boosts about..)

the Queen of the Underworld)<sup>118</sup> after he endure some magical misadventures. Or, the early Christians may have despised Apuleius and labelled him as a magician for another reason. They may have recognized Apuleius as an enemy to the faith because he insulted their beliefs with the old asinine religion jibe when he wrote his novel. This has been preserved by the title of the work known to Augustine, *The Golden Ass* (*asino aureo*).

Other scholars have explained the title as a possible reference to Seth, Isis' arch-enemy;<sup>119</sup> yet, given the Christian usage of the ass title for the work, it seems more plausible that the title reflects the second century anti-Christian jibe of *Onokoites*. For if the original notoriety of *The Golden Ass* and Apuleius' negative reputation as a magician came only from the belief that the magical human to animal transformation in the novel were all true, it is hard to understand why the alternate title *Metamorphoses* was not used in its own local context as it was in all other areas of the empire. Nevertheless, it is only from two Christian North African authors that we know of the title *The Golden Ass* for this work. The first is Augustine writing in the fifth century and the second is Fulgentius writing in the sixth century.<sup>120</sup> It

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<sup>118</sup> *G.A.* XI.2.

<sup>119</sup> "It has been suggested that the Latin translates the Greek *onos purros*, the 'tawny ass' of [Seth] Typhon..." Walsh, "Introduction," pp. xxxi-xxxii. For a full discussion see: John J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p.298&317. Also the original research behind the 'tawny ass' interpretation of the title: Rene Martin. "Le Sens de le 'xpression 'Asinus aureus' et la signification du roman apuleien." *Revue des etudes latines* Vol. 48 (1970), 332-254.

<sup>120</sup> Interestingly, Fulgentius, a later sixth century Christian North African, uses both titles, *The Golden Ass* and *Metamorphoses*, in reference to this work. See Sandy, *The Greek World of Apuleius*, p.233, note #3. However, the author listed as Julius Capitolinus (who was more than likely the fourth century Greek historian,

appears that a certain peculiarity was retained in the devoutly Christian North African context, and Augustine himself felt that the shared geographical context was important to consider: "*Apuleius enim, ut de illo potissimum loquamur, qui nobis Afris Afer est notior...*" (Indeed, of Apuleius, who is the most important one for us to discuss as he is well known to us Africans as a [fellow] African...)<sup>121</sup> It seems probable that in the North African milieu shared by Apuleius, Tertullian, Lactantius, Augustine and Fulgentius an important perspective was retained by Christianity in the use of the title, *The Golden Ass*: the text was a literary adaptation of the second century anti-Christian jibe of Christ as a philosopher-ass or ass-man.

### *The Golden Ass*

No doubt an author such as Apuleius, philosopher, priest, and *bon vivant*, would have expected his work to be received on many different levels and, therefore, the recognition of his anti-Christian aims does not necessarily preclude that he had other literary intentions as well. Apuleius was a well educated man, "who was learned in both languages - that is, the Greek and Latin..."<sup>122</sup> and he held a wide variety of interests.<sup>123</sup> Many alternate readings of this text are possible and

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Ammianus, writing in Latin – see: Sir Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) refers to Apuleius' work only as "*Milesias*" (Milesian tales) in his "The Life of Clodius Albinus," (Latin with English translation by David Magie), in *The Scriptores Historiae Augusta. Loeb Classical Library*. (London: W. Heinemann, 1922), 12.12.

<sup>121</sup>S. Aurelii Augustini, *Epistola*, 138.19.

<sup>122</sup>S. Aurelii Augustini, *De Civitate Dei, Liber VIII*.12.

<sup>123</sup>Gerald Sandy, *The Greek World of Apuleius*, pp.37-38.

many of them have received recognition.<sup>124</sup> The anti-Christian reading of *The Golden Ass* is perhaps one among many, but there is a definite anti-Christian agenda.

Any disagreements concerning the aims of Apuleius are compounded by the fact that *The Golden Ass* is generally recognized as only one version out of three ass metamorphosis tales that were all in existence at roughly the same time. The three works are: the Greek *Metamorphoseis*,<sup>125</sup> the Greek *Lucius, or the Ass*, and Apuleius' Latin *The Golden Ass*.<sup>126</sup> The general agreement is that *The Golden Ass* and *Lucius, or the Ass*, are both adaptations of the somewhat earlier *Metamorphoseis*.<sup>127</sup> However, the *Metamorphoseis* is no longer extant. The only knowledge we have of it comes from Photius (c. 820-892) the Patriarch of Constantinople who wrote:

Read: Several volumes of the "Metamorphoseis" of Lukios of Patrae. He is clear and pure in expression and found of sweetness of style. He avoids innovation in language and pursues to excess the marvellous in his narratives. One might say he is another Lucian. The first two books were transcribed almost exactly by Lukios from the work of Lucian entitled "Lukis or the Ass", or by Lucian from the work of

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<sup>124</sup>The apex of this scholastic tradition is John J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), as well as Alexander Scobie, *Apuleius and Folklore: Toward a History of ML3045, AaTh567, 449A*, (London: Folklore Society, 1983).

<sup>125</sup>The true authorship of both the now lost *Metamorphoseis* and the extant *Lucius, or the Ass* is unclear. However, the author of the *Metamorphoseis* is most often accepted as the unknown Lukios of Patrae, and the author of *Lucius, or the Ass* is most often cited as Pseudo-Lucian rather than Lucian - yet there still is some debate.

<sup>126</sup>Sandy, *The Greek World of Apuleius*, p.233. All extant manuscripts derive from one source, codex Laurentianus 68.2. Also known as manuscript F this was the text read and edited by Sallustius in 395-7. Sallustius refers to this work by the title *Metatamorphoses*.

<sup>127</sup>Hugh J. Mason, "Greek and Latin Versions of the Ass-Story," *ANRW* Vol. 2 pt. 34, no. 2 (1993), 1665-1707, see pp.1700-1701.

Lukios. But it seems more likely that it was Lucian who did the transcribing, as far as one can guess, for we no longer can know which of the two was older. In fact Lucian, as it were, by smoothing out from the breadth of Lukios' narrative and by removing what did not seem to him useful for his own purpose, fit the rest together into one book with the same works and expressions and gave the title "Lukis or the Ass" to what he had stolen from it. In both authors the narrative is stuffed with mythical inventions and vile obscenity, except that Lucian works into his narrative the mockery of Greek superstition that he does in his other writing, while Lukios is serious and believes that changes of humans into others' forms and into animals and back again are real, and in the idle chatter and nonsense of the ancient myths, and put all of this into writing and wove it into his narrative.<sup>128</sup>

It is clear from the above that from at least the ninth century on scholars have been struggling with the relationship between the different versions of the ass-tale.

Although this issue must be taken into account in any analysis of any of the ass-tales, the struggle to identify the aims of Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* need not become overly confused by the recognition of other similar works. It makes very little difference to this study if Apuleius' work was a completely original version of the ass-tale or if it was an adaptation of another similar work. Even so, it is useful to compare *The Golden Ass* with the much shorter Greek *Lucius, or the Ass*, in order to ascertain which elements of the narrative are shared between them and which elements seem to be purely from Apuleius, since Apuleius' additions would have certainly been created with an eye on achieving his overall aims.

An overview of the two works in question reveals the following additions by Apuleius. These are: "Introduction" 1.1, "Aristomenes' and Socrates' Tales of Witches and Magic" 1.3-1.20, "Thelyphron's Tale: Witches, Magic, and Raising the Dead" 2.21-2.30, "The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits" 2.31-2.32, "The Festival of

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<sup>128</sup>Photis (translated by Hugh J. Mason), "*Bibliotheca*, Codex 129," in "Greek

Laughter" 3.1-3.12, "The Three Robbers' Stories" 4.8-4.21, "Cupid and Psyche" 4.28-6.24, "Tlepolemus' Rescue of Charite and Lucius" 7.5-12, "The Death of Charite" 8.1-8.14, "Three Travel Trials: Attackers at Night, The Evil Snake-Man and the Cuckold's Suicide, and The Adulterer's Punishment" 8.15-22, "Three Anecdotes of Adultery" 9.5-7, 9.16-21, and 9.24-25, "The Baker's Wife and her Husband's Magical Death" 9.14-15, and 9.26-31, "The Remarkable Portents and The Estate Owner's Sons" 9.33-38, "The Stepmother and her Stepson" 10.2-12, "The History of the Condemned Woman" 10.23-28, and, of course, all of Book XI, the "Isis Book". The episodes that most clearly reveal Apuleius' anti-Christian aims and which will be examined here are: "Thelyphron's Tale", "The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits", "The Festival of Laughter", and "The Isis Book". It is via an analysis of these additions and by the constant recognition of the philosopher-ass as a metaphor for a humble Christian that the anti-Christian aims of *The Golden Ass* are further revealed.

**Chapter Three: Three Anti-Christian Additions of Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*:  
The Festival of Laughter, Thelyphron's Tale, and The Attack of the Wineskin  
Bandits**

**The Festival of Laughter (3.1-2.12)**

The 'Festival of Laughter' is the premier episode of *The Golden Ass* that reveals Apuleius' anti-Christian aims. It is placed just prior to Lucius' transformation into an ass, and in this episode the protagonist, Lucius, is arrested for the murder of three men. Lucius himself believes that he is guilty of the crime, but that it was a justified self-defence against three bandits. However, this situation was contrived. There were no real bandits, only wineskin dummies, but Lucius is unaware of this fact. He is led through the town and a spoof trial is held in the local theatre. The entire community is present and the entire community is filled with laughter because they are all aware of Lucius' real innocence. Lucius is condemned to death, but at the last moment it is revealed to him, via his own hand, that he has been the victim of a practical joke. Later he is informed by the local magistrates that he has been 'blessed' by the god *Risus* because of the humiliating ordeal he has suffered. Modern scholarship has correctly identified this fictitious festival as a community integration rite,<sup>129</sup> but the true identity of the community that Lucius was being integrated, or

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<sup>129</sup>Stavros Frangoulidis, "The Laughter Festival as a Community Integration Rite in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," *Ancient Narrative Supplementum* 1 (2002), 177-188.

initiated, into has yet to be established. However, it will be demonstrated that in all probability this community was a caricature of a Christian community celebrating Easter/*Pascha* as seen through the satirical eyes of Apuleius. It has long been recognized that the Hypatian Festival of Laughter and the god *Risus* had no real precedent in the ancient world,<sup>130</sup> and thus this festival was a literary creation of Apuleius added for a specific purpose. This purpose was to strengthen the anti-Christian aims of his adapted ass-tale by mocking the initiation rites of early Christians, which were often held during the celebration of *Pascha*.

