# MYSTERIES, PHILOSOPHY, AND SELF-REPRESENTATION IN IMPERIAL ROME: PLUTARCH, APULEIUS, AND VETTIUS AGORIUS PRAETEXTATUS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

MYSTERIES, PHILOSOPHY, AND SELF-REPRESENTATION IN IMPERIAL ROME: PLUTARCH, APULEIUS, AND VETTIUS AGORIUS PRAETEXTATUS

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a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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# DEDICATION

To my grandfather Wayne Buchheim who inspired me in this pursuit. I hope he would be proud of my efforts. Thanks also to my father for his help and support and to my brother for no particular reason.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The dissertation will follow the abbreviation guidelines set out in the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, with any variations from this standard noted.

# Abstract

In my dissertation, I explore the use of mystery cults in three separate authors—Plutarch of Chaeronea, Apuleius of Madauros, and Vettius Agorius Praetextatus—and analyze how these writers use mystery cults to self-referential ends. This study is not primarily concerned with the actual rituals and the objects used in mystery cults, but rather explores how these writers present these elements in their works. Through writing about mystery cults, I argue, these authors intentionally construct significant facets of their public iamges built around claims to erudition and the possession of a *paideia* that includes knowledge of Greek philosophy (often explicitly Platonic). Further, these constructed images are colored by traditionalism and antiquarianism. I argue that these texts are (auto)biographical in nature because each author shapes his personal experience and his ideas about religious practice in calculated ways that aims for a particular type of self-presentation. Through discussion of mystery cults, that is, these three authors present themselves in a way that address both reading and listening audiences. I chart the elements consistent between each author and also explore how specific historical contexts and contemporary intellectual currents shaped what it meant to write about mystery cults over a span of nearly three hundred years. Plutarch's *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris*, Apuleius' *Apology* and *Golden Ass*, and Praetextatus' funerary monument in conjunction with Macrobius' *Saturnalia* all show that elite authors intimately connect participation in mystery cults with erudition and the possession of philosophical knowledge, which is Greek and Platonic in nature. More particularly, Plutarch and Apuleius make strong connections between themselves and the Greek past, emphasizing their connections to Platonic thought. Although Praetextatus' funerary monument

contains some vague Platonic resonances, it primarily emphasizes his connection with traditional religion practices of the Roman senatorial aristocracy that consciously separate the senator from the Christian element in Roman high society. Ultimately, philosophy and religion are nearly synonymous in these texts. In short, each author intellectualizes popular religious forms in order to highlight in some manner the difference between the social elite and the common people. Writing about mysteries is also self-writing.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Mystery cults rely on a performative process that is exemplified by secret and emotionally powerful mystery initiations. The ritual was hidden from the uninitiated, and the penalty for revealing the specifics of these rituals were harsh.[1] This silence makes it difficult to assess what sort of weight people gave to their individual initiations.[2] Mystery cults, however, do appear in literature in a context that ultimately removes the ritual from its performative context. Authors write about these cults in ways that explore abstract, intellectual features of the cults, addressing the rituals in a more scholarly and analytical way that strives to find philosophical clarity in the revelation that occurs at the end of initiation.[3]

The study of mystery cults has vastly changed since Franz Cumont published his influential book *The Oriental Religions of Rome* at the beginning of the twentieth century.[4] Although there have been many challenges to his arguments by recent

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[1] For instance, Thucydides *Histories* 6.53 reports that Alcibiades was commanded to return to Athens for trial for profaning the mysteries of Eleusis by performing a mockery of them in his home. Sergio Ribichini, "Covered by Silence: Hidden Texts and Secret Rites in the Ancient Mystery Cults," in *Submerged Literature in Ancient Greek Culture: Case Studies,* edited by Giulio Colesanti and Laura Lulli (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 166 claims that revealing the secrets of the mysteries in Athens could lead to capital punishment and the confiscation of goods and property. Additionally the name of the guilty party was carved on a stele as a record of punishment.

[2] Ribichini, "Covered by Silence," argues that texts concerning the specifics of mystery cults existed but were meant only for the eyes of the initiates. In this way, the silence surrounding the mystery cults stems from a suppression of these texts. These texts likely would have included the mythical tales, an explanation of mystery revelations, and guides to conduct the actual initiation ceremonies (166-8).

[3] Maria Jose Martin-Velasco and Naria Jose Garcia Blanco, eds, *Greek Philosophy and Mystery Cults* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016) includes multiple contributions that discuss how mystery cults become a part of philosophical discourse, thus adding a bit of intellectual prestige to the mystery initiations.

[4] Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions of Rome* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1911). The importance of the work is attested by the fact that entire conferences have been organized to discuss Cumont's influence on scholarship and scholarly reaction against the main arguments of the book. See, for instance, Richard L. Gordon "Coming to terms with the 'Oriental Religions of the Empire,'" *Numen* 61 (2014): 657-672, which is a review of the proceedings of one such conference.

scholarship,[5] Cumont turned the academic spotlight on a group of religious cults that indeed have much in common beyond the "oriental" origin and the spiritual qualities that he highlighted. The most important aspect of all these cults is the well-known and still somewhat mysterious initiation rituals. The initiation rituals have attracted significant attention from scholars because of the secrets revealed to those initiated. [6] The current study turns away from reconstructing the secret rites and instead focuses on the mysteries as important cultural artifacts in literary texts.[7] Reconstructing the cultural significance of these cults can further illuminate the role mysteries play in the greater context of Greco-Roman religion and literature. To that end, I am primarily concerned with how these cults show up in texts and what authors convey about themselves in writing about these secret rites.

More specifically, the current study considers how mystery cults were perceived and used by ancient authors, in various literary forms, and examines the ways in which writers represent themselves by employing mystery cults in their works. I have chosen to discuss three ancient authors, Plutarch, Apuleius, and Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, dating from the late first century to the end of fourth century AD, who are connected to mystery cults through the cults' appearance as an important feature of their oeuvre and public self-presentation. By showing their cultic affiliations in various literary contexts,

[5] Two important works on ancient religion that discredit much of Cumont's work are Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) and Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986). Additionally set against Cumont's view are Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 246-7 specifically refutes Cumont's notion of oriental religions; Gordon, "Coming to Terms," describes some of the challenges presented to Cumont's ideas in the book Gordon is reviewing; Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010); Jan Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[6] Examples of studies that focus on the reconstruction and general discussion of initiation rites are Bremmer, *Initiations into the Mysteries* and Bowden, *Mystery Cults*.
[7] This study considers mystery cults as culturally relevant entities that are important both outside and within texts.

each author represents himself in a way that reflected his education, scholarly pursuits, and affiliations with certain cultural and social groups.  I argue, first, that the texts treating mystery cults include elements of self-referentiality and, second, that authors fashion a particular kind of public image by including mystery cults in their texts.[8] My aim is to trace the ways mystery cults are commonly used as tools of self-fashioning, but I also highlight those aspects that make each of the main characters of the study unique in his portrayal of cults. The historical context of each writer is important in the interpretation of mystery cult in the texts that they produce. Contemporary political and intellectual currents have their effects on the authors, and these influences are evident in their works. This study argues, therefore, that historical context subtly changes some of the messages an author conveys by writing about mystery cults.

I begin by setting the bounds for this study in terms of definition and methodology. First, I define what is meant by the term "mystery cult," specifically addressing the kinds of religious cults that qualify for this designation. Beyond the question of definition, I also discuss the appeal of these cults, paying special attention to the apparent benefits of initiation and the requirements for participation. Once we have come to terms with definitions, I question the implications of writing and reading about mystery cults. Special attention is given to historical context and discursive modes as important aspects

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[8] The term self-referential in this study designates a text that represents a purposely constructed image of the author using the topics under discussion and bigraphical details as a means to convey certain characteristics of the author. Each text presents an image of the author that is the end result of authorly self-presentation. This constructed image built on infomation presented in the text is somewhat reminiscent of the Latin love poets, who present themselves in their poetry in specific ways. In other words, the sontructed image is a representation of the author. The accuracy of this constructed portrayal is unprovable and, in the context of the current study, unimportant. For information about the concept of literary personae in antiquity, see Clay Diskin, "The Theory of the Literary Persona in Antiquity," *Materilai e discussioni per l'annilisi dei testi classici* 40 (1998) and Roland G. Mayer, "Persona Problems: The Literary Persona in Antiquity Revisited," *Materilai e discussioni per l'annilisi dei testi classici* 50 (2003). For discussions on literary personae as constructed by the Latin love poets, see Katharina Volk,"Ille ego: (Mis)Reading Ovid's Elegiac Persona, *Antike und Abendland* 51 (2005) and Denise Eileen McCoskey and Zara Martirosova Torlone, *Latin Love Poetry* (London: I.B Tauris, 2014), 19-40.

of interpretation. That is, each of these texts is rooted in a particular moment and plays with established ideas associated with the cults to offer a new interpretation of what it means to participate in the mysteries. The authors in offering their own interpretations of cult reveal their own thoughts, and I argue that the texts analyzed here are (auto)biographical in that they use personal information purposefully to present the author in a specific way. Finally, I discuss the cults and the authors that are featured in this study. I conclude by outlining the discussions that appear in later chapters by briefly contextualizing the authors and texts. The subjects of this study use mystery cults as a means to displaying a particular self-image to an audience through a process of intellectualizing a popular form of religious practice. The authors say much about themselves through their use of these cults, and they put an intellectual and philosophical spin on popular religious material for an educated and elite audience, suggesting only the philosophically initiated can truly understand these cults.

## I. The Specifics of the Mysterious

At the heart of this study is the group of religious initiatory cults that scholars have typically designated mystery cults or mystery religions.[9] Before discussing the implication of these mystery cults in literary texts, we need to know exactly what the authors mean when they refer to these cults. In order to come to a suitable definition, we first need to navigate scholarly views concerning mystery cults over the last century and extract the salient features that most suitably represent these cults. Defining mysteries

[9] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults,* categorizes these cults under one definitional banner, as the title suggests. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome,* 247 groups these cults in opposition to civic cults, describing them as new cults in Rome. The titles of Bremmer's, *Initiations into the Mysteries*, and Bowden's, *Mystery Cults,* books are obvious results of this trend.

goes beyond simply stating what they are. The uniqueness of the cults with respect to other forms of religious practice is equally important. The appeal of mystery cults to their potential participants, as well as the identity of participants with respect to their social and economic backgrounds, are important aspects that inform our interpretation of these cults in texts. Current scholarship has redefined mystery cults as part of a larger category of pagan religious practice.[10] These cults offered a more personal approach to religion than state cult and emphasized an individual's experience during and after initiation. The scholarly definitions of mystery cults consistently connect these initiatory practices to an individual and suggest a change in the individual who undergoes initiation. While this change is not a conversion (as that term is commonly understood to indicate a complete change in belief and style), the initiation is a traumatic event that produces an emotional response from the initiate who is meant to reflect on the secrets revealed in the rituals.

Cumont's monumental work, which established the category of mystery cult, provides a helpful platform to begin the discussion of the mysteries. Although scholars have discredited his ideas,[11] scholarly response to Cumont provides fruitful ground for defining the most important features of mystery cults by highlighting the problems with the assumptions attested in the title of Cumont's book. Cumont classifies mystery cults as both "oriental" and "religions." Immediately we must question the designation of these cults as "religions" because of the breadth of meaning associated with this word. In a study that addresses misconceptions started by Cumont, Walter Burkert discounts the notion that these cults are "religions" in their own rights. He points out that Cumont's use of the word religions in this context is inappropriate because the term implies an

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[10] For example, Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome,* 245- 312 discuss mystery cults as part of the religious milieu of imperial Rome.

[11] See note 5 above.

exclusivity that mandates devotion to only one specific religion, a notion that is synonymous with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[12] Initiation into mystery cults, Burkert argues, does not reflect this type of religious conversion, and people were often initiated into multiple cults. As we will see later, the evidence suggests that Plutarch, Apuleius, and Praetextatus were all initiated into more than one mystery cult.

Furthermore, several important anthropological studies of religion suggest that Cumont's use of the word "religion" to describe these cults is inappropriate because of the definitional implications of the word. Clifford Geertz defines religion as a system of culturally important symbols that have meaning to a group of people.[13] These symbols are part of a greater system that makes up the framework of a particular religion and only have religious meaning in this particular context. Geertz's definition of religion posits that each religion has its own unique frameworks of symbols and meaning. Melford E. Spiro echoes the importance of cultural patterns as one of the basic frameworks of religion.[14] Geertz and Spiro both see different religions as different systems of symbols. From these scholars, we can deduce that any smaller system that recognizes the cultural importance of symbols from a larger system must be related to this larger system in some way. If Cumont can really use "religion" to define the "oriental religions," each "religion" must have its own system of symbols that differentiates it from the other

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[12] Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 3-4.

[13] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion,* ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), 3-4 defines religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." This follows Geertz's semiotic approach to culture.

[14] Melford E. Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion,* ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), 96 defines religion "as an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings." It is a much more succinct definition of religion than Geertz's, but Spiro does echo the key connection of culture and religion and the presence of patterns as part of religious systems.

"religions." These cults, however, share cultural symbols with a larger religious system. According to the definitions of Geertz and Spiro, ancient mystery cults cannot be distinct religions because they share culturally important symbols with other forms of Greco-Roman religious practices. Deities associated with the mysteries often have state counterparts, and though mystery cults are doing something quite different from state religion, there is still a connection between the culturally important symbols that link mystery cults to the state religion. The specific rituals might be different, but the deities are basically the same. For example, Demeter is still Demeter whether she is the focus of state sacrifice or mystery initiations. Mystery cults, in this way, are different ways of approaching the material of a more general religious system and, therefore, cannot be considered to be separate religions either from each other or from the state religion.

"Oriental" provides similar definitional pitfalls in reference to mystery cults. Cumont argued that these disparate "eastern religions" form a collective that, despite their differences, constitute a category that he defined as "oriental" due to their apparent eastern origins.[15] Burkert addresses this problem of categorization first by pointing out the term's ambiguity. Despite the fact that the most these cults (Isis, Magna Mater, and Mithras, for instance) could trace historical origins to the east, Egypt, Lydia, and Persia are unique in their religious practices, and boiling them all down to a simple category of "oriental" is much too simplistic and relies on a western perspective. Furthermore, the exotic and eastern appearances of these mysteries seem to be mostly for show and have little connection to the religious rites practiced in the ancestral homes of these foreign

[15] Gordon, "Coming to Terms," 662-663. Gordon points out that Cumont needed a model in which the differences between the cults would be rendered insignificant so he could create this category of *une theolgie barbare*. In an interesting twist, Cumont spends the rest of his book discussing the differences between these various religious practices.

gods. The initiation rituals of Isis, Magna Mater, and Mithras seem more akin to the rituals of Demeter at Eleusis or Dionysus.[16]

The images of the foreign gods were a major part of their rituals, but the "oriental" flair of something like the tauroctony scene in the Mithras cult is a creation spawned from later additions to cultic practice that have little connection with the Persian origins of Mithras. Jás Elsner discusses at length the important connection between religious imagery and religion itself, declaring that art "*was* religion."[17] The images related to cult, he argues, were meant to convey the important meanings and thoughts that the cult held dear. Mithras killing the bull is not a representation of sacrifice and ritual in which the cult engaged but a representation of the universe according to Mithras.[18] This representation, however, had little to do with the Mithra of Persian origin from which the god Mithras evolved. The mystery cult itself was a later Roman construction dating from the first or second century AD.[19] Mithras' representation in art is one example of an almost artificial foreignness that was a salient feature of these eastern mystery cults. Mithras was a Roman creation with his Persian hat being one of the only "oriental" things about him.

Although Cumont's designation of these cults as "oriental religions" does not hold up to scrutiny, his study importantly grouped together these religious cults that are related in distinct ways. Their most obvious commonality is the presence of secret initiations. Burkert focuses on this initiatory aspect as the glue that holds together a somewhat

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[16] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 2-3. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome,* 246 points out that oriental is a misleading term because these eastern cults in Rome were much different from the cults that existed in their reported ancestral homes.
[17] Jás Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100-450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 206. The italics are Elsner's own emphasis.
[18] Elsner, *Imperial Rome,* 207.
[19] Elsner, *Imperial Rome*, 208. For Elsner's full discussion of the images associated with mystery cults, see pages 199-235.

disparate collection of eastern inspired cults. "Mysteries," Burkert says, "were initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal, and secret character that aimed for a change of mind through the experience of the sacred."[20] Burkert conspicuously designates the initiation rituals as the cornerstone of any mystery cult, but he also makes it clear that these initiations were meant to have an effect on the individual initiate. Burkert emphasizes the transformative nature of the rite by describing it as an experience of the "sacred."

Burkert's study fundamentally changed the way scholars looked at mystery cults by fully undercutting the conceptions promoted by Cumont. Nevertheless, Jan Bremmer points out that Burkert's definition may still be too reminiscent of Cumont's assertion that these cults were vehicles for spirituality.[21] He points out that certain cults required no "change of mind" as part of their initiations and he argues additionally that the use of the term "sacred" is vague. Furthermore, he questions whether everyone is meant to have the same experience.[22] Despite the definitional dissent, Bremmer, like Burkert, emphasizes the voluntary aspect of these cults, though he draws attention to other aspects that connect all these cults. Bremmer includes, for example, the involvement of secret and emotionally significant initiation rituals, the nocturnal performance of these rites, some

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[20] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 11.

[21] For a discussion of mystery cults in connection to spirituality see Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 27-37. Cumont discusses the oriental religions as something spiritual in nature that were meant to transform the individual through a conversion to a new faith. The connection that Bremmer makes between Burkert's and Cumont's description of cults seems justified, but, perhaps, too dismissive of Burkert.

[22] For a full discussion on defining mystery cults, see Jan N. Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries*, XI-XIII. In opposition to Bremmer's marginalizing of an experience of the sacred, Yulia Ustinova, "To Live in Joy and Die with Hope: Experiential Aspects of Ancient Greek Mystery Rites," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 56 (2013): 110-111 argues that it is the experience that really matters. She states that "learning and sensation lead to illumination" (111). She further argues that the experience was transformative and reshaped the initiate's views of life and death (108).

obligation to pay personally for the initiation, and the ability for most anyone to participate.[23]

The appeal of these cults extended beyond that of other religious rites, like the state religion, in what they offered to the initiated,[24] such as the promise of a happier afterlife. The most famous example is the Mysteries of Demeter at Eleusis.

> ὄλβιος ὃς τάδ᾽ ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων·
> ὃς δ᾽ ἀτελὴς ἱερῶν ὅς τ᾽ ἄμμορος, οὔ ποθ᾽ ὁμοίων
> αἶσαν ἔχει φθίμενός περ ὑπὸ ζόφωι εὐρώεντι.
>
> Blessed is he of men on earth who has beheld them [the mystery rites], whereas he that is uninitiated in the rites, or he that has had no part in them, never enjoys a similar lot down in the musty dark when he is dead.[25]

The hymn makes it clear that the initiated are entitled to special privileges not offered to the uninitiated masses. These promises of a blessed afterlife, however, seem to be a sixth-century addition to the cult dating roughly to the period when the hymn itself was composed. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood points out that the cult of Demeter at Eleusis, likely beginning in the eighth century, was originally concerned with fertility in connection with the city of Athens. Only in the sixth century did the cult take on a

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[23] Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries*, XII notes Mithras as a unique example of a cult that excluded women from participation.

[24] Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries*, XII points to the general inclusivity of mystery cults as a major difference between the mysteries and *polis* religion. Cumont, *The Oriental Religions*, 30-31 focuses on the differences between the dry and impersonal state religion to the emotionally engaging mysteries. Ustinica, "To Live in Joy," 105-106 points to the non-consideration of social status, the vast membership, and the positive feelings (joy, peace of mind, acceptance of death) as some of the main draws of mystery initiations.

[25] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 480-482. Translation and text are taken from Martin L. West. *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

mystery element that promoted personal choice in joining the cult and a happy afterlife.[26] Although the shift toward eschatological concerns seems to suggest that promises of life after death became an important factor in these cults, Burkert asserts that the afterlife was of secondary importance and initiates were much more concerned about the here-and-now. He compares these cults to votive rites, in which the individual performed rituals with the hope that the gods would help or continue to refrain from interfering in everyday life.[27]

Bremmer therefore contends that each cult gave individuals different motivations for joining. While all these cults promised benefits to the initiate, each one promised something a little different. Eschatological elements are certainly an important aspect of the rites at Eleusis, but the cults of the Great Gods of Samothrace and the Korybantes made no such afterlife promises. Instead, the Great Gods of Samothrace provided for the safety of sailors at sea, and the Korybantes' initiation was considered to be a cure for madness.[28] These two cults underscore Burkert's point that benefits in the "here and now" act as an important motivator for people to join these cults.

Regardless of whether these cults primarily focused on afterlife concerns, the individual is consistently at the center of the initiation process. It is the individual who voluntarily decides to go through the rituals and in turn is awarded some sort of personal

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[26] Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Festivals and Mysteries: Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos (London: Routledge, 2003), 26-27.
[27] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 12-15. Burkert compares an individual who adopts new religious practices to help his personal life to the state adopting new gods and building temples in times of crisis. State religion and private religion likely developed along the same lines, with people in need looking for any way to ease their suffering.
[28] Bremmer, *Initiations into the Mysteries*, XIII. Hugh Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 67 explains that the lack of any solid evidence about the cult precludes any deeper insight as to what the initiations were meant to accomplish. He says that it is appropriate that we do not have any explanations for the cults because the initiates did not seem to have one either. For a full discussion of these cults, see Bremmer, *Initiations into the Mysteries*, 21-54 and Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 49-67.

benefit. The focus on the individual does separate the mystery cults from state religion because of the distinctly personal choice of participating in the rites, a choice that is not present in state cult. Although there is a connection between Athens and Eleusis politically and religiously after the sixth century, the initiations are not done solely for the sake of civic prosperity. A similar trend of separation of mysteries from state worship of a deity can be found in Rome as well, as Rome limited the rites of Magna Mater/Cybele and Bacchus to state approved forms. Cybele was brought to Rome during the Second Punic War in accordance with the Sibylline Books in order to help the republic in their war effort against Hannibal.[29] Despite the warm welcome extended to the goddess, the Roman state put certain prohibitions on her cult practices. First, Roman citizens were not allowed to become Galli, the ecstatic and self-castrated priests of Magna Mater, and sacrifices to the goddess were to be made in the Greek fashion with the head uncovered.[30] The Romans make the cult palatable to their sensibilities, but they allow it to keep its foreign trappings. More importantly, Roman state religion separated itself from the frenzied private rituals of the Galli, creating a split between official state and private practices.

The Bacchanalia affair of 186 BC further emphasizes this split between private and individual practice and state religion. Euripides' portrayal of the rites in his *Bacchae* attests to the orgiastic nature of the cult of Dionysus as early as 405 BC. It was the ecstatic tendencies of the cult that seem to have made the practices less than palatable to

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[29] Magna Mater's entrance into Rome is told in Livy *Ab Urbe* 29.10-11.8 and 14.5-14.14, Ovid's *Fasti* 4.247-384, Silius Italicus *Punica* 17.1-43.

[30] Erich Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 33. Gruen further discusses the connection the Romans are making with the Hellenistic past, and incorporating the cult into Rome by forcing it to maintain its Greekness makes it something at the same time both Roman and Greek. They are emphasizing their Roman characteristics, however, by not entirely absorbing the cult.

the Romans as the mysteries slowly made their way into Italy. In his description of the incident, Livy cites political intrigue as central to the banning of the rites of Dionysus in the Italian peninsula.[31] Ultimately, the Senate banned worship of Dionysus except at shrines predating the incursion of the orgiastic rites. This ban implies is that Rome expected religious practices to work toward the benefit of the state, and the individually based rites went against their notion of *pietas*. Although the state response to the cult of Bacchus was certainly harsher, the senate treats the separation of state and private worship of Bacchus in a way similar to how it imposed legal limits on the participation in the cult of Magna Mater. A still existing inscription orders that the worship of Bacchus could not take place without senatorial approval, and the declaration also limits the number of people who could participate in these rites.[32] From these two episodes, it is clear that the deities associated with the mystery cults have private and public aspects, but the mystery initiations themselves are explicitly separate from state religion.

The private sphere of religious practice is an integral part of these mystery cults, and the voluntary nature of the rites further emphasizes the personal nature of these cults. Regardless of what Burkert means when he refers to an "experience of the sacred," the rituals are emotionally transformative for the individual. The initiate changes in response to the ritual and further reflects on the things witnessed and heard. The general lack of restrictions on membership fostered a community of individuals who shared in these specific experiences and certainly led to different ways of interpreting the initiation rituals and the cults in a greater context. Nevertheless, the personal nature of cult is at the

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[31] The Bacchanalia affair is described in Livy *Ab Urbe* 39 8-14. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture,* 77-78 argues that the senate was reacting against people who had defected to the Carthaginians during the Second Punic War.
[32] *ILS* 18 = *ILLRP* 511.

heart of the present study. Instead of reconstructing the rituals, my focus here is to address the questions some of the motivations behind elite participation in and interpretation of mystery rituals.

## II. Writing (and Reading) Mysteries

Literary texts that treat mystery cults are informed by the personal experiences and research of the author, and writings about mystery cults reflect the author's own thoughts and experiences. The personalities that create these texts are influenced by many different factors, and, naturally, these influences shape their works to a discernable extent. Interpreting each text begins by acknowledging these influences and tracing the marks left on the texts and the way in which these influences shape how an author approaches mystery cults. First, historical context is important in the construction of a text. Contemporary events and intellectual currents significantly push an individual to choose certain subjects and give these subjects specific meaning. Second, established traditions concerning cult give authors a specific language in which they can address the mysteries, and traditional ways of thinking allow for a discussion of a topic that is intelligible to a wider audience. Tradition, however, is also an aspect that authors can manipulate, and by playing with convention, writers can attribute new ideas to old subjects. Finally, the social and political origins of individuals have a profound effect on their thoughts about mystery cults. As educated elites, Plutarch, Apuleius, and Praetextatus surely had a much different viewpoint on these cults than the less educated masses. Speaking from a place of social authority allows them to present their own views of mystery cults, emphasizing an intellectual approach that prescribes proper religious practice that diminishes the

authority of folk tradition and popular religion. Finally, their accounts of mystery cults are biographical in the sense that they reveal something about the author, and present a constructed image of the person behind the text. These three factors profoundly shape the way authors write about cults, and influence interpretation of written accounts and the meaning mystery cults have in a specific context.

A text, of course, is not written in a temporal vacuum, and historical context resonates in a text. The prominent intellectual currents of an era can have a profound effect on an author and text, and the Second Sophistic[33] and the Christianization of Rome[34] mark the two most important movements in the context of this study. Authors' approaches to writing, style, genre, or topic, are influenced by these trends, and different times call for different means of presentation. The political realities of a time period also shape the way in which one talks about certain material and may even influence the choice of topic. Playing along with, or going against, the dominant political or intellectual regime can speak volumes as to what a specific author is trying to convey. The popularity of Isis and her favor with the imperial government, for instance, is one reason why the goddess may receive particular attention in literature.

Beyond the choice of topic, historical context can drastically change the meaning of certain actions and affect the way we interpret the choice of writing about mystery cults. Plutarch and Apuleius treat mystery cults as part of larger religious traditions, and they consider mystery cults unique in their philosophical potential, but they also critique the ideas associated with popular religion and undercut some of the traditional and popular associations of mystery cults. These two were writing in an era when Greco-Roman

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[33] The Second Sophistic is addressed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.
[34] The Christian influence in Rome during the fourth century is discussed in chapter 4.

religion enjoyed a position of authority, and their works can be interpreted as nuanced approaches to material that is separate from, but also linked to, state religion. Their approach, however, does not necessarily subvert the religion of the state. Praetextatus, on the other hand, lived in a Christian Rome where adherence to old religious customs was becoming exceedingly rare. His wife's unapologetic display of adherence to these mystery cults on his funerary monument recalls the former supremacy of the old gods in opposition to the new Christian world order, and she displays an adherence to Roman tradition in the face of the change brought about by Christianity. Although all three authors look at mystery cults through antiquarian glasses, the employment of these cults in each text can change meaning depending on the time period and prevailing intellectual winds.

In this study I focus specifically on texts and how the authors use the traditions associated with mystery cults as a means of self-fashioning. The authors draw from the well of traditional modes of addressing mystery cults, as well as their own experience, to reveal their own familiarity with mystery initiation.[35] The established ways of talking about cults are important interpretive tools for understanding the ways authors present mystery cult initiation in a text and to what end they employ cult in their texts. For this reason, I evaluate sources in a way that blends an historical approach with discourse analysis. George E. Demacopoulos uses this same combination of approaches in *The Invention of Peter* and convincingly argues for the benefits of this methodology.

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[35] For instance, Francesc Casadesus, "The Transformation of the Initiation Language of Mystery Religions into Philosophical Terminology," in *Greek Philosophy and Mystery Cults,* eds. Maria Jose Martin-Velasco and Naria Jose Garcia Blanco (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016) discusses how the language of the mysteries was co-opted into the vocabulary of philosophy as far back as Plato. The authors in the current study are clearly familiar with the philosophical aspects of the mystery cults that early philosophical discourse birthed.

Demacopoulos begins by noting that any discourse offers "its own epistemological horizon, a framework within which statements or practices are offered, understood, measured, embraced, and/or resisted."[36] This idea of discourse is built on Foucault's theory of knowledge structures presented in his *Archeology of Knowledge*. These structures hold together discourse and make it intelligible to an audience. By recognizing the existence of these structures, or, in other words, being mindful of convention and tradition, an author can use discourse as a tool to reshape these structures, thus affecting the way the audience perceives and interprets thoughts.[37]

One of the key advantages of this approach is the reliance on a much smaller scope in historical context. Focusing on discourse lessens the need for a comprehensive history of mystery cults or of the Roman Empire between the second and fourth centuries AD. Instead, I can focus specifically on the texts and their most immediate contexts. The historical context can affect the message conveyed in the discourse, but the information given to the audience relies on the preexistence of a set of meanings associated with mystery cults. Each individual author in this study is in some way playing with these knowledge structures in order to convey certain ideas, like advocating for the philosophical foundation of mystery cults, for instance. The small collection of texts that comprise the focus of my study both work as a part of the knowledge structures that give speech and action meaning and also (re)shape these structures. The texts can only act in

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[36] G. E. Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2013), 3.
[37] Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter*, 192. Note 7 points out that discourse is not simply a means for conveying truth but instead constructs the way in which ideas are meant to be perceived and understood. What we read in any of these texts is not a true representation of the facts surrounding cult but the view promoted by the individual author who is influenced by existing knowledge structures. Demacopoulos cites Elizabeth A. Clark *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) as a starting point for his own research. Demacopoulos echoes the sentiment of Clark that language is not the same thing as truth.

this way because certain conditions already exist that make it possible to make statements about mystery cults.

Looking specifically at discourse additionally allows for a discussion of a wide variety of texts of different genres and from different time periods. The breadth of the material that can be covered under this approach allows for an analysis of the discursive unity between diverse texts. Despite the many differences between the authors studied here, discourse analysis allows for a comparison of texts and for a comparison of the ideas that connect their portrayals of mystery cults. In this study, mystery cults appear in various different types of texts (philosophical treatises, law court speeches, novels, inscriptions), but the discursive unity stemming from mystery cults allows for comparison of these texts. Despite the difference in genre and time, there is much that ties together these three ancient writers—Plutarch, Apuleius, and Praetextatus—, but the differences in representation and meaning are as important as the similarities in each author's thoughts. Analysis of the discourse helps reveal how each author manipulates established knowledge structures through the use of specific discourse.

Discourse equally refers to both written word and actions, so the employment of discourse analysis allows for the interpretation of specific actions in conjunction with the texts. The action of speaking about mystery cults in a specific way, or erecting a monument, can further affect the analysis of the discourse of a text. The words of each author speak volumes in recreating their ideas about mystery cults and the ways in which one ought to participate. What is said and how it is said reveal both intriguing similarities and differences in the current subjects' approach to the mysteries.

The focus of this study, therefore, is on individuals and what these individuals say about mystery cults. Ultimately, the goal is to analyze the way in which discussions of cults relate to the author and, more specifically, to what extent an individual's public image is shaped in his writing about mystery cults. What are the appeals of writing about cults? At the center of the study are not just the texts but the authors themselves. There is some comedic truth to what Franz Liebkind says in Mel Brooks' *The Producers*: "You are the audience! I am the author! I outrank you!" My aim is to center my discussion on the author of each text, or, at least, the portrait of the author the text presents. To distill these self-constructed portraits, this study relies on the premise that these writings are to some extent (auto)biographical in that they represent the experiences of their authors.[38] At least two of the works here are clearly biographically informed, Apuleius' *Apology* and Praetextatus' funerary monument, in the sense that they give us personal information about their authors. The *Apology* is a defense speech in which Apuleius must discuss his own life in order to gain acquittal of criminal magic charges, and these personal details make the text autobiographical. Praetextatus' funerary monument is meant to be representative, in a commemorative way, of its subject and gives information about Praetextatus in an extensive *cursus honorum* as well as a long poem written by his wife describing her husband. In each case, there are certain biographical details that give salient information about the lives of the subjects of the works.

Autobiography, of course, is written by the author with a specific self-image in mind that is meant to be projected to the audience. Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis in a study of the

[38] Olympia Panagiotidou and Roger Beck, *The Roman Mithras Cult: A Cognitive Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 7-8 looks at material remains and literary testimony of cult is the product of the cognitive processes and abilities that happened in the creators' brains. Literary works are the products of the brain's tendency to create links between events and construct a narrative that communicates these thoughts to others.

autobiographical nature of Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales* discusses the work as an autobiography written with a purpose. Aristides actively reminds the reader that he is the author of the text and continually connects himself with the healing god Asklepios. The text is intended by Aristides to be not just a work of self-promotion but a votive piece that is aimed toward the praise of the god Asklepios.[39] In this way, we must bear in mind that this type of autobiographical writing is created toward some greater purpose. Bradley K. Storin sees a similar trend in the letter collection of Gregory of Nazianzus. He argues that Gregory personally compiled and edited his letter collection guided by self-presentational concerns. The letter collection presents to the audience a display of Gregory's learning and eloquence.[40] The type of self writing in which Gregory participates is still autobiographical in so much as it presents a self-fashioned version of Gregory to his reading audience, and there is no need to assess the historical accuracy of the character portrayed.[41] In these self-presentational texts, it is the created image of the author that matters. For Apuleius, the inclusion of personal details is meant to help him out of a difficult legal situation. For Praetextatus, the details from his *cursus honorum* are meant as a display of his successful political career and a further reminder of his pagan roots. That is, these texts do not necessarily represent the true person, but the author presents certain biographical tidbits for the calculated purpose of self-presentation.

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[39] Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, "Sacred Writing, Sacred Reading: The Function of Aelius Aristides' Self-Presentation as Author of the *Sacred Tales*," in *The Limits of Ancient Biography,* ed. Brian McGing and Judith Mossman (Swansen: The Classical Press of Wales: 2006), 195-196.
[40] Bradley K Storin, *Self-Portrait in Three Colors: Gregory of Nazianzus's Epistolary Autobiography* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 6.
[41] Storin, *Self-Portrait*, 22-24 talks about the dangers of limiting the definition of biography, and the mistake of assuming autobiography is a work that reflects the true character of its writer. Storin states that autobiography "is best conceived as a mode of authorship based on a conceit that the 'autobiographical I' reflexively refers to the historical person of the author in any literary form, genre, or situation. No deep dive into the author's psyche need be featured here…" (23).

The other texts featured in this study are not so much portrayals of the personal lives of their authors, but the ideas in them do represent the author, at least to the extent that the texts reflect the author's thought processes. In a discussion of the biographical importance of epistolary correspondence, Michael Trapp refers to Demetrius' *De Elecutione* in which the philosopher explains that letters reveal the soul of the writer. Demetrius additionally mentions that all types of composition can give a peek into the author's psyche, although letters are the best medium for baring one's soul.[42] Texts that are not specifically (auto)biographical can at least be seen as a representation of the author's thoughts, ideas, tastes, and personality.[43] Although Plutarch's philosophical works (discussed in the next chapter) include few biographical details, he presents the ideas in the texts treated here as his own (citing Plato as his muse, of course).[44] His arguments presents his opinions about proper religious practice. The personal choice to write about mystery cults is similar to the voluntary nature of the initiation rituals: Plutarch deliberately picked Isis as a topic for discussion. Both personal knowledge of the cults and philosophical training both inform the texts and Plutarch takes advantage of his knowledge to promote a version of himself as a religiously minded philosopher.

A similar story can be told of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, whose autobiographical qualities have been addressed by scholars, although there is a lack of consensus whether a reader

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[42] Michael Trapp, "Biography in Letters; biography and letters," in *The Limits of Ancient Biography* edited by Brian McGing and Judith Mossman (Swansen: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 335-6. Trapp specifically cites *De Elecutione* 227.

[43] Trapp, "Biography in Letters," 339. Although Trapp is specifically describing how biographical elements come across in letters, these ideas can be applied to other types of writing, as Demetrius indicates.

[44] For example, at the start of *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch addresses the priestess Clea by explaining a shared interest in the gods. He presents the idea of looking to god for Truth as sensible people, which he and Clea are. *On Isis and Osiris* 351 C-D. In another place, the *Life of Aemilius Paulus* 1.1, Plutarch personally addresses his reader, explaining his motivations for writing the *Lives.*

can equate the character of Lucius and Apuleius.[45] Despite this narrative difficulty, one can see traces of Apuleius in this work, as I argue in Chapter 3, by comparing the biographical details from the *Apology* to the material he presents in *The Golden Ass.* The experience that Apuleius has with mystery cults in his defense speech is echoed in *The Golden Ass,* especially in the final book in which Lucius come face to face with Isis. Lucius' subsequent initiations into the goddess's cult are possibly influenced by Apuleius' own experiences. Again, by analyzing the character Apulieus creates in the *Apology*, we can see Apuleius at work in *The Golden Ass* through Lucius, and the author sets his eye toward religious and philosophical matters. Even if Lucius is only a shadow of our author, the ideas that inform *The Golden Ass* have their origin in the mind of the writer.