Therefore, Apuleius fabricated the Festival of Laughter as an exclusive initiation rite celebrated by a unique community. The community of initiation for the Festival of Laughter is identified in the text as the physical town of Hypata, but this identification is largely a literary convenience more so than it is anything else. The retention of the Hypatian location (as used in *Lucius, or the Ass*) helps to keep Apuleius' version within the recognizable framework of the adapted original ass-tale. Nevertheless, Apuleius purposely emphasizes that this festival is to be understood as an unique and exclusive celebration. In 2.31 Byrrhaena's invitation to Lucius reads: "*quo die soli mortalium sanctissimum deum Risum hilaro atque gaudiali ritu propitiamus.*" (On that day we alone in the world seek to propitiate the most sacred god Laughter with merry and joyful ritual.)<sup>131</sup> Obviously, this

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<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>131</sup>Latin and translation from: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses Volume I and II, The Loeb Classical Library*, edited and translated by J. Arthur Hanson, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 2.31. All future references to this work are to this edition and will be listed simply by book and passage numbers in the above text or in the footnotes by *G.A.* followed by the book and passage numbers.

community was set apart from the rest of the world of Apuleius. This condition was similar to the position of Christian communities in Apuleius' time. Their unique belief of spurning all the traditional gods and celebrating suspicious rites set them apart from the rest of society, even though Christian communities existed within the larger context of Roman Traditionalist culture.

Moreover, the festival itself celebrates the wrongful conviction of a condemned criminal. The parallels to Christianity are obvious in this aspect, and the ancients were well aware of the tradition of Christ as a condemned criminal and the perceived sacrificial nature of this act in the eyes of believers. Tacitus, in his *Annals* 15.44, specifically referred to the trial of Christ by Pontius Pilate, and Celsus, in Origen's *Contra Celsus* 2.34, was also eager to draw on this tradition in order to disqualify Christ.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, in *The Passing of Peregrinus*, Apuleius' direct contemporary, Lucian, mockingly refers to Christ as "that crucified sophist...",<sup>133</sup> In the Festival of Laughter Apuleius alludes to the crucifixion in 3.9, " 'Prius' inquit 'optimi cives, quam latronem istum miserorum pignorum meorum peremptorem cruci affigatis....'" ('First, noble citizens,' she said 'before you fasten that thieving murderer of my poor little darlings to the cross...') Moreover, he also draws specific attention to Lucius' sacrificial nature twice in 3.2 of the Festival of Laughter. The first mention is, "*Tandem pererratis plateis omnibus, et in modum eorum quibus lustralibus piamentis minas portentorum hostiis circumofraneis expiant*

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<sup>132</sup>Celsus was so familiar with the Gospels that he even referred to "those who mocked him and put a purple robe around him and the crown of thorns and the reed in his hand." See, Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2.34.

<sup>133</sup>Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 13.

*circumductus angulatim...*” (Finally, after we had wandered through every street and I had been led around into every corner - like those purificatory processions when they carry sacrificial animals all round the town to expiate threatening portents...) The second time follows very closely after the first, “*Tunc me per proscaenium medium velut quandam victimam publica ministeria producunt et orchestrae mediae sistunt.*” (Then public officers led me like a sacrificial victim along the middle of the stage and stood me in the centre of the orchestra.)<sup>134</sup> The combination of Lucius’ performance as a sacrificial victim with the celebration of a wrongfully condemned criminal seems very imitative of the Christian Easter, or *Pascha*, passion of Christ where Christ is arrested, taken to trial, and led to his crucifixion. Nevertheless, in *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius was careful to remind his audience of the importance of laughter in his Festival of Laughter, and he does so on three occasions. The first is at 3.2,<sup>135</sup> the second at 3.7,<sup>136</sup> and the third at 3.10.<sup>137</sup> Thus, if Apuleius was intending

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<sup>134</sup>*G.A.* 3.2.

<sup>135</sup>“*obliquato tamen aspectu rem admirationis maximae conspicio. Nam inter tot milia populi circumsedentis nemo prorsum qui non risu dirumperetur aderat*” (out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of something extremely bewildering: among all the thousands of people sitting around there was not a single one who was not bursting with laughter.)

<sup>136</sup>“*paulo altius aspectu relato conspicio prorsus totum populum - risu cachinnabili difflebant - nec secus illum bonum hospitem parentemque meum Milonem risu maximo dissolutum*” (Then I raised my eyes a little and caught sight of the audience: absolutely the entire populace was dissolved in raucous laughter, and even my kind host and uncle, Milo, was broken up by a huge fit of laughing.)

<sup>137</sup>“*Tunc ille quorundam astu paulisper cohibitus risus libere iam exarsit in plebem. Hi gaudii nimietate gratulari, illi dolorem ventris manuum compressione sedare. Et certe laetitia delibuti meque repectantes cuncti theatro facessunt*” (Then the laughter, which some people had guilefully repressed for a time, now broke out unrestrainedly among the entire mob. Some were rejoicing with excessive mirth, while others were pressing their stomachs with their hands to ease the pain. At any

his Festival of Laughter as a satire of the Christian celebration of *Pascha*, the second century *Pascha* must have included elements of obvious laughter.

The exact nature of the popular celebration of the Christian *Pascha* in the second century is somewhat uncertain. The second century dispute over the correct date for this celebration has been well documented,<sup>138</sup> and the existence of the contest itself provides ample evidence that the *Pascha* was indeed celebrated in the second century. Nevertheless, it was not celebrated in any uniform or universal manner,<sup>139</sup> and in many geographical areas this dilemma would have been further complicated by the existence of a variety of non-orthodox Christian sects such as: Basidilians,<sup>140</sup> Ebionites,<sup>141</sup> Marcionites,<sup>142</sup> Monarchians,<sup>143</sup> and Montanists.<sup>144</sup> This is

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event they were all drenched in happiness, and they kept turning round to look at me as they made their way out of the theatre.)

<sup>138</sup>Two volumes are of particular interest in this discussion: Raniero Cantalamessa, *Easter in the Early Church: An Anthology of Jewish and Early Christian Texts*, (Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1993), and Karl Gerlach, *The Antenicene Pascha: A Rhetorical History*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

<sup>139</sup>Raniero Cantalamessa, "Introduction," in *Easter in the Early Church: An Anthology of Jewish and Early Christian Texts*, edited by Raniero Cantalamessa, James M. Quigley and Joseph T. Lienhard, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 1-23, see esp. pp.3-4.

<sup>140</sup>A form of Gnosticism/Docetism that denied the suffering of Christ.

<sup>141</sup>Judaistic Ebionites upheld the Jewish Law and they denied the divinity of Christ. They rejected the teaching of St. Paul. There were also Gnostic Ebionites who believed as all Gnostics in salvation via secret knowledge.

<sup>142</sup>A belief that rejected the Old Testament and upheld the principles of dualism associated with Manichaeism.

<sup>143</sup>This sect stressed the undivided unity of the godhead by rejecting any view that distinguished between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

<sup>144</sup>'The New Prophecy': A belief centred on the continued voice of prophecy and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Named after its founding prophet, Monatus, who

especially important to consider because in the second century the boundaries between heresy and orthodoxy were not well defined and many influential leaders would only later be defined as 'heretical' by the winning faction. Thus, there were often commonly held ideas overlapping the boundaries between this mixture of emerging heresy and orthodoxy, and certain non-canonical texts of the *Nag Hammadi Library*,<sup>145</sup> as well as select passages from the early church fathers, provide good evidence that *paschal* laughter was one of these ideas.

Isaac as the *typos* of Christ was the primary means by which orthodoxy included laughter in the *pascha* celebration. In Genesis 22 Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac. Isaac, whose name means laughter, carries the wood of his own sacrifice, but at the last minute God offers a ram for Abraham to sacrifice rather than his own son. The story of the sacrifice of Isaac was seen by the church fathers as the Old Testament 'model', or *typos*, of Christ's passion. There is a long list of early Christian authors and theologians, including Augustine,<sup>146</sup> who understood this connection between Isaac, laughter, and the figure of Christ. The earliest references include: Barnabas (c. late first or early second century),<sup>147</sup> Tertullian,<sup>148</sup> Melito of

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taught in association with two prophetesses, Maximilla and Priscilla. It is believed that Tertullian became a Montanist and thus became anti-Catholic.

<sup>145</sup>A collection of religious texts (primarily Gnostic Christian), translated from Greek into Coptic, which were buried c. 400 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. They were recovered in 1945.

<sup>146</sup>S. Aurelii Augustini, *De Civitate Dei, Liber XVI.31-32*. In 31 Augustine illustrates the tension of whether the laughter of Isaac via Sarah was that of joy or that of mockery.

<sup>147</sup>Barnabas (Greek with translation by Kirsopp Lake), "The Epistle of Barnabas," in *The Apostolic Fathers: Volume II, Loeb Classical Library*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912), 7.3.

Sardis (*fl.* 190) and Clement of Alexandria (150-215). Melito of Sardis in his *On Pascha* specifically places the laughter of Isaac and Christ in the context of the *Pascha*,<sup>149</sup> but the text that best demonstrates the second century understanding of Christ, Isaac and *paschal* laughter is Clement of Alexandria's *Christ the Educator*:

Isaac means rejoicing [Greek, laughter] The Spirit exults in such merry-making in Christ, attended with submissiveness... Heraclitus tells us that his Zeus, too, indulges in such a pastime. Indeed, what occupation is more becoming a wise and perfect man than to play and rejoice at the celebration of a solemn religious festival, with submissive reception and the performance of what is holy? It is possible to interpret the meaning of the inspired in still another sense: that it refers to our rejoicing and making merry [Greek, laughter] because of our salvation, like Isaac's... The King is Christ, looking down from above on our rejoicing [Greek, laughter], and 'peering through the door,' as Scripture says, on our gratitude and benediction that works in us joy and cheerfulness with submission... Isaac is another type, too (he can easily be taken in this other sense), this time of the Lord. He was a son, just as is the Son (he is the son of Abraham; Christ, of God); he was a victim, as was the Lord, but his sacrifice was not consummated, while the Lord's was. All he did was to carry the wood of his sacrifice, just as the Lord bore the wood of the Cross. Isaac rejoiced [Greek, laughed] for a mystical reason, to prefigure the joy with which the Lord has filled us in saving us from destruction through His blood.<sup>150</sup>

Although Clement indorsed laughter in the above context, it appears that this rejoicing may have gotten out of hand on occasion.

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<sup>148</sup>Tertullian, "*Adversus Marcionem, Liber III*," in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina I, Tertulliani Opera, Pars I*, (Turnhout: Typographi Brepols, 1954), 509-544, see esp. pp.531-532 for III.18.2.