Biography, of course, has its limits, and the exploration of the authors using the texts will never reveal a true portrait of the individual. The authorial images represented in ancient literary texts are refracted in a way that gives a reader a distorted picture of the author, but the process of refraction is a deliberate aspect of these kinds of texts. Autobiography and biography are types of writings that present a subject in a specific way that is purposefully constructed by the author. When writing a biography (or autobiography), a person chooses a subject and presents the subject in calculated ways. The writer maintains a constant tug-of-war between a real historical figure and the writer's own opinions that influence the portrayal of the subject.[46] In a way similar to

[45] See chapter 3 for a further discussion of the autobiographical aspect of Lucius as Apuleius.
[46] A. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion in the Roman Empire," *Annai della Scuola normale suerione di Pisa. Classe di lettere e filosofia* 16, no. 1 (1986): 31-32. See also Storin, *Self-Portrait,* as well as Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J. Watts, "Introduction: Greek and Latin Epistolography and Epistolary Collections in Latin Antiquity," in *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide*, eds. Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K Storin, and Edward J Watts, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

biography, an author shapes an autobiographical text by carefully picking and choosing information that creates a calculated portrait for the autobiographical subject that reflects the image that the author wants to provide to the reader. In religious and philosophical texts like the ones in this study, the authors have carefully chosen certain aspects of their own thoughts to convey to the audience. For example, the author's prescription of certain religious behavior projects an image of that author religiously minded and thoroughly conversant with philosophical and religious material. By sprinkling in specific philosophical details and references, the image of the author expands to incorporate this additional feature of intellectualism and philosophical study. As the author presents more complicated webs of thought, the audience creates a more and more complex portrait of the author. Mystery cults, then, are literarily useful tools for self-fashioning because of the dense meaning buried in them.[47]

An interesting difference among the authors, as we will see, resides in the message they convey through the choice of writing about mystery cults. For Plutarch, mystery cults allow for a translation of the strange and foreign into something wholly Greek, reaffirming his philhellenic stance. Apuleius uses cults as a way to show his intellectual abilities as a way to make himself seem more Roman than the yokels who prosecute him for magic. And Praetextatus by acknowledging a connection between mystery cults and traditional Roman religion seems to make a statement that sets him at odds with Christianity. A review of historical context, a consideration of discourse, and recognitions

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[47] Casadesus, "The Transformation of," 5-6 refers to *Phaedo* 69C-D, in which Plato says that mysteries imbued with hidden meaning by their creators and the initiated who understand the ritual are actually participating in philosophical exercise. Plato suggests that the "doctrinal principles of the Mystery Cults were philosophically valid." (6)

of these texts as something autobiographical provides the means for the analysis of the way authors use mystery cults as a means of self-fashioning.

Augustine of Hippo and the scholarship that surrounds his *Confessions* provide a useful example of what the current study aims to do with the works of its three chosen authors.[48] In the *Confessions*, Augustine uses autobiographical elements to describe his own conversion (or initiation, perhaps) into Christianity, a religion that shares an initiatory aspect with the mystery cults.[49] Augustine presents the steps leading up to his baptism into orthodox Catholicism as philosophically inspired. The drive toward an intellectual approach to Christianity comes early in the *Confessions* as Augustine comes across Cicero's *Hortensius*, a work that he describes as a call to wisdom.[50] Cicero's protreptic work has a profound effect on the young Augustine, and this episode marks a decisive change in Augustine's thinking as he begins to look away from what he describes as "the pleasure of human vanity"[51] to wisdom and God.[52] The push toward God, Augustine tells us, only goes so far because Cicero's text lacks the name of Christ.[53] Augustine marks his philosophical turn as an important step in his eventual conversion to

[48] For a full biography of Augustine see James J O'Donnell, *Augustine A New Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005). For full discussions of the *Confessions* see Catherine Conybeare, *The Routledge Guide to Augustine's Confessions* (London: Routledge, 2016) and Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversion to Confessions* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).
[49] For an examination of the close relationship between Christianity and the mystery cults, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[50] *Confessions* 3.4.7. *…exhortationem continet ad philosophiam…*Translations and text of the Confessions comes from Augustine, *Confessions, Volume I: Books 1-8*, trans. Carolyn J.-B. Hammond. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.
[51] Confessions 3.4.7 *per gaudia vanitatis humanae*.
[52] Todd Breyfogle, "Book Three: "No Changing Nor Shadow," in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions,* ed Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 42-43 points out that this is Augustine's introduction to philosophy. The young Augustine has the experience, but, as Breyfogle points out, he misses the meaning, as his later interest in Manaechim attests.
[53] *Confessions* 3.4.8 *quod nomen Christi non erat ibi.*

Christianity, and Augustine's description of the *Hortensius* begins the marked intellectualizing of Christian religion that he further develops later in the work.

After learning about philosophy and the pursuit of wisdom, Augustine joins the Manichaeans, but, eventually, Augustine finds the materialistic view of the Manichaeans lacking as he stumbles upon his next step of his philosophical enlightenment in the books of the Platonists.[54] Pointedly, Augustine says that the Platonic works had in them the same sentiment as what he had already read in the Bible, making specific reference to the first few verse of the Gospel of John.[55] He repeats Biblical reference in the next few sections, further cementing the similarity in thought between Platonism and the Bible, providing the reader with firm Platonic and philosophical underpinnings for the Christian faith.[56] Platonist thought allows Augustine to move away from the materialism of the Manichaeans in favor of a transcendental view of God that is founded on the principle of God's immaterial nature.[57] What Augustine says in his explanation of the Platonic materials is that realization of God comes from introspection, and the human soul can bear witness to God through meditative thought.[58]

Augustine's narrative promotes a philosophical view of Christian thought that takes an intellectual stance on religious ideas. He uses Platonism to describe how one might

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[54] Catherine Conybeare, *The Routledge Guide to Augustine's,* 82 indicates that these are not the works of Plato, but Neoplatonic texts. Fox, *Augustine*, 215-240 describes which Neoplatonic works by Plotinus likely are the texts Augustine read. Sarah Byers, "Augustine and the Philosopher," in *A Companion to Augustine,* ed. Mark Vessy (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 175-186 further discusses the philosophical influence on Augustine's *Confessions*.

[55] *Confessions* 7.9.13. Gospel of John 1:1-5. Augustine ends Book 7 of the *Confessions* (7.21.27) by expressing this same sentiment.

[56] Philip Cary, "Inner Vision as the Goal of Augustine's Life." In *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions,* ed. by Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 112 points out that Augustine belabors this point from 7.9.13-15 in order to further emphasize the Platonic elements that work as part of Christian doctrine.

[57] *Confessions* 7.9.14.

[58] *Confessions* 7.9.13. Fox, *Augustine,* 241-257 looks at Augustine's turn toward introspection as he explains the books of the Platonists. Augustine takes to heart that God can be found from within an individual.

come to a truer understanding of God and juxtaposes philosophy with the Bible as two parts of a larger theological puzzle. But Augustine emphasizes that Platonism can only take a person part way to enlightenment, with the Bible filling in the blanks with Christ (a presence Augustine states he did not see in the Platonic texts).[59] Plato allows Augustine to make his account of the immateriality of God credible and culturally relevant.[60] He intellectualizes Christianity by giving it a Platonic framework, but he repeatedly reminds his reader of the importance of the Christian God. While the ideas in the Bible and the Platonic texts coincide, the Platonic texts are missing the ever important presence of Christ.

The *Confessions,* however, are by no means a treatise in Neoplatonism.[61] Nor is the text really an autobiography,[62] yet it is ripe with personal details about its author's life. Augustine applies an intellectual approach to Christianity as a way to signal his differences from the both Manichaeans and Neoplatonists. Furthermore, he exhorts Christians of his own ilk to work toward attaining more insight into their own religious beliefs.[63] Augustine intellectualizes Christianity as a way that allows for a nuanced way of looking at old material, and he suggests that one can only find God through similar

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[59] *Confessions* 7.9.14. *sed quia verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, non ibi legi.* "But that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us that I did not read there."
[60] John Peter Kenney, *Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* ( New York: Routledge, 2005), 49-51 argues that offering a Platonic reading of Christian doctrine connected him with the circle of Ambrose in Milan and offered a model that offered a transcendental form of monotheism that was "coherent and intelligible" (51).
[61] Kenney, *Mysticism,* 52.
[62] Paula Fredriksen, "The *Confessions* as Autobiography," In *A Companion to Augustine,* Ed. Mark Vessey (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 90. Conybeare, *The Routledge Guide to Augustine's*, 146. Augustine's work is not a story of the self but a story of how the self is connected with God.
[63] Paul Van Geest, "Protreptic and Mystogogy: Augustine's Early Works," in *When Wisdom Call: Philosophical Protreptic in Antiquity,* eds. by Olga Alieva, Annemare Kitze and Sophie Van der Meeren (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2018), 350-352. Van Geest argues for a protreptic and paraenetic purpose of the *Confessions*.

religious introspection.[64] So Augustine participates in Christianity in ways similar to the subjects of the present study. He presents an intellectual view of a popular religion that privileges an educated interpretation of the material. The *Confessions* presents personal details about the author, but the greater point of the text is to promote a certain image of Augustine, namely the religious convert who has found the true nature of his religion through thoughtful introspection. But Augustine also presents himself as socially connected, as Platonism was a leading intellectual current among Ambrose and his group in Milan. Augustine, in his own way, uses religion as a mean of self-fashioning and promotes intellectual participation in Christianity.

## III. The Cults and the Characters

We move finally to the cast of characters that populate this study. Our *dramatis personae* include gods and goddesses, Greeks and Romans, and senators and philosophers. The cults loom large in the work, and, before talking about individuals, it will be helpful to orient ourselves briefly in regard to the deities and cults that appear here. After a brief description of each cult, I end with a brief summary of each chapter.

Isis looms the largest of any of the deities included in this study. She appears as a major figure in the *Golden Ass* and Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris*. Even Praetextatus was connected to her through his devotion to the god Sarapis. Isis' mysteries are first mentioned in the second book of Herodotus' *Histories* in a specifically Egyptian context. In Herodotus' account, participants reenact the story of Osiris' dismemberment and Isis'

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[64] Conybeare, *The Routledge Guide to Augustine's*, 8 describes the *Confessions* as a manipulative work that forces the reader to share in Augustine's progress to conversion.

search for her husband's body in a ritual context.[65] The cult of Isis spread beyond the Nile delta because of the interconnectivity of the Mediterranean Sea and Isis' cult center in the delta which acted as a convenient launch pad for the goddess to the rest of the world,[66] and her popularity soared due to easy access to her cult center.[67] She did not show up in Italy, however, until the second century BC, and it is not until the second century AD that there is evidence of mystery initiations.[68]

The Romans tailored the public worship of Isis to meet their own needs, but her temples and priests retained their Egyptian look. The Iseum in the Campus Martius was decorated with hieroglyphs, obelisks, and other Egyptianizing art, and the priests dressed in linen robes, shaved their heads, and shook sistra, the rattle traditionally associated with Isis.[69] The Roman state celebrated two major festivals to Isis, with only one having actual Egyptian roots. The Egyptian festival, called the *Isea,* was celebrated between October 28th and November 3rd and involved a procession reenacting Isis' search for Osiris. The ritual culminated in cries of ecstasy as the celebrants "found" the missing Osiris. The second important festival was called the *Isidis Navigum*, which was celebrated in the early spring to signal the start of the sailing season. The celebration was a thoroughly Roman festival with no discernable Egyptian antecedent. The worshippers highlight Isis'

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[65] Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries*, 110-111. Bremmer argues that the Egyptians would not have considered these rituals mystery initiations. The story of Isis and Osiris, however, does seem to be a central focus of the later mystery initiations.
[66] Laurent Bricault and Miguel John Versluys, "Isis and Empire" in *Power and Politics and the Cults of Isis: Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Isis Studies,Boulgne-surMer, Octiber 13-15,* edited by Laurent Bricault and Miguel John Versluys (Boston: Brill, 2011), 29.
[67] Greg Woolfe, "Isis and the Evolution of Religions," in *Power and Politics and the Cults of Isis: Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Isis Studies,Boulgne-surMer, Octiber 13-15* edited by Laurent Bricault and Miguel John Versluys (Boston: Brill, 2011), 75-76. Bowden, *Mystery Cults*, 161.
[68] Bremmer, *Initiations into the Mysteries*, 114.
[69] Jaime Alvar, *Romanizing Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation, and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis, and Mithras* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 311.

connection to the sea and to navigation by symbolically "kicking off" the sailing season by setting a small boat out to sea.[70]

The Isiac initiation rituals were separate from the state festivals, although the Egyptian veneer remained an important aspect of the rites. Bremmer and Bowden both rely on the last book of the *Golden Ass* to reconstruct what the ritual might have been like, although the vagueness of Apuleius' description makes a true reconstruction nearly impossible. Bremmer connects the initiation ritual to those of Eleusis, positing a similar ritual performed for each.[71] The story of Isis and Osiris likely played an important role in the ritual, and in *The Golden Ass* Lucius describes some sort of symbolic encounter with the gods in the underworld. At the end, the initiate comes away with sacred knowledge that is intended to be kept secret from the uninitiated.

While Apuleius and Plutarch were certainly familiar with the cult of Isis, there is not solid evidence to confirm they were Isiac initiates. Additionally, the two are equally elusive in detailing into what cults they were initiated. Praetextatus, however, gives us an extensive list of his cultic associations which include Sarapis, Cybele/Magna Mater, Dionysus, Demeter at Eleusis, and Mithras. The ecstatic nature of the cults of Cybele and Dionysus has been discussed earlier, and the rites of Demeter at Eleusis have received similar treatment thus far. Because of their less visible presence in the texts that follow, these three deities do not require as much exposition as the cult of Isis. Mithras, however, is a special case which requires some attention because of his connection to solar imagery, which is an important aspect of Macrobius' fifth-century description of Praetextatus' religious thought in the *Saturnalia*. Plutarch additionally equates the sun

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[70] Jaime Alvar, *Romanizing Oriental Gods*, 296-302 gives a much more thorough description of these festivals.
[71] Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries*, 121.

with the philosophical concept of the good, so the philosophical merits of the sun are important in this context.

Mithras, as said earlier, was a Roman adaption of a Persian deity whose cult was an entirely private affair with no related state apparatus. [72] Unlike other mystery cults, Mithras' own cult strictly banned women from participation. Ritual activity took place in small underground vaults called mithrea, which allowed for no natural light and kept participants pressed close together due to the confined quarters. Mithrea were extensively decorated with specific imagery, and the tauroctony scene made up the centerpiece of the decorations. The scene showing Mithras killing a bull is present in every mithreum, and has been read as an astronomical code. [73] It is through this astronomical connection that Mithras gains a close association with the god Sol, establishing Mithras as a solar deity in his own right.[74]

The actual initiation rituals are hard to reconstruct, but artwork from mithrea gives some clues. It appears an initiate was led naked and blindfolded before a priest. The priest seemingly points a sword at the initiate, throws it down, and then places a crown on the head of the initiate.[75] There are a series of initiation grades, with the top grade being designated *pater*. Praetextatus displays the title of *pater patrum* on his own monument, showing that the senator reached the highest position of authority in the cult.

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[72] For a study of the cognitive elements of Mithras, see Panagiotidou, *The Roman Mithras Cult* and Roger Beck, *Religion f the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Elsner, *Imperial Rome,* 136 says that texts describing Mithraism do not survive and likely did not exist. Likely its tenants were orally transmitted. Most evidence of Mithraism comes from the decoration and imagery found in various Mithrea.
[73] For a longer description which includes pictures of discovered mithrea and the importance of the tauoctony scene, see Bowden, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 182-185.
[74] Bremmer, *Initiations into the Mysteries*, 130.
[75] Bremmer, *Initiations into the Mysteries,* 193-194.

The people studied in this work have a special connection to these cults, and each chapter will focus on an individual's interaction with them. The first chapter focuses on Plutarch with attention given to his *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris*. I begin by addressing the historical realities of Plutarch's time and how they provide the background influences for these two works.[76] The importance of Greek *paideia* for both an audience of Greeks and Romans links the two people through their shared culture. These philosophical materials written by a Greek in Greek would have been mutually intelligible to both groups. The resurgence of Hellenic culture and philhellenism in the second century AD is an important aspect in unpacking Plutarch's works. The philosopher shows a considerable amount of Greek loyalties by "translating" the Egyptian rites of Isis and Osiris into something wholly Greek at their core. It is also through Greek philosophy, specifically Platonism, that Plutarch describes proper religious practice. In order to avoid the pitfalls of superstition and be a true initiate of the mysteries, people must rely on reason and philosophic inquiry as guides to their religious thought. Ultimately, Plutarch uses the cult of Isis and Osiris as a philosophical lecture hall to discuss his own ideas of religious observance and the primacy of Greek culture. He uses religion in his texts to reflect his own philosophical and Greek backgrounds.

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[76] General overviews of Plutarch life and works include D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London: Duckworth, 1972); Robert Lamberton, *Plutarch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); C.P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). For a discussion of Plutarch in context of Trajanic Rome, see Philp A. Stadter and Luc Van der Stockt, eds., *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Time of Trajan (98-117 AD)* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002). For discussions of the connections between Plutarch' *Lives* and *Moralia*, see Anastasios G. Nikolaidis, ed., *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives,' Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

Apuleius continues along the same philosophic currents in his own work.[77] His *Apology* and *The Golden Ass* can be read together to construct an Apuleian religious program that puts the academic credentials of their author in the spotlight. The Second Sophistic is also an important aspect for Apuleius' own work, and the showy presentation of the *Apology* bears witness to the sophistic influence. Greek philosophy looms large in Apuleius own work, with Apuleius referring to himself as a Platonic philosopher in the *Apology*. Moreover, he writes additional works discussing Plato's ideas, the *De Deo Socratis* being one example. He explicitly connects his interest in mystery cults with his philosophical tendencies in the *Apology* and seemingly continues this train of thought in his *Golden Ass*. One way of reading *The Golden Ass* uses Lucius' familial connection with Plutarch as a way to reveal some philosophic agenda for the work as a whole. Lucius' ultimate initiations into the cults of Isis and Osiris and the character's subsequent complacency in the final book of the novel runs counter to his famous ancestor's ideas about religious devotion. Apuleius, I argue, plays a religious game to show his philosophical acumen and his possession of *paideia*. Apuleius' insistence in the *Apology* that he differs from his country bumpkin prosecutors is proven through the repeated reference to philosophical study and conscious self-representation of himself as a philosopher.

Praetextatus differs drastically from the previous two authors because he lived in a Christianized Rome and his extant writings are limited to two short poems in praise of his

[77] For a study that situates Apuleius in time, see Keith Bradley, *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays,* ed. Keith Bradley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012). For a discussion of Apuleius in his spatial context, see Benjamin Todd Lee, Ellen Finkelpearl, and Luca Graverini eds., *Apuleius and Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2014). For overviews of Apuleius career and ideas, see Stephen Harrison, "Apuleius," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic,* eds. Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 345-356; Richard Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism: The Impersonation of Philoshophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

wife that adorn the sides of his funerary monument.[78] This chapter will reconstruct a portrait of Praetextatus, who seems to have consciously connected himself with pagan religious practices with special attention given to mystery initiations. The texts that are most important here are his funerary monument, which include a *cursus honorum* and a long poem written by his wife Paulina, Symmachus' *Letters* and *Relationes*,[79] and Macrobius' *Saturnalia.*[80] The aim of this chapter is to use this material to show how Praetextatus' associations with mystery cults resonate in the literature that was written before and after his death. Paulina's poem emphasized her husband's philosophical pursuits, and Symmachus' own letters indicated that Praetextatus' spent much time looking over old philosophical texts in his leisure time. Paulina, however, indicates that the worldly works of Praetextatus pale in comparison with what he learned through mystery initiations. In this way, mystery cults are presented as a means to a transcendent type of knowledge that outranks philosophical study. Macrobius shapes the Praetextatus of the *Saturnalia* by picking up on this connection between religion and knowledge. His Praetextatus is considered wise among his peers because of his breadth of religious knowledge, a portrait which echoes the man portrayed on the funerary monument.

Mystery cults are representative of Praetextatus' scholarly background but also have a ring of antiquarianism to them. Praetextatus' monument emphasizes a connection to the Roman past when paganism was the state religion, so Praetextatus here connects himself to the traditional Roman senatorial aristocracy in opposition to the new Christian ruling

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[78] For a biography of Praetextatus, see Maijastina Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus: A Senatorial Life in Between* (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2002). Also see Praetextatus' entry in the PLRE, PLRE 1.722 "Praetextatus 1." For more discussions involving Praetextatus and the fourth century AD, see Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[79] For a biography of Symmachus, see Cristiana Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus: A Political Biography* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006).
[80] For a discussion of Macrobius, see the introduction of Robert A. Kastor, ed., *Macrobius: Saturnalia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

order. The distinction between the terms Christian and pagan is important for this discussion. The term *paganus* originates from a Latin word that designates a country district, and this term has a usage history that predates Christianity. The term applies to a place that has fixed boundaries and is intrinsically defined by what is around a particular area.[81] *Paganus* originally lacks any sort of religious connotation, but Christians use the term to denote groups of non-Christians, and the term is used as a way of creating a group of "others" which Christians can use to define themselves.[82] Alan Cameron argues that the word itself lacked negative connotations that can be drawn from the "country" related etymology of the word. In the fourth century, it was simply a way in common speech to label people who were not Christians, and the term itself had a neutral connotation.[83] Pagan as a term to denote a religious group relies on a comparison with Christianity. For this reason, the term pagan can denote anyone who is not a Christian or Jew. In the context of this study, pagan refers to anyone who participates in cults that are traditionally associated with the Roman state and the mystery cults discussed up to this point.

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[81] For a thorough discussion of the *paganus* and its evolution, see James J O'Donnell, "Paganus," *Classical Folia* 31 (1971): 163-169.
[82] Thomas Jürgasch, "Christians and the Invention of Paganism in the Late Roman Empire," in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflicts, Competition, and Coexitence in the Fourth Century* eds, Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Saghy, and Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 115-119, 127-129. Jürgasch uses epigraphic evidence to show that pagan and unbaptized could be seen as synonymous and further creates the idea of outsider in relation to the Christians. Dennis Trout, "Napkin Art: *Carmina Contra Paganos* and the Difference Satire Made in Fourth Century Rome" in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflicts, Competition, and Coexitence in the Fourth Century*, eds. Mchile Renee Salzman, Marianne Saghy, and Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) explains the satire used in anti-pagan poems as a case of this type of othering, in which Christians create an identity for themselves through comparison to another (artfully created) group of "pagans."
[83] Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans,* 25. Cameron goes into much greater detail concerning the term itself and similar terms from antiquity until the present day. He compares the word pagan to the modern use of the word gay. Gay etymologically has no connection to the idea of homosexuality, but people use it as a neutral word to replace homosexual. Pagan works the same way. It no longer means rustic in its original etymological sense, but as a general label for people with certain religious beliefs.

The aim of this study is to trace how authors employ mystery cults in texts toward self-referential ends. While many studies of mystery cults have tried to reconstruct the initiation rituals or identify the cults' place in a greater religious schema, the current study considers specifically how three specific authors use these cults in literary texts as a means of self-representation. The diverse selection of texts which encompass a wide range of genres and time periods allows for additional insight into mystery cults as not just a social and religious phenomenon but also a literary one. The grouping of authors that represent both sides of the Constantinian divide, both a Christian and non-Christian Rome, allows for a discussion of the change of meaning in the textual use of mystery cults with the advent of a Christian Rome. Plutarch, Apuleius, and Praetextatus typically do not appear in scholarship together, and the comparison of their texts here allows for a new type of discussion about mystery cults. Ultimately, these three show striking similarities in their interest in philosophy and the repeated connection made with erudition and mystery material. Each author, in his own way, takes cults that are unique in their popular appeal and puts a scholarly stamp on them. A true initiate is the educated initiate, and philosophy is the key to the truth contained in mystery initiation. With Plutarch, Apuleius, and Praetextatus, we see mystery cults as a tool of self-representation that reflects his status, education, and cultural identity.

# Chapter 2: Superstition, Isis, and Plutarch

## I. Introduction

Plutarch's life spanned multiple imperial regimes stretching from his birth in the 40s AD during the reign of Claudius until his death under the emperor Trajan in the 120s.[84] His vast corpus betrays a man concerned with philosophical education and contemplation firmly rooted in a Platonic view of ethics, virtue, and politics. His works are divided into two large collections of writings: the biographical *Lives* and the *Moralia*, an eclectic collection of various philosophical and rhetorical treatises. Yet, despite what appear to be the obvious differences between the *Lives* and the works of the *Moralia*, much connects the two collections. Both bodies of work portray Plutarch as a philosopher who is preoccupied with religious themes in much of what he writes, and he describes philosophy as the key to understanding religion.[85]

This chapter explores particular ways in which Plutarch mingles religion and philosophy to project the image of a religiously informed Greek philosopher. In particular, Plutarch engages mystery cults, specifically the cults of Isis and Osiris, as an avenue for philosophical inquiry. He maps Platonic philosophy onto the Egyptian

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[84] J. Gwyn Giffiths, ed., *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Cambridge: University of Wales Press, 1970), 16 uses these as the dates for his own text. These dates are accepted by scholarship at large, with D.A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London: Duckworth, 1972), Philip A. Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and C.P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) making up a small sample of scholars who give a similar date range.

[85] The religious elements of Plutarch's writing are discussed at great length in Frederick E. Brenk, *In Mist Appareled: Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), and Frederick E. Brenk, *Brenk On Plutarch : Religious Thinker and Biographer: "The Religious Spirit of Plutarch of Chaironeia" and "The Life of Mark Antony,"* ed. Roig Lanzillotta (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Mauro Bonazzi, "Plutarch of Chaeronae and the Anonymous Commentator on the *Theatetus*," in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity*, eds. Harold Tarrant, Danielle A. Layne, Dick Baltzly, and François Renauld (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 140 provides a discussion of Plutarch's connection of *theoria* and *praxis* in his works. Bonazzi, by stressing this union of the theoretical and practical, asserts that Plutarch attempts to translate the divine into the human realm. Due to the divine element, Bonazzi nicely terms Plutarch's Platonism as "a kind of political theology." Plutarch aims to order the soul like God orders the universe by means of ethics and politics. *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* 550 D-E and *The Life of Dion* 10.1-3 are examples of this trend.

material and translates this foreign religion into something he would have readers conceive of as wholly Greek. Plutarch explains that Plato is the key to "truly" understanding the cults of Isis and Osiris, and he further suggests that Greek culture and philosophy are more ancient and authoritative than the Egyptian material he explores in his treatise.[86] Ultimately, the philosophical underpinnings Plutarch sees in mystery initiations provide a framework onto which Plutarch can apply Greek philosophical principles.[87]

More specifically, in this chapter I will argue that Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris* works within the religious framework initially set out in his *On Superstition*. By linking the ideas in both texts, Plutarch establishes religion as a primarily intellectual pursuit, and he turns his philosophical knowledge to the interpretation and explanation of the cult of Isis and Osiris, thus flexing his philosophical muscles and identifying himself as a distinctly Greek philosopher as he undermines the Egyptian roots of the cult to Hellenocentric ends. Plutarch asserts in these texts that an initiate ideally appreciates mystery cults (and religion in general) as an avenue of scholarship and as a celebration of Greekness. My ultimate aim is to show that Plutarch reinforces his identity as a Greek and Platonic philosopher by writing about, and being initiated into, mystery cults.

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[86] Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50-250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), provides an entire chapter, pages 135-186, on Plutarch's connection to the Second Sophistic and his general Hellenistic attitudes. Also Rebecca Preston "Roman questions, Greek answers: Plutarch and the construction of identity," in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire,* ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 86-119 looks at Plutarch's promotion of Greek material in his *Roman Questions*.

[87] For multiple discussions concerning the connection between Plutarch and mystery cults, see *Estudios Sobre Plutarco Misticismo y Religiones Mistericas en la Orba de Plutarco*, eds. Aurelio Perez Jimenez and Francesco Bordoy (Madrid: Ediciones Clasicas, 2001). For an exploration of the way Plutarch connects philosophy and mystery cults, see Geert Roksam "And a Great Silence Filled the Temple...Plutarch on the Connections between Mystery Cults and Philosophy" in *Estudios Sobre Plutarco Misticismo y Religiones Mistericas en la Orba de Plutarco*, eds. Aurelio Perez Jimenez and Francesco Bordoy (Madrid: Ediciones Clasicas, 2001).

Plutarch's *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris* provide examples of Plutarch's ideas about individual religiosity. *On Superstition* is especially relevant in this discussion because it lays out certain principles that form the foundations of Plutarch's other religiously interested works,[88] though examining every religious text in Plutarch's corpus is well beyond the scope of this particular study.[89] These texts, furthermore, focus on individually performed religious activity and address the "proper" approach to religious material. Plutarch's other religious texts, *On the Delphic E* or *On the Face in the Moon,* for example, explain larger philosophical problems in the context of religion. *On the Delphic E,* for instance discusses the nature of the god Apollo and the philosophical implications of his existence. The text presents an interesting philosophical discussion, to be sure, but Plutarch's focus is on the cosmos at large.[90] While Plutarch also discusses larger philosophical issues in *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris,* he more specifically critiques popular ways of participating in religion. Each text privileges an intellectual approach to cult that is prescribed, perhaps unsurprisingly, with an emphasis on philosophy and Greek flair.

The dating of these texts suggests that Plutarch's ideas about religion were fairly consistent throughout his life. *On Superstition* is a work of the youthful Plutarch, whereas *On Isis and Osiris* was written in Plutarch's twilight years, likely in Delphi.[91] Despite the gulf of time between the two treatises, certain features, such as Plutarch's insistence on

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[88] Brenk, *In Mist Appareled*, 9 notes that *On Superstition* is the starting point for many scholars in discussion Plutarch's religious ideas, and Brenk begins his own analysis with this text. D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 79 notes that *On Superstition* is a "key text" in establishing Plutarch's ideas of proper religious behavior. Russell's analysis of the text is much more limited than Brenk's, lasting only two paragraphs.

[89] Frederick E. Brenk has already written a thoughtful book on the religious themes in Plutarch, and it is not my aim to undertake a similar study. See Brenk, *In Mist Appareled*.

[90] Plutarch pulls his ideas for this text from Plato's *Timeaus*.

[91] The dating of each work is discussed later in this chapter.

logic and reasons, appear in these texts as they nicely bookend the literary career of the philosopher. The continuity of thought supports the notion that Plutarch maintained many of the ideas he had in his youth into his old age.[92] By looking at these texts side-by-side, we find that though the tone has changed, the song remains basically the same.

This chapter begins by placing Plutarch in his own time, space, and intellectual landscape. The first section considers Plutarch's own works in their historical and cultural context in order to establish general tendencies in Plutarch's thinking. Plutarch suggests an educational purpose of his texts, and he acts as a teacher and guide for his reader. Plutarch's life bumped up against the beginning of a period later authors (such as Philostratus in his *Lives of the Sophists*) would recognize as an era uniquely brimming with Greek culture and influence.[93] Plutarch's learned discussions of all things Greek exemplified his philhellenic tendency and earned Plutarch much notoriety. This prestige threw him into a politically connected circle of friends which gave him access to the emperors.[94] Plutarch's works reflect this imperial influence, and Egypt's popularity with the emperors from Caligula onward to Trajan and Hadrian surely informs the works.[95]

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[92] Brenk, *In Mist Appareled*, 27 concludes that Plutarch's ideas in *On Superstition* are not far removed from ideas that Plutarch presents in his later works.
[93] G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 4-8 discusses at length the difficulty of dating *The Lives of the Sophists.* Bowersock finally concludes that the work could not have been composed any later that 229/230, relying on an address to a certain Gordian at the beginning of the work, likely Gordian I. C.P. Jones, "The Reliability of Philostratus," in *Approaches to the Second Sophistic: Papers Presented at the 105th Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association,* ed. G. W. Bowersock (Ephrata: Science Press, 1974), 11 argues that the term sophist is hard to define in Philostratus' work, with the boundary between philosopher and sophist often being obscure. Jones concludes that Philostratus has a type of virtuoso speaker in mind when he uses the term sophist. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 15 says that the sophists about whom Philostratus writes about are either Greek or non-Greek individuals steeped in Greek culture.
[94] Russell, *Plutarch*, 10,109, 131. The dedications in his works are testaments to the large and diverse group of friends he kept and give scholars an idea of his audience. They were most likely very similar to Plutarch: rich, politically active, upper class, and self-professed intellectuals. The dedications show a mixed audience with fourteen works being dedicated to Greeks and twelve dedicated to Romans. According to Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers*, 32-33, all of Plutarch's dedicatees were either local Greek dignitaries or governing elites of the empire. This audience would have been essential to Plutarch as a means to support

The historical circumstances form the basis of the analysis of *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris*. *On Superstition* reads like a declamatory speech, and the text uses Greek philosophy as the basis of a diatribe against superstitious people. The philosophical material originates from Hellenistic philosophers, like Theophrastus, but echoes of Plato are also present, and Plutarch builds his religious framework on these Greek philosophical precedents. Religion, Plutarch concludes, is only properly practiced by those possessing Greek *paedeia* and philosophical knowledge. The final section of this chapter turns an analytical eye to *On Isis and Osiris*, discussing the combination of principles espoused in *On Superstition* with the Egyptomania present in both the first and second centuries AD. Plutarch claims that a true initiate of the cult understands Isis and Osiris through philosophy and that the deities themselves are Platonic at the core. Plutarch argues that the Egyptian deities are actually Greek in origin, and contends that this innate Greekness allows Platonic philosophy to be an interpretive tool for understanding the "true" nature of Isis and Osiris. Ultimately, both texts emphasize intellectual aspects of religion and devalue the views of those who come to the cult of Isis without philosophical education. Plutarch's discussion of mystery cults reflects his position as a social elite and Platonically educated philosopher.

## II. Trends in Plutarchean Thought: Plutarch as Educator and Religious Philosopher

A concern for ethical education and moral improvement informed much of what Plutarch wrote. Both the *Lives* and the works of the *Moralia* were intended to educate his

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his vocation "as a philosopher, as a Greek, and as a citizen of the Roman empire to educate thoughtful, moral leaders for these cities and for the empire." (44)

[95] A Further discussion of imperial interest in Egypt appears later in the section dealing with *On Isis and Osiris.*

readership.[96] At the beginning of the *Life of Aemilius Paulus* (1.1), for example, Plutarch declares to his reader that he uses the subjects of his *Lives* as mirrors to which he can compare his own behavior.

> ἐμοὶ τῆς τῶν βίων ἅψασθαι μὲν γραφῆς συνέβη δι᾽ ἑτέρους, ἐπιμένειν δὲ καὶ φιλοχωρεῖν ἤδη καὶ δι᾽ ἐμαυτόν, ὥσπερ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ πειρώμενον ἁμῶς γέ πως κοσμεῖν καὶ ἀφομοιοῦν πρὸς τὰς ἐκείνων ἀρετὰς τὸν βίον. οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀλλ᾽ ἢ συνδιαιτήσει καὶ συμβιώσει τὸ γινόμενον ἔοικεν, ὅταν ὥσπερ ἐπιξενούμενον ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ἐν μέρει διὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ὑποδεχόμενοι καὶ παραλαμβάνοντες ἀναθεωρῶμεν 'ὅσσος ἔην οἷός τε,' τὰ κυριώτατα καὶ κάλλιστα πρὸς γνῶσιν ἀπὸ τῶν πράξεων λαμβάνοντες.
>
> I began the writing of my 'Lives' for the sake of others, but I find that I am continuing the work and delighting in it now for my own sake also, using history as a mirror and endeavoring in a manner to fashion and adorn my life in conformity with the virtues therein depicted. For the result is like nothing else than daily living and associating together, when I receive and welcome each subject of my history in turn as my guest, so to speak, and observe carefully 'how large he was and of what mien,' and select from his career what is most important and most beautiful to know.[97]

Plutarch interestingly enough cites selfish reasons have come to dominate his foray into biographical research. Although he started writing the *Lives* for altruistic reasons, he now hopes to learn from the people about whom he writes and modify his own behavior to reflect the virtues of these larger than life personalities. While he does not explicitly say

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[96] See for instance Anastasios G. Nikolaidis, ed., *The Unity of Plutarch's Works: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives,' Features of the "Lives' in the 'Moralia*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), an edited volume that highlights the concurrent intellectual threads running through each collection.

[97] Bernadotte Perrin, trans., *Plutarch: Lives, Volume VI: Dion and Brutus. Timoleon and Aemilius Paulus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918).The translation and Greek comes from the Loeb edition of the text.

it, Plutarch's rhetorical strategy encourages the reader to take his advice and read the *Lives* as a teaching text. It is not coincidental that the *Moralia* often treat the same virtues and vices that are the subject of the *Lives*,[98] and the educational purpose remains, though the generic context has changed.

Plutarch's works coalesce around a Platonic core, a philosophical system that saw somewhat of a heyday in the second century AD. During the early imperial period, many writers were providing exegeses on various aspects of Plato, making Plato more accessible to a wider reading audience.[99] One such is commentary (roughly contemporary with Plutarch) on the *Theaetetus* (PBerol inv. 9782). The anonymous commentator lists references to other commentaries he has written that discuss the *Timaeus* and the *Symposium*, suggesting he wrote a sizeable body of Platonic inspired works.[100] Indeed, Mauro Bonazzi terms the second century "a period of identity crisis" in the history of Platonism because of the number of Platonic schools that promoted different images of Plato, each providing its own account of his ideas.[101] Plutarch, however, did not manage a

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[98] Sven-Tage Teodorsson, "The Education of Ruler," in *The unity of Plutarch's Works: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives' and Features of the 'Lives' in the Moralia,* ed. Anastasios G Nikolaidis (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). This entire chapter, a part of a larger volume detailing the consistency between the *Moralia* and the *Lives*, poses the idea that the *Moralia* were written as a theoretical model of kingship. The *Lives* take these theoretical principles and show them in action in real world situations. The consistency between these works suggests that education, even beyond education of rulers, is central to Plutarch's motives. We see additional correspondences between the *Moralia* and the *Lives* in *Nicias* and *On Superstition* according to Fraces B. Titchener, "Is Plutarch's Nicias Devout, Superstitious, or Both?" in *The unity of Plutarch's Works: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives' and Features of the 'Lives' in the Moralia,* ed. Anastasios G Nikolaidis (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). The superstitious nature of Nicias is played out in full in his *Life* and is used as a warning in the *Moralia*. Again there is an ongoing theme of teaching and learning by example.

[99] Harold Tarrant, "From Fringe to Core Curriculum: Commentary, Introduction, and Doctrinal Summary." In *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity,* eds. Harold Tarrant, Danielle A. Layne, Dirk Baltzly, and Francois Renaud, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 114. Tarrant claims the increase in handbooks, doctrinal summaries, and commentaries suggests that a larger number of people had become interested in Platonic texts, and the increased production in materials simply was meeting this new demand.

[100] Tarrant, "From Fringe to Core," 103.

[101] Bonazzi, "Plutarch of Chaeronea," 130-132.

formal with rigid time requirements, thus allowing him to produce numerous texts, cementing his status as an expert on Platonic reception.[102]

Plutarch's works suggest that Plato is the preeminent source for understanding virtue, ethics, and morality. Plato, as it were, is the means by which it becomes possible to attain virtue or excellence. In his *On Delays of Divine Vengeance,* Plutarch describes virtue (*ἀρετή*) as connected with God (*ὁ θεὸς*).