<sup>149</sup>Melito of Sardis (translated by Stuart George Hall), *On Pascha and Fragments*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), lines 417, 422-446, and in greater detail in the twenty-five lines of *Fragment 9*.

<sup>150</sup>Clement of Alexandria (translated by Simon P. Wood), *Christ the Educator*, (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1954) Bk. 1.5.21-23. For the Greek consult Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus und Paedagogus*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972.

In a few of Clement's more generalized comments on Christian laughter and comic behaviour he reveals that there were occasions where it exceeded the limits of Christian propriety,

But, if we feel that clowns are to be excluded from our city, we should be the first to give over playing the clown. It is inconsistent for us to be found performing the very role to which we have forbidden ourselves to listen. It is even more inconsistent for us to make ourselves a laughing-stock deliberately, that is, the butt of insults and of jokes. If we cannot bear cutting a ridiculous figure such as some are seen to do in the processions, how can we possibly tolerate a man in his right senses cutting an even more ridiculous figure?... We should be pleasantly witty, but not clowns. As for laughter itself, it, too, should be kept under restraint.<sup>151</sup>

Clement's protests against ridiculous behaviour indicate that it was more than a hypothetical issue that needed to be dealt with. Moreover, the occasion for such behaviour was likely the *Pascha* celebrations due to the perceived link between the sacrifice of Isaac and Christ's passion, and because ridiculous behaviour and the resulting laughter at *pascal* celebrations were still a problem two centuries later. This is illustrated by Zeno of Verona (d. 380) who gave a corrective sermon on the proper way to conduct the laughter of the *pascha* celebration and feasting.<sup>152</sup> Obviously the tradition of *paschal* laughter was firmly imbedded within the Christian tradition. In fact it was so deeply rooted that it was an acceptable practice until the seventeenth century.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Clement, *Christ the Educator*, 2.5.45-46.

<sup>152</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin (translated by Helene Iswolsky), *Rabelais and His World*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), p.287.

<sup>153</sup>*Risus Paschalis* (Easter Laughter) was a customary practice of the medieval church that involved comedic role-playing by a priest in order to invoke joyous Easter laughter from the parishioners on Easter morning. This folkloric custom has not received much scholarly attention to date other than by Michael

However, it is probable that the Christian community which Apuleius had in mind for his Festival of Laughter was not what we would define as an orthodox community. For among the texts of non-orthodox sects, there is no shortage of ancient sources that attest to a second century inclusion of laughter as a key component of Christ's passion. This is particularly true of those sects that were connected to docetism: a loose knit set of teachings that denied, in one form or another, that Jesus physically died on the cross. Guy G. Stroumsa in his article, "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered" has found that "laughter, then, would appear integral to the docetic interpretation of Christ's passion."<sup>154</sup> Moreover, he has challenged the modern belief that docetism had originated from Platonism and Graeco-Oriental Dualism, and he argues instead that "the very historical core of Docetism, at least in its earliest phases, does not lie in Platonic elements, which were wholly absent from Christian origins, but in the rejection of Jesus' passion on the cross, 'a stumbling block [*skandalon*] to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,'..."<sup>155</sup>

These points of analysis are important here because by demonstrating that the

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O'Connell in his article "Mockery, Farce, and *Risus Paschalis* in the York *Christ before Herod*." *Ludus: Medieval and Early Renaissance Theatre and Drama* Vol. 6, No. 1 (2002), 45-58. The custom was officially banned by Clement X in the 1670's ("Easter: Peculiar Customs of Easter Time, *Risus Paschalis*" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*).

<sup>154</sup>Guy G. Stroumsa, "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12:3 (2004), 267-288, see esp. p.275.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 269. However, Strouma cites 1 Corinthians 1.24, but for this reference actually refers to 1 Corinthians 1.23: "but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles..." See also 2. John 1.7 for further biblical evidence concerning Docetism: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh..." (N.R.S.V)

laughter of the docetic Christ was present in the earliest Christian texts it then further implies its probable inclusion in the celebration rites of like-minded Christians in the second century. In his work, Stroumsa examines key texts from *Nag Hammadi* which relate the passion of Christ to the laughter of Christ and two of these texts are worth presenting here: the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

The *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* relate a very peculiar (to us) version of the passion of Christ,

It was another, their father, who drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed; it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. I [*sic*] was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorn. But I was rejoicing in the height over all the wealth of the archons and the offspring of their error, of their empty glory. And I was laughing at their ignorance. (*Second Treatise of the Great Seth*)<sup>156</sup>

But he who stands near him is the living Savior [Christ], the first in him, whom they seized and released, who stands joyfully looking at those who did him violence, while they are divided among themselves. Therefore he laughs at their lack of perception, knowing that they are born blind. (*Apocalypse of Peter*)<sup>157</sup>

In both of these accounts not only does the laughter of Christ feature prominently, but the laughter is that of mockery. Christ is 'laughing at their ignorance.' In the *Second Treatise of Great Seth* this mockery is a consistent theme. All of the key

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<sup>156</sup>Anonymous (translated by Roger A. Bullard and Joseph A. Gibbons), "The Second Treatise of the Great Seth (VII,2), in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 363-371, see esp. p.365.

<sup>157</sup>Anonymous (translated by James Brashler and Joseph A. Gibbons), "The Apocalypse of Peter (VII,3), in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 373-378, see esp. p.377.

figures from the Old Testament and even John the Baptist of the New Testament tradition are 'laughingstocks'.<sup>158</sup> They do not know the truth of the situation even though they think they do. This 'laughingstock' position is very similar to that of Lucius in *The Golden Ass*. Lucius thinks he knows the truth, but, actually, he is ignorant.

This laughingstock position is also not dissimilar to the somewhat later Christian tradition of 'Holy Fools',<sup>159</sup> and there is no doubt that in the miscellany of beliefs held by the Christians of the second century, the idea of a laughing Christ would have had a certain popular appeal especially amongst the laity. In fact, these ideas seemed to have been popular enough to draw the attention of 'heresy-fighter' Irenaeus (c.125-c.202) who warned that Basilides of Alexandria (*fl.* 117-138) was corrupting the faith by teaching that Christ,

thereupon appeared as a man on earth to the nations of these powers and worked wonders. And so he did not suffer, but a certain Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross for him. Through ignorance

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<sup>158</sup>John Dart, *The Jesus of Heresy and History: The Discovery and Meaning of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic Library*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), p.95.

<sup>159</sup>Holy fools were monks and nuns who had made themselves foolish for Christ's sake. They were praised, and often sainted, for their behaviour by the Christian community even though this behaviour was characterized by acts that were usually seen as the opposite of pious behaviour (such acts included pretending to be a prostitute, a john, an actor, a mime, or beggars as well walking around naked and committing wild acts of insanity). These tales were later related to the audience in a comic manner so as to directly evoke their laughter (Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.2), but the sources are not often clear if the behaviour was meant as a means of salvation for the holy fool, or if the behaviour was meant to disguise a close relationship with God. Nevertheless, there is a long-standing literary tradition of holy fools (Greek: *salos*) in Eastern Orthodoxy that stems back to c. 420 with a short account by Palladius concerning a nun at Tabennisis who 'pretended' to be insane.

and error this Simon was crucified, having been transformed by Christ so that he was believed to be Jesus; while Jesus himself assumed the form of Simon and, standing by, ridiculed them.<sup>160</sup>

Thus, there are clear motifs of mocking laughter in context with Christ's passion present in second century docetic Christianity and, as demonstrated earlier, elements of joyous laughter present even in early orthodox thought. These motifs correspond to the laughter of Apuleius' Festival of Laughter as he portrays the Hypatian community as a select group of people who saw religious significance in the expression of laughter during a time typically thought of as negative: a time of judicial trial and condemnation of an innocent individual.

However, in *The Golden Ass* it is not specifically stated that the performance of a mock trial and condemnation was always the 'something cheerful' of the fictitious Festival of Laughter;<sup>161</sup> although it is suggested that this was usually the case by the magistrates in their formulaic speech to Lucius, "*Iste deus auctorem et actorem suum propitius ubique comitabitur amanter...*" (That god will propitiously and lovingly accompany the man who has been both his producer and performer, whenever he may go.)<sup>162</sup> Obviously, the 'something cheerful' always included a performance where the initiate was both the producer and performer of his or her humiliation. Once again this has a parallel with the second century Christian *Pascha*, for in his *On Pascha* Melito of Sardis states that "the Lord made prior arrangements

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<sup>160</sup>Irenaeus (translated by Dominic J. Unger), *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies: Volume I*, (New York, N.Y./Mahway, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1992), 1.24.

<sup>161</sup>Byrrhena uses this description in her invitation to Lucius to describe the festival performance (2.31), and the magistrates refer to it as a "novel suggestion" and that it is *per annua* (3.11).

<sup>162</sup>*G.A* 3.11.

for his own sufferings..."<sup>163</sup> Thus, Christ was both the 'producer and performer' of his passion - an event filled with either the joyful orthodox laughter of the salvation to come or the mocking laughter of Christ towards his accusers.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, Melito illustrates the importance of Christian initiation via trial at the end of an exegesis of Genesis 22 by stating that, "For two things constitute provision for the forgiveness of sins: suffering for Christ, and baptism."<sup>165</sup> Christian initiation was (and still is) a fundamental aspect of the celebration of *Pascha*, and Lucius obviously was initiated by trial in the Festival of Laughter. His wrongful conviction was not unlike Christ's, and his initiation even included a blessing via the dual identity of '*auctorem et actorem*' - a role that Christ himself had performed and a role that Lucius now shared.

Therefore, the key to understanding the Festival of Laughter in *The Golden Ass* as a caricature of the celebration of the Christian *Pascha* is in recognizing the festival as a ritual of initiation that alludes to the *Pascha* via elements of obvious satire, laughter and performance. Lucius finds himself intimately involved with a festival of initiation that celebrates the wrongful conviction of a condemned criminal in a sacrificial manner. In the time of Apuleius Christian orthodoxy had yet to be fully defined and the precise nature of Christian celebrations could vary from location to location. There were many competing Christian sects in the second

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<sup>163</sup>Melito, *On Pascha*, 57, line 398.

<sup>164</sup>It is also interesting to note that the laughter of Christ in the docetic view is an inversion of the mocking laughter of the persecutors of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels. See Dart, p.97.

<sup>165</sup>Melito, *On Pascha*, fragment 12.

century that would be later defined as heretical and there were often theological overlaps between them and orthodoxy. One of these overlaps was the expression of laughter in connection with the passion of Christ: a laughter similar to that of Apuleius' Festival of Laughter. Yet, due to the dominant position of mocking laughter and the role of the laughingstock in both docetic Christian thought and in the Festival Laughter, it seems plausible that the Christian communities that Apuleius sought to satirize were more docetic than orthodox. Moreover, Lucius is 'blessed' by the god of the festival owing to his baptism-like trial as both producer and performer of his own suffering. When all of these elements are viewed together (satire, laughter, performance and the motifs contained within them of suffering, sacrifice, wrongful conviction, joy and/or mockery, as well as initiation by trial) and are then compared to the ideas and practices of second century Christianity, it seems exceedingly plausible that the Festival of Laughter was designed in comic imitation of the *Pascha* celebration and Christian rite of passage. Moreover, there is further evidence which supports this proposition, and this will be considered next.

### **Thelyphron's Tale and The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits (2.21-2.32)**

That the Festival of Laughter was written as a satire of the Christian *Pascha* is also supported by the overall placement of this event within the text. The Festival of Laughter is found immediately preceding Lucius' transformation, or conversion, into an ass (the symbolic representation of a Christian), and following the imbedded tale "Thelyphron's Tale: Witches, Magic, and Raising the Dead". In the light of this study, the significance of placing the Festival of Laughter initiation event right

before Lucius' transformation into an ass is self-evident, but the significance of placing the anti-Christian Festival of Laughter immediately following Thelyphron's Tale is not readily apparent. However, the significance of this placement is revealed by first examining the literary function that the embedded tales play in *The Golden Ass*, and then by examining the nature of Thelyphron's Tale itself. This is especially true in light of the 'resurrection'<sup>166</sup> that takes place via the hand of Zatchlas, the performing necromancer.

It has long been recognized that in *The Golden Ass* the embedded tales (all of which are unique to Apuleius' version of the ass-tale) foreshadow the main events of the novel,<sup>167</sup> and that they all appear to be narratives that Apuleius adapted from the folk tale tradition of antiquity.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, Apuleius also added two major events to his version of the ass-tale that needed to be foreshadowed by embedded tales. These events are: 1) The combined episodes of "The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits" and "The Festival of Laughter" that together provide the set-up and situation of Lucius' "initiation" into an ass,<sup>169</sup> and 2) all of Book XI, the "Isis Book" that deals with the

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<sup>166</sup>Although many scholars of Apuleius commonly refer to the revivification of the corpse in this tale as a 'resurrection' it should be noted that this is not so. Resurrection generally refers to 'a new life' that follows an eschatological event or the immediate physical ascension of a holy person to heaven following their death. Thus, the revivification that takes place in Thelyphron's Tale should be understood as an act of 'raising the dead' and not an example of 'resurrection'.

<sup>167</sup>S.J. Harrison, "Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, edited by Gareth Schmeling (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 491 – 561, see esp. p.510.

<sup>168</sup>Alex Scobie, *Apuleius and Folklore* (London: The Folklore Society, 1983), p.35.

<sup>169</sup>It is possible to look at these two episodes as components of a larger event as "The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits" episode is integral to "The Festival of

climax of Lucius' salvation via Isis. James Tatum has argued that all of the embedded tales in one way or another foreshadow the climax of the Isis Book, or at least that all "have a didactic purpose in harmony with book 11."<sup>170</sup> However, the two embedded tales that precede the Festival of Laughter complex seem to have no easily identifiable connection with the climax, although other scholars have tried to find a connection.<sup>171</sup> The first embedded tale is "Aristomenes' and Socrates' Tales of Witches and Magic" 1.3-1.20, and the second embedded tale is "Thelyphron's Tale: Witches, Magic, and Resurrection" 2.21-2.30.

In the first embedded tale, the storyteller Aristomenes tells to Lucius a cautionary narrative of sex and witches, and the evil that this brings to himself and his friend Socrates. In this tale Aristomenes, a traveller Lucius meets on the road to Hypata, relates the horribly dreadful events that befell his friend Socrates, as well as himself, due to Socrates' sexual philandering with an evil old witch named Meroe.

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Laughter", as the 'murder' of the phony bandits 'sets up' the character Lucius for the 'trials' of the festival by providing the ruse of false murder.

<sup>170</sup>James Tatum, "The Tales in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," in *Oxford Readings in the Roman Novel*, edited by S. J. Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 156-194, see esp. p.191.

<sup>171</sup>See J. Gwyn Griffiths "Isis in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius," in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, edited by B. L. Hijmans Jr. and R. Th. van der Paardt, (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1978), 141-166. In this article Griffiths reviews the Isiac content of *The Golden Ass* and finds that the evidence of the first embedded tale is limited to the name of the witch, 'Meroe', and that "Several of her characteristics recall Isis." (p.143). However, Griffith himself admits that "In spite of a name and of some characteristics which associate her with Isis, Meroe must be classed with the doers of a magic that is bad and baneful." (p.145) Although Griffith's tries to downplay Meroe's Thessalian wickedness, one must conclude considering Meroe's overall evilness that the embedded tale of "Aristomenes' and Socrates' Tales of Witches and Magic" does not foreshadow the event of Isiac salvation, but only the event that immediately follows it - Lucius' induction to Milo's witch filled household.

Aristomenes lives to tell the tale, but Socrates meets his demise. Thus, this tale foreshadows the event that directly follows it: Lucius as a houseguest in the home of Milo and his witch wife, Pamphile, as well as Lucius' love affair with Pamphile's apprentice/servant, Photis.<sup>172</sup> Consequently, the second embedded tale, "Thelyphron's Tale: Witches, Magic, and Raising the Dead", which is placed immediately before the Festival of Laughter complex, foreshadows this event and consequently its anti-Christian aims.

Thelyphron's tale begins at Byrrhena's dinner party where Thelyphron, a guest at the dinner party, is goaded into telling the audience 'his story'. His story recounts a series of events that began when he was traveling through Thessaly as a young man. In Thessaly he agreed to take the job of guarding a corpse from the attack of witches known for stealing the facial parts of corpses during the night before their funerals. The corpse in question was the husband of a beautiful young widow, and the widow in this tale is very eager to see that her former husband's body remains intact. Thelyphron's role throughout the embedded tale is that of a comic bungler, but, nevertheless, when dawn arrives it seems that he had managed to be successful in his endeavour. However, he suspects that a witch in the form of a weasel unsuccessfully attempted to mutilate the corpse during the course of his watch. Thelyphron receives his pay (but still manages to inadvertently insult the widow and obtains a beating in the comic genre) and prepares to go on his way when the maternal uncle of the dead man publicly accuses the mournful young

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<sup>172</sup>R. Th. van der Paardt, "Various Aspects of Narrative Technique in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, edited by B.L. Hijmans Jr. and R. Th. van der Paardt, (Groningen: Boumas Boekhuis, 1978), 75-94, see esp. p.83 and p.84.

widow of murdering her husband. The widow denies the charge and so the uncle produces a 'first rate Egyptian prophet' (Zatchlas) who has agreed for a 'great price' to temporarily raise the dead man so that the corpse may give testimony to the circumstances of his death. Zatchlas performs the feat and the corpse testifies that "I was murdered ... by the evil arts of my new bride and sacrificed to her poisoned cup, ceding my still warm bed to an adulterer."<sup>173</sup> When some of the crowd felt "that the lies of a corpse ought not to be trusted",<sup>174</sup> the corpse proves his claim by revealing that witches actually tried to steal his nose and ears during the night of Thelyphron's watch. However, because the corpse and Thelyphron share the same name, the witches accidentally stole Thelyphron's ears and nose instead (through a hole in the door) while he was asleep, and then they replaced these missing parts with wax prosthetics. When Thelyphron tests his ears and nose to see if this is true, they fall off into his hands and the crowd breaks out in laughter. Thelyphron is too embarrassed to ever return home and so the tale ends.

The laughter of the crowd in Thelyphron's tale, and the laughter that he has to endure at Byrrhaena's dinner party, do indeed clearly foreshadow the laughter Lucius endures during the Festival of Laughter,<sup>175</sup> and the changes in fortune experienced by Thelyphron are also experienced by Lucius during the Festival of Laughter. Things appear to be one way in Thelyphron's Tale only to be found the

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<sup>173</sup>2.29

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup>Nancy Shumate, "Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: The Inserted Tales," in *Latin Fiction: The Latin Novel in Context*, edited by Heinz Hofmann, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 113-125, see esp. p.122. Also Judith K. Krabbe *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp.158-159.

opposite is true: the grieving widow is a murderess adulteress/ Thelyphron's apparent success is actually a failure. The same happens in the Festival of Laughter, where murder victims are punctured wineskins and trials are festivals). However, Thelyphron's tale foreshadows the Festival of Laughter in yet another way - through the character and action of Zatchlas.

In the past, many scholars of *The Golden Ass* have felt that Apuleius meant to portray Zatchlas as a genuine priest of Isis due to his exotic name and priest-like costume, and, therefore, his appearance foreshadows the Isiac content of Book XI.<sup>176</sup> However, Warren S. Smith in "Style and Character in the 'Golden Ass': 'Suddenly an Opposite Appearance'" questions this, and suggests that Apuleius did not intend the character of Zatchlas to represent a genuine priest of Isis. In his article, Smith refuses to ignore the overall comedy of the tale and the "tongue-in-cheek tone of the scene"<sup>177</sup> as the exotic Egyptian necromancer bursts into the action. Smith states that:

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<sup>176</sup>Griffiths, "Isis in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius," pp.143-145. Also P.G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel: The 'Satyricon' of Petronius and the 'Metamorphoses' of Apuleius*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.179. There is a great debate concerning the correct etymology of the name Zatchlas. Although in the past it was believed to be of an obscure Egyptian origin (see J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Introduction," in *Apuleius of Madauros: The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*, edited by J. Gwyn Griffiths, (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 1975), 1-66, see esp. p.29. An opposite view is held by J. Arthur Hanson in: Apuleius (Latin with translation by J. Arthur Hanson), *Metamorphoses, Loeb Classical Library* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1989), note #1 p.113. Also more recent scholarship refutes the claim of an Egyptian origin for 'Zatchlas', and identifies this name as a comic satire of an 'exotic' name. See, Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.229.

<sup>177</sup>Warren S. Smith, "Style and Character in 'The Golden Ass': 'Suddenly an Opposite Appearance,'" *ANRW* II 34.2 (1994), 1575-1599, see especially p.1581 and corresponding note #10 on the same page.