> Ἀλλὰ σκοπεῖτε πρῶτον ὅτι κατὰ Πλάτωνα πάντων καλῶν ὁ θεὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐν μέσῳ παράδειγμα θέμενος τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀρετήν, ἐξομοίωσιν οὖσαν ἁμωσγέπως πρὸς αὐτόν, ἐνδίδωσιν τοῖς ἕπεσθαι θεῷ δυναμένοις. καὶ γὰρ ἡ πάντων φύσις, ἄτακτος οὖσα, ταύτην ἔσχε τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ μεταβάλλειν καὶ γενέσθαι κόσμος, ὁμοιότητι καὶ μεθέξει τινὶ τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἰδέας καὶ ἀρετῆς· καὶ τὴν ὄψιν αὐτὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἀνάψαι φησὶν τὴν φύσιν ἐν ἡμῖν ὅπως ὑπὸ θέας τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ φερομένων καὶ θαύματος ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ ἀγαπᾶν ἐθιζομένη τὸ εὔσχημον ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τεταγμένον ἀπεχθάνηται τοῖς ἀναρμόστοις καὶ πλανητοῖς πάθεσι καὶ φεύγῃ τὸ εἰκῇ καὶ ὡς ἔτυχεν ὡς κακίας καὶ πλημμελείας ἁπάσης γένεσιν. οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ὅ τι μεῖζον ἄνθρωπος ἀπολαύειν θεοῦ πέφυκεν ἢ τὸ μιμήσει καὶ διώξει τῶν ἐν ἐκείνῳ καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι.[103]
>
> Consider first that God, as Plato says, offers himself to all as a pattern of every excellence, thus rendering human virtue, which is in some sort an assimilation to himself, accessible to all who can 'follow God.' Indeed this was the origin of the change whereby universal nature, disordered before, became a 'cosmos': it came to resemble after a fashion and participate in the form and excellence of God. The same philosopher says further that nature kindled vision in us so that the soul, beholding the heavenly motions and wondering at the sight, should grow to accept and cherish all that moves in stateliness and order, and thus

[102] Bonazzi, "Plutarch of Chaeronea," 132. Some of Plutarch's key works of Platonic reception include *On the Creation of Souls in the Timaeus* and the *Ten Platonic Questions.*

[103] *On Delays of the Divine Vengeance* 550D-E. Text and translation come from Plutarch, *Moralia: Volume VII: On Love of Wealth. On Compliancy. On Envy and Hate. On Praising Oneself Inoffensively. On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance. On Fate. On the Sign of Socrates. On Exile. Consolation to His Wife*, trans. Phillip H. De Lacy and Benedict Einarson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).

> come to hate discordant and errant passions and to shun the aimless and haphazard as source of all vice and jarring error; for man is fitted to derive from God no greater blessing than to become settled in virtue through copying and aspiring to the beauty and the goodness that are his.

Plutarch establishes two main sources of virtue: God (*ὁ θεὸς*) and Plato. In Plutarch's philosophical schema, God provides himself (*ἑαυτὸν*) to human beings as a model for excellence (*παράδειγμα…ἀρετήν*).[104] The order by which God has structured the universe is meant as the blueprint by which humans are to order their own souls. As Plutarch says, humans acquire virtue by copying this godly example (*μιμήσει καὶ διώξει τῶν ἐν ἐκείνῳ καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι*). While God acts as the ultimate example of virtue, Plutarch cites Plato as the source of this divine insight. Twice in the passage, Plutarch uses Plato as his authoritative source as the one who authored this notion of divinely ordered virtue (*κατὰ Πλάτωνα…αὐτὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ*). Without Plato, Plutarch seems to suggest, it would be impossible to know the way to virtue.

The connection of virtue, religion, and Plato is not relegated only to discussions in the *Moralia.* In the *Life of Dion*, Plutarch again presents Plato as the guide to virtue through study of the divine. Here, Plutarch makes the presence of Plato even more pronounced. In the context of the narrative, Dion recognizes that the son of the tyrant of Syracuse has become corrupt in his character because he lacks proper education. Dion's cure: read and study under Plato!

> Τὸν δ᾽ υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, καθάπερ εἴρηται, διαλελωβημένον ἀπαιδευσίᾳ καὶ συντετριμμένον τὸ ἦθος ὁ Δίων ὁρῶν παρεκάλει πρὸς παιδείαν τραπέσθαι καὶ δεηθῆναι τοῦ πρώτου τῶν φιλοσόφων πᾶσαν δέησιν ἐλθεῖν εἰς Σικελίαν· ἐλθόντι δὲ παρασχεῖν αὑτόν, ὅπως διακοσμηθεὶς τὸ ἦθος

[104] My discussion of this passage foreshadows the later discussions in this chapter of the Platonic nature of the Egyptian deities and the philosophical nature of religion in general.

εἰς ἀρετῆς λόγον, καὶ πρὸς τὸ θειότατον ἀφομοιωθεὶς παράδειγμα τῶν ὄντων καὶ κάλλιστον, ᾧ τὸ πᾶν ἡγουμένῳ πειθόμενον ἐξ ἀκοσμίας κόσμος ἐστί, πολλὴν μὲν εὐδαιμονίαν ἑαυτῷ μηχανήσεται, πολλὴν δὲ τοῖς πολίταις, ὅσα νῦν ἐν ἀθυμίᾳ διοικοῦσι πρὸς ἀνάγκην τῆς ἀρχῆς, ταῦτα σωφροσύνῃ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ μετ᾽ εὐμενείας πατρονομούμενα παρασχὼν καὶ γενόμενος βασιλεὺς ἐκ τυράννου.[105]

This tyrant's son, as I have said, Dion saw to be dwarfed and deformed in character from his lack of education, and therefore exhorted him to apply himself to study, and to use every entreaty with the first of philosophers to come to Sicily, and, when he came, to become his disciple, in order that his character might be regulated by the principles of virtue, and that he might be conformed to that divinest and most beautiful model of all being, in obedience to whose direction the universe issues from disorder into order; in this way he would procure great happiness for himself, and great happiness for his people, and that obedience which they now rendered dejectedly and under the compulsion of his authority, this his moderation and justice would base upon goodwill and a filial spirit, and he would become a king instead of a tyrant.

The "first of all philosophers" to which Plutarch refers is Plato, who appears as a character in this biography, and Dion (as Plutarch portrays him) sees Plato as the only means of salvation for the corrupt character of the tyrant's son. Again, Plutarch describes Plato as the guide to the divine (*τὸ θειότατον*) which creates order in the universe out of disorder (*ἐξ ἀκοσμίας κόσμος ἐστί*). Dion hopes that the tyrant's son, by becoming a student of Plato, will take his disordered soul and reorder it to match the divine order.[106] In both of these passages, Plutarch promotes education and personal study as a means of correcting human frailty. By highlighting the positive aspects that come with studying Plato, Plutarch hopes that his readers take the hint and begin their own study. Plutarch

[105] *Life of Dion* 10.1-3. Text and translation comes from Plutarch, *Lives, Volume VI: Dion and Brutus. Timoleon and Aemilius Paulus,* trans. Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918.
[106] Bonazzi, "Plutarch of Chaeronea," 140 notes that Plutarch generally in his philosophy wants to order the soul in the same way as God orders the universe.

combines the theoretical and moral aspects of philosophy with the practical ethics of politics. While he unravels the theoretical implications of divine virtue in *On Delays of Divine Vengeance*, Plutarch also presents the practical applications of virtue as an aspect of a good ruler. Philosophy and Plato are the means by which the tyrant of Syracuse can become a king and not a tyrant (*καὶ γενόμενος βασιλεὺς ἐκ τυράννου*).[107] Plutarch takes inspiration from Plato, who attempts to educate the tyrants of Syracuse in philosophy, in order to create virtuous rulers, though, as Plutarch relates later in the *Life of Dion*, Plato eventually fails in his attempt.[108]

While the ultimate example of virtue is God, Plutarch presents Plato as the gatekeeper of enlightenment, as it were. In the *Life of Dion* and *On Delays of Divine Vengeance*, he presents Plato as the preeminent philosophical source on matters of ethics, morality, and, it seems, religion. These texts reveal important trends in Plutarch's thinking, containing philosophical ideas that permeate much of his corpus. First, Plato is the inescapable source that informs all of Plutarch's copious production. Each text comes with a Platonic seasoning, and the teachings therein find their roots in the Platonic dialogues. Second, Plutarch makes a clear connection between religion (through the repeated mention of God and the divine) and philosophy. He promotes the idea that mortal pursuit of virtue and excellence is an attempt to mirror the order set out by the divine. In other words, to study philosophy is to yearn after the divine.[109] This philosophical pursuit of God is especially

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[107] Teodorsson, "The Education of Rulers," 339.
[108] Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers,* 10. *Life of Dion* 5.
[109] I borrow this wording from title of the article by Geert Roksam, "Plutarch's Yearning After Divinity: The Introduction to *On Isis and Osiris,*" *The Classical Journal* 110 (2014-2015) in which Roksam performs a close reading of the introduction of Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris.* He argues that Plutarch consistently presents a close connection between knowledge and the divine (215-220), pointing to *On Isis and Osiris* 351 C-D as an example of such a pairing. The link between God and knowledge is also present in *On Love of Wealth* 527F-528A; *Progress in Virtue* 78D-E; *On Tranquility of Mind* 472E; *On Inoffensive Self-Praise* 545A.

germane to the discussions of *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris* which appear later in this chapter. Plutarch also privileges Greek culture and philosophy as the sole means to understanding virtue and the divine. He suggests that only the Greek Plato can save the corrupt character of the son of the tyrant of Syracuse. The preeminent position of all things Greek is a salient feature of Plutarch's works and shows up consistently in other writers that are contemporary with Plutarch.

Plutarch's privileging of Greek culture is a staple of literature dating from the second and third-centuries in the Roman Empire, a period which saw an explosion of Hellenic culture. Even ancient scholars recognized that something unique was happening: Philostratus named the period the Second Sophistic, drawing a connection to the great thinkers and speakers from the Classical past,[110] and the general background radiation that was Hellenism colored much of the literature from this period. Displays of Greek knowledge (philosophy, history, culture, language, etc.) advertised the possession of *paideia* and communicated authority and credibility.[111] *Paideia* was most clearly displayed through the glorification of Greek cultural heritage. For example, the topics of

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[110] Goldhill, "Introduction: Setting an Agenda: 'Everything is Greece to the Wise,'" in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire,* ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14-15 discusses the problems with the term Second Sophistic, focusing specifically on the dating and categorizing who exactly can be defined as a "sophist." Despite the problems that accompany any sort of peridoization, Goldhill does note that the term is helpful from a standpoint of labelling the Greek cultural movement. Goldhill eventually settles on dating the Second Sophistic between the first and third centuries. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 9 defines the Second Sophistic as a product of the high empire. Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), 11-12, 38 connects it with the second and third centuries (what he calls an age of ambition) as a product of the elite competition for cultural capital. George Kennedy, "The Sophists as Declaimers," in *Approaches to the Second Sophistic: Papers Presented at the 105th Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association,* ed. G. W. Bowersock (Ephrata: Science Press, 1974), 20-22 describes the important influence the Greek past had on sophistic writers. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, 11-15 discusses the perception by the Greeks of their monopoly on culture, and expressing this culture was a means of showing social position and gaining certain political privileges. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 9-11 and 88 lays out the personal benefits of showing one's Greek cultural aptitude. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire,* includes an entire chapter dedicated to analyzing the role Greek history plays in sophistic displays and the importance of antiquarian knowledge as a trope for sophistic speeches (65-100).

[111] Anderson, *The Second Sophistic,* 85 also notes that they have the ability to transform this heritage by playing with conventions.

declamation, a popular sophistic practice, [112] often involved Greek history and addressed major Greek historical figures like Alexander the Great.[113]

Additionally, the use of proper Greek language was privileged as the vernacular of the educated classes. The language used was a dialect built on the Greek spoken by the sophists in Classical Athens. This recreated form of Attic, which is a distorted mirror of Attic from the fifth century, artificially created a separation between elites and the lower classes because using "correct" Greek meant that the speaker or writer had proper Greek *paideia*.[114] By composing in Attic, a sophist or philosopher broadcast to the rest of the world his *paideia* and reinforced him as a keeper of Greek culture and heritage.

Reliance on Greek culture in the forms of Attic dialect and Greek history are useful to these educated elites because it allows them to establish themselves in a position of authority. The sophists and philosophers derive their *gravitas* from their knowledge of Greek history and culture. This cultural knowledge reflects the academic pedigree of the speaker or writer and acts as a reminder of the social position linked with this kind of

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[112] Kennedy, "The Sophists as Declaimers," 17-20. Kennedy highlights the importance of declamation as a teaching tool in the sophists' schools. He also indicates that aptitude in declamation led to the success of a teacher.
[113] Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic,* 67-70. Whitmarsh discusses the different ways Alexander is used in sophistic display. Alexander was used as both a symbol of Greece and of tyranny. His function in a speech depended on context and audience.
[114] The term *paideia* is loaded with meaning and significance. Goldhill, "Introduction," 17 says that the word implies a body of privileged texts, artwork, values, and culture which informs lives of the civic elite. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic,* 15 adds that seeking *paideia* was to strive for a "particular form of identity, a fusion of manliness, elitism, and Greekness." Preston, "Roman questions," 89-90 defines the term as formal education and culture shared by Greek elites that include public speaking, knowledge of history, texts, Attic language, and aristocratic ethos. The elite aspects are clear from all of these definitions.

expensive education.[115] This character was built on a foundation of Greek *paideia* and enhanced by deft use of Classical tropes and references to Greek history and culture.[116]

Plutarch clearly displays a well-rounded knowledge of Greek history and literature. His education in Athens positions him as a specifically Greek philosopher, and the city acts a spiritual connection to his philosophical model, Plato. Plutarch studied under the socially prominent Ammonius (*fl.* 67),[117] possibly of Egyptian origin,[118] whose lofty career included high political office in Athens as well as his position as a teacher in the Academy.[119] His education in Athens establishes Plutarch as part of the upper echelons of Greek society because of the high price of an education. Lucian's *The Dream* (*c.*125-*c.* 180) presents what is absolutely necessary for education: time, money, and social position.[120] From all this, it is safe to conclude that Plutarch was from a wealthy and prominent family from his hometown of Chaeronea.

Plutarch's use of his Greek *paideia* is on display in his seminal work *The Parallel Lives*, in which the author compares the virtues and vices of major characters from Greek and Roman history. He clearly draws from Greek history in his Greek *Lives*, but his treatment of Greek material in the Roman *Lives* is particularly interesting here. Even though he is treating subjects that are Roman in origin, Plutarch emphasizes the Greek

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[115] Swain, *Hellenism and Empire,* 65-66. By tying themselves to leaders of the past through the use of language and by picking certain topics for declamations, the elites of the present were able to further their own claims to rule.

[116] Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic,* 13-14. Greeks conceived of themselves as having some sort of monopoly over culture.

[117] C. P. Jones, "The Teacher of Plutarch," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 71 (1967): 208. The lack of evidence leaves the dates of Ammonius obscure, but Jones argues that the man could have been born in the 20s and lived into the 70s or 80s.

[118] Jones, "The Teacher of Plutarch," 207. Jones says that only Eunapius refers to Ammonius' Egyptian background, and Eunapios claims to use Plutarch as his source. Plutarch, however, never says such a thing in his surviving corpus.

[119] Jones, "The Teacher of Plutarch," 206. Plutarch gives only indirect information about his teacher, but it is clear from his role in several dialogues, such as *On the Delphic E,* that Ammonius acted in the capacity of hoplite general.

[120] Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, 9. The specific passage cited is *The Dream* 1.

qualities of his Roman subjects. As Plutarch says in his *Life* of the Roman *Aemilius Paulus,*[121] the characters of the past are meant to be examples for the people for the present. Plutarch, however, is looking at these historical figures through Greek eyes. Philip Stadter points out that Plutarch's treatment of Aemilius is a conscious attempt to create a solid connection between the Greek and Roman worlds, and Plutarch highlights the Greek qualities of Aemilius. Plutarch introduces Aemilius as a decedent of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras.[122] This early introduction to the Roman figure places Plutarch's subject with one foot in both the Roman and Greek realms. Although Aemilius' family is of the Roman Patrician class, the founder of the family was the son of the Greek Pythagoras.

Plutarch further highlights the virtuous qualities of Aemilius by describing his cultivation of Roman religious traditions. Plutarch tells us that Aemilius made himself intimately familiar with Roman religious traditions, and he privileges the philosophers who define religion as a scientific way of approaching the gods (*καὶ μαρτυρῆσαι τοῖς φιλοσόφοις, ὅσοι τὴν εὐσέβειαν ὡρίσαντο θεραπείας θεῶν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι*).[123] While the

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[121] *Aemilius Paulus* 1.1.

[122] *Aemilius Paulus* 2.1-2. *Τὸν Αἰμιλίων οἶκον ἐν Ῥώμῃ τῶν εὐπατριδῶν γεγονέναι καὶ παλαιῶν οἱ πλεῖστοι συγγραφεῖς ὁμολογοῦσιν. ὅτι δ' ὁ πρῶτος αὐτῶν καὶ τῷ γένει τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἀπολιπὼν Μάμερκος ἦν, Πυθαγόρου παῖς τοῦ σοφοῦ, δι' αἱμυλίαν λόγου καὶ χάριν Αἰμίλιος προσαγορευθείς, εἰρήκασιν ἔνιοι τῶν Πυθαγόρᾳ τὴν Νομᾶ τοῦ βασιλέως παίδευσιν ἀναθέντων.* "That the Aemilii were one of the ancient and patrician houses at Rome, most writers agree. And that the first of them, and the one who gave his surname to the family, was Mamercus, a son of Pythagoras the philosopher, who received the surname of Aemilius for the grace and charm of his discourse, is the statement of some of those writers who hold that Pythagoras was the educator of Numa the king." Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers*, 2 argues that Plutarch's presentation of Aemilius solidifies the Greek nature of his Roman subject and demonstrates the cultural sharing taking place between Greece and Rome."

[123] *Aemilius Paulus* 3.2-3. *γενόμενος δ' ἱερεὺς τῶν Αὐγούρων προσαγορευομένων, οὓς τῆς ἀπ' ὀρνίθων καὶ διοσημειῶν ἀποδεικνύουσι Ῥωμαῖοι μαντικῆς ἐπισκόπους καὶ φύλακας, οὕτω προσέσχε τοῖς πατρῴοις ἔθεσι καὶ κατενόησε τὴν τῶν παλαιῶν περὶ τὸ θεῖον εὐλάβειαν ὥστε τιμήν τινα δοκοῦσαν εἶναι καὶ ζηλουμένην ἄλλως ἕνεκα δόξης τὴν ἱερωσύνην τῶν ἀκροτάτων μίαν ἀποφῆναι τεχνῶν, καὶ μαρτυρῆσαι τοῖς φιλοσόφοις, ὅσοι τὴν εὐσέβειαν ὡρίσαντο θεραπείας θεῶν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι.* "Moreover, when he was made one of the priests called Augurs, whom the Romans appoint as guardians and overseers of the art of divination from the flight of birds and from omens in the sky, he so carefully studied the ancestral customs of the city, and so thoroughly understood the religious ceremonial of the ancient Romans, that his priestly function, which

philosophers in question are not named, the clear implication from Plutarch's other works, like the *Life of Dion,* is that Aemilianus was a student of Plato. Aemilius gives Plato his due deference when it comes to questions of religion and intimately familiarizes himself with Roman religious traditions because of his philosophical tendencies. Plutarch further emphasizes the importance of Greek learning in the *Life* by making a brief comment on the education of Aemilius' children. After he loses the election for a second consulship, Aemilius gives his attention to his priestly duties as augur and the education of his children. While he makes sure the children study their Roman traditions, he has them learn everything else from Greek teachers.[124] Plutarch presents Aemilus' choice of educators favorably, suggesting that the Roman material is not quite enough for a rounded education.

The *Life of Aemilius,* echoing the sentiments of the *Life of Dion* and *On Delays of Divine Vengeance,* establishes several important aspects of Plutarch's philosophical focus. First, Greek culture deserves a privileged place in any pursuit, philosophical or biographical. Plutarch emphasizes Aemilius' Greek aspects as a way of suggesting that the good qualities of the Roman stem from his knowledge of Greek culture and his ancestral Greek family relations. Second, Plutarch again injects a quick reference to

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men had thought to be a kind of honor, sought merely on account of the reputation which it gave, was made to appear one of the higher arts, and testified in favor of those philosophers who define religion as the science of the worship of the gods."

[124] *Aemilius Paulus* 6.8-10. …*τῶν ἱερῶν ἐπιμελούμενος καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἀσκῶν τὴν μὲν ἐπιχώριον παιδείαν καὶ πάτριον ὥσπερ αὐτὸς ἤσκητο, τὴν δ' Ἑλληνικὴν φιλοτιμότερον. οὐ γὰρ μόνον γραμματικοὶ καὶ σοφισταὶ καὶ ῥήτορες, ἀλλὰ καὶ πλάσται καὶ ζωγράφοι καὶ πώλων καὶ σκυλάκων ἐπιστάται καὶ διδάσκαλοι θήρας Ἕλληνες ἦσαν περὶ τοὺς νεανίσκους. ὁ δὲ πατήρ, εἰ μή τι δημόσιον ἐμποδὼν εἴη, παρῆν ἀεὶ μελετῶσι καὶ γυμναζομένοις, φιλοτεκνότατος Ῥωμαίων γενόμενος.* "…giving his attention to his duties as augur, and training his sons, not only in the native and ancestral discipline in which he himself had been trained, but also, and with greater ardour, in that of the Greeks. For not only the grammarians and philosophers and rhetoricians, but also the modellers and painters, the overseers of horses and dogs, and the teachers of the art of hunting, by whom the young men were surrounded, were Greeks. And the father, unless some public business prevented, would always be present at their studies and exercises, for he was now become the fondest parent in Rome."

philosophical religiosity. Aemilius can understand the Roman religious practices precisely because he has knowledge of the Greek philosophers. Finally, Plutarch presents Aemilius as a Roman steeped in Greek *paideia*, hinting at the shared pool of *paideia* that exists between the Greeks and Romans. D.A. Russell notes that Plutarch presents Greek *paideia* as the force that curbs the barbaric practices the Romans tended to exhibit.[125] Plutarch indicates the formative quality of Greek philosophy in the development of Roman morality. Ultimately, Plutarch extracts the Greek elements from the Roman, showing once again the primacy of Greek philosophy over other systems. This Greek philosophical primacy, as we shall see, is an important aspect in the *On Isis and Osiris*, where Plutarch presents a similar argument about a culture even more foreign than the Romans.

In his writings, Plutarch is a clear champion of Greek culture as a universal guide to ethics, morality, and religion. Plutarch asserts that Greek philosophy is the key to understanding virtue and attaining excellence, and Plutarch has Dion recognize Plato's ability to create virtuous rulers with Greek philosophy. Plutarch shows the influence of his times by drawing from the deep wellspring of Greek culture and history as a testament to his possession of *paideia.* The *Lives* and *Moralia* both display Plutarch's knowledge of Greek history and classical culture, knowledge that gives him added *gravitas* in the second century. Finally, there are clear religious connection in his texts that intimately tie philosophy and religion together. Plutarch even goes so far as to present philosophy as an intellectual pursuit of the divine. It is with this type of religious philosophy in mind that we turn our attention to Plutarch's *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris*.

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[125] Russell, *Plutarch*, 131.

## **III. *On Superstition (Peri Deisidaimonias)***

Plutarch's *On Superstition* is a vital piece of evidence in understanding the religious thought that underlay many of Plutarch's other works. In his discussion of religion in Plutarch, D.A. Russell declares the work to be a "key text" in establishing Plutarch's idea of proper religious behavior.[126] Russell asserts that for Plutarch piety is displayed through outward behaviors, and decency and self-control are important elements in the practice of religion.[127] Plutarch, as we will see, prescribes reason as an important element in his approach to religion in order to avoid the kind of behavior that he categorizes as superstitious. Logic helps stave off the indecency that comes hand in hand with superstition.

The tone of *On Superstition* has led to tenuous assertions concerning its date and its original dissemination. It seems that the work might come from an earlier part of Plutarch's career, with Gwyn Griffiths suggesting that the fiery rhetoric of the work indicates a product of youth.[128] F. C. Babbit also looks to the impassioned tone as evidence that the work was intended for oral performance.[129] While these assertions are unprovable and the work lacks anything internally that could date it, *On Superstition* does indeed seem to differ from some of the other works of Plutarch in the bombastic tone of the writer (or, perhaps, speaker). When compared to *On Isis and Osiris*,[130] for instance,

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[126] Russell, *Plutarch*, 79. Russell only spends roughly two pages discussing the *On Superstition*.
[127] Russell, *Plutarch*, 81.
[128] Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osidire*, 26. Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou, *Plutarch's Parallel Lives-Narrative Technique and Moral Judgement* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 170 suggests that one-sided and fiery rhetoric in the *Moralia* might actually be a rhetorical device that shocks the reader into raising questions about the text and reflecting on the philosophical issues at hand. Plutarch promotes a more active reading of the text in order for the reader to understand a character in the *Lives,* for instance, and not simply act as a judge (2-6).
[129] F. C. Babbit, *Plutarch's Moralia II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 452.
[130] A later section of this chapter will establish the *On Isis and Osiris* as a work produced by an elderly Plutarch

*On Superstition* does seem to lack some of the tolerance and sobriety that his Egyptian work exhibits. In fact, this work reads as something of a declamatory speech, and its relatively short length could also suggest a performed piece. The assumption of this chapter is that *On Superstition* dates from early in Plutarch's career.[131]

This early work essentially creates the foundation for Plutarch's later religious writing.[132] Establishing the main ideas of this treatise will help to inform interpretations of *On Isis and Osiris*. The very first section of this work sets out the general theme that atheism and superstition are two opposites on a wide spectrum of religiosity.

> Τῆς περὶ θεῶν ἀμαθίας καὶ ἀγνοίας εὐθὺς ἐξ ἀρχῆς δίχα ῥυείσης τὸ μὲν ὥσπερ ἐν χωρίοις σκληροῖς τοῖς ἀντιτύποις ἤθεσι τὴν ἀθεότητα, τὸ δ' ὥσπερ ἐν ὑγροῖς τοῖς ἁπαλοῖς τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν πεποίηκεν. ἅπασα μὲν οὖν κρίσις ψευδής, ἄλλως τε κἂν ᾖ περὶ ταῦτα, μοχθηρόν· ᾗ δὲ καὶ πάθος πρόσεστι, μοχθηρότατον. πᾶν γὰρ πάθος ἔοικε ἀπάτη φλεγμαίνουσα εἶναι· καὶ καθάπερ αἱ μετὰ τραύματος ἐκβολαὶ τῶν ἄρθρων, οὕτως αἱ μετὰ πάθους διαστροφαὶ τῆς ψυχῆς χαλεπώτεραι.[133]
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> Ignorance and blindness in regard to the gods divides itself at the very beginning into two streams, of which the one produces in hardened characters, as it were in stubborn soils, atheism, and the other in tender characters, as in moist soils, produces superstition. Every false judgment, and especially concerning these matters, is a mischievous thing; but where emotion also enters, it is most mischievous. For every emotion is likely to be a delusion that rankles; and just as dislocations of the joints accompanied by lacerations are hardest to deal with, so also

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[131] Frederick Brenk "'A Most Strange Doctrine.' Daimon in Plutarch," *The Classical Journal* 69 (1973), 1 takes the early date of *On Superstition* for granted.

[132] The same ideas come up again in the *On Isis and Osiris, On the Dephic E,* and *On the Face of the Moon*, just to name a few examples.

[133] *On Supersition* 164E-F. The text and translations for *On Superstition* from Babbit, *Plutarch's Moralia II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

> is it with derangements of the soul accompanied by emotion.[134]

The slippery slope that leads to superstition (*δεισιδαιμονίαν*) starts with blindness (*ἀγνοίας*) and ignorance (*ἀμαθίας*), which are the words that appropriately appear at the start of *On Superstition.* Plutarch brings the reader's attention to these purveyors of logical fallacies by introducing the text with these words. The rhetorical effect of beginning the work with blindness and ignorance poetically reflects the starting point of the vice of superstition. The most important word in the entire first section however is *δεσιδαιμονίαν*. The word translates simply as superstition, but its roots give it the meaning of fear of the gods, with the suggestion that the fear is excessive in some way. The *δαίμων* part of the root is particularly important because it helps to establish what kind of supernatural powers are at the heart of superstitious fear.

The entry for *δαίμων* in *Liddell and Scott* is fairly long and offers little help in understanding what Plutarch means when he uses the term. In the *On Superstition,* it seems that there might be some connection to evil sprits in a reference to child sacrifice in Carthage (171C).[135] But this evil spirit idea does not quite hold up in the context of Plutarch other works. In *On the Face in the Moon* (945B)*,* Plutarch seems to define a *δαίμων* as an entity that possesses both *nous* and *psyche*. Even in the *Lives, δαίμων* is still defined differently and is often equated with *τύχη*. [136] Frederick Brenk, in his thorough analysis of the word *δαίμων* in Plutarch, concludes that in the context of *On Superstition*,

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[134] All translations from *On Superstition* come from the Loeb edition of the *Moralia* translated by Frank Cole Babbitt first in 1928 and reprinted in 1968.
[135] This idea of human sacrifice in connection with evil spirits is picked up in *On the Decline of the Oracles* 417D.
[136] Brenk, "A Most Strange Doctrine," 10. *On the Fortune of the Romans* 319F, for example.

Plutarch likely uses the word to stand in for a general concept of divinity. Brenk suggests that in *On Superstition* (168C) Plutarch could be using *δαίμων* with the word *θεός* in hendiadys to refer to a greater divinity, although he undercuts this idea by saying scholars cannot be completely sure of the use of hendiadys in this case.[137]

While the argument for finding unity of the term *δαίμων* in Plutarch's corpus is complex, it seems that in the context of *On Superstition* Plutarch refers specifically to all things divine, and perhaps all matters that are out of mortal control. The work does not distinctly contrast terms like *θέος*, *δαίμων*, or even *τύχη*. Plutarch suggests that the superstitious man fears his lack of control over the world and he seeks to gain control through various superstitious activities. In a later section of the work, Plutarch even takes the time to discuss the role of fortune in human life. After a discussion of why the superstitious flee from and run to the gods in times of trouble, he reminds his reader "*κοινὸν ἀνθρώπων τὸ μὴ πάντα διευτυχεῖν... τὰ δ' ἀνυρώπινα πάθη καὶ πράγματα μέμικται συντυχίαις ἄλλοτ' ἄλλως ῥεούσαις*."[138] Plutarch emphasizes not specifically the fear of a god but the fear of fortune as some type of divine malignity, but he reminds his readers that the ebb and flow of fortune is natural and unrelated to divine fury. In a sense, the superstitious man fears fortune as a divine property as part of the agency of a *δαίμων*. This superstitious notion of fortune as an evil supports the idea of δαίμων as relating to all things that the superstitious deem uncontrollable.

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[137] Brenk, "A Most Strange Doctrine," 1-2. Brenk refers specifically to 168C in his article in which Plutarch tells his reader that the superstitious man fears the attacks of the gods and blows of the δαίμων. Brenk further distinguishes between divinity and *daimon*, which are used separately in Greek, the former referring to general divinity and the latter referring to a specific type of divine entity. Brenk also cites similar usage in Theophrastus.

[138] *On Superstition* 167F. "It is the common lot of mankind not to enjoy continual good fortune in all things... but human experiences and actions are linked with chance circumstances which move now in one course and now in another."

Plutarch cites emotion as a pivotal aspect that exacerbates and intensifies superstitious feelings, especially fear. In the introduction to this work,[139] Plutarch says that superstition stems from false judgment (*κρίσις ψευδής*) and that emotion (*πάθος*) will go on to create further turmoil in the soul (*διαστροφαὶ τῆς ψυχῆς χαλεπώτεραι*).[140] The distortion of the soul is the worst symptom that stems from superstition, so Plutarch seeks to reaffirm the importance of reason (*λόγος*) in religious matters in order to avoid this sickness of the mind. Plutarch points to the separation of logic and religion as a major problem. For the philosopher, superstition and religion cannot be considered the same because they are diametrically opposed in terms of logic and reason. The excessive behavior incited by emotion and false judgment place it far from what can be considered proper religious behavior.[141]

The example Plutarch uses is that of Nicias and the dangers of relying on superstition in important matters. Plutarch says that Nicias should have committed suicide rather than delay the Sicilian expedition because of an eclipse, a delay which led to a massive defeat and the deaths of many Athenians.[142] This seemingly religiously inspired fear is anything but religiously motivated. The emotion that stalled Nicas' expedition is a detriment to his reason, and plenty of passages in the work emphasize the importance of logical thought processes in religious matters. Plutarch claims fear and emotion hinder reasoned thought, and he discusses the power of fear (*φόβος*) to agitate the soul in this context.

> ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ κοινὸν ἔγκλημα παντὸς πάθους ἐστίν, ὅτι
> ταῖς πρακτικαῖς ὁρμαῖς ἐκβιαζόμενα κατεπείγει καὶ

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[139] 164E-F cited above.
[140] There is a beautiful word picture in this line of the soul trapped between words of turmoil.
[141] Titchener, "Is Plutarch's Nicias Devout," 279. This error is also pointed out in Plutarch's *Nicias*.
[142] *On Superstition* 169A.

> συντείνει τὸν λογισμὸν. μόνος δ᾽ ὁ φόβος, οὐχ ἧττον ὢν τόλμης ἐνδεὴς ἢ λογισμοῦ, ἄπρακτον ἔχει καὶ ἄπορον καὶ ἀμήχανον τὸ ἀλόγιστον.[143]
>
> But this general complaint may be made against every one of the emotions, that by their urgings to be up and doing they press hard upon the reasoning power and strain it. But fear alone, lacking no less in boldness than in power to reason, keeps its irrationality impotent, helpless, and hopeless.

Plutarch argues that every emotion puts due strain on logical reasoning, but fear alone (*μόνος δ᾽ ὁ φόβος*) goes even further in causing distress and acts as a motivator nearly as powerful as reasoning (*οὐχ ἧττον ὢν τόλμης ἐνδεὴς ἢ λογισμοῦ*).

The ideas of fear and superstition as products of false religion are picked up in an earlier section that discusses the difference between the atheist and the superstitious. They differ specifically in their approach to the gods. The atheist is beset with something akin to indifference while the superstitious man cares too much. What binds these two is the lack of reason in their conclusions about religion. Plutarch tells us:

> ἡ γὰρ ἄγνοια τῷ μὲν ἀπιστίαν τοῦ ὠφελοῦντος ἐμπεποίηκε, τῷ δὲ καὶ δόξαν ὅτι βλάπτει προστέθεικεν. ὅθεν ἡ μὲν ἀθεότης λόγος ἐστὶ διεψευσμένος, ἡ δὲ δεισιδαιμονία πάθος ἐκ λόγου ψευδοῦς ἐγγεγενημένον.[144]
>
> For in the one man ignorance engenders disbelief in the One who can help him, and on the other it bestows the added idea that He causes injury. Whence it follows that atheism is falsified reason, and superstition is an emotion engendered from false reason.

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[143] *On Superstition* 165C-D.
[144] *On Superstition* 165C.

The key to this passage is the last clause in which Plutarch points out that false reason (*λόγου ψευδοῦς*) amplified by emotion leads to superstition. He reiterates that emotion is a dangerous factor in religious thought because it disrupts the logical capacity of the soul and leads to harmful, false reasoning. The atheist is posed as making a simple mistake of indifference which ultimately will not cause injury. When logic is completely eclipsed by emotion, however, any false assumptions become particularly dangerous because they causes extreme reactions. Essentially, superstition is caring too much in the wrong way. This extreme stance is the reason why Plutarch suggests that atheism is not as dangerous as superstition. He returns to this point at the end of the treatise by commenting on the irreligiosity of both atheism and superstition by comparing a person who wants to escape from superstition in the manner of a person fleeing from wild animals or robbers. Plutarch remarks thusly in considering the people trying to blindly escape superstition: "*οὕτω γὰρ ἔνιοι φεύγοντες τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν ἐμπίπτουσιν εἰς ἀθεότητα τραχεῖαν καὶ ἀντίτυπον, ὑπερπηδήσαντες ἐν μέσῳ κειμένην τὴν εὐσέβειαν*."[145] By not adhering to logic, one leaps over (*ὑπερπηδήσαντες*) the true religiosity that is somewhere between atheism and superstition. Reason ultimately is the key to proper religious function, and this idea forms the cornerstone of Plutarch's religious thought.

Plutarch also comments frequently in *On Superstition* about how a superstitious man tries to escape the gods' wrath. He mentions conjurers,[146] old crones,[147] magic spells, and purifications.[148] Although illogical practices are still to blame for stooping to these magical remedies, other attitudes concerning superstition were prominent during the

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[145] *On Superstition* 171F. "For thus it is that some persons, in trying to escape superstition, rush into a rough and hardened atheism, thus overleaping true religion which lies between."
[146] *On Superstition* 166A. the word used is γοητής.
[147] *On Superstition* 168D. Here he uses the word γραῦζ.
[148] *On Superstition* 171B.

empire and suggest the label of "superstition" was meant to marginalize popular religious forms. In his analysis of religion during the empire, Richard Gordon draws attention to elite attempts to maintain control over religious practice. He argues that religion broke down into the official religion, which the elites controlled, and the popular religion of the masses. Popular religion in this context is conceived of as old wives' tales and the practices of country bumpkins. Gordon asserts that a claim of superstition as a product of ignorance allows elites to diminish popular religious ideas and promote elite authority over religion.[149] The earliest works on superstition act in a polemical way that devalues popular religion in the way that Gordon describes.[150] Hugh Bowden describes Plutarch's *On Superstition* as attacking the religious norms of the times in a less than subtle way.[151] Plutarch's ideas stem from Plato,[152] although Plato never uses the word superstition in his surviving corpus.[153] Plutarch's diatribe against superstition can be interpreted as devaluing popular religious practices, of which mystery cults are arguably a part. Plutarch, however, says that the mysteries should be considered pleasurable things.[154] Philosophy is meant to trump popular ideas about religion in this sense, and Plutarch suggests that the mysteries (*μυήσεις*) are only properly understood within a philosophical framework. The integral link Plutarch creates between religion and philosophy suggests

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[149] Richard Gordon, "The Veil of Power: emperors, sacrificers, and benefactors," in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World,* eds. Mary Beard and John North (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990), 237-238.
[150] Hugh Bowden, "Before Superstition and After: Theophrastus and Plutarch on Deisidaimonia," *Past and Present* (2008) 56. Bowden says the earliest works on superstition were written by Hellenistic and Roman authors.
[151] Bowden,"Before Superstition," 64.
[152] Bowden "Before Superstition," 64-65. Most influential for Plutarch is Plato's discussion in the *Laws* 885b4-9 in which Plato discusses the possible harm of atheism and the Timeas 40a2-4 and 40d6-41a3 in which Plato establishes the gods as essentially wise, benevolent, and good.
[153] Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard Universtiy Press, 2004), 51. For a complete discussion of Plato's influence on the ideas of superstition see pages 51-78.
[154] *On Superstition* 169D.

an attempt by Plutarch to elevate popular religious practice to an intellectual level. Instead of marginalizing popular religious beliefs, he elevates them with his philosophical analysis. The mysteries are meant to be pleasurable because of their innate philosophical value. If Plutarch marginalizes anything, it the ignorant mindset with which a common person approaches cults.