This “first-rate” (*primarius*) prophet is willing to resuscitate corpses for a “stiff fee” (*grandi praemio*), and the dead man’s uncle invokes him with a complicated formula of Egyptian mumbo-jumbo which sounds much like the comic circumlocutions for “Greece” in the prologue of the novel.<sup>178</sup>

Although one might argue that Zatchlas’ role is a positive one, he is the agent who reveals the truth of the matter, the overall description of Zatchlas is hardly admirable. Thus, Zatchlas' role is better recognized as negative, as he is the agent that brings about the humiliation of the tale’s protagonist, Thelyphron, rather than his salvation. Moreover, it seems clear that Thelyphron's Tale is presented as a comedy in both action and characterization. There is a bungled misadventure with a comic hero-buffoon, Thelyphron, along with a stereo-typical grieving young widow/murderess, and an 'exotic' Egyptian necromancer. All of these characterizations are strong elements of satirical comedy, and they must not be understood as serious examples of those whom Apuleius would have wished to praise (such as the true priests of Isis).<sup>179</sup> Thelyphron’s Tale is presented as a comedy of lies,<sup>180</sup> and the reader is left to wonder whether in this surprising world of Thessalian magic and mystery if it was not Zatchlas himself who conjured up

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<sup>178</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup>Compare Apuleius' low-key description of Zatchlas with the complimentary description of the priests of Isis in Book XI.10. Griffiths, "Isis in the Metamorphoses of Apuleius," pp.143&145. Although arguing for a priestly identification, Griffiths shows some concern with that identification as necromancy was categorized as magic. Tatum, "The Tales in Apuleius'," p. 169, feels that "His [Zatchlas] 'divine' providence is accorded great respect, and the miracle of resurrecting the dead for a good purpose, *veritas*, stands in the strongest possible contrast to the evil magic practiced by the witches of Socrates or Thelyphron."

<sup>180</sup>Smith, "Style and Character," p.1582.

Thelyphron's wax ears and nose in order to support the claims of the 'lying' corpse whom he has just revived.

Moreover, there are other problems with associating Zatchlas as an Egyptian priest of Isis rather than as the first-rate prophet/necromancer that Apuleius identifies him as. One of the problems is that Zatchlas' act is simply a temporary 'raising of the dead', and nothing like the more permanent promise Isis makes to the transformed Lucius in book XI, "I alone - can ... prolong your life beyond the limits determined by your fate."<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, the act of raising the dead itself is hardly described in laudable terms in Thelyphron's Tale. The corpse complains about having to leave "Lethe's draughts" and pleads "Stop now, I beg you. Stop and let me go back to my rest."<sup>182</sup> To add to this Zatchlas even threatens the corpse: "Or do you not believe that I can invoke the Furies with my curses and have your weary body tortured?"<sup>183</sup> Consequently, Zatchlas should not be seen as a salvation orientated priest of Isis, but instead his character should be seen as someone possibly contrary to the Isiac tradition.

In fact, recent scholarship in magic of the Greco-Roman world plainly reveals that the character of Zatchlas was clearly meant to be understood as a representative of a well-known class of wandering Egyptian and/or Jewish magicians in the second century. The Roman educated elite usually recognized these

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<sup>181</sup> 11.6 nor, is it like the ancient Egyptian practice of "Opening the Mouth". "Opening the Mouth" was a rite performed by the Egyptians that was believed to produce a more permanent revivification of the dead. See Griffiths, "Isis in the *Metamorphoses*," p.144.

<sup>182</sup> 2.29.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

itinerant magicians as charlatans, and Matthew W. Dickie in his book *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* explains that,

Itinerant Egyptian magicians and persons passing themselves off as such will have exploited the widely-held view that as Egyptians they were expert in magic, ... Zatchlas will be an example of the type. ... Egyptian magicians were a known feature ... [and] will have dressed appropriately in linen, shaved their heads and made much of their holiness...<sup>184</sup>

Thus, although Zatchlas may appear to the modern eye as a true representative of Isis, Apuleius was actually presenting another well-known magical/religious type in antiquity, the itinerant Egyptian magician - the type of magician who would commonly perform both exorcisms and necromancy. Necromancy was most definitely categorized as 'bad magic' and not 'good religion' in the second century context of the empire, and the ancient Egyptian priestly tradition itself condemned the practice of necromancy.<sup>185</sup> If Apuleius had been presenting Zatchlas as a true priest of Isis he would only have been casting a negative light on the worship of Isis, an act that would seem contrary to his aims of Isiac salvation in the climax of Book XI. Apuleius himself hints that it would be a comic mistake to identify Zatchlas as a true priest by putting the single identification of Zatchlas as "*sacerdos*" into the

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<sup>184</sup>Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, pp.229-230.

<sup>185</sup>Griffiths, "Isis in the *Metamorphoses*," pp.143&144. Although Griffiths is evaluating an Isiac identity for Zatchlas in light of the Egyptian ceremony of "The Opening of the Mouth" (a permanent resuscitation of the dead) he does have to admit the problems associated with assigning a priestly identification for Zatchlas and he cites Pierre Grimal, who draws from the priest Calasiris in Heliodorus (6, 14) and cites Grimal's article, "*Le calame égyptien d' Apulee*," *Revue des études anciennes* 73, (1971), 343-355 as an example of one who disagrees with this identification.

mouth of the 'paying' uncle.<sup>186</sup> However, the author specifically identifies Zatchlas twice as a first-rate prophet/necromancer in a manner similar to the tradition of an historic and celebrated secondary century necromancer: Alexander of Abonoteichus.

In Lucian's, *Alexander, The False Prophet*, the author negatively describes, in the form of a letter to a certain Celsus, the manner and acts of the prophet Alexander of Abonoteichus.<sup>187</sup> Lucian reports that Alexander had wandered "about the country practicing quackery and sorcery, and 'trimming the fatheads..."<sup>188</sup> and that "whenever a man [like Alexander] turned up ... they were all agog over him on the instant and stared at him as if her were a god from heaven."<sup>189</sup> Moreover, Lucian states that,

But now he [Alexander Abonoteichus] was even sending men abroad to create rumours in the different nations in regard to the oracle and to say that he made predictions, discovered fugitive slaves, detected thieves and robbers, caused treasures to be dug up, healed the sick, and in some cause actually raised the dead.<sup>190</sup>

Clearly, Zatchlas was a characterization of those known historical figures such as Alexander of Abonoteichus, who wandered about 'trimming fatheads' and performing acts of necromancy such as raising the dead.

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<sup>186</sup>*G.A. II.28*, "'Miserere, 'ait' sacerdos, miserere.'" ("Mercy, priest, mercy!' he said.")

<sup>187</sup>Lucian (Greek with English translation by A. M. Harmon), "Alexander the False Prophet," in *Lucian, Loeb Classical Library*, edited by T.E. Page, *et al.*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936). It is not clear if the Celsus whom Lucian addresses is the same Celsus of Origen's, *Contra Celsum*, or another person of the same name.

<sup>188</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>189</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

Necromancy was classified as magic in antiquity, and as illustrated earlier, Christianity was clearly associated with magic and magicians in the Roman Traditionalist point of view. Celsus attributed Jesus' miraculous power to 'magical' practices learned in the land of first-rate magicians, Egypt<sup>191</sup> and he described the work of Jesus and Christian elders in terms of itinerant magicians.<sup>192</sup> Necromancy and exorcism were acts often associated with Christianity, and, as illustrated by Alexander of Abonoteichus, they were acts that were part of any good magician's repertoire in the second century. Indeed, it seems that necromancy itself was unmistakably linked with Christianity in the second century and *The Acts of Thomas* preserve the Christian view of Roman Traditionalist criticism on the Apostles' acts of raising the dead. In a passage from *The Acts of Thomas*, a Roman Traditionalist husband begs his Christian convert wife,

be not led astray by deceitful and vain words, not by the works of sorcery which I have heard this man [Thomas] performeth in the name of Father, son, and Holy Ghost; for it was never yet heard in the world that any raised the dead, and, as I hear, it is reported of this man that he raiseth dead men.<sup>193</sup>

The Christian bias is obvious in the above, but there were so many accounts of raising the dead circulating in the early Christian literary traditions, and consequently their oral traditions, one must conclude that raising the dead would have been recognized as an activity acutely associated with Christianity in the

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<sup>191</sup>*Contra Celsum*, 1.38, also see this work p.10.

<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.40, also see this work p.10.

<sup>193</sup>“The Acts of Thomas,” 96 (translated by Montague Rhodes James), in *The Apocryphal New Testament: Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 364-438, see esp. pp.406-407.

second century. Although there are only three acts of raising the dead presented in the canonical Christian gospels (all of them by Jesus) and two acts of raising the dead in the canonical *Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>194</sup> the Apocryphal Acts of the second century are teeming with accounts of the apostles and their associates raising the dead. The Acts of John (c. 150), Peter (C. 200), Andrew (c. 200) and Thomas (c. 200-225) all include several accounts of raising the dead in their narratives, and even the fragmentary Acts of Paul (c. 160-170) include acts of raising the dead.<sup>195</sup> With the widespread proselytization activities of the early Christians, it must be concluded that at least some of these stories would have been known to those who remained outside the faith, and certainly, the intended audience of Lucian's *Passing of Peregrinus* was expected to have enough knowledge of Christianity to make his anti-Christian passages appear humorous.<sup>196</sup> The account of the *Scillitan Martyrs* (c. 180) and Lucian's *Passing of Peregrinus* provide evidence that Christian literature was not kept hidden. In the account of the *Scillitan Martyrs*, the Christians freely reveal their books and letters of Paul to their accusers,<sup>197</sup> and in the *Passing of Peregrinus* the

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<sup>194</sup>Matthew 9:18-26, Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:40-56 (daughter of synagogue leader, Jairus, is raised from the dead by Jesus); Luke 7:11-17 (the widow's only son is raised by Jesus at Nain); and John 11:1-44 (Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, is raised by Jesus). Acts 9:36-42 (the apostle Peter raises Dorcas), Acts 20:9-12 (the apostle Paul raises Eutychus).

<sup>195</sup>Examples include Acts of John 24, 47, 52, 75, 80, & 83. Acts of Peter 26, 27, & 28. Acts of Andrew 7, 18, 19, 22, 23, & 24. Acts of Thomas 54 & 81. Acts of Paul *Coptic MS* p. 11, p. 14, other MS 6. See *The Apocryphal New Testament: Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses*, translated by Montague Rhodes James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>196</sup>Lucian, "The Passing of Peregrinus," 11-13.

<sup>197</sup>"The Scillitan Martyrdom," in *The Passion of S. Perpetua*, edited by J. Armitage Robinson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 106-121, see

Christians are described as reading their sacred books aloud in prison.<sup>198</sup> Obviously, the Christians made no secret of their oral and literary traditions, and Celsus was at least one Roman Traditionalist who was most certainly well versed in them.