Plutarch's *On Superstition* is a crucial work in establishing Plutarch's religious ideology most importantly because it suggests the connection between reason, philosophy, and religious practice. Emotions such as fear can cause a warping of logical faculties which in turn causes an individual to ignore true religious practice in favor of something else. This privileging of reason in philosophy is an important element in *On Isis and Osiris*, in which Plutarch takes a philosophical approach to the Egyptian cults. The idea of knowledge and reason factors heavily into interpretation of cult, and Plutarch uses this allegorical and philosophical reading as an exercise in his reasoned interpretation of religious practices. Mystery cults, as Plutarch shows us, can only be appreciated with philosophical know-how and logical analysis. Plutarch indicates that an introspective mindset, bolstered by philosophical education, is necessary when participating in mystery initiations and any religious ritual. His discussion of the cult of Isis reinforeces the ideas Plutarch presents in *On Superstition*, and the philosophical exegesis of the Isiac material bolsters Plutarch's already impressive philosophical credentials.

## IV. *On Isis and Osiris (Peri Isidos kai Osiridos)*

*On Isis and Osiris* is a treatise likely written during Plutarch's old age. Griffiths dates the work to near the end of Plutarch's life and argues for a date either a year or two before 120 AD. Due to Plutarch's advanced age, the work was likely composed mostly in Chaeronea and Delphi.[155]

*On Isis and Osiris*, as the name would suggest, focuses on the myths concerning the two chief deities of the Egyptian pantheon. Plutarch, addressing a priestess of Delphi named Clea,[156] gives special attention to the dismemberment of Osiris and to Isis' own journey in recovering the body parts of her brother-husband. The analysis goes further into the specific attributes of each deity, explaining in great detail the folklore that describes Isis and Osiris. Plutarch's main view of these deities always remains philosophical, and he attempts to explain allegorically the myths of Isis and Osiris using a Platonic framework. Allegory is particularly useful in this endeavor, but Plutarch warns his reader against looking too shallowly at the material. Plutarch asserts that one should beware of any explanation that either looks at myth as a factual account of things that happened or that sees Isis and Osiris as simply symbols of the yearly flooding of the Nile.[157] Plutarch in this treatise acts as a philosophical guide for his reader. As the text shows, Plutarch's goal in discussing Isis and Osiris is to explain correctly the Platonic underpinnings that inform the myth, elements that only the philosophically initiated truly understand.

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[155] Griffiths *Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris*, 17.
[156] Griffiths *Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris,* 254. Griffiths argues that in addition to Clea being an initiate of the mystery cult of Dionysus, as the text relates, she is likely also an initiate of Isis due to her familiarity with the cult.
[157] *On Isis and Osiris* 374E. What Plutarch means here specifically is that it is wrong to interpret mythological figures as formally historical mortal figures who have become gods through a historical process. For example, Plutarch would likely disapprove of Praetextatus' description of Saturn in the first book of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*.

The work's focus on the Egyptian cults is a unique way for Plutarch to apply Platonic philosophy to religious matters. This is not the only work in which Plutarch attempts to analyze mystery cults, and Geert Roksam describes other instances in which Plutarch mentions mystery cults in his writing. Essentially, Plutarch links philosophy and the mysteries as two sides of the same coin, with personal choice and some initiation rituals being shared in common.[158] Additionally, mystery cults lend themselves well to philosophical exegesis. In a surviving fragment of *On the Festival of the Images at Plataea*,[159] Plutarch discusses how primordial truths are buried in mystery initiations. One needs philosophical knowledge to distill this truth from the religious material.[160] Because mystery cults are embedded with philosophical truth, they offer a unique philosophical challenge to Plutarch. By extracting the truth from the cult, he displays his philosophical prowess. Plutarch promotes reason and logic in *On Isis and Osiris* as the correct tools for properly dissecting mystery cults. His religious knowledge supports his status as a philosopher, and Plutarch's choice of the cults of Isis and Osiris helps to show off his intellectual credentials.

The Roman imperial period showed an increased interest in Egyptian culture and religion in Rome. Specifically, under the Flavians and Antonines the cults of Isis and Osiris are given particular attention by the ruling families. Vespasian's rule is tied heavily into Egypt. Vespasian was declared emperor while he was in Alexandria, and he cited an abnormally intense flooding of the Nile as Sarapis assenting to the new imperial

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[158] Roksom, "'A Great Silence Filled the Temple,'" 222-223.
[159] Fragment Sandbach 157.1.
[160] Peter Van Nuffelen, "Words of Truth: Mystical Silence as A Philosophical and Rhetorical Tool in Plutarch," *Hermathena* 182 (2007), 18-21.

regime.[161] Isis also saw imperial favor under the Flavians through the rebuilding of the Iseum Campense and a general promotion of Roman interest in Egypt.[162] This glorification of the Egyptian deities under the Flavians would likely have caught the attention of a young Plutarch, who visited Alexandria in his younger years, possibly even in 70 AD while Vespasian was ruling the empire from Alexandria.[163]

The Flavians' renewal of all things Egyptian carried over to the Antonine emperors as well. Trajan showed a particular interest in Egypt as evidenced by the Kiosk of Trajan on the island of Agillicia. Here Trajan commissioned art that included his cartouche and scenes of the emperor making offerings to the gods.[164] Trajan also commissioned various building projects related to Isis and Osiris in Luxor, Myos, Hormos, and Philai.[165] Brenk argues that this building program is part of a larger trend exhibited by the Roman emperors, with Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Trajan, and Hadrian all either having themselves depicted in or adding buildings to a complex in Philai, located in Upper Egypt south of Aswan. Brenk goes so far as to suggest that Trajan's interest in Egypt may have turned Plutarch's attention to Isis and Osiris.[166] Although this theory is a possibility, there were surely many reasons Plutarch set his sights on Egyptian myth. His teacher's Egyptian roots as well as the increasing popularity of Isis and Osiris that took place in the late first and early second century, in addition to the philosophical richness of the mysteries, were all likely contributing factors to Plutarch's Egyptian focus.

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[161] Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers*, 195. Stadter goes on to suggest that *On Isis and Osiris* 361F-362A's reference to a dream of Ptolemy Stoter is a reference to Vespasian's own vision of Sarapis.
[162] Frederick Brenk, "In the Image, Reflection and Reason of Osiris: Plutarch and the Egyptian Cults," *Estudios Sobre Plutarco Misticismo y Religiones Mistericas en la Orba de Plutarco*, eds. Aurelio Perez Jimenez, and Francesco Bordoy (Madrid: Ediciones Clasicas, 2001), 79-80.
[163] Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers*, 194.
[164] Brenk, "In the Image," 75. Brenk also mention similar depictions of Trajan at the temple of Hathor at Dendera.
[165] Brenk, "In the Image," 75.
[166] Brenk, "In the Image," 84.

Plutarch's description of the cult of Isis and Osiris also shows a shift back to ideas that were prevalent in the Hellenistic period. While Isis had become the main focus of the cult for a few centuries, Plutarch focuses on Osiris for most of the treatise instead of Isis. This favoring of Osiris shows a resurgence of a Hellenistic preference for Osiris over Isis, suggesting that Plutarch draws from Hellenistic sources for this work.[167]

This focus on Hellenistic material has an additional effect of the conception of Isis in the imperial period.[168] Griffiths asserts that in the Hellenistic period "Isis is a queen-mother who is identified with most of the forces of nature and equated, at the same time, as 'she of many names,' with a large number of other deities in various places and countries."[169] Griffiths goes on to say that the multi-faceted nature of Isis bleeds into the Roman period, and Apuleius portrays Isis in this way at the end of his novel the *Golden Ass*. Plutarch picks up this idea of Isis and incorporates it into his own work, always sure to remind the reader of the philosophical and cultural implications of this multi-faceted nature of Isis.

Plutarch's main focus in this work is always philosophical, although he tries to act reverently in regard to the religious material he is describing. For this reason, Plutarch takes the middle road between myth and philosophy, which, as we have seen, is the moderate stance expounded in *On Superstition*. Myth and philosophy are here blended as complementary ways in reaching a greater truth and instilling virtue.[170] Myth becomes an important teaching tool, and it additionally allows the inquisitive to explore the depths of

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[167] Brenk, "Religion under Trajan: Plutarch's Resurrection of Osiris," in *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Tome of Trajan (98-117 AD),* eds. Philip A. Stadter and Luc Van der Stockt (Leuven: University of Leuven Press, 2002), 81.
[168] Griffiths, *Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris*, 42.
[169] Griffiths, *Plutarch's Isis and Osiris*, 42.
[170] Plutarch's approach to myth as a teaching tool echoes what he says in *On How to Teach Poetry*. Myth is still dangerous to the pliable mind, but a good teacher will sift out the bad and develop the mind of the student with the good material hidden in the stories.

the human soul.[171] But the only person who can successfully understand the myths and convey this meaning to his students is the teacher/philosopher, and Plutarch is here to act as a guide through the bramble patch that is mythological allegory.

In the context of the present study, the appeal of *On Isis and Osiris* is the attention Plutarch pays to mystery cults and initiations and the connection that he claims exists between these cults and philosophical truth. Plutarch hints at his own experience in such cults and seems to expound the philosophical merits of participating in the mysteries. In the dialogue *On the Disappearance of the Oracles* Plutarch delivers similar sentiments, hinting at a wealth of personal experience concerning the mysteries on Plutarch's part. If he really believes his own idea about the philosophical nature of mystery initiation, as Lamberton observes, it is likely that Plutarch was initiated into several cults.[172] Roksam, in his own discussion of Plutarch's works dealing with the mysteries, waxes poetic, although not incorrectly, when he says, "the true adept of the mysteries cannot but be a philosopher, and initiation into the mysteries...will in the end always be initiation into the great mysteries of philosophy."[173] Roksam distills this thought directly from Plutarch and highlights an important aspect of the last few sections of *On Isis and Osiris.*

*On Isis and Osiris* establishes the mystery rituals of Isis and Osiris as, ideally, philosophical exercise. Plutarch early on emphasizes the importance of logic and rationality in pursuing the cult of Isis.

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[171] Bernard Boulet, "Why Does Plutarch's Apollo Have Many Faces," in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives,' Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia,'* ed.Anastasios G. Nikolaidis (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 168-9.

[172] Lamberton, *Plutarch*, 55. A reference in his consolation to his wife about the death of their child (*Moralia* 611D) alludes to membership in the mystery cult of Dionysus. It is likely that he was initiated into quite of few of these cults, and his familiarity with the Isis cult hints at his status as an initiate, but this he never directly states this.

[173] Roksam, "A Great Silence," 230.

> οὔτε γὰρ φιλοσόφους πωγωνοτροφίαι, ὦ Κλέα, καὶ τριβωνοφορίαι ποιοῦσιν, οὔτ᾽ Ἰσιακοὺς αἱ λινοστολίαι καὶ ξυρήσεις· ἀλλ᾽ Ἰσιακός ἐστιν ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁ τὰ δεικνύμενα καὶ δρώμενα περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς τούτους, ὅταν νόμῳ παραλάβῃ, λόγῳ ζητῶν καὶ φιλοσοφῶν περὶ τῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀληθείας.[174]
>
> For it is not the cultivation of a beard, Clea, and the wearing of the threadbare cloak that make a philosopher, nor does dressing in linen and all manner of shaving make an Isiac devotee; the true devotee of Isis is he who, whenever he hears the traditional view of what is displayed and done with regard to these gods, examines and investigates rationally what truth may be in it.[175]

This introductory section sets the tone for the allegorical interpretation that is to follow. Plutarch reminds his addressee Clea that wearing linen robes does not mark someone as a true initiate of Isis.[176] The physical evidence of cult participation is but a surface level marker of belonging. A devotee who approaches religion properly will look at the myth and the rites rationally and investigate the truth contained in the rites. Ideally, they will seek the greater philosophical truth as they participate and reflect on the rituals.[177] Cult participation actually relies on much more than following the guidelines of preset rituals, and Plutarch encourages the initiate to look for the meaning behind the actions and symbols. Plutarch is willing to discount all initiates of Isis who merely wear linen robes

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[174] *On Isis and Osiris* 352C.

[175] Translations of *On Isis and Osiris* come from Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside*. The Greek text is taken from Frank Cole Babbit, *Moralia, Volume V: Isis and Osiris. The E at Delphi. The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse The Obsolescence of Oracles* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

[176] Roksam, "Plutarch's Yearning," 217. Clea is also the dedicatee of *The Bravery of Women* and mentioned in the introduction to *On the Sayings of Kings.* Roksam claims she as a priestess who is willing to deepen her understanding of the divine is the ideal reader of this text about Isis and Osiris.

[177] Van Nuffelen, "Words of Truth," 23 argues that the mysteries offer a purer reflection of truth, but philosophical reflection is essential in approaching these philosophical elements. Complimenting this description of the truth in the initiates tokens, Van Nuffelen points to *On Isis and Osiris* 364E as Plutarch suggesting that mysteries will always present an essential divine truth no matter what the geographic and cultural origin.

without further examining what the initiation actually says about greater philosophical questions.[178] Mystery initiation ought to be a philosophical exercise, and Plutarch describes philosophical enlightenment in terms that recall the type of truth one is meant to grasp in mystery initiations.

Plutarch emphasizes the close connection between philosophy and mystery cults by describing philosophical epiphany in the language of religious enlightenment.

> ἐν χρήσει γὰρ τὰ αἰσθητὰ καὶ πρόχειρα ὄντα πολλὰς ἀναπτύξεις καὶ θέας αὐτῶν ἄλλοτ᾽ ἄλλως ἀμειβομένων δίδωσιν. ἡ δὲ τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ εἰλικρινοῦς καὶ ἁπλοῦ νόησις ὥσπερ ἀστραπὴ διαλάμψασα τῆς ψυχῆς ἅπαξ ποτὲ θιγεῖν καὶ προσιδεῖν παρέσχε. διὸ καὶ Πλάτων καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης ἐποπτικὸν τοῦτο τὸ μέρος τῆς φιλοσοφίας καλοῦσιν, ὡς οἱ τὰ δοξαστὰ καὶ μεικτὰ καὶ παντοδαπὰ ταῦτα παραμειψάμενοι τῷ λόγῳ, πρὸς τὸ πρῶτον ἐκεῖνο καὶ ἁπλοῦν καὶ ἄυλον ἐξάλλονται, Eκαὶ θιγόντες ἁμωσγέπως τῆς περὶ αὐτὸ καθαρᾶς ἀληθείας οἷον ἐντελῆ τέλος ἔχειν φιλοσοφίαν νομίζουσι.[179]
>
> For the things which are perceptible and near at hand are in use and afford many revelations and glimpses of themselves as they are variously interchanged at various times. But the understanding of what is spiritually intelligible and pure and holy, having shone through the soul like lightening, affords only one chance to touch and behold it. For this reason both Plato and Aristotle call this branch of philosophy that concerned with the highest mysteries, in those who have passed beyond conjectural, confused and widely varied matter spring up by force of reason to that primal, simple an immaterial element; and having directly grasped the ultimate end of philosophy in the manner of a mystic revelation.

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[178] A later example of this absent-minded devotee is the foolish Lucius from the last book of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. His story, and the implications of his actions, are addressed in the next chapter.

[179] *On Isis and Osiris* 382 D-E.

Plutarch argues for a disconnect between the physical objects displayed in mystery rituals and the loftier concepts these objects represent.[180] If all religious symbols hint at an unchanging truth, then the symbols themselves are actually unimportant. The intangible truth is much more important than the physical religious symbols which can change depending on cult, location, time, and many other reasons. The goal is to recognize the truth that is represented by the symbol. By realizing philosophical truth, the soul is touched in a way reminiscent of the mystery initiations. It is this close connection between philosophy and mystery cult that is integral to this study's reading of the text. Plutarch has established that ideal religious practice is philosophically grounded, and initiation into cult is akin to philosophical study. But the connection does not end there. In the context of *On Isis and Osiris,* Plutarch links the Egyptian deities with specifically Greek (and Platonic) philosophical ideas.

In addressing the philosophical nature of the Isis cult, Plutarch establishes Isis and Osiris as deities not particularly foreign despite their exotic Egyptian façade. Plutarch, perhaps surprisingly, goes to great length to reassure his reader that Isis and Osiris are Greek at their core, and their Egyptian trappings only cover up what was originally a Greek conception. The use of allegory in this text is an important way of translating the Egyptian material into Greek. Plutarch adapts material that has a foreign ring into terms that are familiar to an audience educated in Greek *paideia.* Establishing the Greek nature of Isis has two important implications. First, by framing Isis and Osiris in a Greek context, Plutarch is able to talk about the two using a Greek philosophical vocabulary. The now Greek material no longer requires Egyptian context in order to understand the

[180] The idea of giving a concept preference over physical objects has an unsurprising Platonic resonance to it. From this passage, Plutarch suggests the need for Platonic theory and concepts in approaching religion. This is the basic gist of the entire *On Isis and Osiris.*

nature of Isis and Osiris.[181] Second, and perhaps more importantly, Plutarch has established the primacy of Greek culture over Egyptian. The Greek origin of Isis and Osiris, explored below, goes to prove that Greek concepts predate Egyptian ones. This gives Greek culture a privileged position as a cipher for getting to the core of Egyptian theology. This tendency toward the glorification of Greece is part and parcel with general patterns of the Second Sophistic.

The hellenization of the Egyptian deities is done most simply with an etymological exercise. Plutarch is able to connect the names of Isis and Osiris to Greek words, thus revealing their Greek roots.

> Διὸ θειότητος ὄρεξίς ἐστιν ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας μάλιστα δὲ τῆς περὶ θεῶν ἔφεσις, ὥσπερ ἀνάληψιν ἱερῶν τὴν μάθησιν ἔχουσα καὶ τὴν ζήτησιν, ἁγνείας τε πάσης καὶ νεωκορίας ἔργον ὁσιώτερον, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ τῇ θεῷ ταύτῃ κεχαρισμένον, ἣν σὺ θεραπεύεις ἐξαιρέτως σοφὴν καὶ φιλόσοφον οὖσαν, ὡς τοὔνομά γε φράζειν ἔοικε, παντὸς μᾶλλον αὐτῇ τὸ εἰδέναι καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμην προσήκουσαν. Ἑλληνικὸν γὰρ ἡ Ἶσίς ἐστι καὶ ὁ Τυφών…[182]
>
> For this reason the longing for truth, particularly for truth about the gods, is a yearning for divinity, since it involves in its training and intellectual pursuit an acquirement of sacred lore which constitutes a holier task than all ceremonial purification and temple service, a task which is supremely welcome to this goddess whom you worship as one who is exceptionally wise and devoted to wisdom. Her name certainly seems to imply that to her more than anyone else belong knowledge and understanding. For Isis is a Greek name; so is Typhon…

[181] Russell, *Plutarch,* 83; Griffiths, *Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris*, 32.
[182] *On Isis and Osiris* 351 E-F.

This passage does double duty by creating Greek roots for Isis and the Egyptian god Seth, whom Plutarch here equates with the monster Typhon. The two entities are opposing forces, one standing for knowledge and a preserver of sacred lore and the other a destructive and ignorant force. Already we see Plutarch placing us back into a Greek context, making his reader comfortable with what is shown to be familiar ground for one possessing Greek *paideia.* The philosophical foreshadowing of the rest of the work is strong, establishing early the idea of Isis as knowledge seeking out and reuniting with Osiris, philosophical truth, whom Typhon destroyed. Plutarch at this point only hints at the Greek roots of Isis' name, but there is a possible connection to the Greek *οἶδα*,[183] an appropriate etymology for the name of a deity known as a knower of things and a seeker of truth.[184]

Later in the work, Plutarch returns to the discussion of Isis' name, and goes into more detail by connecting her to ideas of movement and knowledge. This all works in reference in her journey in finding Osiris' dismembered body parts.

> Καθόλου δ᾽ ἀμείνων οὗτός ἐστιν, ὥσπερ καὶ Πλάτων ὑπονοεῖ καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης. κινεῖται δὲ τῆς φύσεως τὸ μὲν γόνιμον καὶ σωτήριον ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸ εἶναι, τὸ δ᾽ ἀναιρετικὸν καὶ φθαρτικὸν ἀπ᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὸ μὴ εἶναι. διὸ τὸ μὲν Ἶσιν καλοῦσι παρὰ τὸ ἵεσθαι μετ᾽ ἐπιστήμης καὶ φέρεσθαι, κίνησιν οὖσαν ἔμψυχον καὶ φρόνιμον. οὐ γάρ ἐστι τοὔνομα βαρβαρικόν, ἀλλ᾽ ὥσπερ τοῖς θεοῖς πᾶσιν ἀπὸ δυοῖν ῥημάτων τοῦ θεατοῦ καὶ τοῦ θέοντος ἔστιν ὄνομα κοινόν, οὕτω τὴν θεὸν ταύτην ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπιστήμης ἅμα καὶ τῆς κινήσεως Ἶσιν μὲν ἡμεῖς, Ἶσιν δ᾽ Αἰγύπτιοι καλοῦσιν.[185]

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[183] Griffiths, *Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris*, 258.
[184] Lamberton, *Plutarch,* 86.
[185] *On Isis and Osiris* 375 C-D.

> In general this god (Osiris) is the better, as both Plato and Aristotle conjecture. The fertilizing and saving aspect of nature inclines towards him and towards being, while the annihilating and destructive aspect inclines away from him and toward the negation of being. For this reason do they name Isis thus, from *iesthai*, 'to hasten' with understanding (*epistemes*) and 'to move' (*pheresthai*), since she is soulful and intelligent movement. For the name is not un-Greek, but just as all the gods (*theoi*) derive their names from 'what is seen' (*theon*), so this goddess, because of her understanding (*episteme*) and movement (*kinesis*), is called Isis by us, and Isis by the Egyptians.

This particularly lengthy section uses Greek etymology to blend the religious with the philosophical. First, Plutarch reminds his reader of the Greek roots of Isis through an extensive etymological argument. He justifies his reading of Isis' name through parallel uses of etymological explanations of other terms in a philosophical context. The derivation of the name Isis from Greek words "understanding" (*ἐπιστήμης*) and "hastening" (*κινήσεως*) make sense because the idea of movement is associated with the intellect which Isis ultimately represents. To help prove his point, Plutarch invokes the name of an undeniably powerful source: Plato.[186] Plato had made similar statements about the moving nature of the intellect in connection with the divine,[187] and these older etymological exercises help to justify what Plutarch is specifically doing here with his own discussion of Isis. Essentially words with negative connotations are those which

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[186] Griffiths, *Plutarch's On Isis*, 515-516. Griffths says that the parallel etymological exercise that Plutarch is attributing to Plato occurs in the *Cratylus* 401C. Although Griffiths asserts that these derivations seem "foolish to us" there seems to be no sense of ridicule of the source material.

[187] Griffiths, *Plutarch's On Isis*, 516 cites Plato's *Cratylus* as a point of comparison. In 397D, Plato connects the word *theos* with *thein* to reflect on the movement of the heavenly bodies which constitute the earliest divinities. In section 401C, Plato's Socrates plays an etymological game similar to Plutarch's in which he is able to find discernable meaning in even foreign names.

concern binding of movement.[188] Isis' hastening toward the god Osiris is desirable in the same way as the intellect's hastening toward truth, as Plutarch describes.

Osiris also gets the Greek treatment, and Plutarch argues that his name is from clearly perceivable Greek roots.

> καὶ τί δεῖ πολλὰ τοιαῦτα συνάγειν; εἰσὶ γὰρ οἱ τὸν Ὄσιριν ἄντικρυς ἥλιον εἶναι καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι σείριον ὑφ' Ἑλλήνων λέγοντες, εἰ καὶ παρ' Αἰγυπτίοις ἡ πρόσθεσις τοῦ ἄρθρου τοὔνομα πεποίηκεν ἀμφιγνοεῖσθαι...[189]
>
> For there are those who say bluntly that Osiris is the sun and that he is called Serios by the Greeks, even if among the Egyptians the prefixing article has caused the name to be obscured (O-Serios=Osiris)…

Plutarch claims Osiris' name is derived from the Greek σείριος, an epithet that is connected with the sun, though, as Griffiths asserts, in other sections of the work Plutarch points out the connection between this epithet and the dog-star Sirius. [190] The definite article *ὁ* is mistakenly combined with *σείριος* in order to create *Ὄσιρις*. Further establishing Osiris' solar characteristics is important for Plutarch's philosophic argument about the Platonic nature of the Egyptian myth, as we will see.

Interestingly Plutarch gives Osiris a slightly different etymology later in the work.

> Ὁ δ' Ὄσιρις ἐκ τοῦ ὁσίου καὶ ἱεροῦ τοὔνομα μεμειγμένον ἔσχηκε· κοινὸς γάρ ἐστι τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου λόγος· ὧν τὰ μὲν ἱερὰ τὰ δ' ὅσια τοῖς παλαιοῖς ἔθος ἦν προσαγορεύειν.[191]

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[188] Plutarch give a list of these words and discusses them at the end of *On Isis and Osiris* 375 D.
[189] *On Isis and Osiris* 372D.
[190] Griffith, *Plutarch's On Isis*, 500.
[191] *On Isis and Osiris* 375E.

> The name of Osiris is compounded of the words *hosios* (holy) and *heiros* (sacred); for he is an idea common to the things in heaven and in Hades of which the former used to be called sacred by the ancients and the latter holy.

Here, Plutarch asserts that Osiris' name is a combination of holy (*ὁσίου*) and sacred (*ἱεροῦ*), which furthers Osiris' connection as a deity associated with the heavenly realm, his association with the sun, and his connection with death. Plutarch explicitly asserts the Greek nature of Osiris beyond just the etymology of his name. In fact, he sees Osiris as a particularly Greek deity while Sarapis, a Hellenistic creation, is more Egyptian in nature.[192] Despite the apparent differences in origin, both deities are aspects of the same divinity, which, as Plutarch describes, has a Platonic essence. The emphasis, however, always returns to the solar imagery, downplaying the ideas of death.[193]

The Greek origin of Isis and Osiris, once established, allows for a discussion of the deities in Greek philosophical terms. Plutarch describes each as an element of Platonic theory that prizes the examination of the forms as the ultimate goal of the contemplative life. The journey of Isis in the myth is representative of the intellect, which is considered divine in nature, constantly seeking and striving toward philosophical truth. Osiris, then, is the truth that the philosopher must seek. Osiris' solar connections link him with the sun which is meant to be a visible representation of an ultimate god/Good.[194] Plutarch's allegorical reading of the myth of Isis and Osiris conveys the Platonic underpinnings of Egyptian religion and reinforces the Greekness of the two deities.

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[192] *On Isis and Osiris* 376A.
[193] Brenk, "In the Image," 85.
[194] Brenk, "In the Image," 85.

Plutarch's discussion of the cult is predicated on two important assumptions, both supported by Plutarch's own arguments, of course. First, as demonstrated above, Isis and Osiris are both fundamentally Greek, as has been analyzed thus far. Second, the cults of Isis and Osiris are intelligible only to the philosophically minded, who ideally approaches the religion in an educated and reasoned way. That is, the ideas introduced in *On Superstition* inform Plutarch's description of the cult of Isis and Osiris. The introductory section (352C) of the work programmatically establishes Plutarch's position as an authority on the cult. By reminding Clea that not all people with shaved heads and linen robes are initiates of Isis, Plutarch suggests the markers of a true initiate go beyond physical trappings. Of course, philosophical instruction assumes a pivotal role in an examination of the mysteries.

The language Plutarch uses in *On Isis and Osiris* clearly connects mystery initiations with philosophical inquiry in the same way as the language of *On Superstition* connected philosophy and religion. He describes the ultimate end of philosophy as something similar to initiation into a mystery cult. In a passage previously discussed (382 D-E), Plutarch describes the ends of philosophy in language that recalls mystery initiation. The connection between religious and mystery epiphany shows the necessity of philosophical engagement in mystery initiations. Plutarch asserts that Plato and Aristotle highly esteem philosophy that seeks pure truth (*ἀληθῶς*), and Plato himself uses similar mystery language in a philosophical context.[195] The last line of the passage closely links an epiphany of philosophical truth through the phrasing *τέλος...φιλοσοφίας*. The word *τέλος*

[195] Plato uses similar mystery language in the *Symposium* 210A. In this context, Plato is specifically referring to love.

is closely associated with mystery initiation,[196] and Plutarch's language further suggests a close association with philosophy and cult.

Plutarch tells his reader that philosophy is essential to understanding what is truly happening in the ritual.

> Διὸ δεῖ μάλιστα πρὸς ταῦτα λόγον ἐκ φιλοσοφίας μυσταγωγὸν ἀναλαβόντας ὁσίως διανοεῖσθαι τῶν λεγομένων καὶ δρωμένων ἕκαστον, ἵνα μή, καθάπερ Θεόδωρος εἶπε τοὺς λόγους αὐτοῦ τῇ δεξιᾷ προτείνοντος ἐνίους τῇ ἀριστερᾷ δέχεσθαι τῶν ἀκροωμένων, οὕτως ἡμεῖς ἃ καλῶς οἱ νόμοι περὶ τὰς θυσίας καὶ τὰς ἑορτὰς ἔταξαν ἑτέρως ὑπολαμβάνοντες ἐξαμάρτωμεν.[197]
>
> Therefore in these matters above all we should take as a guide into the mysteries the understanding which philosophy gives, and reflect devoutly on everything said and enacted. Theodorus said that when he proffered his teachings with the right hand, some of his hearers received them with the left. Let us not make the similar mistake of putting a different construction on what established custom has rightly ordered concerning sacrifice and festivals.

The initiate is meant to reflect on the ritual. Walter Burkert says that some initiates would take the initiations seriously while others would not,[198] but Plutarch clearly emphasizes the need to give considerable attention to the ritual. Reflection on words and action is the key to understanding religious practice. Plutarch advocates going beyond the emotional response of the initiation ritual to engaging one's logical faculties in analyzing the

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[196] Bremer, *Initiation into the Mysteries*, viii says the *telete* was a word used to denote a mystery initiation. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 11 defines the word *telos* as the consummation of cultic initiation.
[197] *On Isis and Osiris* 378 B.
[198] Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 11.

particulars of a mystery initiation.[199] Philosophy must act as the guide to initiation just as Plutarch has assumed the role of philosophical guide to the meaning of Isis and Osiris.

Plutarch's purpose for analyzing the cult of Isis and Osiris in this way was surely motivated by many factors, and the desire to educate his audience, as demonstrated earlier with the *Aemilius Paulus,* stood at the heart of the matter. In addition, Plutarch clearly projects much about himself by selecting Isis and Osiris as his subjects. First, he announces his Greek roots and his conception of the unique position of Greek culture as something that is even older that the ancient gods of Egypt. Second, Plutarch flexes his philosophical muscles by forming complex arguments for the Platonic nature of these two deities.

By looking at Isis and Osiris with a Greek frame of mind, Plutarch asserts that philosophy is an essential aspect of mystery cult. Platonism explains the meaning behind the bizarre story of divine dismemberment and allows for an allegorical interpretation of Egyptian myth that makes the foreign material more palatable for a Greek audience. The philosopher understands the myths as something more than a strange tale, and the constructive way Plutarch dissects Isis and Osiris reveals a philosophical philhellene.

Plutarch's exegesis of mystery cults advertises his Greek origins and his expertise as a Platonic philosopher. The argumentation and intellectual calisthenics he uses in order both to Hellenize Isis and Osiris and to explain their philosophical importance is a display of his *paideia.* Mystery cults and religious are useful to Plutarch because religion offers a rich area of discussion that allows for this kind of educated exposé posed in Greek terms. Isis and Osiris offer a unique opportunity for Plutarch to emphasize his *paideia* through

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[199] Plutarch, right before this passage, indicates that misinterpretation of symbols can lead to dangerous results. One group errs completely and the mistake becomes superstition. The other group shuns religious material completely and falls into atheism.

the connection between Greek culture and philosophy. Plutarch takes advantage of the mystery material to project a self-portrait that is marked by Greek *paideia* and philosophical learning.

## V. Conclusion

Plutarch presents himself as an educator and Platonic guide through the pitfalls of religion and mystery cults. Both his *Lives* and *Moralia* suggest a desire to educate his audience on virtue that relies on a philosophical view of the divine. He also shows some of the characteristics typical of Greek texts of the second century. Greek *paideia* was crucial to a person's public image because it reflected an individual's social background and education, and the cultivation of *paideia* was essential in gaining access to the upper levels of society. Plutarch plays close attention to his choice of topics and his explanation of Platonic ideas in order to display himself as not just educated, but also distinctly Greek. His style, content, and antiquarianism show that he is a member of a circle of social elite, who style themselves as keepers of Greek wisdom.

Consistent throughout Plutarch's works is the link between religion and philosophy. Philosophy is the path by which one attempts to understand religion, and ultimately the divine. This promotion of a religious philosophy is present in both the *Lives* and the *Moralia,* and the virtue that comes with this knowledge leads to a reordering of the soul. He considers this religious knowledge to have stemmed from Plato. His works are full of philhellenic and antiquarian learning, all bolstered by his knowledge and citation of Plato. His presentation of his *paideia* is important because it creates for the audience a particular image of the writer and philosopher.

The early work *On Superstition* has the flavorings of a piece composed for oral performance, but more important in this text are the philosophical bounds Plutarch places on religious practice. Early on he advocates combining logic and reason in the performance of religious rites. Philosophical contemplation and education are essential for understanding religious practice and ward off the dangerous vice of superstition, which has untold negative consequences. *On Isis and Osiris* develops these ideas of proper religious practice, asserting the need to look at these deities through a philosophical lens. Logic is once again considered necessary in approaching religious rites, and not every bald, linen clad person is a true initiate. The initiate must look closely through philosophically tinted glasses at the myths and rituals in order to understand the nature of divinity and, ultimately, philosophical truth.

Plutarch considers Isis and Osiris as creations not of Egyptian origin but as fundamentally Greek. Although he notes that Isis has been known by many names to many peoples, he asserts that her Egyptian name betrays her core Greekness, which allows him to discuss something seemingly Egyptian in Greek terms. Greek philosophy becomes the key to understanding this religious cult. The myth of Isis and Osiris, as Plutarch tells it, suggests that the metaphysical theories of Plato are so pervasive and ancient that they have become the framework on which the cult was built.

For Plutarch, Greek culture and philosophy maintain a special status as something old and influential. Just as important, however, is the question of what Plutarch is saying about himself by expressing these ideas. By using language that equates the mysteries with philosophy, Plutarch displays his own *paideia* and philhellenism. Mystery cults present an opportunity for Plutarch to show off his knowledge and reveal the extent of his

own philhellenism and philosophical expertise. Plutarch presents Greek philosophy as the key to understanding the finer details of the Isis cult (and mystery cults in general). Ultimately, mystery cults are an important subject in Plutarch because they allow him to show off both his Greek roots and his philosophical learning. By writing about Isis and Osiris, Plutarch is further advertising his *paideia* to his audience and promoting the image of himself as the quintessential Greek philosopher, the Platonist who ultimately seeks a greater divine truth.

# Chapter 3: Mysteries, Magic, and Philosophy in Apuleius' *Apology* and *Golden Ass*

Apuleius (*c.* 120-*c.* 170s) is most commonly connected to mystery cults through Book XI of *The Golden Ass.* Scholarly interpretation of the so-called Isis book have ranged from deeming the text to depict genuine religious conversion to Lucius' experience with the Isis cult as an example of religious satire.[200] Most of these analyses, however, neglect the presence of mysteries in Apuleius' other works. In the *Apology*, as we will see, Apuleius makes a spectacle of telling his audience that he has been initiated into a great number of mystery cults. Furthermore, Apuleius' participation in and knowledge of religious rites, I argue, complement his philosophic knowledge. Although Apuleius does not catalogue the cults in which he is an initiate, he clearly intends his membership in these unnamed mystery cults (and religion in general) to be a critical part of his defense. Apuleius' trial strategy relies on a display of his knowledge of philosophy and religion in order both to endear himself to the judge and also differentiate himself from the prosecution, whom he describes as uneducated and irreligious. The nexus of mystery cults, magic, and philosophy in the *Apology* resonates in Apuleius *Golden Ass*, and interpreting the novel with the *Apology* in mind allows for a new view on the religious material in the novel. Apuleius ties together philosophy and religion in a way reminiscent of Plutarch. The link Apuleius establishes between religion and philosophy, a link that echoes Plutarch, allows for another way to view the initiations in which Lucius

[200] G.N. Sandy, "Knowledge and Curiosity in Apuleius' Metamorphoses," *Latomus* 31 (1972): 179-183 discusses the last book of *The Golden Ass* as a conversion story. Keith Bradley, "Contending with Conversion: Reflections on the Re-formation of Lucius the Ass," in *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays,* ed. Keith Bradley (New York: Routledge, 2014), 23-40 disagrees with the notion that Book XI has anything to do with religious conversion. S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 238-252 discusses the satiric elements of the initiation into the Isis cult.

participates in Book XI of *The Golden Ass*. Lucius no longer pursues any type of philosophical inquiry but instead relies on unquestioning faith and devotion to Isis. An understanding of Apuleius' religious and philosophical ideas, that is, allows for an interpretation of the novel on Apuleius' own terms.