Although Christian raising the dead was often done to ascertain the truth about situations, including murder,<sup>199</sup> in Christian literature a distinct difference was made between ‘magical necromancy’ and ‘Christian raising up’. For the Christians, non-Christian necromancy was a temporary revivification of the dead, whereas the Christian raising up was seen as a semi-permanent lease on life until the person would meet death again in the future. This view is represented in *The Acts of Peter*, where Simon the Magician’s act of raising the dead is presented as both negative and temporary, but Peter’s raising up becomes a new life for the once dead person.<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, one must doubt that those outside the faith would have shared and supported such a distinction between acts of raising the dead. No doubt, raising the dead was simply necromancy and bad religion to the Roman Traditionalist mind, and Christians were in the habit of both praising it and performing it. To the Roman Traditionalist, there would be little difference between the character of Zatchlas and

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esp. p.114: “*Saturninus proconsul dixit: Quae sunt res in capsula uestra? Speratus dixit: Libri et epistulae pauli uiri iusti.*” (Saturninus the proconsul said: What things do you have in your case? Speratus said: The books and letter of Paul, a just man.”

<sup>198</sup>Lucian, “The Passing of Peregrinus,” 12.

<sup>199</sup>“The Acts of John”, 75 and “The Acts of Andrew,” 24.

<sup>200</sup>Acts of Peter 31, “and once he [Simon the Magician] appeared to make many dead to live and move, as he did with Nicostratus.” Acts of Peter 27 “Young man, arise and walk with thy mother so long as thou canst do her good; and there after shalt thou serve me after a higher sort, ministering in the lot of a deacon of the bishop (*or*, and of a bishop). And immediately the dead man rose up, and the multitudes saw it and marvelled...”

Peter the Apostle.

The sources from antiquity, both Roman Traditionalist and Christian, provide ample evidence that raising the dead was a hallmark of the well-known category of itinerant magicians and that Christian preachers/wonder workers were seen as belonging to this category. Christian raising the dead was often done to obtain a truthful account of a situation and this is certainly in line with the characterization of Zatchlas in Thelyphron's Tale. The character of Zatchlas was not meant to foreshadow the Isiac aim of Book XI, but rather the anti-Christian aim of the Festival of Laughter. However, Apuleius' 'hints' that the Festival of Laughter will concern Christianity are not limited to the embedded Thelyphron's Tale with the character and role of Zatchlas. There are also further indications of this in the episode of "The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits."

"The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits" is a short episode (2.32) that concludes Book II and follows immediately after the conclusion of Thelyphron's Tale and Byrrhena invitation for Lucius to participate in the Festival of Laughter. The passage is introduced at the end of 2.31 with Lucius taking leave of Byrrhena's banquet "*crapula distenus*" (bloated with drink). Almost immediately after leaving Lucius and his servant are plunged into darkness as "*vento repentino lumen quo nitebamur exstinguitur...*" (a sudden wind blew out the light on which were relying).<sup>201</sup> When the two arrive back at Milo's house they are 'attacked' by the pseudo-bandits and Lucius narrates that, "*ut quemque colluctantem offenderam, altissime demergo,*" (and as I came at each one in combat I plunged my sword into

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<sup>201</sup>G.A. 2.32.

him to its full depth...).<sup>202</sup> The battle thus ends, and Lucius retires to Milo's home.

The situation of this short episode evokes associations with the promiscuous banqueting alleged against the Christians by Apuleius' contemporary Fronto and reported by Minucius Felix in *Octavius*.<sup>203</sup> This accusation, which was discussed earlier, describes a similar situation to that of Lucius. The Christians, at the end of their banqueting when they were full with drink, would find themselves plunged into darkness. Once they found themselves in the dark they would reach out and begin to have sexual intercourse with the nearest available partner, related or not. This is not unlike Lucius who, like the Christians described by Fronto, found himself plunged into darkness and fuelled by the drunkenness from sumptuous banqueting he plunged his phallic 'sword' into those in the nearest vicinity. Thus, the allegation of incestuous promiscuity against the Christians was also associated with Lucius in *The Golden Ass* and introduces the anti-Christian aims of the Festival of Laughter.

Therefore, that the Festival of Laughter was written as a satire of the Christian *Pascha* is supported not only by the evidence within the episode itself, but also by its placement within the text. It is placed following the embedded Thelyphron's Tale, which foreshadows the anti-Christian aim through the character of the magician Zatchlas, and it is also placed before the episode of "The Attack of the Wineskin Bandits", which further foreshadows the anti-Christian nature of the Festival of Laughter by evoking associations with the allegations of Christian promiscuous banqueting. Thus, before Apuleius begins his satire of the Christian

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<sup>202</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup>Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 9.

*Pascha*, and the characterization of Lucius as a Christian 'ass', he introduces it via foreshadowing the other two main characteristics associated with Christianity in the second century: magic/magicians and sexual promiscuity.

## Chapter Four: Lucius' Life as an Ass, The Isis Book and The Question of Genre

### Lucius' Life as an Ass

In the Attack of the Wineskin Bandits, Thelyphron's Tale, and the Festival of Laughter, Apuleius introduces his anti-Christian aim primarily through the element of satire. However, in Books IV through X Apuleius employs a different approach to further his anti-Christian aims; he relies on the comic allegory of the second century identification of the ass-man, or philosopher-ass, as a humorous caricature of Christ and/or his followers. The trials of Lucius the ass-man reflect Apuleius' Roman Traditionalist view that Christians were no better than stupid asses whose fate lies in the hands of cruel Fortuna.<sup>204</sup> Consequently, Lucius is transformed not into a wise owl as he had hoped, but into a foolish ass,<sup>205</sup> when Apuleius returns his novel back to the pre-existing storyline of the original ass-tale.

Hence, the anti-Christian jibe is more implicit than it is explicit in Books IV through X, and although Lucius survives his ordeal of being an ass it can hardly be described as pleasant because he is almost constantly in the shadow of death. Even

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<sup>204</sup> Apuleius draws attention to the role of Fortune, or Fortuna, in causing disaster for Lucius a number of times in *The Golden Ass*. For example see 7.2, & 20; 8.24; and esp. 11.15.

<sup>205</sup> Frangoulidis, "The Laughter Festival as a Community Integration," p.186 notes that the transformation of man into ass is associated with the initiation rite of the Festival of Laughter, although he does not address the Christian context.

the times that are not all that unpleasant are made unpleasant due to his asinine form.<sup>206</sup> This seems a far cry from the blessing he received after the Festival of Laughter, “That god will ... never let your mind feel grief, but will constantly make your face smile in cloudless loveliness.”<sup>207</sup> It seems Lucius' 'Christian' initiation at the Festival of Laughter and its consequence of turning him into an ass provided him with nothing but trouble, as it can hardly be said that Lucius experiences no grief as an ass. Thus, Apuleius insinuates that Christians do not receive any kind of salvation; instead they receive only the hard life of an ass.

Moreover, as the novel continues towards the climax in Book X, Lucius the ass finds himself in the same position as many a Christian did in the second century. Like the historical Christian martyr Perpetua, who was expected to 'perform' as if she were a priestess of the goddess Ceres for her martyrdom,<sup>208</sup> Lucius finds himself as the unwilling participant in a dramatic arena spectacular. He will be forced to publicly copulate with a vile, condemned woman as the finale to the "Judgment of Paris". However, Lucius the ass makes a daring escape instead and flees to the safety of the shores of the Aegean Sea at the town of Cenchreae. It is after this in Book XI that Lucius finds true salvation in the form of Isis and begins a blessed life in her service. This stands in sharp contrast to all his previous suffering as a Christian ass.

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<sup>206</sup>*G.A.* X.13-23. In this section the expression of Lucius' human appetites within his asinine form lead directly to the tribulations of his proposed arena performance.

<sup>207</sup>*Ibid.*, III.11.

<sup>208</sup>Perpetua, “*Passio S. Perpetuae*,” XVIII.

### The Isis Book (Book XI)

The original ass-tale ends with the conclusion of Book X when Lucius the ass is returned back to human form before he must copulate with the condemned woman. In the original ass-tale, Lucius spies some roses, which are the means to reverse the spell he is under, and he eats them. The comic punch-line at the end of the book is that the rich woman who had once enjoyed making love to him as an ass now rebukes him in his human form. However, Apuleius ends his version of the ass-tale much differently. He adds an entire book, Book XI or the 'Isis Book', and offers an alternative to the Christian religion in the form of a saviour goddess, *sospitatrixis deae*,<sup>209</sup> who can actually alleviate the hardships of life.

The Isis Book (Book XI) begins with Lucius the ass recognizing the rising moon over the sea as a manifestation of Isis. After purifying himself in the seawaters, he prays to Isis to either restore his human form or let him die. Isis appears to Lucius and grants him salvation. She describes to him how he will find the roses needed to restore his form in the course of a procession held in her honour. Yet, before Lucius the ass is transformed back into Lucius the man, Apuleius provides a lengthy and elaborate description of the procession in the holiest of terms. Moreover, the book does not end after the logical resolution of Lucius' transformation back into human form. Instead, Apuleius spends much time describing the sanctity of Lucius' life as an acolyte in the priesthood of Isis and the sacrifices this involves. This description continues after his acceptance into the priesthood of Isis with similar descriptions of Lucius' life as an acolyte into two

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<sup>209</sup>G.A. XI.9.

separate priesthoods of Osiris, Isis' divine husband and brother. The narration of Book XI and the entire novel ends with Lucius having "joyfully carried out the duties of that ancient priesthood, founded in the days of Sulla."<sup>210</sup>

The very notion of a book eleven was an abnormality in the ancient world,<sup>211</sup> and the addition of Book XI suggests that Apuleius was presenting the Isiac religion as one of 'new' life. It is a 'rebirth' after Lucius' asinine existence. Moreover, that Apuleius was indeed suggesting a 'new' life via Isis is further demonstrated by both the change in tone from the ridiculous to the sublime and by the shift in the identity of the narrator. In terms of the change of overall tone between Books I through X and Book XI, one scholar has suggested Book XI can best be described as "the climax of *Pilgrim's Progress* tacked on to the end of *Tom Jones*"<sup>212</sup> as Apuleius moves from the slap-stick of humorous folktale to the flattering language of the devotion of the divine. Furthermore, in the first ten books Apuleius describes the narrator as hailing from the "ancestral stock" of the Greek Attic Hymettos, Ephyrean Isthmos, and Spartan Taemaros.<sup>213</sup> However, in Book XI Apuleius alters Lucius' Grecian identity and identifies himself as Lucius by having him described as, "a man from Madauros"<sup>214</sup>-- the very same locality Apuleius himself came from! Through

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<sup>210</sup>*G.A.* XI.30.

<sup>211</sup>Walsh, "Lucius *Madaurensis*," p.148.

<sup>212</sup> Frances Norwood, "The Magic Pilgrimage of Apuleius," *Phoenix* Vol. 10 (1956), 1-12, see esp. p.5.

<sup>213</sup>*G.A.* I.1.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, XI.27. For Apuleius changing the identity of the narrator from a fictional character to himself see Warren S. Smith, Jr., "The Narrative Voice in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," in *The Roman Novel*, edited by S.J. Harrison, (Oxford:

this personal identification with the author, the fictional Lucius has, like Collodi's Pinocchio several centuries later, finally become a 'real' boy. Thus, Apuleius presents Isiac salvation as the 'real' ultimate transformation into true being or new life -- and opposite Christianity's transformation into an ass and its life of hardship.

This 'real' or authentic life offered by Isis was also one of an eternity. Isis herself speaks of the potential of eternal life through the worship of her,<sup>215</sup> and this is also suggested by the construction of Book XI itself. Book XI is one of constant ongoing religious holiness and when the narration abruptly ends with no dramatic resolution whatsoever the reader is initially left dissatisfied. However, due to the overall length of Book XI, it appears that Apuleius is implying that Lucius' true 'journey' does not begin until he casts off his asinine form with the aid of Isis, and the abrupt end implies that Lucius' new life will now continue, in one form or another, for perpetuity. It is a work in progress. Lucius' life has been transformed from one of continual suffering to one of successive levels of holiness through the salvation of Isis.

The discourse of an eternal 'new' life and salvation via Isis suggests, as A.D. Nock demonstrated in 1933, that Apuleius was responding to the new religious climate Christianity had created in the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>216</sup> In other words, Nock has suggested that in Book XI Apuleius was writing within the 'new' religious context of his day, and employing the religious language and addressing

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Oxford University Press, 1999), 195-216, see esp.209.

<sup>215</sup>*Ibid.*, XI.6.

<sup>216</sup>A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.15.

the religious concerns that had been stimulated in the second century by the spread of Christianity. Although this idea has been widely accepted, the transformation of Lucius back into a man is most often understood as being a metaphor for the renunciation of the world of disorder symbolized by Isis' long time enemy, Seth Typhon, an Egyptian god who, as discussed earlier, was also symbolized at times as having the head of an ass.<sup>217</sup> However, the identification of Seth Typhon with the head of an ass is buried deep in Egyptian antiquity,<sup>218</sup> and it is plausible that by the time of Apuleius in the second century the figure of the ass-man was more commonly accepted as symbolic of Christ rather than Seth Typhon in other regions of the Roman empire.<sup>219</sup> Nevertheless, if the figure of the ass-man was the only evidence of Apuleius' anti-Christian aim, it could be plausibly suggested that he had only anti-Sethian sentiments in mind when he wrote *The Golden Ass*. However, the combined evidence of the anti-Christian Festival of Laughter and its foreshadowing elements coupled with the second century popularity of the figure of the

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<sup>217</sup>Joseph DeFilippo, "*Curiositas* and the Platonism of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*," in *Oxford Readings in The Roman Novel*, edited by S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 269-289, see esp. pp.283-284.

<sup>218</sup>William A. Ward, "The Hiw-Ass, the Hiw-Serpent, and the God Seth," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol. 37, No. 1 (1978), 23-34. In his article Ward illustrates the deep antiquity of the association of Seth with the ass in terms of Egyptian hieroglyphs, however, Ward also points out "that the ass was one of several real and mythological animals associated with this deity.", see p.23 note #1.

<sup>219</sup>It seems that second century Christian apologists (Tertullian and Minucius Felix most notably) never make the connection of the shared symbolism of Seth Typhon as an ass-man and Jesus as an ass-man, even though they had ample opportunity too. Thus, it seems likely that the ass-man figure more commonly stood for Christ, whereas the ass-man figure as a symbol for Seth may have been only understood by those well versed in Egyptian religion - otherwise the apologists would have endeavoured to refute it.

philosopher-ass as a caricature of Christ, along with the Christian religious ideals explicitly addressed in Book XI all demonstrate that it was the new enemy, Christ and Christianity, who were the more likely targets of Apuleius' disdain rather than the old enemy, Seth Typhon. Nonetheless, one does not actually have to decide whether it was Christ or Seth Typhon that Apuleius was rebuking when Isis declares to Lucius, "cast off at once the hide of that wretched beast which I have long detested."<sup>220</sup> There is evidence to support that in the second century, the figures of Christ and Seth Typhon were often linked together in the Roman Traditionalist mind.

Besides sharing the symbolism of the ass-man, the names of Christ and Seth are associated with one another in various ancient gnostic magic and religious sources.<sup>221</sup> It is likely that these two enemies of Isis would share the same, or similar, persona in the Roman Traditionalist mind of the second century. In the religious world of Apuleius it would be difficult to deny that such an association existed between these two deities of similar form when other deities not nearly so easily matched, such as Hermes and Thoth, were seen as being one in the same only due to their shared role as divine conveyors. However, to the modern mind there seems to be a problem in associating Christ with Seth Typhon because we tend to see Christ as an obviously positive figure and Seth Typhon as an obviously negative figure.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup>G.A. XI.6.

<sup>221</sup>Jean Doresse (translated by Philip Mairé), *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion*, (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p.105.

<sup>222</sup>For the opposite view of the Christ/Seth-Typhon identification see Jarl Fossum and Brian Glazer, "Seth in the Magical Texts," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie*

Yet, it is unlikely that second century opponents of Christ, such as Apuleius, would have seen Christ in this positive light. The inversion of imperial ideology implicit in Christianity and the outright refusal of Christians to worship the *genus* of the emperor no doubt made Christ in minds of Roman Traditionalists, as chaos causing as Seth Typhon.<sup>223</sup> However, modern scholarship concerning the second century association between Christ and Seth Typhon in magic and religious texts has become complicated as there was another cult figure by the name of Seth who was identified with Christ in antiquity. This was the figure of Seth the son of Adam (Seth Adam).

It is evident that in certain gnostic religious texts and texts from the Greek magical papyri that Jesus is associated with Seth Adam and not Seth Typhon.<sup>224</sup> However, in other spells of these texts it is not often readily apparent which Seth the magicians are associating Jesus with. Moreover, there are a few occasions where it is clearly more probable that it is Seth Typhon rather than Seth Adam to whom they are referring.<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, both Christ and Seth Typhon were most often

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*und Epigraphik* 100 (1994), 86-92, see esp. p.87 for the modern confusion concerning the positive and negative association of the Christ/Seth Typhon identification. For the Hermes association with Thoth see p.92. However, although Fossum and Glazer assert their argument against the association of Christ with Seth Typhon very forcefully they do not properly account for the evidence that both the names of 'Ioa' and 'Aberamentho' were associated interchangeably with both Jesus and Seth Typhon in certain texts.

<sup>223</sup>On the view of Christianity as an inversion of imperial ideology see Klaus Wengst (translated by John Bowden), *Pax Romana and the Peace of Christ*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp.50-51.

<sup>224</sup>Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp.77-78.

<sup>225</sup>David G. Martinez, *P. Michigan XVI: A Greek Love Charm from Egypt* (P.

considered *daemons* rather than true gods by the Roman Traditionalists.<sup>226</sup> and to those who may have seen both these enemies of Isis depicted as similar looking ass-men and who had heard the marketplace magicians invoking Christ as “Seth Seth the Living Christ”,<sup>227</sup> it is more than likely that they would assume the Seth in question was Seth Typhon, rather than Seth Adam. Only those of a Judaeo/Christian background would have been able to question if the Seth of these incantations was Seth Typhon or Seth Adam. To the average person of the elite social class, to which Apuleius and his primary audience belonged, Christ was simply another new and popular manifestation of Seth Typhon who was raging havoc his North African countryside, a new version of an old ‘disorder’ that Isis had to vanquish.

### The Question of Genre

As stated above, the entire last book of *The Golden Ass*, the Isis Book, was a distinctive addition by Apuleius to the original storyline of the ass-tale. Prior to book XI, Apuleius follows the storyline of the original Greek ass-tale, although he punctuates it with unique episodes and inserted tales which further his overall aim, or aims. However, it is not immediately obvious why such a learned and well-educated man as Apuleius would not only adopt and adapt a popular tale of the

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Mich. 757), (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1991), p.33.

<sup>226</sup>On the *daemonic* nature of Seth Typhon see Joseph DeFilippo, “*Curiositas* and Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*,” p.284.

<sup>227</sup>Quotation taken from Fossum and Glazer, “Seth in the Magical Texts,” p.90 as found in B.A. Pearson, “Egyptian Seth and Gnostic Seth,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 22*, (Missoula: 1977) p.28 citing the Berlin collection of Greek magical papyri (*col.i.9.*).

traditional storytelling genre, but also to maintain and reinforce this point via his inserted tales to achieve his goal. Yet, upon a closer examination of the types of literature circulating in the second century of the Roman Empire, it becomes apparent that his meticulous maintenance of the common folktale genre was in parody of early Christian literature. It was yet another anti-Christian jibe.

In his seminal work, *Apuleius and Folklore*, Alexander Scobie clearly demonstrates that Apuleius constructed the storyline and genre of *The Golden Ass* in imitation of popular folktale.<sup>228</sup> However, Scobie also demonstrates that among the Roman literary elite, Apuleius' primary audience, such 'popular' works were held in disdain -- even though they were well acquainted with the world of 'storytellers' (*fabulatores/aretalogi*) and their 'stories' (*fabulae*).<sup>229</sup> That Apuleius would do such a thing as write a fable, given his reputation as an acclaimed philosopher, scholar and rhetorician, seems absurd. Apuleius must have had another motive in mind (other than lowering himself in the eyes of his peers) when he chose to adopt and adapt the world of folktale. He must have intended to use the genre of folktale in parody of the similar 'popular works' in circulation at the time which employed the same folk genre. These popular works included the Greek romances and, of course, the craze in the second century: Christian literature.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup>Alex Scobie, *Apuleius and Folklore*, see esp. pp.35-38.

<sup>229</sup>*Ibid.*, see esp. pp.19-20.

<sup>230</sup>William Hansen, "Christian Novella," in *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, edited by William Hansen (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 50-54, see esp. p.51.