## I. Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to use the *Apology* as an interpretive tool to understand what is happening in *The Golden Ass.* The methods here owe much to Richard Fletcher's analysis of the Platonic elements in Apuleius' corpus. Fletcher argues that because Apuleian scholarship has focused primarily on *The Golden Ass,*[201] many scholars have been trained to look at the rest of Apuleius' works as smaller pieces that somehow legitimize the novel as a culmination of all of Apuleius' writings.[202] Because Fletcher's book specifically focuses on the Platonic elements in Apuleius, he decides that the best way to bring attention to Platonic philosophy in the corpus is by centering his analysis on one of Apuleius' Platonic works, specifically the *De Platone.* Fletcher reunifies the corpus around Apuleius' philosophical works and relies on the rhetorical works to act "as the *telos* for the Apuleian corpus in terms of Apuleius' Platonism."[203] By removing *The Golden Ass* from the center of the corpus and placing the *De Platone* in the

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[201] John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Ahuvia Kahane and Andrew Laird, eds., *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Julia Haig Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass: A Study in Transmission and Reception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); B.L. Hijmas Jr. and R.Th. van der Paardt, *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1978). These are just a handful of examples of studies that use *The Golden Ass* as their main focus.

[202] Richard Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism: The Impersonation of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3-7.

[203] Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism,* 7.

spotlight, Fletcher seeks to show the unity of the corpus by focusing on the Platonic philosophy that permeates all of Apuleius' works.

One benefit of Fletcher's approach is that it enables scholars to examineApuleius from a new perspective allowing for fresher analysis of well-trod ground. Fletcher's methods are particularly effective for a study primarily concerned with Platonism, but the current study sees Platonism as only one piece in a much larger Apuleian puzzle. Instead of re-centering the corpus around one specific work, I aim to center Apuleius' works around their author, or a version of him, at least. The author is the one constant for all the works of a given corpus, and his self-constructed image can be used as an interpretive tool to better understand what he wrote. Ideally, one ought to defer to Apuleius himself in order to understand what he is trying to convey in all his writings, but this approach is weakened by the acknowledgement that it is impossible to know exactly what was happening inside Apuleius' head. These texts, as I discussed earlier,[204] have an (auto)biographical element that works toward a self-represtational end. Unification of the corpus is possible by constructing and analyzing a hypothetical Apuleius relying on biographical material found in his works. The *Apology* is a particularly fruitful piece that gives a fair amount of biographical information about its author. In the speech, Apuleius purposefully constructs an identity for himself in order to gain an acquittal for criminal charges. In the speech he uses biographical material, picking and choosing details that are most beneficial in the context to present a figure that both the judge and audience find sympathetic. The portrait Apuleius creates for himself in his defense speech through the use of religion and philosophy, gives us a version of Apuleius, a somewhat idealized Apuleius, to be sure, but also a version built on information that other texts corroborate.

[204] See the discussion of (auto)biography in Chapter 1.

The current study will use the *Apology* to create a hypothetical Apuleius, distilling what Apuleius presents about himself in the *Apology.* These attributes which Apuleius projects in the speech will be used to interpret *The Golden Ass.*

Apuleius' use of mystery cults in both the *Apology* and *The Golden Ass* is particularly important here. After establishing the character of Apuleius through a close reading of the *Apology,* I will analyze the reasons why Apuleius refers to mystery cults in his defense speech and will consider what exactly he is trying to convey about himself by discussing cults. Apuleius, I argue, most vividly connects education and erudition with the mysteries, and he emphasizes the expansiveness of his own knowledge as a member of these cults. Apuleius claims a combination of philosophy, specifically Platonic, and knowledge of religious rites is the means by which he claims to seek out truth and show his devotion to the gods.[205] For Apuleius, religion is a means to a philosophic end, and he emphasizes mystery cults as an important aspect of continued philosophic inquiry and investigation. Apuleius lays out the philosophical elements of the mysteries in his *Apology* and *The Golden Ass* provides hints that Lucius' actions ignore the important link between mystery cults and philosophy, much to the protagonist's detriment by the novel's end.

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[205] See the discussion of *Apology* 55.9 below.

## II. The *Apology*

### A. Background and Apuleius as Philosopher

Scholars generally agree that the *Apology* was delivered in either 158 or 159 AD in the North African town of Sabrata.[206] Apuleius is charged most seriously with the use of harmful magic to bewitch and marry the wealthy widow Pudentilla. Apuleius reports that Pudentilla had been widowed some time before he arrived in Sabrata. After Pudentilla rejected many suitors, Pontianus, her son, sought a suitable match for his mother because he feared for her health. He convinced his friend Apuleius, who was visiting Sabrata on his way to Alexandria, to marry Pudentilla in order to keep the family inheritance safe. After Pontianus suddenly died, Pudentilla's other son Pudens accused Apuleius of bewitching his mother. Since Pudens was too young to bring the case on his own, his uncle Aemilianus led the prosecution.[207] The case was heard in front of the Proconsul of Africa Claudius Maximus, "a renowned Stoic tutor of Marcus Aurelius."[208] The speech begins with Apuleius setting the tone of what is to come and addressing minor charges, which amount to no more than character assassination. The rest of the speech refutes the charges of magical malfeasance and discusses at length (and reinterprets) a personal letter Pudentilla letter wrote to her son Pontianus, which forms the "smoking-gun" evidence of the prosecution's case.

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[206] Hijmas, "Apuleius Orator," 1713.
[207] Apuleius retells this series of events in *Apology 68.1-78.4.* Pudens initially accused Apuleius of murdering Pontianus, but quickly dropped those charges in favor of the magical ones.
[208] Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism*, 44. Stephen Harrison, "Apuleius," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic,* ed. Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 351 suggests that Claudius Maximus is the same tutor mention in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* 1.17.5.

The text of the speech as we have it likely constitutes what Apuleius said at trial. Generally, scholars agree that Apuleius did in fact deliver this speech in court in some fashion.[209] If the speech represents what Apuleius said in court, it is just as likely that Apuleius edited the speech before it was published for public consumption. Hijmas argues that it is possible that Apuleius reworked his speech before it was distributed, though he contends that any changes would not have been great. Hijmas appoints out that certain portions of the speech suggest an actual delivery through references to the setting of the speech. Apuleius refers to the water clock, witnesses called by the prosecution, and pieces of evidence presented and read aloud at the trial. While Hijmas concedes that none of these references makes reworking impossible, the inclusion of these items supports a strong argument for a document that mostly preserves the speech given at trial.[210]

The case itself was tried as part of *cognitio extraordinaris* in which the judge Maximus decided issues of fact and had a degree of discretion over sentencing.[211] If found guilty, a person of Apuleius' social standing could face a sentence of either execution or exile, both ultimately leading to the confiscation of property and a return of the dowry to Pudentilla.[212] Scholars generally assume that the law used to prosecute this case was the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis*, which dealt with instances of both

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[209] Keith Bradley, "Appearing for the Defense: Apuleius on Display," in *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays*, ed. Keith Bradley (New York: Routledge, 2014), 147, Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia*, 3, and Hijmas, "Apuleius Orator," 1713 are only a few examples whose scholarship takes the presentation of the speech in an actual court for granted.
[210] Hijmas, "Apuleius Orator," 1719; Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia,* 3 remark that the relation between the written and spoken speech is uncertain. Jones, *Apuleius,* 3 argues that it is "inherently implausible" that the speech is merely "an imaginary speech spoken on an imaginary occasion."
[211] Tristan Taylor, "Magic and Property: The Legal Context of Apuleius' Apology," *Antichthon* 45 (2011): 151.
[212] Taylor, "Magic and Property," 159-161 includes a discussion of the penalties of execution and exile with and without the revocation of citizen rights.

magic and poisoning.[213] Dickie points out that the term *veneficus* was used ambiguously to mean both poisoner and sorcerer, suggesting that there was no real distinction between the two.[214] The term *veneficiis* in the *Lex Cornelia* carries similar ambiguities, blurring the lines between magic and poisoning.

The other legal possibility is that the case was brought as a violation of the *Lex Iulia de maiestate*, which outlawed secret nocturnal gatherings. Nighttime meetings were suspect in Rome because the Romans saw them as breeding grounds of conspiracy (as was the case of the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BC). Jones alleges that the nocturnal rituals of which Apuleius is accused is possibly the more dangerous charge because of this connection to conspiracy.[215] Apuleius, however, never says which laws he is accused of violating. His only mention of a law dealing with magic is a reference to a section of the Twelve Tables that forbids a person from bewitching the fruit trees of his neighbor.[216]

Because Apuleius purposefully constructed the speech to obtain an acquittal of criminal charges, using the *Apology* to create a picture of Apuleius comes with some risk. Although there are surely differences between the historical Apuleius and his law court character, the potential differences do not invalidate the character Apuleius presents to his audience. [217] In fact, the character that Apuleius creates during his trial is important to this study as an interpretive tool. The elements that Apuleius wants his audience to know

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[213] Taylor, "Magic and Property," 152.
[214] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 131. Clyde Pharr, "The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 63 (1932): 287 further discusses the use of the word *venenum* to mean poison and medicine, with the meaning changing depending on context.
[215] Jones, *Apuleius*, 5.
[216] *Apology* 47.3.
[217] B.L. Hijmas "Apuleius Orator: 'Pro se de Magia' and 'Florida,'" in A*ufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*. *Part 2*, *Principat 34.2,* ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 225. B.L Hijmas concedes that "…the public image presented here [in the Apology] may have differed from the historical truth; but for sheer lack of evidence concerning the latter the difference cannot be sketched even in vague terms."

about himself are what matter. Because it is impossible to know the true Apuleius, the character Apuleius creates in the *Apology* can stand in as a substitute for the actual man. Although there are likely embellishments and half-truths in the courtroom Apuleius, the information Apuleius reveals about himself is still grounded in reality. The Apuleius of the speech, that is, is an Apuleius for public consumption, and this character still reflects important aspects of Apuleius. A reader must keep this version of Apuleius in mind while reading not only the *Apology* but also his other writings, which often present information that compliments the material in the speech. Any embellishments emphasize aspects that he deems most important about himself. This essence of Apuleius would surely shape the way Apuleius' audience interpreted his works.[218] This is an image built for public consumption, but, more importantly, it is an image built on philosophical and religious foundations, foundations that become an important part of his defense.

Apuleius begins the *Apology* by taking a Socrates-esque stance by claiming that he is not just defending himself in court, but he also attempting to defend philosophy.

> …quippe insimulari quiuis innocens potest, reuinci nisi nocens non potest. Quo ego uno praecipue confisus gratulor medius fidius, quod mihi copia et facultas te iudice optigit purgandae apud imperitos philosophiae et probandi mei.[219]

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[218] Carlos F. Norena, "Authority and Subjectivity in the Apology," in *Apuleius and Africa,* eds. Benjamin Todd Lee, Ellen Finkelpearl, and Luca Graverini (New York: Routledge, 2014), 36-37 discusses how the first half of the speech is meant to establish Apuleius' authority as a textual interpreter so his opinion carries more weight when discussing written law. Richard Fletcher, "Plato Re-Read Too Late: Citation and Platonism in Apuleius' *Apologia*," *Rasmus* 38 (2009): 59-61 discusses the importance of Plato and Platonic quotation on the context of the speech. His demonstrated knowledge of Plato is meant to establish Apuleius as an educator in the eyes of the audience. Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism,* 184-191 points out that the Platonism included by Apuleius in the speech is meant to support Apuleius claim that he is a philosopher and further allows him to act as Platonic teacher to the prosecution and the audience. Keith Bradley "Law, Magic, and Culture in Apuleius's Apology," in *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays*, ed. Keith Bradley (New York: Routledge, 2014), 18-19 argues that Apuleius physical appearance is a way of presenting himself as a philosopher to the audience, a characterization which was meant to be a guide in how his listeners (or readers) were meant to read his speech.

[219] *Apology* 1.2-3.

> For one can defame an innocent man, but only convict a guilty one. That thought in itself gives me confidence, and I must say I am delighted to have been granted an opportunity and an occasion to clear the name of Philosophy, and to justify myself in the eyes of ignorant people, with you as my judge…[220]

Apuleius sets the tone for the rest of the speech, casting himself as the defender of philosophy against ignorant people (*imperitos*),[221] a certainly not-so-subtle jab at the prosecution. Apuleius takes his innocence for granted and suggests that the prosecution's case is founded entirely on defamation. He relishes the opportunity to clear the name of philosophy, setting up what seems to be a didactic speech rather than a courtroom defense. Apuleius clearly sees himself as the defamed innocent philosopher (*innocens*), who is being slandered by the ignorant prosecution, but his main concern is not himself, but philosophy. This initial section of the speech establishes philosophy as the real defendant, making Apuleius a defense attorney. Apuleius has already begun one of his key strategies by setting this philosophical tone. He will use his erudition to distance himself from the *imperitos* of the prosecution while ingratiating himself to the philosophically minded judge. In fact, Apuleius shows particular enthusiasm for presenting philosophy's case in front of a judge who is in the philosophical know, just like Apuleius.

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[220] Text and translations of the *Apology* come from Christopher P. Jones, ed., *Apuleius: Apologia, Florida, De Deo Socratis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[221] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 43-44 points out the resemblance of this speech to Plato's *Apology* of Socrates. Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism,* 184-185 also points out the connection between this speech and Socrates *Apology* but further adds that there are no sophistic parallels to Apuleius' work until the Christian apologetics.

Apuleius continues to establish this defense speech as a philosophically inspired discourse by drawing attention to his own scholarly and philosophical merits. The image of an Apuleius who is personally invested in philosophy is a major part of his defense, and the speech relies on a strategy that portrays Apuleius as an expert on philosophical knowledge and texts. First, Apuleius needs to show off his intellectualism in order to establish a connection between himself and Maximus. After defining his speech in terms of a defense of philosophy, Apuleius deals first with rather frivolous charges which include an attack on his good looks, his possession of a mirror, and his composition of love poetry (6-24).[222] Apuleius presses his philosophical advantage by using his appearance to promote himself as the introspective philosopher on a quest for knowledge, a quest which has sapped his strength and has given him his unkempt appearance.[223] The way Apuleius defends himself against an accusation of being too pretty helps create the picture of his philosophical self. Apuleius counters this attack by saying it would be wrong to reject the divine gift of beauty (*munera deum gloriosissima nequaquam aspernanda*),[224] and that, though he once might have been as good looking as Pythagoras (*Pythagoram…eum sui saeculi excellentissima forma fuisse*),[225] his intensive philosophical studies have caused a deterioration in his good looks.

> Sed haec defensio, ut dixi, aliquam multum a me remota est, cui praeter formae mediocritatem continuatio etiam litterati laboris omnem gratiam corpore deterget,

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[222] Bradley, "Appearing for the Defence," 156. These accusations hardly stand up as true criminal charges but were likely offered by the prosecution as a form of character assassination, perhaps hinting at some level of effeminacy in Apuleius.
[223] Bradley, "Law, Magic, and Culture," 18-19.
[224] *Apology* 4.5. "The most glorious gifts of the gods are by no means to be rejected." Apuleius quotes Homer's *Iliad* to help prove his point. This is not the first or last time in the speech that Apuleius relies on literary citation to lend credibility to his arguments.
[225] *Apology* 4.7. "…that Pythagoras himself…was the most outstandingly handsome man of his time."

> habitudinem tenuat, sucum exsorbet, colorem obliterat, uigorem debilitat.[226]
>
> But as I said, such a defense is far from relevant to me, since apart from my unprepossessing looks, my continuous occupation with literary study obliterates all my physical charm, and makes my body thin, my vitality feeble, my complexion pale, and my energy weak.

First, the comparison Apuleius makes to Pythagoras is poignant. Apuleius reminds the audience of his philosophical leanings by making the explicit connection between himself and the famous philosopher Pythagoras. As Apuleius tells us, however, the Pythagorean beauty is gone, and all that is left is a husk of a man. His weak and pale appearance is the end result of too much philosophical study. Apuleius means for his physical appearance to reinforce his philosophical credibility, but his emphasis on looks is working double-duty. Keith Bradley argues that a disheveled appearance in court reinforces Apuleius' Roman aspects which would further endear him with the judge.[227] The ideal Roman orator is meant to be physically impressive, and rhetorical handbooks mark disheveled hair as a sign of a good orator.[228] So now Apuleius is the Roman philosopher-orator, creating further layers of connections between Apuleius and the philosophically minded Roman judge.

The philosophical tone Apuleius sets early in the speech places it within a larger body of sophistic display pieces, a popular literary form during the so-called Second Sophistic, and further understanding the nature of this philosophical tone informs our interpretation of this speech and Apuleius' other works. S. J. Harrison contends that the "philosopher

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[226] *Apology* 4.10.
[227] Apuleius describes his appearance in the *Apology* at 4.10-13.
[228] Bradley, "Appearing for the Defense," 155-9. Bradley specifically cites Quintilian *Instituntiones* 6.1.30 and 6.1.33.

Apuleius" who is established at the start of the speech is a character of questionable authenticity. Harrison argued that Apuleius is merely putting on the kind of philosophical façade that was popular during the Second Sophistic. The popularity of showy display speeches informed by Greek *paideia* would surely have not gone unnoticed by Apuleius.[229] Harrison's study works on the premise that Apuleius models himself on the sophists who were presenting speeches at this time, although he does in Latin what most others are doing in Greek.[230] Harrison argues that the speech follows the pattern of sophistic discourse and shows a wide variety of knowledge that is meant to both impress and flatter the judge Maximus.[231] The start of the speech foreshadows the philosophical and literary means that Apuleius uses later in the *Apology* to show off his erudition and rhetorical prowess, and Harrison sees Apuleius' public display of philosophical material in the speech as merely a part of a sophistic display, with Apuleius only showing off knowledge of a philosophical school which he does not take quite as seriously as Plutarch does, for instance.[232]

While Harrison makes a compelling case for Apuleius the sophist, other scholars interpret Apuleius as a serious student of Platonic texts and Greek culture. Keith Bradley, in his own analysis of the speech, says that a person who identifies himself so closely with Latin culture (by speaking Latin and presenting himself as a Latin orator) would have little reason to associate himself with the sophistic movement, which was heavily

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[229] For a fuller discussion of the Second Sophistic, see Chapter 2.
[230] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 86-87 claims that the *Apology* bears resemblance to sophistic discourse through its display of extensive learning and rhetorical technique.
[231] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 87.
[232] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 254-255. Specifically in the context of *The Golden Ass,* Harrison argues that Platonic elements are only included as demonstration of cultural learning are meant for entertainment purposes. This idea can be included to fit with the *Apology*, with Apuleius relying of literary references as a way to entertain and flatter the judge.

steeped in Greek culture.[233] Bradley points out that "[t]he form of the Roman orator was far more valuable in court than the dandyism of the Greek sophist."[234]

Richard Fletcher, like Bradley, disagrees with labeling Apuleius as a sophist. He specifically points out, for example, that Apuleius' translation of Plato's *Phaedo* is a break in the popular trends of the Second Sophistic, and there is, furthermore, no sophistic equivalent to the *Apology* until the Christian apologists.[235] Apuleius shows an interest in philosophy that is much more similar to Cicero's approach than the sophists. Apuleius fashions himself as a spokesman for Plato, and this trend is consistently traceable throughout his entire corpus.[236] Fletcher's arguments rely on the assumption that Apuleius shows an interest in philosophy that extends beyond showy intellectualism.

In sum, Bradley and Fletcher both argue that Apuleius is not a merely a sophist bandying about his philosophical knowledge as a way both to flatter and cajole his way out of criminal proceedings. Yet the authenticity of Apuleius' philosophical interest matters little for the present discussion. What is important is the fact that Apuleius strives to present himself as genuinely interested in philosophy. Philosophy is an integral part of Apuleius' character, and he often acts as a teacher through his philosophical discourse.[237] Any interpretation of Apuleius, therefore, should keep in mind the importance of philosophy to the author and interpret his works with philosophy in mind. Now that Apuleius has established himself as a philosopher early in the speech, he can turn his attention to the charges involving magic. Apuleius ties together philosophy with magic

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[233] Bradley, "Appearing for the Defense," 155.
[234] Bradley, "Appearing for the Defense," 159.
[235] Fletcher, *Apuleius Platonism,* 184.
[236] Fletcher, *Apuleius Platonism,* 29-30. Additionally, Fletcher explains that the word "impersonation" in the title of his book refers to Apuleius talking in the guise of Plato and conveying his philosophy in relatable terms to his audience (18-20).
[237] Fletcher, *Apuleius Platonism,* 189-190. Fletcher points out that Apuleius tries to reeducate his stepson Pudens who has been led astray by the corrupt teaching of his uncle Aemilianus.

and mystery cults in order to refute the prosecution's case. He stresses the important connection between philosophy and religion to discredit the charges of magic by showing that what the prosecution calls magic is in truth religious practice meant to lead to philosophical truth. Plato is an important source for Apuleius because Platonic references add to Apuleius' credibility as a philosophical educator and textual critic, which further helps his case. The following analysis of the *Apology,* therefore, is based on two important assumptions. First, Apuleius presented his speech in court in a form that closely resembles the extant speech. Second, philosophy is an integral aspect of his speech because it allows Apuleius to bring magic, religion, and intellectualism under the same philosophical umbrella.

B. Magic, Mysteries, and Philosophy

Apuleius' strategy in his speech is to show that what the prosecution labels "witchcraft" is actually philosophical study. To do this, Apuleius relies on a bevy of literary citations and refutation to address these charges, [238] and more importantly, the charges of magic that pose a real threat to him.[239] This section will analyze the way Apuleius approaches magic as a cache of religious knowledge, which for Apuleius is a means to a philosophical end of pursing truth. Apuleius unleashes an intellectual barrage that discredits the prosecution and fortifies his position as a religiously minded philosopher. Ultimately for Apuleius, religion is meant to be a scholarly pursuit, approachable only by the philosophically initiated.

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[238] Fletcher, "Plato Re-read," 56-61 points out the Platonic quotations that Apuleius uses in his speech include poetry written by Plato, the *Alcibiades,* and the *Charmides*.

[239] Apuleius deals with the charges of magic in general in sections 29-65 and specifically in reference to Pudentilla in sections 68-70.

Philosophy and Plato offer Apuleius a counter to the magical charges by blending the philosophical and religious into one entity. Displaying his knowledge of Plato will offer him a way to discredit the accusations of magical malfeasance. As we have seen, Platonic philosophy in the second century is characterized by its connection with the intellect and the soul, which ultimately has a divine origin. In his writings, Plutarch shows that a philosopher attains wisdom through communication with the divine. Plutarch's use of mystery initiation language to describe philosophy illustrates the close connection between religion and philosophy that is a regular feature of second-century Platonism.[240] In a discussion of Apuleius in a philosophical context, Hijmas says that philosophical and religious activities are inseparable for Apuleius and dubs him a "*philosophus religiosus*."[241] Apuleius' goal in his defense is to show his Platonic pedigree in order to educate the prosecution and endear himself with the judge Maximus.

Apuleius begins his counterattack to the charges of magical misconduct by calling into question the truth of the accusations and then belittling the charges as born from simple superstition.

> Quin, inquam, vana haec conuicia aufertis? Quin ostenditis quod insimulauistis: scelera immania et inconcessa maleficia et artis nefandas? Cur vestra oratio rebus flaccet, strepitu uiget? Aggredior enim iam ad ipsum crimen magiae, quod ingenti tumultu ad invidiam mei accensum frustrata expectatione omnium per nescio quas anilis fabulas defraglavit.[242]

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[240] George Boy-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC-250 AD: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 150-154, 460-461. *On Isis and Osiris* 382D.
[241] B.L. Hijmas, "Apuleius, Philosophus Platonicus," in A*ufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*. *Part 2*, *Principat 36.1,* ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 397.
[242] *Apology* 25.4-5

> I repeat, won't you drop this empty abuse? Won't you prove your allegations—monstrous crimes, forbidden magic, the black arts? Why is your speech so weak on facts and so strong on noise? (Turning to address Maximus.) Well, I now come to the actual charge of magic, which he set ablaze with a tremendous roar to make me disliked, and then, disappointing everyone's expectation, doused it with a few old wives' tales.

Apuleius lists the charges against him in an ascending order of gravity, ending on the phrase *artis nefandas*, sarcastically emphasizing the serious charge of magic as an act of terrible impiety. While *inconcessa* can mean unlawful and forbidden, *nefandas* has the added severity of meaning forbidden by divine law. Apuleius undercuts the seriousness of these crimes with a series of rhetorical questions that call out the weakness of the prosecution's arguments (*oratio…flaccet*) which are more noise than actual proof (*strepitu viget*). The phrase *anilis fabulas* puts an exclamation point on Apuleius' mockery of what he clearly considers to be a laughable charge. Apuleius relies on the prosecution's belief in magic to help paint his opponents as uneducated yokels, further developing the depiction presented earlier in the speech (1.3). There is an interesting echo of Plutarch's *On Superstition* here in Apuleius' reference to old wives' tales as the source of the prosecutions ridiculous beliefs in magic. Plutarch, as noted earlier, discussed how superstition stems from ignorance that is a direct product of old wives' tales and belief in the efficacy of magic.[243]

Apuleius frames the accusation of magic in a way that trivializes the charges to a degree that suggests these magic inspired proceedings would seem laughable to all in attendance. Bradley, however, points out that given the cultural saturation of magic in the

[243] Plutarch's *On Superstition* sections 166A, 168D, and 171B discuss magic, old crones, and old wives' tales.

ancient world, these charges are less absurd than Apuleius would have his audience think. The phenomena which link Apuleius to magic, a reference to a skeletal figure wrapped in linen (61-65), a boy experiencing epileptic symptoms (42-52), and the use of fish as a component for spells (29-41), all appear in the Greek Magical Papyri. [244] Furthermore, Apuleius' alleged use of erotic magic to seduce Pudentilla would not have been unfamiliar to the North African audience.[245] There is evidence that magical practices were particularly prevalent in Egypt and took some sort of regular shape by the first-century AD, although magic has roots much further in the past.[246] The prominence of magic in North Africa and the recognizable magical acts that Apuleius supposedly conducted are further complicated because of Apuleius' status as an outsider in Oea. Matthew Dickie points out that a philosopher who was interested in the occult was a familiar character type that stemmed from Hellenistic descriptions of Pythagoras.[247] The similarity between the occult philosopher and the wandering magician, another familiar figure from this period, would have put Apuleius in a delicate situation as a philosophically trained outsider interested in knowledge that vaguely related to the occult, as Apuleius seems to blend together two archetypal characters the wandering magician and the aloof occult philosopher in his presentation. The belief in magic and the suspicion of outsiders who dabble in dark arts put Apuleius in a perilous position.

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[244] Keith Bradley, "Apuleius' Apology: Text and Context," in *Apuleius and Africa,* ed. Benjamin Todd Lee, Ellen Finkelpearl, and Luca Graverini (New York: Routledge, 2014), 30-31.

[245] Bradley, "Law, Magic, and Culture," 31, Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia*, 7 and Harrison, *Apuleius*, 86 all agree that charges of magic were not uncommon.

[246] Arthur Darby Nock, "Greek Magical Papyri," in *Arthur Darby Nock: Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Zeph Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 188. Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2003), 229 also points out the close connection between magic and Egypt.

[247] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 204.

Apuleius' future was entirely in the hands of Maximus in this *cognitio* trial, and it was to Apuleius' benefit that he downplay the seriousness of the charges. The best chance at acquittal was showing that magic is not exactly the harmful activity of old wives' tales. In the previous passage, Apuleius presents the prosecution as relying on old wives' tales, highlighting a clear case of superstitious fear. Since Apuleius has suggested that Aemilianus' idea of a magician does not hit the mark, it is up to Apuleius to enlighten his audience as to the real definition of "magician" relying on an etymological analysis of the word *magus.*

> Quae quidem omnis Aemiliano fuit in isto uno destinata, me magum esse, et ideo mihi libet quaerere ab eruditissimis eius aduocatis, quid sit magus. Nam si, quod ego apud plurimos lego, Persarum lingua magus est qui nostra sacerdos, quod tandem est crimen, sacerdotem esse et rite nosse atque scire atque callere leges cerimoniarum, fas sacrorum, ius religionum?[248]
>
> Since Aemilianus rested it entirely on this one point, that I was a magician, I would like to inquire of his most learned advocates what a magician is. For if a magician in the Persian language is what a priest is in ours, as I have read in many authors, what kind of crime is it to be a priest and to have the right information, knowledge and mastery of the ceremonial rules, ritual requirements, and sacred laws?

Apuleius, as Christopher Jones has pointed out, alludes to Plato's *Alcibiades* (1.121E-22A) in order to show that magic is precisely a priestly pursuit. In this definition, a magician is not a worker of evil magic intent on causing harm and manipulating wealthy widows into marriage but instead refers to the Persian priestly class. The stoic Maximus,

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[248] *Apology* 25.8-9

Jones asserts, would have been familiar with Plato, and this reference would not have been lost on him.[249] A Persian *magus* is simply a synonym for the Latin *sacerdos*. The first half of this section repeats the word *magus* three times. After Apuleius makes the connection between priest and magician, however, he switches to using the word *sacerdos,* using the priestly word in sharp contrast to the word *crimen.* He has translated *magus* as a way of reinforcing the religious qualities of the word. The rhetorical question that ends the section emphasizes that there can be nothing wrong with having knowledge of religious rites and sacred laws (*rite* and *ius religionum*). Apuleius reinforces the image of the priest/magician as source of religious knowledge through the repeated use of verbs of knowing (*nosse, callere, scire*). The passage continuously asserts that a magician/priest is educated about religious matters. Apuleius, however, has fashioned himself as more than knowledgeable about religion. His subtle allusions to Plato in this particular section (25.8-9) further promote himself as a religiously minded philosopher.

Apuleius further emphasizes the connection of religion and magic by directly referring to Plato's *Charmides*, drawing attention specifically to a king who was taught magical lore by Zoroaster.[250] Upon quoting his Plato in full, Apuleius gives his explanation of the nature of magic.

> Auditisne magiam, qui eam temere accusatis, artem esse dis immortalibus acceptam, colendi eos ac venerandi pergnaram, piam scilicet et diuini scientem, iam inde a Zoroastre et Oromaze auctoribus suis nobilem, caelitum antistitam, quippe qui inter prima regalia docetur nec ulli temere inter Persas concessum est magum esse, haud magis quam regnare?[251]

[249] Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia,* 71.
[250] Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia*, 73 points out this is a reference to Plato's *Charmides* (157A).
[251] *Apology* 26.1-3.

> You hear that magic, which you thoughtlessly charge me with, is an art pleasing to the immortal gods, thoroughly expert in worshiping and honoring them, unquestionably pious and skilled in divine lore, famous from the time of the originators, Zoroaster and Oromazes, and priestess of the gods in heaven; and hence magic is among the first lessons of kingship, and no Persian is readily permitted to be a magician any more than be a king.

The Platonic passage reforms the image of magician from sinister evil-doer into a pious religious figure, and magic is essential knowledge that a king must cultivate, in a Persian context, to rule correctly (so essential that one cannot become a king in Persia without "magical" knowledge). Apuleius enlists Plato to educate his audience as to the true nature of magic. Plato is a weighty source that lends to Apuleius' credibility as a philosopher. The sophistication of Apuleius' reference should have impressed Maximus as Apuleius builds (or reveals) the bridge that connects magic and religion, which uses philosophy as its supports.

Apuleius' argument for the close relationship between magic and religion relies not only on Plato but also on the commonly held belief that magic is one type of communication with the divine. First, the word *magus* in Greek is a loanword from Persian to denote a Persian priest,[252] so there is a historical basis for the connection of magic and religion.[253] Nevertheless, Apuleius must avoid reminding his audience of the dangerous aspects of this connection. Magic (by one definition) operates in a way similar to other forms of religious practices because it aims at communication between mortals

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[252] Arthur Derby Nock, "Paul and the Magus," in *Arthur Darby Nock: Essays on Religion and the Ancient World,* ed. Zeph Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 308 Nock says that magus specifically refers to a Persian fire priest. *Magus* used to denote a priest appears in Cicero's *Laws* 2.26 and Pliny's *Natural History* 16.249, to name only two examples.

[253] Cicero, for instance, makes references to the Persian *magi* in his *On Divination* (1.23.46) and *Laws* (2.10.26).

and the divine, but the difference lies in the means and ends of communication. Magic, unlike prayer or sacrifice, for instance, compels divine forces to act on behalf of the sorcerer outside of the normal *do ut des* requests.[254] The Romans understood magic as connected to religion as a means of communication with the divine, but they considered it separate from proper religious observances. Magic was ultimately deemed bad because it sought to subvert the natural order of the world.[255] Apuleius therefore must connect himself to the image of the Persian magician who works as an agent of the divine as one who knows divine rituals and sacred laws. He must deflate the inherent impiety that is associated with magic so as to weaken the prosecution's case. Apuleius relies on Plato to shift the focus from a magician as a *veneficus* to the construction of the *magus* as *sacerdos,* "a priest" who has a rich wealth of religious knowledge.

Once Apuleius has argued that *magus* and *sacerdos* are synonyms, he must now cast himself as the religiously minded magician/priest that he has borrowed from Plato. Interestingly enough, he does not mention his participation in public religious festivals and sacrifices but instead highlights his status as the initiate in a number of mystery cults. In the following section, Apuleius emphasizes that he has been initiated into many different cults and has previously talked publically about his religious participation.

> Sacrorum pleraque initia in Graecia participavi. Eorum quaedam signa et monumenta tradita mihi a sacerdotibus sedulo conseruo. Nihil insolitum, nihil incognitum dico. Vel unius Liberi patris mystae qui adestis, scitis quid domi conditum celetis et absque omnibus profanis tacite ueneremini. At ego, ut dixi, multiiuga sacra et plurimos ritus et uarias cerimonias studio ueri et officio erga deos

[254] Nock, "Paul and the Magus," 313.
[255] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 135, 140.

> didici. Nec hoc ad tempus compono, sed abhinc ferme triennium est, cum primis diebus quibus Oeam ueneram publice disserens de Aesculapii maiestate eadem ista prae me tuli et quot sacra nossem percensui. Ea disputatio celebratissima est, uulgo legitur, in omnibus manibus uersatur, non tam facundia mea quam mentione Aesculapii religiosis Oeensibus commendata. [256]

> I have been initiated into many mysteries in Greece, and the priests entrusted me with certain symbols and tokens of them, which I store carefully. What I say is nothing strange or secret. For instance, merely to take such initiates of Liber Pater as are here, you know what you keep hidden at home and venerate silently, apart from all those who are not initiated. But I, as I said, have learned all kinds of observances, many rituals, and various ceremonies in my pursuit of truth and my reverence for the gods. I am not making this up on the spot, since about three years ago, within a few days of my arrival in Oea, when speaking in public on the majesty of Asclepius, I openly mentioned these same facts, and listed all the rites familiar to me. That discourse of mine is very well known, is widely read, is frequently in every hand, and pleases the pious people of Oea not so much because of my eloquence but of my mention of Asclepius.

As Apuleius refutes allegations of owning a possibly magical figurine wrapped in linen,[257] he tells his audience that he has been initiated into many mysteries in Greece (*pleraque intitia in Graecia*), but does not give any indication of which cults these are. It may be possible, however, to assume he was initiated into the cult of Liber Pater given

[256] *Apology* 55.8-11.

[257] The implication is that the figure had the same kind of religious affiliations as the items the initiates of Liber Pater keep secret at home. The figure is meant to have some kind of religious, possibly mystery cult, significance.

the way he knowingly mentions the sacred objects that Maximus has hidden in his home.[258] Notably this is not the first time Apuleius has publically discussed his initiation into various mysteries. Apuleius purposefully refers to a speech he gave in Oea, a town located near Carthage. Although the speech discussed Asclepius, he presumably talked at some length about his cultic memberships.

Apuleius claims his Oean speech was very well-known, so well-known, in fact, that in response to Apuleius' request, people in the crowd begin yelling out quotations from this other speech and one man even produces a book containing the speech in full.[259] The whole situation, however, seems a little too perfect, and the reader cannot take the popularity of the speech for granted. In the second century AD, it was not uncommon for advocates in court to plant people in the audience during a trial. In a letter (2.14), Pliny complains that people are being paid by lawyers to sit in the crowd for the purpose of interrupting speeches,[260] and a similar thing appears to be happening in the *Apology*. It is not unreasonable to assume that Apuleius strategically put these people in the audience because he wanted a reason to bring up his speech in Oea as way to reinforce himself as religious. Because of this, we should be cautious before taking this spontaneous display of Apuleian support from a group of strangers as an indication of the speech's popularity. With that said, the speech to which Apuleius refers did actually take place, and

[258] Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia*, 137 says that Liber Pater was an important deity in Sabrata where the trial was held. It is logical to assume that many in the audience, including Maximus, were part of this cult.
[259] *Apology* 55.12. *Audisne, Maxime, multos suggerentis? Immo, ecce etiam liber offertur*. "Do you hear, Maximus, the many people supplying the words? Why, look, someone has actually produced the book."
[260] Elaine Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture: From Cicero to Apuleius* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 207. Fantham describes Pliny as discussing these interruptions at court as part of a larger decline of decorum and integrity in a court setting.

Christopher Jones suggests that *Florida* 18 may have been the preface of this speech,[261] because like this section of the *Apology* (55.11), *Florida* 18 also talks about Asclepius.[262]

The laundry list of cults included in the Oean speech, [263] which Apuleius requested to be read in full in court, forms the bridge between Apuleius philosophical knowledge, displayed throughout the speech, and his religious knowledge. Reading the Oean speech in court ensures that Maximus and the audience have a complete list of the cults of which Apuleius is an initiate, establishing Apuleius as a thoroughly religious man, or at least a knowledgeable one. Apuleius lays claim to a share of religious knowledge through his multiple initiations in language that recalls his description of a Persian *magus.*[264] Compounded with his frequent references to Plato throughout his speech, Apuleius is able to effectively to identify himself as an individual who is shaped by his religious and philosophical knowledge.

Apuleius follows up his display of piety with an attack on the prosecutor Aemilianus for his clear impiety and lack of proper education, setting Aemilianus as a foil to the philosophical and religious Apuleius. Apuleius suggests that Aemilianus accuses him of witchcraft because Aemilianus enjoys mocking religion (*Atque ego scio nonnullos et cum primis Aemilianum istum facetiae sibi habere res diuinas deridere*).[265] This volley against Aemilianus is another tactic that Apuleius uses to distance himself from the negative aspects of magic, for which Apuleius stands accused. Apuleius must clearly walk a fine line between mystery cults and magic. Mysteries and magic, to be sure, show some

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[261] Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia*, 138.
[262] The way Apuleius discusses the speech suggests that the speech would have been familiar to at least some of the audience.
[263] Unfortunately, this list of cults does not exists as an extant part of the *Apology*.
[264] *Apology* 55.11. *multiiuga sacra…plurimus rtus…varias cerimonias. Apology* 25.8-9. *leges cerimoniorum, fas sacrorum, ius religionum.*
[265] *Apology* 56.3. "And yet I know some people, especially Aemilianus here, find amusement in mocking the practices of religion."

similarities in literary and cultural precedents. The works of Horace and Ovid suggest that the lines between magic and mystery initiations were blurred. Horace's *Epode 5* shows a scene of witchcraft that Dickie says has the feel of a mystery ritual. Horace uses the phrase *arcana sacra* in reference to the witches' spell-casting implements,[266] and Ovid uses this same phrase in the *Metamorphoses* in reference to the sacred objects that are a part of the mysteries of Demeter at Eleusis.[267] Horace's witches also perform their rituals under circumstances similar to mystery initiations: in secret and during nighttime hours.[268] The close connection between mysteries and magic surely would not have been out of place, and an attack against Aemilianus for his impiety in linking the religious with the profane allows Apuleius to further disconnect the negative associations of magic from his mystery cult participation.