The elements of parody in *The Golden Ass* have long been recognized,<sup>231</sup> but there appears to be little motive to why Apuleius would offer a parody of the genre of Greek romance to his educated audience. However, it has long been noted that early Christian literature has much in common with both the form and function of the Greek romances and with those of traditional oral tales, or 'folktales'.<sup>232</sup> These characteristics include that they are told as a narrative, they occur in real historical settings and they involve elements of 'verbal realisation'.<sup>233</sup> These folktale traits appear in all examples of the Greek romances and early Christian literature.

Moreover, Allen Cabaniss in "The *Satiricon* and the Christian Oral Tradition" has

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<sup>231</sup>John Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, see the chapter on pp.251-275, and esp. p.273. Also H.J. Mason, "Fabula Graecanica: Apuleius and His Greek Sources," in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, edited by B.L. Hijmans Jr. and R. Th. van der Paardt (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1978, 1-15, see esp. pp.8-9.

<sup>232</sup>Richard Pervo, "The Ancient Novel Becomes Christian," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, edited by Gareth Schmeling, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 685-711. See esp. p.709. Derek Brewer, "The Gospels and the Laws of Folktale: A Centenary Lecture, 14 June 1978," *Folklore* Vol. 90, No. 1 (1979), 37-52, see esp. p. 41. Moreover, it appears that the early Christians themselves preferred the oral transmission of their sacred stories over that of written texts, such as when St. Papias (c. early second century) wrote, "For I did not imagine that things out of books would help me as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice." Eusebius (translated by G.A. Williamson), *The History of the Church From Christ to Constantine*, (London: Penguin Books, 1989) Bk. III.39. This fact is consistent with the view that the vast majority of early Christians came from the common social classes of the mainly illiterate workers and slaves; this was especially true of the first century. Thus, the stories of early Christians were more often orally transmitted due to both the emerging Christian tradition and the necessity of the audience. However, as Christianity began to spread in the second century to include more and more members of the upper classes, written texts began to appear within the Christian context. These literary accounts illustrate all the telltale characteristics of oral or folk literature that has been simply been transcribed from the oral register.

<sup>233</sup>'Verbal realisation' refers to aspects that are characteristic of narrative retelling or expanding a tale out from its nucleus. For a good description see Derek Brewer, "The Traditional and Symbolic Story," *Mediaeval English Studies Newsletter* No. 2 (June 1980),1-9, see esp. pp.2-3.

illustrated several points of similarity between this other early Latin novel (*The Satyricon*) and early Christian literature.<sup>234</sup> and Richard Pervo has pointed out a striking similarity between the *Acts of Thomas* and *The Golden Ass*. Pervo states that,

Within *AThom* [Acts of Thomas] are two long poems, excellent representatives of Syriac prosody. The better known of these is "The Hymn of the Pearl." On the surface this is a pleasant fairy-tale. When read in terms of symbols, the hymn presents in poetic form the theology of the book. A very apt analogy in several ways is the embedded tale of Cupid and Psyche in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, with its fairy-tale charm and symbolic meaning. In both cases the harmless story, told to prisoners in *AThom* and to a captive young woman in Apuleius, is a hermeneutical key to the text.<sup>235</sup>

Although the similarities between *AThom* and *The Golden Ass* noted above are not proof that Apuleius was deliberately imitating *AThom*, (or *vice versa*) it does illustrate the very close relationship between the genre of early Christian literature and the genre of the *Golden Ass*. To the likes of Apuleius the sacred stories of the Christians must have appeared no better than 'fairy tales', and Christ would have been recognized by him as the comically caricatured philosopher-ass, *Onokoites*. Apuleius simply put it all together in *The Golden Ass*.

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<sup>234</sup> Allen Cabaniss, "The *Satyricon* and the Christian Oral Tradition," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* Vol. 3 (1960), 36-39. The *Satyricon* was written by Petronius who lived in the Neronian age. It survives almost completely intact, but some sections are fragmented and others are missing. Written in Latin it is considered the first picaresque novel as it chronicles the often risqué wanderings of two scholars.

<sup>235</sup> Pervo, "The Ancient Novel Becomes Christian," pp.705-706.

## Conclusion

The second century Roman Traditionalist view of Christianity as an asinine superstition was hardly laudable. It was a view unique to the second century that was based on the belittling effects of the comic insult. This attitude developed from the first century 'stock insult' view of Christians as baby killing cannibals and capitalized on the humour of the Christian language of 'loving one another'. In the third century the negative social realities of violent state mandated persecutions of Christians replaced the comic insult, but in the time of Apuleius Roman Traditionalist violence against Christians was much less common and the asinine insult was the standard opinion. There is no better reflection of this attitude than the ribald comic satire of *The Golden Ass*.

Our understanding of the world of early Christianity in the Roman Empire is enhanced by recognizing that *The Golden Ass* was originally created as an anti-Christian propaganda or opinion piece. That in the second century opposition to Christianity popularly took the form of comic asinine insults rather than of whispered rumours of abomination helps to explain how many Roman Traditionalists would have been able to put aside their fears and succumb to a potential convert's curiosity. It also gives us further insight into the administrative practices of the Roman Empire. Rome has always been praised for its religious inclusiveness, but it must be remembered that some religious practices were not

tolerated. Practices such as refusing to acknowledge the power and privilege of the imperial order by denying the divinity of the emperor could be subject to harsh punishment, even if these practices were considered more asinine than abominable.

There can be no denying that Apuleius may have had a multitude of social and/or philosophical aims in mind when he wrote *The Golden Ass*. Nevertheless, one cannot rule out that among the many potential objectives of Apuleius there exists evidence of a distinct anti-Christian aim. The religious social context of North Africa in the second century suggests, as Walsh originally asserted, that *The Golden Ass* (or at least its Book XI climax) was written as a strong reaction against the spread of Christianity. Furthermore, as illustrated in this thesis the three primary themes of *The Golden Ass*, magic, sex and the figure of the ass, correlate with the three dominant views that were held by Roman Traditionalists concerning Christianity. Roman Traditionalists believed Christianity to be a *superstitio*: a group who by the use of magical arts stupefied the gullible and partook in deviant (especially incestuous) sexual cultic rites. These practices along with the practice of martyrdom revealed the devotees of Christ to be nothing more than oversexed, stupid, stubborn asses in the minds of the Roman Traditionalist *status quo*.

The common cognitive parallels between the character of the ass and the perceived character of Christians supports that the figure of the ass was associated with Christians in antiquity. This association was strengthened in the minds of Roman Traditionalists as the early Christians themselves seemed to have adopted this animal as a symbol of humility and as such an appropriate mascot for their faith. Furthermore, the much consulted practice of ancient astrology confirmed this view

by believing that the god Saturn and the God of the Jews were one and the same and the animal emblem of this god was an ass.

The mental associations between the God of Judaism/Christianity with the figure of the ass were given material or visual forms in both the *Palatine Graffito* of Rome as well as in the *Onokoites* caricature described by Tertullian. The original comparative analysis that I have presented in this thesis of the two separate accounts of the *Onokoites* figure by Tertullian has revealed that the figure of the ass-man was widely understood throughout the Roman Empire as a metaphor for Christ.

Moreover, when the evidence of the *Onokoites* figure as presented in the *Apologeticum* is combined with the evidence of the *Palatine Graffito* it provides good proof that in the environs of the Roman elite the metaphor of Christ as an ass-headed philosopher was considered extremely humorous.

Apuleius, a man whose character was certainly representative of his social class and the religious climate of his time, was more than capable of applying this humorous anti-Christian jibe in literary form. Apuleius illustrates his anti-Christian opinion in *The Golden Ass* via the use of satire, comic allegory, parody and by suggesting that the goddess Isis is mankind's true saviour. The analysis of the evidence as presented here reveals for the first time in modern scholarship that the 'Festival of Laughter' episode was intended by Apuleius as a comic satire of a second century Christian *Pashca* celebration. It has also shown that the anti-Christian theme of the Festival of Laughter was cleverly foreshadowed by Apuleius through 'Thelyphron's Tale': a story that presents an itinerant magician and his act of raising the dead. The acts of the necromancer Zatchlas in Thelyphron's Tale are not

unlike the many stories circulating in the second century of the acts of raising the dead by the apostles of Christ. Moreover, the language and imagery of the bizarre events of the 'Attack of the Wineskin Bandits' seems to allude to the old accusations of Christian social and sexual deviance.

Yet for much of the novel, Apuleius capitalizes on his audience's recognition of the ass-man as a comic metaphor for Christ or one of his followers, and in the view of Apuleius the misadventures of the philosopher-ass Lucius illustrate that Christians have no blessed existence in this life. This analogy is strengthened by the 'arena' ending of *The Golden Ass* originally proposed for Lucius. However, Apuleius saves his best for the last and instead of closing his work with the traditional ass-tale ending he offers the goddess Isis as the true means of salvation. Lucius' authentic form is returned to him via Isis, and his sublime life as a devotee of the goddess in conjunction with his identification with author helps to reveal that Apuleius is sincere in this final book of *The Golden Ass*.

In the end it is by solidly placing *The Golden Ass* in its unique second century historical context that the anti-Christian aim of Apuleius becomes apparent. Without a firm understanding of the peculiar nature of the Roman Traditionalist versus Christian religious tension of Apuleius' time it is understandable that in the past most modern scholars have chosen to ignore the distinct anti-Christian statement of *The Golden Ass* and instead to focus on its possible philosophical aims. However, once all things have been considered, it becomes evident that Apuleius was writing a religious 'story'. It is the story of an ass-man protagonist in a parody of Christian Scripture -- who in the end receives true salvation from Isis. It is simply an

elegant tale that addressed the specific religious tensions of his time: the challenge of Christianity.

APPENDIX



Figure #1  
Haemorrhaging  
Woman



Figure #2  
Multiplication  
of Loaves



Figure #3  
Water to  
Wine

(Above figures from "The Trees Sarcophagus," c.360, Musee Reattu, Arles, panels #1, #3, & #5, in Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of God: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.54.)



Figure #4  
The Raising of Lazarus (From "The Raising of Lazarus Sarcophagus," c.340, Latern, Musei Vaticani, Rome, in Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p.55.)



Figure # 5  
 Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem  
 (Above figure from "Entry of Christ into Jerusalem Sarcophagus," c.325, Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Rome, in Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p.29. Note that although the 'wand' itself has been broken off - it was clearly once present.)



Figure #6  
 Gold Glass Bowl  
 (Above figure from "Gold Glass with Ass," Musco Sacro Vaticano. Photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, in Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p.50)



Figure #7  
 Ass with Foal Amulet  
 (Above figure from "Amulet With Ass and Foal," Inscription: "Dominus Noster Iesus Christus Dei Filius," H. Leclercq, *DACL*, I: col. 2064, in Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p.50)



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