Apuleius reasserts his separation from the pseudo-mystery ritual occurring in *Epode* 5. The phrase *studio veri et offico erga deos* links Apuleius' religious and philosophical lives. The phrase reveals the philosophical importance of mystery initiations as a way of seeking philosophic truth. Indeed, o*fficio* brings with it the notion of duty, so practicing philosophy is like fulfilling a religious duty, and the opposite could also be true. The under-educated Aemilianus, Apuleius has us think, does not understand the mistakes he makes by linking Apuleius' activities with harmful magic. Aemilianus' inherent impiety bars him from be initiated into philosophy.

In short, the image of an Apuleius who is personally invested in philosophy is a major part of the defense speech, and the speech relies on a strategy that portrays Apuleius as an

[266] *Epode* 5.52
[267] *Metamorphoses* 10.436. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 139, 341 endnote 71.
[268] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 139, 341 endnote 71. Also see Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries,* XI-XII which discusses these elements associated with mystery initiations. This trope appears in Apuleius' description of Pamphile's magical ritual in Book III of *The Golden Ass*.

expert on philosophical knowledge and texts. First, Apuleius needs to show himself as an intellectual in order to establish a connection between himself and Maximus, a reminder to the judge that the two come from the same educated circles. For this reason he represents himself as an introspective philosopher on a quest for knowledge.

Apuleius' intellectualism and the expertise that he advertises in the first half of the speech allows him to establish himself as a teacher and credible source for philosophic and religious information. Fletcher argues that the first half of the *Apology* establishes Apuleius as an expert teacher of Platonic philosophy, and his displays of erudition and literary citation are the tools Apuleius uses to teach his audience Platonic philosophy. By flexing his philosophical muscles in the first half of the speech, Apuleius allows for the designation of educator in the second half.[269] Platonic citation gives Apuleius an opportunity to act in a pedagogic way in order to teach the prosecution about a concept that would otherwise be entirely Greek to them. Apuleius must translate this foreign material for a prosecution which is unable to read Greek and has never studied Plato. Apuleius does not necessarily attack the prosecution for their ignorance of Greek but specifically attacks their refusal to learn Platonic philosophy.[270] The first part of the speech establishes Apuleius not only as a philosopher and teacher but also an expert interpreter of texts so his testimony is given added credibility when he interprets the letter from Pudentilla later in the speech.[271] In this way, the density of literary and philosophical reference and allusions has more than just a shock and awe effect. The densely literary nature of the *Apology* recalls Apuleius' other philosophical works, like *De Platone* and *De Deo Socratis,* and suggests that Apuleius is using the Platonic

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[269] Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism*, 267.
[270] Fletcher, "Plato Re-read too Late," 59.
[271] Norena, "Authority and Subjectivity," 37.

material in an educational way for his audience. The court context begs the speaker for credibility, and all intellectual display here is aimed at that.

Apuleius' role as a teacher is highlighted in his description of the corrupt boy Pudens, who was being led astray by his wicked uncle. Apuleius attacks Aemilianus for his bad influence on the impressionable Pudens.

> Cum a nobis regeretur, ad magistros itabat; ab iis nunc magna fugela in ganeum fugit, amicos serios aspernatur, cum adulescentulis postremissumis inter scorta et pocula puer hoc aevi conuiuium agitat… Loquitur nunquam nisi Punice et si quid adhuc a matre graecissat; enim Latine loqui neque uult neque potest.[272]
>
> Under our guidance he went to school, while now he runs far away into taverns, shuns his studious friends and associates with the most depraved youths while still a boy, feasting among whores and goblets… He never talks except in Punic and in the little Greek he still has from his mother; Latin he neither wishes to speak, nor can he.

A particular point of interest for scholars is the way Apuleius appears to deride Pudens for only speaking Punic, and Apuleius seems to suggest that Pudens' sole reliance on Punic makes him inferior to speakers of both Latin and Greek. Bradley highlights epitaphs from North Africa that show a command of Latin and Greek as a point of pride for many upper class people, who only made up a small portion of the population,[273] but Fletcher argues that Apuleius is more concerned with Pudens' hedonistic lifestyle that has led to the deterioration of his Latin and Greek. In this second half of the speech Apuleius is comparing himself with Aemilianus as an educator, and Aemilianus is clearly not doing a good job. Pudens is only acting outlandishly because he is being educated

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[272] *Apology* 98.6 and 98.8.

[273] Bradley, "Apuleius' Apology," 26.

incorrectly by Aemilianus. Apuleius seeks to reverse this trend by replacing Aemilianus' lessons with lessons that are embedded in the defense speech which also serve to educate Aemilianus himself.[274] Apuleius' strategy has been to discredit Aemilianus, and, by showing the results of Aemilianus' corruption of Pudens, the magic charges Aemilianus asserts seem misguided. Apuleius' intelligent speech laden with philosophical references proposes Apuleius as a much sounder source of what magic actually is: philosophy.

C. Concluding Remarks on the *Apology* and Apuleius' Character

Apuleius presents a constructed image of himself in the *Apology* by using biographical information and by relying on select Platonic quotation to establish himself as a religiously minded philosopher. Apuleius establishes a bridge between religion and philosophy by asserting that a magician and a priest are the same thing. He highlights his participation in mystery cults to show how religion has philosophical ends of pursuing truth. The philosophical self-representation is particularly important because it allows Apuleius to emphasize the pedagogic aspects of his *Apology,* an aspect that is part of his other philosophical works. The speech is arguably much more about teaching the prosecution and the audience about philosophy than about seeking acquittal.[275]

The Apuleius distilled from the *Apology* is critical in an interpretation of *The Golden Ass* offered in the next section. In the same way that Apuleius was a teacher in the *Apology*, he is working in a similar capacity in his novel.[276] By understanding Apuleius

[274] Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism*, 189-190.
[275]Fletcher, "Plato Re-read," convincingly argues that the speech as a whole is meant to be as much about teaching the prosecution as it is about gaining an acquittal.
[276] Apuleius as an educator throughout his corpus is not an unreasonable assessment of the man considering most of his works are explanations of various Platonic theories (*De Platone, De Mundo, De Deo Socratis*). There are even selections from his *Florida* that promote the philosophical life and emphasize Apuleius' role as a teacher (*Florida 13* is an example).

as the religiously minded philosopher, one can read *The Golden Ass* as a cautionary tale that addresses proper religious devotion. Because Apuleius describes himself as a mystery initiate who is concerned with truth through piety, the novel should be read with these with these ideas in mind. What one finds is that initially the novel's main character and narrator has an insatiable curiosity and desire to learn more about magic, which in the *Apology* is established as a close relative to mystery initiations. Lucius' curiosity resembles philosophical inquiry, and philosophy is important to the novel. Yet in Book XI, Lucius rejects curiosity and the education that Apuleius promotes in his defense speech and becomes instead an unquestioning initiate of Isis, a fate that Apuleius would surely consider a misguided approach to religion.

## III. *The Golden Ass*

### A. Background and Establishing Lucius' Character

Scholars typically date *The Golden Ass* to the 170s AD, making it the latest extant work by Apuleius and the culmination of a lofty literary career.[277] The novel follows the adventures of Lucius, a Greek from Corinth, who is staying at the home of a family friend in Hypata while visiting Thessaly on business. Lucius is intensely interested in magic and pursues every opportunity that might lead to more information about the arcane arts. His curiosity eventually leads to his transformation into an ass, a problem which is only resolved in the final book of the novel through instructions given to Lucius by the

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[277] Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia*, X gives a date of the 170s AD. Harrison, *Apulieus*, 10 gives a wider date and says it is possible the novel was composed in either the 170s or 180s AD, acting as a culmination of a distinguished literary career.

goddess Isis. The themes of religion, philosophy, and magic run throughout the novel and echo the content of Apuleius' *Apology*.

John Winkler, in his landmark book on *The Golden Ass*, remarks that the first ten books of the novel are recast in a completely new light by Book XI and proposes that Apuleius purposely raises questions in the final book that force a reader to reinterpret the rest of the novel.[278] He goes on to describe *The Golden Ass* as a type of detective novel, in which the reader must piece together various bits of evidence to make sense of the end.[279] Various clues appear in the book which suggest what Apuleius is trying to accomplish in his novel and what message he is trying to convey. The novel itself, as well as the time and place in which it was written, should give some idea of the message of the whole story. Additionally, Apuleius as the author is crucial to an interpretation of the novel. The information addressed in the previous section concerning the *Apology,* therefore, is highly relevant in the context of *The Golden Ass* because it helps to shed additional light on the characterization of Lucius and on the nature of his religious devotion at the novel's end.

The portrait of Apuleius distilled from the *Apology* is a useful tool in analyzing the character of Lucius in *The Golden Ass.*[280] The religious and philosophical ideas that are important to Apuleius, I argue, must be used to evaluate the actions of Lucius in the novel as he goes from man to ass to initiate. Book I establishes Lucius' philosophic pedigree and his curiosity, but by Book XI he seems to forsake his curiosity with his initiation into

[278] John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 206. Earlier, Winkler claims that the speech of the priest named Mithras in 11.5 is what forces the change in interpretation of the rest of the novel (9).
[279] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, 60-69 is the full discussion of the detective novel idea.
[280]Richard Fletcher, "“Ex Alienis Vocibus:” Platonic Demonology and Socratic Superstition in Apuleius “Metamorphoses,”" in *Philosophy and the Ancient Novel*, eds. Matilia P. Futre Pinheiro and Silvia Montglio, (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2015): 105. Fletcher, in a discussion of the Platonic elements of *The Golden Ass,* conveys the need to read Apuleius' with all of his texts in mind.

the cult of Isis.[281] Lucius' apparent rejection of *curiositas* and knowledge flies in the face of everything that Apuleius conveys in his *Apology,* which champions the close connection between religion and philosophy. Lucius acts as a warning against placing religious devotion and superstition above philosophic curiosity. Apuleius' defense speech explains the right way to participate in mystery cults, and Lucius ignores his philosophic education for an existence that is built on blind faith instead of philosophy.

Understanding Lucius as a character in the novel is important in addressing the novel's stance on philosophy and religion. The preface asks a compelling question as to the identity of the narrator: *quis ille*?[282] The difficulty of such a seemingly simple question has perplexed scholars, who have offered answers to this riddle. Harrison points out that scholars normally agree with one of three possibilities of who is actually narrating this section: Lucius, Apuleius, or a combination of the two.[283] Winker thinks that the term *Aegyptiam* suggests that Lucius, now writing as a deacon of Isis is the one speaking here, which does make sense given that the rest of the novel is told in Lucius' voice.[284] Harrison points out that the rest of the biographical information in this section matches neither what we know about Apuleius nor what we learn about Lucius later in

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[281] Sandy, "Knowledge and Curiosity," 182-183 argues that Lucius' curiosity is ultimately quelled through his initiation into the cult of Isis. He receives glorification through his devotion to Isis and has no need for curiosity anymore. Nancy J Shumate, "The Augustinian Pursuit of False Values as a Conversion Motif in Apuleius 'Metamorphoses," *Phoenix* 42, no.1 (Spring 1988): 58 concludes that Lucius' conversion to the Isis cult shows Lucius putting aside his curious interest in false values and is able to focus his energies in one place, that is, on Isis. P.G. Walsh, "The Rights and Wrongs of Curiosity (Plutarch to Augustine)," *Greece & Rome* 35, no.1 (April 1988): 74-78 points out that Apuleius includes a philosophical evaluation of curiosity that is absent in the original Greek story. The word *curiositas*, not found in the rest of Apuleius' corpus appears twelve times in *The Golden Ass*, marking curiosity as an important aspect. If *The Golden Ass* shows an example of wrong curiosity, then, Walsh claims, the *Apology* shows the correct kinds. Byron MacDougall, "The Book of Isis and the Myth of Er." *American Journal of Philology* 137 (2016): 280-281 argues that Lucius never overcomes his curiosity that gets him into trouble over the course of the novel. Instead, he unthinkingly chooses the initiate's life.

[282] *The Golden Ass* 1.1.

[283] S.J. Harrison, "The Speaking Book: The Prologue to Apuleius' Metamorphoses," *The Classical Quarterly* 40 (1999): 507 gives a bibliography of attempts in answering this question.

[284] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, 60.

the novel.[285] While the prologue foreshadows the later events of the novel, like the reference to Egypt, we need to look for solid information about the character Lucius elsewhere.

The beginning of Book I give us some general and tantalizing information about Lucius.

> Thessaliam — nam et illic originis maternae nostrae fundamenta a Plutarcho illo inclito ac mox Sexto philosopho nepote eius prodita gloriam nobis faciunt — eam Thessaliam ex negotio petebam.[286]
>
> I was travelling to Thessaly, where the ancestry of my mother's family brings us fame in the persons of the renowned Plutarch and later his nephew, the philosopher Sextus. Thessaly, I say, is where I was heading on business.

We find out that Lucius is related to Plutarch on his mother's side. Plutarch's name would have been a very recognizable to any ancient reader, and Plutarch immediately throws philosophy into the narrative of the novel. The family ties between Lucius and Plutarch are particularly noteworthy. Apuleius would not likely have frivolously added this bit of information about his protagonist. Lucius' relation to Plutarch is important because it establishes the possible intellectual connection between Lucius and his famous philosophical ancestor. Apuleius' Lucius is likely familiar with Plutarch's work and his curiosity potentially reflects an interest in philosophy.[287] In other words, Lucius is

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[285] Harrison, "The Speaking Book," 508-9 has a full discussion of the problems of Apuleius, Lucius, or a combination the two as the speaker of the prologue.

[286] *The Golden Ass* 1.2. The translations and text come from J. Arthur Hanson, *Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[287] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 216-217 suggests that Lucius' relation to Plutarch is meant to highlight Lucius own intellectual interest and stresses the possible role of Platonism in the novel. Keith Bradley, "Lucius and Isis: History in Apulieus's Metamorphoses," in *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays*, ed. Keith Bradley (New York: Routledge, 2014), 218. Bradley points out that Plutarch discusses the physically

showing off his intellectual pedigree by telling the reader about his famous relation. Shortly after this brief introduction to the reader, Lucius hears the conversation of two other travelers and remarks "*Isto accepto sititor aloquin noviatis*."[288] Apuleius uses this statement to establish Lucius' insatiable curiosity and thirst for novelty. Curiosity and philosophy, as Apuleius establishes in the *Apology*, go hand in hand, and Lucius' curiosity is particularly piqued by the setting of Thessaly, home, as Lucius tells us, to magic.

At the beginning of Book II, Lucius marvels that he is now in the country that is famous for its magic. He looks around in wonder and drinks in everything he sees, strengthening his insatiable curiosity.[289] Thessaly has a magical draw for Lucius and his curiosity about magic incites him to uncover the secrets of these rites, an endeavor which turns out to be to Lucius' detriment. In Book III, his persuasion of Photis to help him see her mistress Pamphile casting spells and preparing magical rites signals a turning point for Lucius. Mystery cults play a significant role in these scenes leading up to and finally showing Pamphile at work, and Apuleius plays up the similarities between mystery cults and magic.[290] Photis is hesitant to tell Lucius about the dealings of her mistress but decides he is trustworthy because he has been initiated into several mysteries.[291] Photis

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submissive nature of the Isis cult in his own writings. Plutarch describes a highly intellectual form of the cult, and this depiction of the cult of Isis, I think, is important for interpreting Lucius at the end of the novel.

[288] Golden Ass 1.2. *Isto accepto, sititor alioquin novitatis, "Immo vero" inquam "impertite sermone non quidem curiosum, sed qui velim scire vel cuncta vel certe plurima*." When I heard that, my thirst for novelty being what it is, I asked, "Please let me share your conversation. Not that I am inquisitive, but I am the sort who wants to know everything, or at least most things."

[289] *The Golden Ass* 2.1. *…suspensus alioquin et voto simul et studio, curiose singula considerabam*. "…I was on tenterhooks of desire and impatience alike, and I began to examine each and every object with curiosity."

[290] The precedents of this connection are discussed in the previous section.

[291] *The Golden Ass* 3.15. *…praeter sublime ingenium, sacris pluribus initiatus profecto nosti sanctam silentii fidem*. "…besides your lofty character, you have been initiated into many cults and you certainly understand the sacred trust of silence."

describes Lucius as *sacris pluribus initiatus*, a phrase not dissimilar from Apuleius own description of his multiple cultic initiations (*Sacrorum pleraque initia*).[292] This reference to Lucius' initiate status makes Photis' description of her mistress's magical rites feel more like mysteries. Photis uses the phrase *arcana dominae meae revelare secreta*[293] to describe her mistress's magic. The phrase *arcana secreta* is strikingly similar to the phrase *arcana sacra*, which appears both in Horace and Ovid to describe magic and mystery initiations specifically. In other words, Apuleius again highlights the grey area between magic and religion by employing the language of the mysteries to describe magical practices. His Photis treats magical rituals as tantamount to mystery initiations by emphasizing the secrecy associated with both rituals. Pamphile conducts her magical business only after nightfall (*sic noctis initio*)[294] and she performs her secret acts in solitude apart from any witnesses.[295] Lucius does eventually see what he is, in fact, not supposed to see and is consequently turned into an ass while attempting to replicate Pamphile's transformation into a bird.

The similarity of the magical scene to mystery initiations is important because it establishes Lucius as the uninitiated looking in on a ritual only viewable by initiates. While mystery cults were shown by Apuleius to be a way to philosophical enlightenment, it goes without saying that proper initiation into the cult is the first step toward the pursuit of cultic (or philosophical) knowledge. Lucius, it might seem, ignores the need for an initiation and pays the price for his overzealous curiosity. While curiosity is not necessarily a bad thing, it does seem that Lucius goes about his magical investigation in

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[292] *Apology* 55.8. In this way, Lucius mirrors Apuleius' own participation in mystery cults.
[293] *The Golden Ass* 3.15. "…to reveal my mistress's hidden mysteries."
[294] *The Golden Ass* 3.17. "Then at nightfall…"
[295] *The Golden Ass* 3.20. …*semper abstrusa et omnium praesentia viduata solet huius modi secreta perficere.* "...she always performs secret acts of this sort in seclusion and divorced from all company."

an incorrect manner, but this is not surprising for his character. Winkler labels Lucius as a type of comic professor character, who is intelligent but acts almost absentmindedly.[296] Lucius' education is on display with his defense speech at the Festival of Laughter in Book III (3.3-7),[297] which shows Lucius' impressive rhetorical skill, but he rarely applies his wits effectively, as seen in his impatient curiosity which drives him to view actual magic. But curiosity is meant to be a defining characteristic of the novel's protagonist. Between books III and XI, Lucius clings to his curiosity as he takes advantage of his new asinine form. Being an ass allows him access to conversations that he would not be able to hear if still a man.[298] He even goes so far as to compare himself to Odysseus because, like the Greek hero, he too has seen many places and learned many things.[299] Stefen Tilg, however, claims that Lucius has mostly squandered his opportunities to learn anything while in ass form. Lucius listens to many stories whose morals could be helpful to the curious Lucius. For instance, the story of Cupid and Psyche (*The Golden Ass* 4.28-6.24) could have served as a reminder of the potential dangers of curiosity. Lucius, however, is too busy judging the entertainment value of the stories instead of learning from them.[300] While Lucius hears much as the ass, he seemingly learns nothing.

Lucius' curiosity is his defining characteristic through the novel. His familial connection with Plutarch implies Lucius' own educational pedigree, as his curiosity pushes him to investigate new things. He clearly takes up a philosophical view on things,

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[296] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, 160-165.
[297] Lucius further displays his erudition in an extravagant encomium on women's hair (2.8-9).
[298] *The Golden Ass* 9.15.6. Lucius claims his new giant ears are especially helpful in eavesdropping on conversations.
[299] *The Golden Ass* 9.13.3-5.
[300] Stefan Tilg, "Lucius as Ass (*Metamorphoses* Books 3-11)," in *Apuleius' Metamorphoses: Nine Studies*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 24-27 discusses Lucius' self-attribution as an Odysseus figure. He also points out that once Lucius becomes an initiate, the stories that were ubiquitous in the first ten books cease.

as expected of a relative of Plutarch, and he shows an interest in religion as an initiate of several mystery cults. Although Apuleius' portrayal of Lucius is often comic, yet his underlying philosophical characteristics are a positive aspect even if Lucius operates in a misguided in a way. Lucius and Apuleius are also connected through their participation in mystery cults and their philosophical education. The reference to Plutarch as Lucius' relative suggests that both Lucius and Apuleius give place of preference to Plato. Yet, by Book XI of *The Golden Ass*, Lucius abandons the Apuleian approach to these cults as a way to seek truth (*studio ueri et officio erga deos*). Instead, Lucius makes a drastic character change by the novel's end which replaces philosophic curiosity for what increasingly becomes with mindless devotion. The final book of *The Golden Ass,* therefore, acts as a satire of religion and shows how one can incorrectly participate in cults.[301]

B. The Isis Book

As stated above, Winkler sees Book XI as a jarring addition to the novel, and this final book seemingly poses more questions than answers.[302] Lucius has a vision in which the goddess Isis tells him that he will be set free from all his troubles and the tortures of fortune if he becomes an initiate into her cult. After he has followed the goddess's directions and has participated in three different initiations, Lucius confesses that he is

[301] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, 226-7. Winkler says that one possible reading of the novel's end is that Lucius is meant to be seen as a buffoon. Harrison, *Apuleius*, 245-248. Harrison, in discussing the elements of Book XI that discredit a sincere religious interpretation, says that Lucius' initiation is meant to be a satire on religious mania and youthful gullibility. My own interpretation of Book XI as satire is built on what Apuleius says in the *Apology.* If the interconnectedness of religion and philosophy that Apuleius painstakingly lays out in the speech is an important part of Apuleius' philosophical ideas (I assume it is), then Book XI of *The Golden Ass* must be satire to some degree.

[302] Sandy, "Knowledge and Curiosity," works on the opposite premise that Lucius initiation into the cult of Isis is a culmination of his character development.

happily living in Rome as a legal advocate and as a deacon of Isis. A central issue with this book revolves around the idea of religious conversion and Apuleius' sincerity in his portrayal of religious thought and devotion. Does Apuleius want to portray a serious religious "conversion" in Book XI?[303] Apuleius' decision to choose Isis as the central figure of Book XI is important because of mystery associations. Apuleius' knowledge of the cult and the exotic qualities of the Egyptian deity were surely influential in his decision.[304] Finally, Book XI contains subtle echoes of Platonic and Plutarchean ideas. Apuleius describes Isis as a single supreme deity, a divine being whose true nature is comprehensible only to the philosophically initiated. If we analyze the final book of *The Golden Ass* keeping in mind the character of Apuleius from the *Apology* in mind, the Isis book appears to warn readers of potentially corrupt human elements in religion which provide an improper observance of cult practices. Lucius, who has shown himself to thirst for knowledge, has intellectually failed by the novel's end because he disregards philosophy and reason in favor of blind devotion and irrationality. While Apuleius does not make any grand statements on the doctrinal faults of the cult, he subtly but clearly depicts Lucius as the victim of extortion perpetrated by corrupt members of the cult. Apuleius foreshadows Lucius' predicament with Lucius' description of the priests of the Syrian goddess in Book VIII (26-30). Lucius describes these priests as shrieking and lacerating themselves in order to take collections from the group that has gathered to

[303] Scholarly discussion of conversion, partly treated in Chapter 1, suggests that the word "conversion" is not applicable here. This discussion is picked up below.
[304] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, 206 claims the readers would surely be familiar with Isis worship even if they were not initiated into the cult. Bradley, "Contending with Conversion," 36-37 argues that Apuleius was familiar with Isis because of the popularity of her worship in Carthage, Athens, and Sabrata. Bradley also points to *Apology* 55.8 as evidence that Apuleius was initiated into multiple cults and speculates that he knew about Isis through these initiations. Bradley, "Lucius and Isis: History in Apuleius's Metamorphoses," in *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays*, ed. Keith Bradley (New York: Routledge, 2014), 220-221 discusses the high number of places of worship for Isis in Rome during the Antonine period. Bradley also refers to Isis imagery on coins of both Hadrian and Antonius Pius.

watch.[305] The tone is clearly one of critical derision that criticizes the priests for the misappropriation of religion for financial gain. Apuleius not quite subtly has Lucius comment on the great expense of his Isiac cultic initiation, and he has seems to have forgotten his own criticism of the Syrian priests.

Lucius' confrontation with Isis and his subsequent initiations have been read as an example of religious conversion, and the text seems to support this interpretation as the priest of Isis at the head of a procession tells Lucius that he must turn away from his sinful ways and embrace true religion.[306] G. N. Sandy argues that Book XI completes Lucius' character development where he finally sates his troublesome curiosity and now instead cultivates his spiritual needs with Isis.[307] While Lucius' new devotion of a significant part of his life to Isis is striking, calling this change in behavior a "conversion" is wrong in the context of pagan religion in the second century. Ramsey MacMullen points out that the idea of conversion has a Judeo-Christian connotation to it, and this idea does not fit into Greco-Roman religious sensibilities. The idea of conversion implies exclusivity, and mystery cults do not force initiates to belong to just one cult, as shown by Apuleius who was a member of a number of cults. The convert is required to act in a way proscribed by governing doctrine, marking out what are right and wrong religious observances, a quality MacMullen connects with Christianity and Judaism but not Greco-Roman religion in which participation in multiple cults was the norm.[308] Bradley echoes

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[305] Ashli J.E. Baker, "Appearances Can be Deceiving: Costume and Identity in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, *Florida*, and *Apology*." *Arethusa* 50 (2017), 352-355 argues that the priests are an example of appearance not matching the person. Although they look like priests, they are actually frauds. Baker suggests the priests of the Syrian Goddess foreshadows the priests of Isis.

[306] *The Golden Ass* 11.15.

[307] Sandy, "Knowledge and Curiosity," 183.

[308] Ramsay MacMullen, "Conversion: A Historian's View," *The Second Century: a Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1985): 71-2. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 3-4 makes similar statements about conversion in the context of mystery cults.

this sentiment and denies that Book XI tells a conversion story. He compares Lucius' preference for Isis with the conversion of pagans to Christianity because of the impressive miracles performed by the Christian God.[309] Lucius enters Isis' cult because she has proven herself more powerful than the fortune which has dogged him for ten books.[310] Isis' ability to transform Lucius the ass back into a man is an impressive miracle that pushes Lucius to initiation. Yet Bradley notes that Lucius' participation in her cult does not indicate any idea of exclusivity, and Lucius never indicates that he is banned from participating in other cults.[311] In fact, Lucius is later initiated into the Cult of Osiris,[312] confirming that Lucius is not solely an Isiac convert.

The idea of conversion is further undermined by the tone of Book XI, which ultimately parodies mindless religious devotion.[313] Harrison claims that three things point to a satirical reading of religion. First is the theme of money and the expensive initiations that take place. Second, the repeated false ends of the novel show Lucius' repeated gullibility and reinforce the fact that the cult is taking advantage of him. Lastly, Lucius hopefully and naïvely interprets the words of the priests because he wants to believe despite his own doubts.[314] Although Lucius has his own doubts about the multiple initiations, he readily takes the priestly interpretations of his dreams at face value because Lucius so desperately wants to believe. Winkler gives a similar interpretation of the last

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[309] Bradley, "Contending with Conversion," 27.
[310] Isis herself boasts that she is more powerful than fortune and can protect her initiate from adverse fate. *The Golden Ass* 11.6.
[311] The closest the text get to signaling some idea of exclusive worship is Isis' declaration that *Plane memineris et penita mente conditum semper tenebis mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula adusque terminos ultimi spiritus vadata.* "You will clearly remember and keep forever sealed deep in your heart the fact that the rest of your life's course is pledged to me until the very limit of your last breath." While a powerful statement, Isis does not declare that Apuleius is meant to have no other gods before her.
[312] *The Golden Ass* 11.27.
[313] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 238.
[314] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 245-248. Harrison points to 11.16-30 to show Lucius' "naive misunderstanding and hopeful interpretations on his vision" (247).

book and puts a spotlight on Lucius' baldness at the end of the novel. He claims that Lucius' bald head can mean one of two things: sincere religious devotion on Lucius' part or that Lucius is a gullible fool.[315] The shifting message about religious conviction which Winkler sees in the novel makes either option viable, but the comedic tone of the novel suggest insincerity. Winkler describes *The Golden Ass* as a philosophical comedy about religious knowledge,[316] and these comedic elements undermine any sort of serious tone connected with Lucius' religious experience. Apuleius uses Book XI to present his ideas about religion that recall the sentiments found in the *Apology*. The comedic elements that lead to the end of the novel are not solely for entertainment purposes.[317] Apuleius has a particular message in mind when presenting Lucius' audience with this religious vision, and his choice of Isis allows him to explicitly connect magic and religion in the same way he did in the *Apology*.

Magic plays a central role in Book XI, much like it did in Book I and is present at the beginning and end of Lucius' misfortunes. It is both the cause and the cure of his asinine suffering. Interestingly, Apuleius has Isis take the credit for the remedy to Lucius' curse when Photis gave Lucius the same cure in Book III.[318] Lucius' prayer hints at a magical connection through the use of lunar imagery, and this lunar imagery further foreshadows Isis' appearance in the story. From the outset of Book XI, Apuleius has created a scene that is dense with magical allusion. Lucius begins his prayer by looking at the moon and referring to its power over everyone and everything its light touches.

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[315] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor,* 226-7.
[316] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, 124.
[317] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 248 sees the gullibility by Lucius and his willingness to be taken advantage of as only making the novel more amusing and entertaining.
[318] *The Golden Ass* 3.25. *Nam rosis tantum demorsicatis exibisasinum statimque in meum Lucium postliminio redibis*. "All you have to do is take a bite of roses and you will depart from the ass and immediately return to be my own Lucius once again."

> video praemicantis lunae candore nimio completum orbem commodum marinis emergentem fluctibus; nanctusque opacae noctis silentiosa secreta, certus etiam summatem deam praecipua maiestate pollere resque prorsus humanas ipsius regi providential…[319]
>
> … and [I] saw, just emerging from the waves of the sea, the full circle of the moon glistening with extraordinary brilliance. Surrounded by the silent mysteries of dark night, I realised that the supreme goddess now exercised the fullness of her power; that human affairs were wholly governed by her providence…

The moon rising from the sea foreshadows Isis' emergence from the water, and the absolute power of the moon recalls the importance the moon has in magical rituals.[320] Drawing down of the moon is a powerful magical display that is meant to add potency to a witch's spell. Horace's *Satire* 1.8 alludes to Canidia drawing down the moon in order to add power to a love spell,[321] and the satire presents a clear literary precedent for this lunar power Apuleius includes in Lucius' speech. [322] Using the rising moon to foreshadow Isis' entrance into the story promotes a connection between Isis and the moon, a link that is further emphasized in the description of Isis' robe (*earumque media semenstris luna flammeos spirabat ignes*) (11.4).

Upon uttering his prayer, Lucius sees the goddess Isis emerge from the water in all of her Egyptian splendor. His initial description of the goddess focuses on her beauty,

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[319] *The Golden Ass* 11.1.
[320] J. F. D'Alton, *Horace and his Age: A Study in Historical Background* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 217.
[321] *Satire* 1.8.35-36.
[322] Bridgitte, Libby B., ""Moons, Smoke, and Mirrors in Apuleius' Portrayal of Isis." *The American Journal of Philology* 132 (2011): 317-318 interprets Isis' appearance in the book as a foreshadowing of the fraud perpetrated against Apuleius later in the book. She argues that 11.2 brings attention to the moon as a reflector of the sun's rays. Since Isis does not make her own light, she is a fraud and a satiric representation of the Isis cult.

specifically her hair, clothing, and her exotic features.[323] From here, Lucius moves into a description of the physical aspects that connect her to the east.

> Per intextam extremitatem et in ipsa eius planitie stellae dispersae coruscabant earumque media semenstris luna flammeos spirabat ignes. Quaqua tamen insignis illius pallae perfluebat ambitus, individuo nexu corona totis floribus totisque constructa pomis adhaerebat. Nam dextra quidem ferebat aereum crepitaculum, cuius per angustam lamminam in modum baltei recurvatam traiectae mediae paucae virgulae, crispante brachio trigeminos iactus, reddebant argutum sonorem. Laevae vero cymbium dependebat aureum, cuius ansulae, qua parte conspicua est, insurgebat aspis caput extollens arduum cervicibus late tumescentibus. Pedes ambroseos tegebant soleae palmae victricis foliis intextae. Talis ac tanta, spirans Arabiae felicia germina, divina me voce dignata est…[324]
>
> Along the embroidered border and over the surface of the cloak glittering stars were scattered, and at their centre the full moon exhaled fiery flames. Wherever streamed the hem of that wondrous robe, a garland of flowers and fruits of every kind was attached to it with an inseparable bond. She carried a wide variety of emblems. In her right hand she held a bronze rattle made of a narrow strip curved like a belt, with a few rods across the middle which produced a tinkling sound as her arm moved in a triple beat. From her left hand hung a golden boat-shaped vessel, and on the projecting part of its handle there rose an asp, rearing its head high and swelling its neck wide. Her ambrosial feet were shod in sandals woven from leaves of victory-palm. Such was her imposing appearance as, exhaling the fertile fragrances of Arabia, she favored me with her divine voice.

Isis identifies herself after a lengthy introduction, but Lucius' physical description of the goddess makes it clear with whom Lucius is face to face. The sistrum (*aereum*

[323] *The Golden Ass* 11.3.
[324] *The Golden Ass* 11.4.

*crepitaculum*) and the asp (*aspis*) are strongly associated with Egypt and unquestionably inform the audience of the goddess' identity. The iconography would have likely set the reader into an Isis frame of mind because of her rising popularity in the first and second centuries, as discussed previously.[325] Her close ties with the imperial administration through various Egyptian building projects as well as her appearance on imperial coinage make Isis an ideal choice for Apuleius' novel. [326] Her popularity and recognizable image are clearly two aspects that make Isis a good choice, but her exotic and foreign nature were also appealing.[327] Apuleius ends his description by adding that she was breathing the spice of Arabia (*spirans Arabiae Felicia germina*), which further emphasizes the exotic and eastern nature of the goddess.

The connections between Isis and magic are forged elsewhere in the novel through the general connection between Egypt and magic. Isis was considered in antiquity to have a close connection to magic because of her Egyptian roots,[328] a region that was considered to be steeped in magical lore. Early in the novel Lucius recounts a tale he heard about a prophet named Zatchlas hired to reanimate a corpse. The Egyptian origin of the prophet and his powerful control over death are important in establishing Zatchlas as legitimate.[329] Zatchlas' reputation as a gifted prophet is amplified by his Egyptian origin, which the uncle of the dead man is sure to profess to the crowd in an attempt to give the prophet credibility.[330] The uncle appeals to the prophet Zatchlas by begging in the Nile's

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[325] See both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.
[326] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 243. Bradley, "Lucius and Isis," 220-221.
[327] Winkler, *Auctor & Actor*, 277-279.
[328] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 229.
[329] *The Gold Ass* 2.28-30.
[330] Interestingly, Zatchlas is described thusly: *Et cum dicto iuvenem quempiam linteis amiculis iniectum pedesque palmeis baxeis inductum et adusque deraso capite producit in medium.* "At this point he introduced a young man dressed in long linen robes and wearing sandals woven from palm leaves. His head was completely shaven." The major elements of s shaven head and linen robes that Lucius wears at the end

name and the mysteries of Memphis, infusing more Egyptian-ness into the scene. Zatchlas is satisfied with the plea and successfully raises the corpse from the dead. The success of the performance shows not only Zatchlas' abilities as a prophet and magician, but it also highlights Egypt and its associations with magical ability. The notion of Egyptian magician priests was not uncommon in the world of *The Golden Ass*, and Matthew W. Dickie refers to instances of educated Greek men going to Egypt and returning with magical knowledge. These magicians were often connected with Isis and played the part of her priests, and the connection between Egypt and magic was a commonly held belief.[331] Similar to the public venue in which Zatchlas appears, these priests often performed in marketplaces and in front of temples,[332] so Apuleius is drawing from popular culture in writing the character of Zatchlas.

The story of Zatchlas reinforces the binds that tie magic and religion, specifically in an Egyptian context, bonds that were nearly inseparable as discussed in the *Apology*. By the time Isis appears in Book XI, the reader already has this magical framework in mind from both Apuleius' story of the Egyptian prophet and from the popular depiction of the magician priest character who was so recognizable in the second century. Zatchlas control over death is also recalled in Isis' promise to Lucius to live past his fated day of death.[333] Lucius' desire to learn more about magic has come to a climactic end with the emergence of Isis from the sea, as if he had drawn down the moon for his own purposes. Her mystery cult and connection to magic sates Lucius' curiosity because of the

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of the novel (and Plutarch mentions in his *On Isis and Osiris*) are present and likely emphasize Zatchlas' Egyptian-ness. It is possible that there is some Isis connection in these descriptors, but Zatchlas never mentions Isis in his reanimation of the corpse.

[331] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 229-330.

[332] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 233-234.

[333] *The Golden Ass* 11.6. *...scies ultra statuta fato tuo spatia vitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere.* "…you will know that I—and I alone—can even prolong your life beyond the limits determined by your fate."

incredible and miraculous power Isis demonstrates in curing him of his asinine form. Lucius puts his faith in illogical magic and sets aside philosophy. The magic here is not the "magic" of the Persian magi but instead recalls the superstitious behavior against which Plutarch warns. By approaching Isis' cult in an immoderate way, Lucius sets himself up for philosophical failure.

In sum, the exotic portrait of Isis Apuleius gives in the novel immediately sends the mind into an Egyptian context. Just as the novel began with Lucius' search for magic, the narrative circles back in the final book to magical practice because Egypt and magic are closely associated. Isis' cult and her associations with magic and Egypt make her a thematically logical choice as the central figure of final book of *The Golden Ass.* The novel comes full circle when Lucius' hardships, which start with an exploration of magic, end with Isis' own knowledge of a magical remedy. The magical elements that Apuleius introduces with the appearance of Isis link the religious and the magical, an intellectual tract Apuleius has already followed in the *Apology.* As Apuleius reveals, participation in mystery cult and the display of religious knowledge was a common aspect of the intellectual elite during the second century,[334] and *The Golden Ass* clearly reflects these greater trends. Importantly, we must ask to what end Apuleius introduces the mysteries of Isis in his novel, and the *Apology* may offer a clue as to Apuleius' purpose. I suggest that the link between religion and philosophy that Apuleius establishes in his defense speech is important to the interpretation of his novel. Lucius' prayer for salvation ignores the idea of philosophical study through religious practice and instead recalls the superstitious man running to bathe in the sea in Plutarch's *On Superstition* (*tu saevis exanclatis*

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[334] Harrison, *Apuleius,* 243.

*casibus pausam pacemque tribue; sit satis laborum, sit satis periculorum*).[335] Lucius' superstitious behavior is at odds with the Plutarchean tidbits Apuleius gives his reader in the first book of the novel. Within this context, something is not quite right. Apuleius has constructed this scene and Lucius' prayer in a way that suggests Lucius' ultimate failure in properly approaching religion. His initiations are incited by superstitious devotion, not the philosophical inquiry presented by the *Apology* (55.8).

The theme of curiosity and philosophical inquiry is established within the first few lines of the novel (1.2), but Lucius seems to abandon his thirst for knowledge as he goes through his initiations. As soon as Lucius begins the process of initiation into the cult of Isis, he slowly stops asking questions and begins to accept unquestioningly what he is told by the cult hierarchy. As mentioned above, Sandy sees Book XI as fundamental to the character development of Lucius, and Apuleius portrays Lucius as losing the curiosity that led him into his investigation of magic. Essentially, Lucius no longer has to ask questions because he has all the knowledge that he needs in Isis, an omniscient and all-nourishing deity.[336] Curiosity is unnecessary when you have a protective god offering everything to you in exchange for your devotion.[337]

Sandy, however, ignores the fact that Lucius does not immediately lose his inquisitiveness even after his first initiation. When Lucius arrives in Rome, Isis once again appears to him in a dream to tell Lucius that he must go through another initiation. The news of a second initiation introduces doubt into Lucius' mind (*apud meum sensum disputo*), and he finally asks a priest about the vision. Lucius, with the help of other

[335] *The Golden Ass* 11.2. "…strengthen my fallen fortune, grant me rest and peace from the cruel mischances I have endured."
[336] Sandy, "Knowledge and Curiosity," 182-3.
[337] Bradley, "Lucius and Isis," 212-213.

initiates, finally figures out that he needs to be initiated into the cult of Osiris.[338] This is followed shortly by another divine vision ordering a third initiation, which further disturbs Lucius, and he is worried that the second initiation had been conducted incorrectly (*Nimirum perperam vel minus plene consuluerunt in me sacerdos uterque*).[339] Osiris soon informs him that he needs a Roman initiation in addition to the Greek one he had already been through.[340] This final initiation seems to solidify his faith in the cult, and by the novel's end he is bald and happy in Rome as a deacon of the goddess, but it is important to remember his doubts leading up to each of the last two initiations. Before the second initiation, Lucius reexamines his religious doubts (*Ac dum religiosum scrupulum partim apud meum sensum disputo*),[341] and before the third vision he begins to suspect the priest of bad faith. Lucius' doubts are echoed in the reader's mind who, at this point, has come to suspect the cult of some type of scam.[342] Lucius, unlike the reader, is eager to accept any explanation that legitimizes the Isis cult and unquestioningly accepts the

[338] *The Golden Ass* 11.27. *Plenissime iam dudum videbar initiatus. Ac dum religiosum scrupulum partim apud meum sensum disputo, partim sacratorum consiliis examino, novum mirumque plane comperior: deae quidem me tantum sacris imbutum, at magni dei deumque summi parentis, invicti Osiris, necdum sacris illustratum*; "I thought that I had already been fully initiated for a long time. But while I was both debating my conscientious doubt in my own mind and also examining it with the help of advice from initiates, I made an amazing new discovery. I had been steeped in the mysteries of the goddess, but I had not yet been enlightened by the mysteries of the great god and supreme parent of the gods, Osiris the unconquered." Later in this section a priest named Asinus Marcellus confirms what Lucius had decided.
[339] "Doubtless," I thought, "both priests calculated wrongly, or at least incompletely, in my case."
[340] *The Golden Ass* 11.29. *Ceterum futura tibi sacrorum traditio pernecessaria est, si tecum nunc saltem reputaveris exuvias deae quas in provincia sumpsisti in eodem fano depositas perseverare, nec te Romae diebus sollemnibus vel supplicare iis vel, cum praeceptum fuerit, felici illo amictu illustrari posse.* "Besides, a third initiation is absolutely necessary in your case, if you just consider the fact that the goddess's garments you assumed in the province remain in storage there in that temple. In Rome you cannot worship in them on holy days, nor be illumined by that blessed robe when you are commanded."
[341] "But while I was both debating my conscientious doubt in my own mind…"
[342] Lucius had already attacked the priests of the Syrian goddess as frauds, and these multiple and expensive initiations are reminiscent of those priests' actions.

cult's interpretation of his visions.[343] In fact, Lucius now relies on the priests to tell him what to think, and all of his doubts are removed by blind faith in Isis.

Lucius subservience to the cult is a distinct change in his character and poses a potential problem for any reader familiar with Apuleius' other works. Apuleius does not promote Lucius' passive religious behavior in the discussion of religion included in the *Apology.* Apuleius, instead, describes participation in mystery cults as an active experience that seeks out truth, whereas Lucius is blindly accepting the words of the priests of Isis on unquestioning faith. Apuleius uses Lucius' character shift to signal a critique of excessive religious devotion. Lucius' use of passive and servile language in Book XI reveals a different kind of relationship with cult compared to what Apuleius describes in the *Apology*.[344] Plutarch discusses a passive quality of the cult in his *On Isis and Osiris*, but the focus is on the physical demands of the cult that require fasting, for example. Plutarch's treatise, as we have seen, promotes an intellectual approach to the cult and suggests no placement of mental shackles on the initiate.[345] If Lucius had read carefully the works of his famous ancestor, he might have realized that he was taking Isis' request for service too far by making himself completely subservient to her and her cult. The passivity Lucius shows amounts in Apuleian terms to a flawed relationship with the goddess.

Furthermore, Platonic philosophy is once again an important aspect that Apuleius includes in *The Golden Ass.* Apuleius inclusion of the Cupid and Psyche story in Book V foreshadows potential Platonic elements at work in the novel. The resonances of the story

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[343] Harrison, *Apuleius,* 246-247.
[344] Bradley, "Lucius and Isis," 211. Bradley points out the passive construction and the use of the word *famulum* in *The Golden Ass* 11.27.
[345] Bradley, "Lucius and Isis," 218.

to Plato's *Phaedrus* immediately catch the eye of a knowledgeable reader.[346] Isis' first appearance, as well as Lucius' prayer, evokes the Platonic idea of a supreme being that recalls ideas presented in the *Apology*. Therefore, the Platonic elements present in Isis' initial appearance are not surprising. When Isis first addresses Lucius, she lists various deities with whom she is associated and finally says the Egyptians correctly call her by the proper name Isis (*priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii, caerimoniis me propriis percolentes, appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem*),[347] and she also refers to herself as a supreme deity (*summa numinum*). Apuleius describes the supreme god in *De Platone* (190-191), and the language Isis uses to describe herself is similar to the *Apology*'s description of Apuleius *basileus*, the statue he keeps stored in linen wrappings (64). The *Apology* describes the supreme deity in terms that refer to Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Laws*, and *Epinomis* and describes this deity as primal force of creation.[348] The references to the

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[346] Harrison, *Apuleius*, 256-257 notes that *The Golden Ass* 5.24 has language that closely resembles *Phaedrus* 248C.

[347] *The Golden Ass* 11.5. *En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies initialis, summa numinum, regina manium, prima caelitum, deorum dearumque facies uniformis, quae caeli luminosa culmina, maris salubria flamina, inferum deplorata silentia nutibus meis dispenso; cuius numen unicum multiformi specie, ritu vario, nomine multiiugo totus veneratur orbis. Inde primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deum matrem, hinc autocthones Attici Cecropeiam Minervam, illinc fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynnam Dianam, Siculi trilingues Ortygiam Proserpinam, Eleusinii vetusti Actaeam Cererem, Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatam isti, Rhamnusiam illi, et qui nascentis dei Solis incohantibus illustrantur radiis Aethiopes utrique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii, caerimoniis me propriis percolentes, appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem.* "'Behold, Lucius, moved by your prayers I have come, the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, and first offspring of the ages; mightiest of deities, queen of the dead, and foremost of heavenly beings; my one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses. With my nod I rule the starry heights of heaven, the health-giving breezes of the sea, and the plaintive silences of the underworld. My divinity is one, worshipped by all the world under different forms, with various rites, and by manifold names. In one place the Phrygians, first-born of men, call me Pessinuntine Mother of the Gods, in another the autochthonous people of Attica call me Cecropian Minerva, in another the sea-washed Cyprians call me Paphian Venus; to the arrow-bearing Cretans I am Dictynna Diana, to the trilingual Sicilians Ortygian Proserpina, to the ancient people of Eleusis Attic Ceres; some call me Juno, some Bellona, others Hecate, and still others Rhamnusia; the people of the two Ethiopias, who are lighted by the first rays of the Sun-God as he rises every day, and the Egyptians, who are strong in ancient lore, worship me with the rites that are truly mine and call me by my real name, which is Queen Isis.'"

[348] Jones, *Apuleius: Apologia,* 156-157 connects these Platonic texts to the *Apology.*

supreme deity of creation appear also in the *De Mundo*[349] and *De Deo Socratis*,[350] suggesting that the idea of a supreme Platonic deity can be found throughout Apuleius' corpus. Isis seems to find herself in *The Golden Ass* as a manifestation of a supreme deity found in all the philosophical works of Apuleius. She is likely acting in a similar function as the *basileus* figure in *The Golden Ass* as a philosophically important element. Apuleius has given Lucius a clue to the philosophical importance of the figure of Isis as she describes her true nature. Although Lucius seems to understand the idea of a single supreme deity as seen in the language of his request for help at the start of Book XI, he must have forgotten his Plato as Isis introduces herself, for he ignores the philosophical importance of Isis' self-introduction which should remind him of this Platonic deity. Knowledge of Plato should push Lucius to engage in religion in the way Apuleius espouses in the *Apology*. He ought to come to the cult in order to understand the meaning behind the myths, symbols, and rituals. Thoughtful introspection and philosophical study of the hidden meanings behind the cult practices are paramount. Instead, Lucius loses the philosophic thread once he allows the human agents of Isis to influence his interpretation of her religion.

There is a clear contrast to the presence of Isis and the exploitive practices of her priests, who take advantage of the gullible Lucius and bleed him financially dry.[351] Lucius claims that he is unable to afford the third round of initiation because he has put

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[349] In *De Mundo* 37 there is an interesting passage that lists many different designations and title for the god Jupiter, but Apuleius concludes that they all refer to the same supreme entity. The passage feels interesting similar to Isis introduction of herself to Lucius.
[350] Hijmans, "Apuleius, Phiosophy Platonicus," 436-439.
[351] Gold Ass 11.28. *Ad istum modum desponsus sacris, sumptuum tenuitate contra votum meum retardabar… amque saepicule non sine magna turbatione stimulatus, postremo iussus, veste ipsa mea quamvis parvula distracta, sufficientem corrasi summulam.* "Although I was thus pledged to be initiated, I was delayed against my wishes by the meagreness of my funds… After I had been, to my great discomfort, frequently goaded, and finally commanded, I sold my clothing, little as it was, and scraped together a sufficient sum."

all of his resources into the previous two (*sumptuum tenuitate contra votum meum retardabar*), but the pressure the cult applies ultimately lead to Lucius scraping together the necessary funds (*veste ipsa mea quamvis parvula distracta, sufficientem corrasi summulam*). The cult's extortion of the gullible Lucius undermines any religion sincerity of Book XI,[352] and provides the framework for a philosophical lesson. Apuleius is using the story of Lucius to warn against religious sects that seek monetary gain from their religious pursuits. This warning is foreshadowed in the beggar priests of the Syrian goddess from Books VIII, as well as in *Apology* (21.6) where Apuleius says that the gods do not need any money, and the person who needs it least most closely resembles the gods.[353] These passages suggest that Apuleius sees a problem with the human agents of religion and not religion itself.

### C. Concluding Remarks on *The Golden Ass* and Lucius' Character

One possible reading of *The Golden Ass* sees the novel as a religious cautionary tale by looking at the novel in relation to Apuleius' beliefs about religious thought and philosophy as presented in the *Apology*. The curiosity that Lucius shows at the beginning of the novel is not necessarily an inherently bad attribute, though it is the misdirection of his curiosity that gets Lucius into trouble. Magic is an important aspect in the novel, and its connection to mystery cult poses the biggest problem for the uninitiated Lucius. When he peeked in on the magical rites in which he was uninitiated, Lucius lacked the knowledge to understand the magical mysteries, a lack which ultimately leads to his

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[352] Harrison, *Apuleius,* 245.
[353] *Equidem didici ea re praecedere maxime deos hominibus, quod nulla re ad usum sui indigeant, igitur ex nobis cui quam minimis opus sit, eum esse deo similiorem*. "I certainly have found that what particularly makes gods superior to humans is that they need nothing for their own use, so that whichever of us needs the least more closely resembles a god."

transformation into the ass. When he finally does go through the proper initiations to Isis, he makes an abrupt about-face by abandoning his natural penchant for asking questions and investigating the unknown. Instead of actively participating in religious rituals as a complement to philosophical study, Lucius takes a passive approach in which he relies on a human element to learn about the divine.

Various hints in the novel suggest that Lucius should have known better to trade in his reason for devotion and irrationality. Plutarch's own work on Isis would have informed Lucius that the cult does not demand the mental subservience Lucius shows. Isis own identification of herself as the supreme deity hints at further Platonic undertones, and the cosmology it presents implies a bigger picture that requires investigation on Lucius' part. Isis cult should provide the means to investigate the supreme deity and truth, but Lucius rejects this for the security blanket of mindless devotion. Lucius falls into a trap of superstition that privileges excessive fear instead of rational behavior. Isis' power impresses Lucius, and Isis' priests continuously goad Lucius into putting everything (physically and mentally) he has into Isis' cult.

## IV. Conclusion

Apuleius as the author is the key to interpreting his own corpus, but recreating the real man is admittedly impossible. Instead, the character Apuleius constructs in his written works is the closest anyone can get in a recreation of the author. The clues he left in his *Apology* create a framework of ideas that were most important to him as an intellectual and philosopher and indicate the image he wanted to project. His defense speech gives a prominent place to philosophy, magic, and religion, specifically mystery

cults. The speech is saturated with these themes, and Apuleius projects these as important aspects of his self-presentated image. He weaves all of these attributes together in the *Apology*, and fashions his image in the speech to emphasize his philosophically inclined mystery participation.

Mystery cults are important for Apuleius because they provide an outlet for philosophical research that seeks an ultimate truth. By reminding his audience that he is part of many different cults and repeatedly connecting religion and philosophy, Apuleius is able to create an image of himself built on his personal attributes as a philosopher and intellectual. In the context of the *Apology*, Platonic philosophy is used as a means to legitimize his own interest in religion, and Apuleius paints philosophy as a fitting complement to mystery cults.

Apuleius' *Apology* is an important interpretive tool in reading *The Golden Ass* and its main character Lucius. Lucius starts out as an inquisitive philosopher type who is not so distantly related to Plutarch, a great Platonic philosopher in his own right. Lucius' interest in magic is similar to Apuleius' interest in cult, but Lucius is fascinated by magical practices for which Apuleius is prosecuted, practices unconnected with the knowledge of a Persian *magus*. When Lucius finally comes face to face with a supreme Platonic Isis, a divine form of truth, he seemingly closes his eyes to the philosophic entity who stands before him. He rejects his life of inquiry and treats religion from the standpoint of superstition as opposed to learning. He fails in following in the footsteps of Plutarch and falls short of the mark that Apuleius sets in his other works. Lucius ought to treat mystery cults as another philosophical outlet, but he refuses to follow Apuleius example. Instead, Lucius can be read as a failed Apuleius. *The Golden Ass* is a novel that

takes everything that Apuleius preaches in the *Apology* and completely turns it on its head. Readers aware of the Apuleius of the *Apology* can see that the way Lucius operates as an initiate of a mystery cult flies in the face of what Apuleius would consider proper behavior. Apuleius' self-constructed image informs our reading of his novel, and we only understand the extent of Lucius' failure by looking at the character with the Apuleius of the *Apology*, built on mystery cults, in mind.

# Chapter 4: A Late Antique Mystery: Praetextatus and Cult on a Funerary Monument

## I. Introduction

The late fourth century was a time of change for the Roman aristocracy. Christianity had nearly usurped the position of the traditional state religion, yet some senators kept faithful to their paganism. This adherence to the past is especially evident in the writings of the senator Q. Aurelius Symmachus (340-402) and on the funeral monument of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus (319-384) and the literary tradition that surrounds him.[354] Praetextatus was a prominent public figure in Rome, probably born in the city, and achieved a lofty civil career by the time of his death in 384.[355] Upon his death, his wife Paulina seems to have commissioned a funerary monument for her husband that commemorated her husband in a wealth of inscriptions.

Praetextatus' funerary monument has writing on all four of its sides, three of which, the back, the left, and the right sides, are written in iambic verses (for texts and translations see below).[356] The front, the only part of the monument not in meter, displays the senator's *cursus honorum*, listing all of the priesthoods and civic offices he held. Surprisingly, his wife has her own *cursus* tacked on to the end of his. The back is a personal address to Praetextatus from his wife Paulina. Fabia Aconia Paulina was the daughter of Aconius Catullinus, who was consul in 349,[357] so her family was on the social level with Praetextatus, and the presence of her own *cursus* next to her husband's

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[354] Maijastina Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus: A Senatorial Life in Between* (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2002), 17. Kahlos argues that if Praetextatus married around age twenty-five and was married for forty years, as his funerary monument reports, then Praetextatus should have been born between 314 and 319.
[355] PLRE 1.722 "Praetextatus 1."
[356] CIL VI 1779 = ILS 1259 = CLE 111 = *Musa Lapidaria* 32.
[357] PLRE 1.675 "Paulina 4."

shows her social prominence. On both the right and left sides Praetextatus praises his wife in verse, seemingly responding to her poetry.

A central motif of the monument is the preoccupation with pagan religion, specifically mystery cults. It is these cults and their significance with respect to education that are an important element of Praetextatus' character both on the monument and in other authors. Praetextatus' friend Symmachus, and the later author Macrobius, focus on Praetextatus' religiosity as an important element of the man, although Macrobius plays up the religious aspects of the man more than Symmachus does. Even the Christians call attention to Praetextatus' paganism, though in a much more negative light, and the anonymously authored *Carmen contra paganos* and certain letters written by Jerome both attack Praetextatus shortly after his death for his religious affiliations. [358]

This chapter considers the ways the funerary monument creates an image of Praetextatus and how other writers either reinforce or change the image the funerary monument presents. After placing Praetextatus into the larger historical context of the fourth century, special attention is given to the monument itself and its depiction of both Praetextatus and Paulina. The *Letters* and *Relationes* of Symmachus are consulted to present a different contemporary picture of the senator. Praetextatus' legacy is discussed with the help of Macrobius in an attempt to analyze the way in which later authors interpreted the mystery affiliations of the long dead senator. Mystery cults, I argue, are generally used to reflect Praetextatus' education and knowledge of classical antiquity. The image of the fully devout pagan on the funerary monument, though not entirely validated in other writers, is a constant aspect of every depiction of Praetextatus, and each depiction connects the senator with various academic pursuits.

[358] The letters specifically are 23 and 39.

**II. Praetextatus' World: The Context of the Fourth Century AD**

During Praetextatus' lifetime, the imperial government changed significantly in its attitude toward traditional pagan cults, seeming to shift from neutrality to something resembling hostility. Certain changes in imperial policy toward the public cults show the potential aggression of Christianity toward the traditional forms of Roman religious worship. The most major of these changes are Gratian's refusal of the title of *pontifex maximus* and the removal of the altar of Victory from the Roman senate house. Earlier scholarship has portrayed an era of intense conflict between the Christians and pagans over their religious differences, and "anti-pagan" legislation has been interpreted as an outright assault against the pagan resistance, which was led by Praetextatus and Q. Aurelius Symmachus.[359] Although this notion has been largely discredited,[360] a conflict over tradition was still one result of the changes brought about by Christianity. Symmachus unambiguously connects tradition and civic religion in his *Relationes,* and Praetextatus' own monument recalls traditional modes of religious devotion. Analysis of the important imperial policies clarifies Praetextatus' position as a pagan in the fourth century and makes, further, his monument steeped in paganism unique and even more poignant.

Michele Renee Salzman discusses the influence of Constantine in ushering in a new Christian order in Rome. She argues that the trend in scholarship to portray Constantine as having a Christian agenda is mostly a fiction. She points out that nobles were appointed to positions with little regard for religious affiliation, and the only animosity

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[359] *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century,* ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) is a prime example of this approach to the history of the fourth century.
[360] Alan Cameron's *Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), for example, discredits any idea of a staunch pagan resistance to the advances of Christianity.

toward Constantine did not come from disputes between Christian and pagan. Instead, the senators were frustrated with Constantine's intervention into senatorial politics.[361] T.D. Barnes, however, argues that Constantine did in fact favor Christians when appointing people to various political positions.[362]

Imperial policy toward pagan religion shifted early in Praetextatus' career when Constantius removed the altar of Victory from the senate house in 357.[363] The altar's absence was short-lived, however, and Julian, an emperor sympathetic to paganism, seems to have restored the altar of Victory to its traditional home upon Constantius' death.[364] After Julian died, the next emperors, although they were Christians, were relatively neutral in religious affairs. Specifically, Valentinian I made no effort to remove the altar from the senate house when he became emperor after Julian, setting a precedent for the next two decades.

Gratian became emperor in 375 after the death of Valentinian I, and he followed in the footsteps of his predecessor for the first few years of his reign by remaining religiously neutral in public policy. In 382, however, Gratian refused the traditional title

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361 Salzman, "Constantine and the Roman State: Conflict, Cooperation, and Concealed Resistance," in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistance in the Fourth* Century, eds. Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Sághy, and Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11-45 provides an in-depth view of Constantine's policies and his approach to paganism and Christianity. The chapter also includes a helpful bibliography of Constantinian scholarship.

362 T.D. Barnes, "Statistics and the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995): 146. Agnati Ulrico, "Religious Tolerance in the Fourth-Century AD Melting Pot: An Introduction," in *Beyond Intolerance: The Milan Meeting in AD 313 and the Evolution of Imperial Religious Policy from the Age of the Tetrarchs to Julian the Apostate,* eds. Davide Dainese and Viola Gheller (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2018), 15-36 argues that Constantine did show preference to Christian senators, though he avoided inciting religious quarrels. The ambiguity of the language of his arch reveals an emperor trying to stay the middle-ground. He tolerates pagans but, as Ulirco says, tolerance does not imply impartiality (21-22).

363 Cristiana Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus: A Political Biography* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 45.

364 R.H. Barrow, *Prefect and Emperor: The Relationes of Symmachus AD 384* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1972), 32.

of *pontifex maximus*, signaling a change in his policy in religious matters.[365] His refusal of the traditional priesthood was followed with legislation that confiscated the state subsidies that helped to maintain and to subsidize the duties of civic priesthoods. The legislation mandated the confiscation of the funds that supported the cult of the Vestal Virgins.[366] In what John Matthews refers to as "the crowning blow in the new offense,"[367] Gratian once again removed the altar of Victory from the senate house, where it had been since the time of Augustus.[368] Gratian's legislation ostensibly attacked the legitimacy of traditional Roman cults and helped to remove them from the state political apparatus. Depriving the cults of state funds and removing the altar suggests an attempt to undermine paganism's connection to the imperial government and the importance of the priesthoods in political advancement.

Gratian's removal of the altar of Victory became a point of contention with the pagans. The issue culminated with Symmachus leading an embassy to the emperor to

[365] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 51-56 gives a full discussion of Gratian's public policy toward pagan practices. Cameron points out that there is no evidence that Gratian outright refused the title or if subsequent emperors followed suit (51-52). Cameron argues that Gratian did not reject the title as much as he redefined its priestly authority (56). The source for Gratian's refusal of the pontifical robes is the unreliable historian Zosimus, who Cameron claims is full of absurdities and errors (51). Alan Cameron, "Gratian's Repudiation of the Pontifical Robes," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1968): 96-102 and Alan Cameron, "The Imperial Pontifex," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103 (2007): 341-384 further discuss Gratian's supposed refusal of the pontifical robes.

[366] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 39-51 offers a full discussion. Cameron argues that public funds had been appropriated in this way before, and Gratian was not doing anything different from his predecessors (48). R. Lizzi-Testa, "Christian Emperor, Vestal Virgins and Priestly Colleges: Reconsidering the End of Roman Paganism.," *Aniquite Tardive* (2007): 262 argues that the legislation can be seen as Gratian responding to a specific grievance from senators who want the altar removed in order to gain senatorial support. Robert R. Chenault, "Rome Without Emperors: The Revival of a Senatorial City in the Fourth Century CE" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2008), 239-259 argues that the portrayal of the altar of Victory affair was an aberration since this was an issue that had repeatedly come up since 357. The pagan response by Symmachus can be seen as a reaction to the diminishing influence of Rome, not as Symmachus' staunch defense of pagan religion.

[367] John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court: AD 364-425* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 204.

[368] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome,* 42 argues that the legislation was implemented not as a way to attack pagans but as a way to get funds back into public coffers. The removal of the altar of Victory was a long standing issue which just so happened to be taken up again during Gratian's reign. Thus, Gratian was not an aggressive aberration in a succession of emperors in the fourth century.

requests its restoration. The orator, however, was turned away without audience.[369] Reportedly, a long list of Roman senators, with the help of Pope Damasus, put together a petition rejecting the pagan attempt to have the altar restored, which may have been a factor in Gratian's refusal of the embassy. When Valentinian II became emperor after Gratian's death, the pagan senators and Symmachus saw another chance to plead their case and renewed the petition to save the altar of Victory. In his *Third Relatio*, written in 384*,* Symmachus argued for the altar's restoration and justified the practice of pagan religion in general emphasizing the importance of tradition.

> Cui enim magis commodat, quod instituta maiorum, quod patriae iura et fata defendimus, quam temporum gloriae? Quae tunc maior est, cum vobis contra morem parentum intellegitis nil licere.[370]
>
> To whom is it more suitable than to the glory of our time that we defend the institutions of our ancestors and the rights and fate of the fatherland? This glory is then greater, since you understand that you may do nothing against the custom of your parents.[371]

The reference to Valentinian II's *parentes* sends a clear message to the new emperor. Symmachus argues that customs and traditions are ideally highly valued, which is precisely why Valentinian II should not act against the precedent set by his predecessors. As Valentinian I left the altar of Victory in its place, so should Valentinian II. But this connection to tradition goes back centuries, and implicit in Symmachus' argument is the idea that the altar's history stretches back to Augustus. Symmachus reiterates his point

[369] R.H. Barrow trans., *Prefect and Emperor: The Relationes of Symmachus,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 32.
[370] Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.2
[371] Translations of Symmachus' *Relationes* are my own.

about the importance of tradition by exclaiming that *consuetudinis amor magnus est*.[372] Michele Salzman argues that the use of the word *consuetudo* implies that pagan rites are a "biological need as well as a natural right."[373] The force of this word and its position at the beginning of the phrase reinforces the need for tradition in order for the state to function properly. Symmachus strengthens his argument by referring to the obvious trouble with the barbarians that threatened the borders of the empire. He asks *quis ita familiaris est barbaris, ut aram Victoriae non requirat?*[374] The old gods of Rome are essential to her protection especially in such uncertain times. Symmachus implies that the emperor might as well abandon the safety of the empire if he is willing to do away with the customs that had protected Rome for centuries.

Symmachus' reliance on tradition in his arguments resonated well with the people in court.[375] But the request was eventually denied by the emperor at the prompting of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan who threatened Valentinian with excommunication and wrote a lengthy counter attack against Symmachus.[376] Ambrose saw paganism as an outdated and an archaic survival, while his own church was one that was new and growing in a world subject to change. One such change was the equal footing commoners and elites would share in Christianity, a social levelling that would have appeared terrible to traditionalist aristocrats.[377] The priesthoods of Roman religion were filled with

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[372] Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.4. "The love of custom is great."
[373] Michele Renee Salzman, "Reflections on Symmachus' Idea of Tradition," *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Genschichte* 38 (1989): 350.
[374] Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.3. "Who is on such good terms with the barbarians so that he need not require the altar of Victory?"
[375] Sogno, *Symmachus,* 50.
[376] Barrow, *Prefect and Emperor,* 33. Ambrose wrote two letters concerning the embassy to Valentinian. First in *Letter 17*, Ambrose asks the young emperor to see the full text of Symmachus' speech. It is in this letter where he threatens Valentinian with excommunication. In *Letter 18* Ambrose refutes, point by point, each one of Symmachus' claims.
[377] Matthews, *Western Aristocracies,* 206-9.

members of wealthy and important families, who would exert control over state religion.[378] The need for humility in Christianity and the mixing with the common crowd would have been an unwelcome change for pagan senators. By reinforcing the importance of tradition with respect to the pagan cults, Symmachus gets a reputation as a traditionalist,[379] and it is this traditionalist sentiment that seems to define the pagan elite, Praetextatus included.[380]

Ultimately, Ambrose's arguments against the stark traditionalism of Symmachus carried the day, yet there seems to have been an odd silence coming from Pope Damasus and the Christian senators who were allegedly quite vocal in Symmachus' first attempted audience with Gratian. Despite the fact that Ambrose claims that the Christian block in Rome was just as vocal the second time around, there is little evidence coming from Damasus himself that supports Ambrose's assertion. Robert R. Chenault concludes that this silence from the Church stems from the presence of internal conflicts concerning religious dogma, specifically about the merits of marriage and virginity that was a major focus of Jerome's work in the same years. Christian thinkers were so busy nailing down their own identity and beliefs that the altar of Victory appeared as inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. In fact, any attacks against paganism can be interpreted as a means to solidify Christians as a distinct group in opposition to the pagans, not as

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[378] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome,* 151.
[379] Michele Rene Salzman and Michael Roberts, *The Letters of Symmachus: Book 1* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), xxxiv. The sentiment comes out in some of Symmachus' letters to Praetextatus in which Symmachus laments the disarray of pagan religion because of senatorial mismanagement (*Letter* 1.51).
[380] This traditionalism forms the backbone of the characterization of the important personalities in Macrobius *Saturnalia*.

concentrated attacks on unbelievers specifically for their religious beliefs.[381] In other words, the church uses Symmachus' traditionalism as a way to define itself.

While this anti-pagan legislation almost begs for a story of a pagan last-stand against the overbearing Christian element in imperial politics, the interactions between pagans and Christians in the fourth century do not support that version of events. The thorough analysis of Alan Cameron's *Last Pagans of Rome* puts this conflict to rest, and any tensions have less to do with differences over religious ideology and more with the pagan senators' connection to tradition. Additionally, mortuary evidence suggests a lack of real religious conflict. Nicole Denzey Lewis argues that every Christian catacomb site is "in reality a late antique cemetery that contained thousands of burials where, generally, we have no indication of the dead's religious affiliations because a majority of the graves are unmarked." If religious affiliation were such an important marker, Lewis argues, graves would have been clearer in marking the religious affiliations of the dead.[382] Further, pagan and Christian senators shared a cultural heritage that drew from the same source. The underlying cultural unity sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish pagan from Christian. The two groups "used a common language of forms and themes in the

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[381] Robert R. Chenault, "Beyond Pagan and Christian Politics and Intra-Christian Conflict in the Controversy over the Altar of Victory," in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, eds. by Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Sághy, and Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), gives a discussion of the finer points of the conflict in the beliefs of the church and how this conflict is represented on the political scene. Dennis Trout "Napkin Art *Carmina Contra Paganos* and the Difference Satire Made in Fourth Century Rome," in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, eds. by Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Sághy, and Rita Lizzi Testa, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) also gives the impression of the creation of a distinct group identity through exaggerated, satirical attacks on a group of "others."

[382] Nicole Denzey Lewis, "Reinterpreting 'Pagans' and 'Christians' from Rome's Late Antique Mortuary Evidence," in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, eds. by Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Sághy, and Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 274-8.

decoration of their tombs, sarcophagi, and other objects…"[383] The shared cultural heritage of the elites is what bound the senators as a group, and the pagans' grievances here have little to do with the invasive Christian belief system and more about preserving the *parentum mores*, as Symmachus says in his *Third Relatio*. The pagans seek to keep the intellectual pursuits of the past in elite hands, and their religious affiliations are meant to reflect erudition.[384] Pagans may have argued so vehemently for the restoration of the altar of Victory because their paganism gave cohesion to their social group.[385] Much of paganism's importance lay in its traditional role as part of civic duty and served to strengthen the connection the pagan aristocrats of the fourth century fancied they had with their ancient counterparts. Traditional Roman state religion, for the pagan senators, was an integral part of their political lives, and it has been argued that this group needed to defend the traditional state religion to retain its cohesiveness.[386] The "pagan resistance" of the fourth century was less about religious conflict and more about defending tradition.

In sum, Praetextatus' career spanned a half century that saw Christianity infringing on public traditions and cults. The so-called "pagan resistance" adhered to tradition in the face of these paradigm shifting policies and appealed, in vain, for the restoration of the altar of Victory on the grounds of precedent. While traditional Roman priesthoods represent ancestral customs, the mystery cults on Praetextatus' monument must be acting in a slightly different way. The discussed political and religious policies of the fourth

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[383] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius*, 57.
[384] Matthews, *Western Aristocracies,* 6.
[385] R. A. Markus, "Paganism, Christianity and the Latin Classics in the Fourth Century," in *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century,* ed. J. W. Binns (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1974), 10.
[386] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus,* 114. Kahlos cites J. F. Matthew and J. J. O'Donnell as scholars who have come to this same conclusion.

century strongly influence the interpretation of Praetextatus' monument. Ultimately, the religious sentiments found on Praetextatus' monument reaffirm a traditionalist stance and echo similar ideas Symmachus included into his *Third Relatio.* Beyond traditionalism, however, pagan religion, specifically mystery cults, highlight a private form of pagan intellectualism that is reinforced by initiation into the mysteries.

## III. Praetextatus' Funerary Monument: Description and Contents

Praetextatus' funerary monument is an unabashedly pagan piece in what has been already described as an increasingly Christianized Rome. All four sides of the monument take pagan religion as an important interpretive element. The foregrounding of pagan religious offices draws attention to the religious aspects of the monument. The front and back sides of the monument present an individual who admires tradition in both religious and political contexts, and mystery cults further emphasize his connections to the pagan past, but they also send an additional message. The poem on the back describes mystery initiations as a repository of knowledge that surpasses what Praetextatus learned in his own study of ancient texts. Paulina hopes to emphasize her husband's prestige and academic pedigree by highlighting his religious activity. Yet, Praetextatus' religiosity is only part of the story the monument tells. Next to him stands the religiously devout and imposing figure of his wife Paulina, who participated jointly in the mysteries with her husband.[387] It is Paulina's voice that speaks the loudest on the monument, and it would be irresponsible to talk about the monument without showing Paulina her due deference. In the end, Paulina seeks to show her own independence through her dependence on her husband's reputation as a means to enhance her own prestige in Rome. For both husband

[387] The obvious exception is the cult of Mithras, in which women were not allowed.

and wife, mystery cults are used to display their education and their preference for traditional forms of worship.

Praetextatus' funerary monument, a large marble base,[388] presumably a statue base, now in the Capitoline Museum, was found somewhere in Rome, but the exact spot is unknown.[389] This uncertainty makes it impossible to put the monument into a physical context, but suggestions in the texts are helpful in making an educated guess as to where it was displayed. The monument has writing on all four of its sides, three of which, the back, the left, and the right sides, are written in iambic verses.[390] The front displays Praetextatus' *cursus honorum*, listing all of the priesthoods and civic offices he held. Surprisingly, his wife has her own *cursus* tacked on to the end of his. This is the only section of the monument that is not in meter.

The back is a personal address to Praetextatus from his wife Paulina. The prominent position in which Paulina is placed on the monument shows her as integral in fully reading the monument. Both the right and left sides are addresses from Praetextatus in praise of his wife Paulina and seemingly respond to her own poetry.

## A. The Front

The front of Praetextatus' funerary monument, which is a fairly traditional type of *cursus honorum*, further establishes a cultural context, specifically Praetextatus' own role in the political and religious spheres in the fourth century.

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[388] The Capitoline Museum website says the monument in 130cm tall, although it lacks details about the other dimensions and weight.
[389] F. Buecheler, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (Linga: In Aedibs BG Teureri, 1895), 64-65 and Hermann Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (Berlin: Weidmannos, 1892), 279.
[390] CIL VI 1779 = ILS 1259 = CLE 111 = *Musa Lapidaria* 32. Specifically, all the poems are written in iambic senarii. For this study, I will be using the Latin text from the ILS.

D(is) M(anibus)
Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, augur
p[o]ntifex Vestae,
pontifex Sol[is], quindecemvir,
curialis Herc[u]lis, sacratus
Libero et Eleusi[ni]is, hierophanta,
neocorus, tauroboliatus,
pater patrum, in [r]e publica ver[o]
quaestor candidatus,
pretor urbanus,
corrector Tusciae et Umbriae,
consularis Lusitaniae,
pro consule Achaiae,
praefectus urbi,
legatus a senatu missus V,
praefectus praetorio II Italiae
et Illyrici, consul ordinarius
designatus,
et Aconia Fabia Paulina c(larissima) f(emina)
sacrata Cereri et Euleusiniis
sacrata apud Eginam Hecatae,
tauroboliata, hierophantria.
Hi coniuncti simul vixerunt annos XL

Praetextatus (or Paulina) dedicates the monument to the *di manes,* which is a long established practice found on Roman funerary monuments. The first eight lines focus on his pagan affiliations by listing the various priesthoods he held during his career, starting with his positions in public cults followed by mystery cults. Praetextatus fell into the mold of a traditional pagan aristocrat as far as his civic duties were concerned as he navigated the customary offices of the *cursus honorum*. As his monument states, he held a variety of positions, as was expected of a Roman aristocrat, but what is striking is the position of priestly offices on top of the *cursus honorum* above his civic offices. The long list of priesthoods, extending eight lines, gives the impression that he must have been a

devout, holy man.[391] Yet it was not unusual for a senator to have held a number of priesthoods,[392] and listing them all on a monument is nothing new.[393] The accumulation of priesthoods in this context most likely represents the competitive nature of senatorial politics of the fourth century, with the priestly colleges acting as a place of competition for aristocrats.[394] Some of the priesthoods are ancient, signifying Praetextatus' connection with the ancient Roman past. His positions of *pontifex Vestae*, *pontifex Solis*, and *quindecimvir* show that he held three of the four oldest priesthoods of the Roman state religion.[395]

His clear connection with ancient Roman cults is joined by an interest in mystery cults from the east. Praetextatus advertises his priestly roles in the cults of Demeter at Eleusis, Dionysus, Hecate, Magna Mater, and Mithras, a greatest hits list of mystery cults in the Greco-Roman world, as it were. The appearance of priesthoods of mystery cults is a new feature in the fourth century[396] and represents a newer form of elite competition.

The next ten lines show his *cursus honorum*, which culminates in his election as a *consul ordinarius,* a prestigious position to hold at this point in the empire.[397] Praetextatus, however, is only *designatus* on his monument, which indicates he died in December of 384, before he was able to take the position in 385. His appointment as *pro consule Achaiae* occurred in 362 under Julian,[398] which indicates the respect the pagan

[391] This is the impression that is given in Praetextatus' PLRE entry.
[392] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus,* 84.
[393] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome,* 132.
[394] Iara, "Social Aristocracy How Individual is Individual Religiosity," in *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, eds. by Éric Rebillard and Jörg Rüpke (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 173-4. She adds the idea that the accumulation of priesthoods does not necessarily provide information about an individual's religious identity because of this competition aspect.
[395] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus,* 63.
[396] Iara, "Social Aristocracy," 180.
[397] Cameron, *The Last Pagans,* 38.
[398] PLRE "Praetextatus 1"

emperor had for the pagan senator. Maijastina Kahlos cites Ammianus Marcellinus, who says that Julian appointed Praetextatus "*arbitrio suo,* by his own will," pulling the senator out of retirement.[399]

After the death of the pagan emperor, Praetextatus' own religious affiliations did not hurt his career as reflected by his election to the *consul ordinarius*, which was the pinnacle of a senatorial career. The fact that the Christian emperor Valentinian II allowed such an appointment is evidence that Praetextatus' religious beliefs did not hinder his ability to participate in Roman politics.

B. The Back

Despite the wealth of public positions that mark his distinguished career, the back of Praetextatus' monument describes a man who is not as concerned with worldly matters as much as he is with the religious ones, specifically the private mystery cults. In forty-one lines Paulina praises her husband for his piety and indicates it is this quality that distinguishes her husband from other men.

[Sple]ndor parentum nil mihi maius dedit,
[quam] quod marito digna iam tum visa sum.
[se]d lumen omne vel decus nomen viri,
Agori, superbo qui creatus germine
patriam, senatum coniugemq(ue) inluminas 5
probitate mentis, moribus, studiis simul,
virtutis apicem quis supremum nanctus es.
Tu namque quidquid lingua utraq(ue) est proditum
cura soforum, porta quis caeli patet,
vel quae periti condidere carmina
vel quae solutis vocibus sunt edita, 10
meliora reddis quam legendo sumpseras.
sed ista parva: tu pius m[y]stes sacris

[399] Kahols, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus,* 32. She cites Ammianus 22.7.6.

teletis reperta mentis arcano premis
divumque numen multiplex doctus colis,
sociam benigne coniugem nectens sacris 15
hominum deumque consciam ac fidam tibi.
Quid nunc honores aut potestates loquar
hominumque votis adpetita gaudia,
quae tu caduca ac parva semper autumans
divum sacerdos infulis celsus clues? 20
Tu me, maritem disciplinarum bono
puram ac pudicam sorte mortis eximens
in templa ducis ac famulam divis dicas;
Te teste cunctis imbuor mysteriis;
Tu Dindymenes Atteosqu[e] antistitem 25
teletis honoras tauteis consors pius,
Hecates ministram trina secreta edoces
Cererisque Graiae tu sacris dignam paras.
Te propter omnis me beatam, me piam
celebrant, quod ipse me bonam disseminas, 30
totum per orbem ignota noscor omnibus.
Nam te marito cur placere non queam?
Exemplum de me Romeulae matres petunt
subolemque pulchram, si tuae similis, putant.
Optant, probantque nunc viri nunc feminae, 35
quae tu magister indidisti insignia.
His nunc ademptis maesta coniunx maceror,
felix, maritum si superstitem mihi
divi dedissent, sed tamen felix, tua 40
quia sum fuique postque mortem mox ero.

The distinction of my parents gave me no greater gift than that even then I appeared worthy of my husband. But all my glory and honor consisted in your name, my husband Agorius, who, born from proud stock, give luster to your country, the senate, and your wife with your integrity of mind, your character and also your studies, through which you have attained the summit of merit. Whatever has been set forth in both languages by the devotion of the wise, to whom the gate of heaven stands open, either the poetry which skilled writers have produced or what has been put forth in prose-all this you leave in a better state than when you took it up for your reading. But these are trivialities: you, a pious intimate, keep silent in the recesses of your mind the things discovered in secret mysteries, and in scholarly wise worship the manifold divinity of the gods, of your kindness linking your wife, the faithful companion who shares the thoughts of your heart, to the sacred things

> of men and gods. Why should I speak of offices and positions of authority and the joys sought by the prayers of men? For you always declared them to be transient and trivial, and have your fame as the priest of the gods, marked out by headband. You, my husband, rescuing me from the lot of death, bring me, made pure and chaste by the blessing of your teachings, into the temples and consecrate me as a servant to the gods. In your presence I am initiated into all mysteries; you, my dedicated husband, honor me as priestess of Cybele and Attis with the ceremony of the bull's blood; while I function as servant of Hecate you teach me her threefold secrets; you make me worthy of the rites of the Greek Ceres. Because of you, all celebrate me as blessed and holy, because you yourself spread abroad fair report of me; though unknown, I am known to all throughout the world. For why should I not win favor when you are my husband? The Roman mothers seek a pattern from me and think their offspring handsome if it is like yours. Both men and women approve and long for the marks of distinction which your teaching bestowed on me. Now that these have been taken away, I, your wife, pine in sorrow. I would have been happy if the gods had granted that my husband should survive me, yet I am still happy because I am and was and presently after death shall be yours.[400]

The peculiarities of style and diction on the monument suggest where the monument may have been displayed. The fact that the poems on the three sides are written in iambics is strange in an era when most epitaphs were written in either hexameters or elegiacs. Iambics never have one defined use in poetry, being used on everything from votive offerings to simple graffiti. Commonly, however, iambics are used as a meter in conversation. The conversational element of iambics reinforces the idea that the couple is talking to each other, and the address to the other spouse in each poem reinforces this notion.[401] A couple having a conversation like the one on this monument is rare, which makes the connection between husband and wife that much more pronounced. Yet this

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[400] This translation comes from Courtney, *Musa Lapidaria: A Selection of Latin Verse Inscriptions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 60-1.

[401] Courtney, *Musa Lapidaria,* 253 calls Praetextatus' poems fictitious addresses to his wife.

personal conversation written in very personal terms suggests that it was probably set up in a semiprivate location, such as the senator's home. The conversation between husband and wife and the very personal language of Paulina's poem on the back and the two side poems would be less appropriate in a public space.

The fact that paganism takes center stage on the monument supports this idea of a private viewing location. The inscriptions accompanying statues of Praetextatus that were displayed in the Roman Forum, like *CIL* 6.1779a, are completely secular, listing only Praetextatus' civic achievements. Such a religious monument would not fit in a public space of a city in which public monuments were secular in nature. It was probably set up in a private villa that would have had a limited audience. While it makes sense to assume that the monument was set up in the home of Praetextatus, calling this a private viewing location would be incorrect. An aristocratic home would hardly have been private due to what would have likely been a steady flow of clients, friends, and political contacts. [402] This monument was meant to be seen and promote this specific image of Praetextatus (and, by extension, Paulina).

Praetextatus' interest in antiquarian study is an important characteristic of the man on this monument. Paulina makes sure to explain that Praetextatus' research spanned both Latin and Greek (*quidquid lingua utraq(ue) est proditum*), suggesting that he was widely read and educated in the literary heritage of both Rome and Greece. He studied both poetry (*quae periti condidere carmina*) and prose (*quae solutis vocibus sunt edita*). Paulina finally tells us that Praetextatus has left the ancient classics in a better state than

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[402] Alan Cameron, "Were Pagans Afraid to Speak their Minds in a Christian World? The Correspondence of Symmachus," in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, eds. Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Sághy, and Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 98.

he found them (*meliora reddis quam legendo sumpseras*), presumably through his own translations and commentaries. For example, Praetextatus is known to have translated Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle's *Analytica.*[403] The monument immortalizes a senator clearly interested in antiquarian study and research, a trait that will appear again in Macrobius' version of Praetextatus.

Yet for all the renown his erudition and political success earned him, Paulina points out that these worldly honors are inconsequential to Praetextatus (*sed ista parva*). Paulina reinforces this notion with a rhetorical question asking why she should speak of the things Praetextatus thought trivial (*quae tu caduca ac parva semper autumans*), because of his position as an honored priest (*divum sacerdos infulis celsus clues*). Paulina claims that the knowledge gained through mystery initiation and participation is a greater form of knowledge than what Praetextatus gained through his study of ancient texts. The poem reports that pious Praetextatus kept secret the things he discovered in the mysteries (*tu pius m[y]stes sacris/ teletis reperta mentis arcano premis*), as was expected of an initiate, but the context of the phrase in the poem suggests a special type of wisdom gained in participation in the mysteries. In fact, Paulina describes Praetextatus as worshipping the gods of the mysteries in an educated way with the inclusion of the word *doctus* (*divumque numen multiplex doctus colis*).[404] Paulina makes explicit in her language the link between mystery cults and education. Praetextatus strengthens his already impressive academic résumé by being a priest and participant in mystery cults. It is crucial to note

[403] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome,* 387.
[404] This line also suggests the idea of a type of pagan monotheism that is discussed in Wolf Leibschuetz, "The Significance of the Speech of Praetextatus," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity,* eds. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). This idea finds its way into Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, which will be addressed later. There are clearly some interesting philosophical implications that come with the phrase *numen multiplex*.

that the language of the poem suggests this wisdom comes only from participation in mystery rituals and seems to exclude the performance of civic priesthoods. Specifically, Paulina's dismissal of positions of authority downplays the importance of civic cults (*Quid nunc honores aut potestates loquar / hominumque votis adpetita gaudia*).

Through her language, Paulina makes it clear that she expects to live on after death because of the knowledge she gained through her participation in the mysteries with her husband. She asserts that because of his literary achievements, the gates of heaven are open to Praetextatus (*porta quis caeli patet*), using language that is very similar to the words Ennius puts into the mouth of Scipio (*mi soli caeli maxima porta patet*).[405] While Cameron argues that this does not specifically mean that Praetextatus is in heaven,[406] Paulina makes it clear that she believes her husband is in some sort of afterlife by the way she ends her poem with *sum tua / quia fuique postque mortem mox ero*. The *ero* emphatically asserts that the two will be together again at some point in the future, presumably when Paulina dies. This last line reinforces that the sky is open to her husband, and while he may not be in heaven in the way that Jerome imagines a Christian heaven in his diatribe against Praetextatus upon the pagan's death,[407] it is clear that his afterlife is ensured because of his religious belief and his participation in the various mystery cults.

What is tricky about reading this monument as a piece of self-representation is that only two of the sides are ostensibly in Praetextatus own words, while Paulina's voice is clearly the loudest on this monument with her forty-one line piece. Since this is the case,

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[405] E. Courtney, *Musa Lapidaria*, 254. The quote that Ennius ascribes to Scipio's epitaph is *mi soli caeli maxima porta patet* (FLP 44).
[406] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome,* 304.
[407] Cameron, *The Last Pagans,* 304 and Kahlos, *Vettius Agoris Praetextatus,* 160-1. This letter is Jerome's *Letter* 23.3.

the monument stands as a representation of Praetextatus and not a text of his own self-representation. There are two possible ways of approaching this problem. First, the front clearly represents Praetextatus in the list of the offices he performed, and the left and right poems are written by Praetextatus himself. It is possible that Praetextatus had some idea of what the monument would look like, and he might have had some input in its creation, specifically dictating the order his *cursus* was listed. In this way, the front loading of religious offices was Praetextatus' way of emphasizing his own religious affiliations. The second way is to push Praetextatus slightly into the background and look at the monument as a self-representation of Paulina. She describes her husband in order to refer to herself. She gains prestige and status through the political prominence and erudition of Praetextatus. The representation of her husband constitutes Paulina's attempt to create an image of herself. Either way, the use of mysteries on the monument relates most importantly to traditional religious practice and intellectualism and emphasizes the connection between religion and erudition. This is a theme that is picked up by Macrobius later on and contemporarily by Symmachus.

## IV. Symmachus' Letters and Praetextatus

Symmachus, although younger by a generation, was a close friend and colleague of Praetextatus, and the two exchanged a fair amount of correspondence, most likely much more than is present in the existing collection of letters. Eleven letters in Symmachus' first book of *Letters* are addressed to Praetextatus and range in subject matter from state business to inquiring about Paulina's health.[408] Although the *Letters* do not dive into

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[408] It is important to note that Paulina is mentioned is *Letter* 1.48. Symmachus does not even mention his own wife's name in his epistolary correspondence.

much detail concerning the personal relationship between the senators, Symmachus gives us a much more "humanizing portrayal" than the idealized figure found on the funerary monument.[409] Symmachus' "image of Praetextatus as a witty but somewhat delinquent pagan undermines attempts at representing this eminent senator as a virtual 'holy man.'"[410] That is not to say that the Praetextatus of the letters bears little resemblance to the one on the monument. In fact, Symmachus highlights his friend's scholarly and philosophical pursuits and his friend's (lack of) religious participation. It is the religious attributes where Symmachus' version of Praetextatus differs from the version presented on the funerary monument. The *Letters*, in addition to omitting comments about mystery cults, focus on Praetextatus' seeming neglect of his civic cultic responsibilities. Symmachus' *Letters* reveal a different way of using religion in creating a public image. Religion for some is explicitly connected with traditional senatorial duties, and Symmachus further reinforces traditional Roman values by commenting favorably on Praetextatus' constructive use of leisure time.

The writings of Symmachus, although they have been considered almost useless by some scholars for their lack on any real information concerning the time in which they were written,[411] are useful for reconstructing the personalities of the people about whom Symmachus writes. While the letters often lack specific details and are ripe with polite formality, Symmachus does shed light on Praetextatus' character by the nature of their relationship, especially the way in which Symmachus can poke fun at his friend. The repeated request for longer and more frequent communications from Praetextatus shows

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409 Salzman and Roberts, *The Letters of Symmachus*, 93.
410 Salzman and Roberts, *The Letters of Symmachus*, 95.
411 Salzman and Roberts, *The Letters of Symmachus,* xv.

that the two were good friends.[412] It is these personal touches that point to the nature of the friendship and lend credibility to the characters portrayed.

There is, however, a caveat in using a letter collection to reconstruct an ancient personality. Letter collections are assembled with a purpose. The person collecting and publishing letters is "no innocent archivist" and is much concerned with self-presentation.[413] Symmachus' letters function in a utilitarian way that seeks to promote a certain image of the senator, an image that is steeped in traditional values.[414] Symmachus presents the letters to Praetextatus as a way to boost his own prestige through a display of his political connections. Despite editorial motives,[415] Cristiana Sogno argues that "the letter collection constitutes an (auto)biographical monument to the Roman Senator Q. Aurelius Symmachus,"[416] and one can see evidence of the personal relationship of Symmachus and Praetextatus beyond the polite and sterile style of Symmachus' letters. While perhaps not a true to life representation of their relationship, the letters do provide at least some idea of how the two elder senators interacted.

In the *Letters*, Symmachus and Praetextatus seem to differ religiously in some key ways. Symmachus is noted as only a *pontifex maior* and never lists himself in as many priesthoods as Praetextatus.[417] There also appear distinct differences in their preferences of certain cults. Praetextatus makes it clear that his interests in religion span both public

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[412] Salzman and Roberts, *The Letters of Symmachus,* li.
[413] Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J. Watts, "Introduction: Greek and Latin Epistolography and Epistolary Collections in Late Antiquity," in *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide,* eds. Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J. Watts (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 4.
[414] Cristiana Sogno, "The Letter Collection of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus," in *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide,* eds. by Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J. Watts (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 178-181.
[415] Sogno, "The Letter Collection," 180-181 argues that Symmachus likely published the first book of letters between 384 and 385. Although Symmachus died before the collection was published by his son Memmius, Sogno believes that Symmachus did most of the editing for books 1-7.
[416] Sogno, "The Letter Collection," 183.
[417] J.F. Matthews, "Symmachus and the Oriental Cults," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 63 (1973), 188.

cults and the private mysteries, as is shown, for example, from his role as *pontifex Vestae*, a traditional Roman cult, and his title of *pater patrum* which is a title from Mithraic cults. Praetextatus has been considered to be an "orientalist" because of his involvement in the mystery cults that have their roots in the east, but this designation is problematic. These eastern cults had been part of the Roman religious milieu for centuries in some cases, and most of the eastern flair was just for show. The cults themselves were more or less Roman at this point. Despite their Roman associations, the mysteries clearly stand separate from the civic cults, which seem to be Symmachus' sole preference.

Symmachus' omission of all references to the mystery cults in any of his letters has earned him the designation of traditionalist.[418] One of the key differences between these oriental cults and traditional Roman cults is function with respect to the state. For example, Symmachus argues for the restoration of the altar of Victory not only for its traditional value but also because of the salutary benefits it provides the state. The mystery cults, however, tend to focus on a more personal and private type of worship.[419] An inscription from a Mithraeum in Rome suggests the private nature of these mysteries. The dedicator of a Mithraeum points out, presumably in the aftermath of the defunding of public cults in the 380s, that he did not need money from the state to maintain his cult site.[420] Symmachus' focus is on the state, and he plays the part of traditional Roman senator by keeping his attention on civic religion.

Symmachus' silence on the operation of oriental cults in the city may result more from the nature of his correspondence than from his disdain for mystery cults. Symmachus writes his letters and *Relationes* to important people of the aristocracy and

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[418] Matthews, "Symmachus and the Oriental Cults," 180.
[419] Matthews, "Symmachus and the Oriental Cults," 177-78.
[420] *CIL* 6.754.

court. His letters simply show the routine of polite imperial correspondence.[421] It would have been out of place to take a stance on certain religious sects. These letters are polite in an almost cookie-cutter way. He writes only what is considered to be appropriate and adds nothing else, and formal correspondence makes it difficult to decipher Symmachus' true feelings about these oriental cults. Although there is a difference in function between the oriental and traditional cults, there is by no means any evidence that there was a split between aristocrats of different pagan sects.

Symmachus' *Letters* show Praetextatus in a different light than his funerary monument, although the letters echo the religious and scholarly interest of Praetextatus. Symmachus on a few occasions complains that Praetextatus has been away from Rome too long on vacation. These lengthy vacations keep the senator away from his civic and religious duties back home. In one letter (1.47), Symmachus laments the Praetextatus' long stay in Baiae as a particular hindrance in Praetextatus' priestly duties. Symmachus playfully chastises his friend for his long absence and his priestly neglect (*multa nobis in collegio sunt deliberanda; quis tibi has indutias publici muneris dedit*?).[422] While there is clearly no real animosity in the statement, Symmachus presumably reveals some kernel of truth in his joke to his friend. The same theme of priestly neglect also shows up again in another letter (1.51), in which Symmachus laments the state of Roman religion in the late fourth century. He claims that he had intended to stay out of the city but had to return to fulfill his priestly duties. He did not trust his colleague to perform sacrifices in his place because of the great negligence among priests at this time (*Neque enim fert animus*

[421] J. F. Matthews, "The Letters of Symmachus," in *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century,* ed. J. W. Binns (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1974), 61.
[422] Symmachus' *Letters* 1.47. "We must discuss many things in the college; who gave you this pause from service?" All translations for Symmachus' letters are my own.

*in tanta sacerdotum neglegentia sufficere collegam*),[423] and he calls such priestly neglect *genus…ambiendi*[424] (type of career boosting) for many senators. Symmachus uses this to frame his questions asking when Praetextatus would return from the vacation he is now taking in Etruria. Symmachus says to him *iam querimur esse aliquid quod tamdiu civibus praeferatur*,[425] suggesting how much he is missed in Rome. These letters depict a Praetextatus whose absence interferes with state religious matters, which Symmachus describes are in disarray. Symmachus uses Praetextatus' absence as a way to discuss the degradation of traditional religious office and further links pagan religion with senatorial tradition.

These two instances show a Praetextatus whose frequent absence from Rome has prevented the senator from fulfilling his priestly duties. This claim is made explicitly in 1.47, but Symmachus more subtly teases his friend in 1.51 by framing his question of Praetextatus' return with his discussion of priestly neglect by the general senatorial populace. The long absences from these priestly duties suggest that the thoroughly devout pagan of the funerary monument is to some extent fictitious, founded in reality with a sprinkle of exaggeration. Symmachus suggests that Praetextatus is neglecting some of his priestly duties and, by extension, his civic duties, as well. Such neglect does not befit a man of Praetextatus' stature.[426]

Symmachus' *Letters*, while drawing attention to the human frailty of Praetextatus in religious matters, are sure to highlight the scholarly nature of the older senator.

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[423] Symmachus, *Letters,* 1.51. "Nor does my mind bear to put in place my colleague in times of such great neglect of priesthoods."
[424] Symmachus' *Letters* 1.51.
[425] Symmachus' *Letters* 1.51. "We are already complaining that there is something which keeps you so long from the citizens."
[426] It is possible that Praetextatus' neglect in the *Letters* is attributable only to the civic cults. It is just as likely that Praetextatus continues his mystery cult duties while on vacation.

Symmachus frames his complaint of Praetextatus' long absence with the admission that he is sure his friend is not wasting his time in leisure but is putting it to good use (*neque…virtutem puto friguisse deliciis*).[427] But his academic pursuits are couched in terms of personal engagement, further separating Praetextatus' from the affairs of the city (*Sed dum tibi legis, tibi scribis…*).[428] The repetition of the reflexive pronoun effectively foregrounds Praetextatus' own personal academic pursuits. *Letter* 1.53 charmingly adds to Symmachus' portrayal of Praetextatus as an intellectual, as he speaks sarcastically about the pride the elder senator takes in his hunting. Symmachus, of course, knows the truth: these hunting trips are really ways for Praetextatus' to get time away to study.[429] Symmachus goes on to make a wonderful reference to Praetextatus as a Hesiod figure meeting the muses in the woods. It must be these encounters, Symmachus says, that give Praetextatus his novelty as well as his learned archaisms.[430] This scholarly portrayal of Praetextatus, whose proficiency in prose and poetry is evidenced by the sophistication of his letters and his bearing of a Hesiodic crown,[431] recalls the intellectually engaged man Paulina describes in her poem. Clearly, the scholarly nature of Praetextatus must have been a defining part of his character for his contemporaries, and this image filters into later generations, as is the case for Macrobius.

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[427] Symmachus' *Letters* 1.47. "Nor do I think your virtue has grown cold in delights."
[428] Symmachus' *Letters* 1.47. "While you read for yourself, and you write for yourself..."
[429] Symmachus Letters, 1.53. *Ego actus, quos pernox et perdius curae tibi habes, tum cotidiana ingenii tui pabula de litterarum, quas mihi tribuis, sapore coniecto.* So, you will deceive others, who know you only from a superficial encounter, but I from the flavor of your letters to me, infer the activities that keep you busy day and night and the daily nourishment that your intellect receives."
[430] Symmachus *Letters* 1.53. *...sensuum novitas, verborum vetustas...* "novelty of content…archaism of language…"
[431] *Letter* 1.53. *Nisi forte in silvis Apollinem continaris, ut ille pastor Hesiodus, quem poetica lauru Camenalis familia coronavit.* "That is, unless, perhaps you met Apollo in the woods, like that shepherd Hesiod, whom the family of the muses crowned with poetic laurel." Symmachus can only assume that the muses are responsible for Praetextatus' uniqueness and archaic language.

Symmachus' *Letters* suggest different ways of using religion in the construction of a representation of a person. Symmachus clearly sees civic cult bound up intrinsically with what it means to be part of the Roman senatorial elite. Group solidarity is why Symmachus shows such concern for Praetextatus' long leave from his priestly duties. Intellectual and literary pursuits in Symmachus' *Letters*, however, have no real connection to religious practice, and this sentiment, which runs against the grain of Paulina's poem. Yet, the study of philosophy and ancient texts are clearly part of what it means to be an aristocrat in Late Antique Rome. The literary activities of Praetextatus in *Letter* 1.53 yield much different knowledge than the rituals Paulina describes in her poem. Symmachus' correspondence with Praetextatus gives a less idealized, or perhaps differently idealized, view of the elder senator than the funerary monument, but it gives more insight to the motives of Praetextatus' funerary monument. Paulina's poem purposefully distances her husband from the civic sphere that Symmachus holds dear and places Praetextatus in the private sphere of the mystery cults, where the real magic happens. The presence of mystery cults on the monument are meant to stand in some sort of opposition to civic religion and as a furthering of the academic study for which Praetextatus was already known. While Symmachus' portrayal does indeed sidestep the more devout qualities of Praetextatus' monument, the *Letters* also confirm the antiquarian and academic interests that appear as important characteristics of Praetextatus on his monument. It is these qualities that resonate to later generations and are the cornerstone of the character Macrobius creates for his *Saturnalia*.

## V. Macrobius' *Saturnalia* and Praetextatus

Macrobius' *Saturnalia* is a lengthy work in seven books that is written in the format of a dialogue in a symposium setting. The work takes Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *De re publica* as its inspiration for structure, cast of characters, and setting. The interlocutors of the dialogue are the most important pagan intellectuals and statesmen from the end of the fourth century, part of an era Macrobius call the *saeculum Praetextati*.[432] The topics of conversation are mostly of an antiquarian nature, with the focus being on the importance of Vergil and the variety of knowledge that is contained in his works. The discussion on the merits of reading Vergil takes a back seat in scholarship, however, to the lengthy discourse Macrobius' Praetextatus gives on solar theology, which explains that most deities are various aspects of the sun. The religious discussion that makes up a significant portion of the *Saturnalia*'s first book has been used to recreate the religious beliefs of Macrobius, the pagans who were contemporary with him, and even as a model of Praetextatus' own religious ideas.[433]

This section will also spotlight Praetextatus' speech on solar theology, but it aims to shift the focus from the recreation of pagan ideals to an analysis specifically of how and why Macrobius chooses to portray this important senator. The way Macrobius characterizes Praetextatus and how this characterization relates to what we know about the real senator is integral to understanding how Praetextatus' image on his funerary monument (and Symmachus' *Letters*) trickles down to later generations. First, the section seeks to contextualize Macrobius in order to explain what he may be trying to do with the

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[432] *Saturnalia* 1.1.5.

[433] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome,* 262-265 argues that Praetextatus and his circle in the *Saturnalia* are not "real" people. Kahlos, *Vetius Agorius Praetextatus*, 184-188 sees the work as an encyclopedia of antiquarian learning which possibly represents the senatorial class in an idealized way. Kahlos also believes that the Praetextatus in the *Saturnalia* is not a faithful representation of the real senator.

characters in his dialogue. Next, special attention will be given to what Praetextatus says as well as the response and praise he receives from the rest of his party guests. Finally, the important aspects that are part of earlier depictions of Praetextatus will be shown to reverberate in Macrobius' depiction of the man. Ultimately Macrobius chose Praetextatus as the central figure of his work because of the senator's erudition that Macrobius and Paulina make manifest in Praetextatus' participation in mystery cults. Knowledge of the mysteries sets Macrobius' Praetextatus up as an unrivaled authority on religious matters and more broadly reflects an innate connection with elite erudition and mystery cults.

Macrobius gives his reader some indication of his background in the preface to the *Saturnalia*. He initially apologizes to his audience for any slip in his Latin diction and style, placing the blame on any mistake to his birth *sub alio caelo*.[434] The clear implication of this statement is that Macrobius was not born in Rome and his apology is predicated upon the fact that he grew up without direct exposure to the Latin spoken and used in the city of Rome. This apology, however, does not seem entirely genuine to some degree, since it is traditional for authors to make similar *recusatio* statements of pardon for their prose.[435] Apuleius, as the previous chapter mentioned, does the same thing at the start of his *Golden Ass*, where he has the character Lucius apologize for any slips in his Latin. The general scholarly consensus, seemingly for lack of any better evidence, is that Macrobius was born in Africa. Cameron, in his discussion of Macrobius' identity indicates that the Macrobius who wrote the *Saturnalia* held certain political office in Africa,[436] and this may be evidence of Africa as Macrobius' birthplace.

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[434] *Saturnalia* Preface section 11. "Under another sky"
[435] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 232.
[436] Alan Cameron, "The Date and Identity of Macrobius," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 56 (1966): 27.

The dating of the *Saturnalia* was debated until Alan Cameron established a *terminus ante quem* date of 431 in his 1966 article. Cameron lays out Macrobius' name as Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, a *vir clarissimus et illustris*.[437] He was Praetorian Prefect of Italy in 430, and he displays in the *Saturnalia* his erudition and breadth of learning, suggesting a man born to a rich and well connected family. He had much in common in these respects with the characters in his dialogue, except his work on the *Saturnalia* postdated the death of his most major character by decades.[438]

With such a later date, it is fair to ask how familiar Macrobius would have been with his interlocutors. It is very likely that he never met any of them and only had second-hand knowledge of his subjects either through people who had known them or works they had written. The sources used by Macrobius are many, and some scholars even suggest that Macrobius is pulling from a now lost work of Praetextatus.[439] Perhaps not coincidentally, most of the characters in the Saturnalia either received or wrote a letter to Symmachus and are included in his letter collection between 404 and 408.[440] It is possible that Symmachus' *Letters* provided some inspiration for Macrobius in the creation of his characters, but ultimately, each interlocutor is a creation of Macrobius. It is not feasible to read the Praetextatus of the *Saturnalia* as a biographical, true-to-life counterpart of the person found on the funerary monument.

Despite what appears to constitute a fiction on Macrobius' part, the character of Praetextatus in the *Saturnalia* is important to Macrobius because he represents a type of antiquarianism and learning that Macrobius fears to be lacking in his own time.

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[437] Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 231.
[438] Praetextatus died in 384 and Symmachus *c.* 402.
[439] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius*, 195-197. Here Kahlos provides an analysis of Macrobius' sources. Liebesuetz, "The Significance," 199 suggests that Macrobius used lost works of Praetextatus as a source.
[440] Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, 253.

Macrobius' focus on the past is played out in a grander discussion of Vergil, but pagan religion is vitally important not because the *Saturnalia* represents some kind of pagan propaganda piece,[441] but because paganism is the old-time-religion that is crucial to the antiquarian interests of the author.

Praetextatus' first appearance in the dialogue comes as a defense of antiquarian interests. Avienus, one of the youngest men in attendance at the Saturnalia celebration, suggests to the group that they should all use more modern ways of speaking instead of using archaism. Praetextatus retorts, but in a playful and constructive manner.

> Bona verba quaeso, Praetextatus morali, ut adsolet, gravitate subiecit, nec insolenter parentis artium antiquitatis reverentiam verberemus, cuius amorem tu quoque dum dissimulas magis prodis.[442]
>
> "Please now, watch your tongue," Praetextatus interjected, with his characteristic gravity, "and let us not arrogantly and disrespectfully raise our hand against antiquity, the mother of all arts, for whom you, too, show your love even as you try to hide it."

Praetextatus emphasizes the importance of antiquity as a teacher (*parentis artis antiquitatis*), and points out that Avienus' own speech betrays his love of an ancient way of speaking by making note of an antiquarian idiom hidden in Avienus' words. Praetextatus next goes on at some length about how ancient authors used various words and how those usages persist into contemporary language. This discussion is dense with

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[441] Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, 256. Cameron goes on to explain the there was no confrontation between pagans and Christians that would require the need of propaganda because of the desire to avoid conflict. After all, these pagans and Christians still had to work together in state business. Kastor, *Macrobius*, xviii echoes this sentiment.

[442] *Saturnalia* 1.5.4. The text and translations come from the Loeb edition of the work. Robert A. Kastor, trans., *Macrobius: Saturnalia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

literary references, which help to highlight Macrobius' own education as he speaks through Praetextatus. Macrobius uses this long digression to establish the antiquarian nature of his primary interlocutor and host of the Saturnalia gathering. Praetextatus is meant to embody the interests of a bygone era, and Macrobius foreshadows Praetextatus' long discussion on pagan religious practices through this early display of antiquarianism.

Praetextatus' knowledge of antiquity alludes to the senator's scholarly pursuits, to which both Paulina and Symmachus discuss in their respective texts. Macrobius draws on this scholarly tradition surrounding Praetextatus by making the senator the major interlocutor on a lengthy lecture about the development of the Roman calendar[443] and a discussion about the origins of the Saturnalia,[444] both subjects that rely on antiquarian religious knowledge. Praetextatus' speech on the Saturnalia's origins is preceded by Avienus, who turns to Praetextatus exactly because of the senator's extensive expertise in religious lore.

> Licet omnes, ait, qui adsunt pari doctrina polleant, sacrorum tamen Vettius unice conscius potest tibi et originem cultus qui huic deo penditur et causam festi sollemnis aperire.[445]
>
> Though all present share the same potent learning, Vettius is nonetheless singularly well-informed about all religious rites and can reveal to you both the origin of the cult that is paid this god and the rationale behind the customary observance.

[443] *Saturnalia* 1.12-1.16.
[444] *Saturnalia* 1.7.18-1.10.23.
[445] *Satunralia* 1.7.17.

Avienus begins by emphasizing the learning of the entire group, claiming that everyone has a similar educational background, but Praetextatus surpasses all in his familiarity with religious traditions (*sacrorum tamen Vettius unice conscious*). The word *unice* separates Praetextatus from the pack and elevates him to his position of religious authority.

Macrobius establishes the religious familiarity of his primary speaker early to set up the discussion about solar theology that takes up a large portion of the first book. Later, Avienus again asks Praetextatus a religious question, this time asking why different people worship the sun with so many different names. Again, Macrobius highlights Praetextatus' religious knowledge in a context that additionally suggests a philosophical approach to religion.

> Hic Avienus: Hoc equidem mecum multum ac frequenter agitavi, quid sit quod solem modo Apollinem modo Liberum modo sub aliarum appellationum varietate veneremur. Et quia sacrorum omnium praesulem esse te, Vetti Praetextate, divina voluerunt, perge, quaeso, rationem mihi tantae sub uno nomine in nominibus diversitatis aperire. Tum Vettius: Cave aestimes, mi Aviene, poetarum gregem, cum de dis fabulantur, non ab adytis plerumque philosophiae semina mutuari. Nam quod omnes paene deos, dumtaxat qui sub caelo sunt, ad solem referunt, non vana superstitio sed ratio divina commendat.[446]
>
> Here Avienus said: "I've gone over this question in my mind, often and long: why is it that we worship the sun now as Apollo, now as Liber, now by various other names? Because the divine powers wished that you, Vettius Praetextatus, be master of all sacred lore, please, go on and reveal to me the reason that so many different names converge on a single godhead." Then Vettius said: "Careful, my good Avienus: do not suppose that when the flocks of poets tell stories of the gods they are not often

[446] *Saturnalia* 1.17.1-2.

> borrowing germs of wisdom from the sacred shrine of philosophy. It's not empty superstition but divine reason that prompts them to relate almost all gods-at least those beneath heaven-to the sun."

Avienus firsts asks Praetextatus to explain these religious matters because of his mastery of religious knowledge (*sacrorum omnium praesulem*). The word *praesulis* used to describe Praetextatus is translated as "master" by Robert Kaster in his edition of the work, but the word *praesul* has specific religious connotations that stem from pagan religious tradition. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* defines the word as a person leading a religious precession and connects it etymologically to the word *salio* (to jump), perhaps suggesting a link to the priesthood of the *Salii*. *Lewis and Short* gives an analysis of the word over time, referring to its use in later religious language to denote Christian religious offices, such as the bishopric. The religious nature of the word *praesul*, which perhaps is also punning of Praetextatus' own name, helps to further characterize Macrobius' Praetextatus as a character steeped in religious lore and antiquarian learning. While Kastor's translation of *praesul* as master works, there are many more religious layers to which Kastor's translation does not allude.

The language of the passage suggests a philosophical, specifically Platonic, way of interpreting the gods. Praetextatus says that the poets often draw from philosophical thought in their descriptions of the gods, and the description of the gods as emanations of the sun has philosophical precedents, as we saw in Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris*. Praetextatus bolsters this philosophical agenda with a Greek quote attributing to the philosophers the idea that "all is one."[447] The idea of monotheism stemming from these

[447] *Saturnalia* 1.17.4.

ideas of solar theology is not a new idea, and Praetextatus is presented as describing a long tradition of philosophical thought.[448]

A few connections are immediately apparent between Macrobius' description of solar theology and Praetextatus' own funerary monument. First, Praetextatus' use of Greek recalls Paulina's praise of her husband working on texts in both Latin and Greek. Second, nearly every deity listed on Praetextatus' monument appears in Macrobius. The only deity that is not in both texts is Mithras, whose absence in Macrobius seems strange considering Mithras' importance in the later empire.[449] These links between the *Saturnalia* and Praetextatus' funerary monument do not prove Macrobius was familiar with the monument, but these connesctions do suggest that Macrobius' sources were influenced to some degree by the sentiments found both on the monument and in Symmachus' *Letters*.

At the end of the long lecture on the solar roots of a great many deities, Praetextatus' captivated audience praises the religiously minded senator for his speech. But, as Wolf Liebeschuetz points out, they do not praise him for the novelty of his arguments but rather his learning and erudition.[450]

> Hic cum Praetextatus fecisset loquendi finem, omnes in eum adfixis vultibus ammirationem stupore prodebant: dein laudare hic memoriam, ille doctrinam, cuncti religionem, adfirmantes, hunc esse unum arcanae deorum naturae conscium, qui solus divina et adsequi animo et eloqui posset ingenio.[451]

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[448] Liebeschuetz, "The Significance of," 191. Plutarch presents Osiris' connections with the sun which has certain philosophical implications of Osiris being a supreme Platonic deity. Apuleius describes Isis in the same language of a deity of many names but one divine presence, although Apuleius, interestingly, connects Isis with the moon.
[449] Liebeschuetz, "The Significance of," 189.
[450] Liebeschuetz, "The Significance of," 196.
[451] *Saturnalia* 1.24.1.

> Here, as Praetextatus finished speaking, all had their eyes fixed upon him, with looks that made plain their astonishment and wonder. Then this one began to praise his memory, this one his learning, all of them his piety, swearing that here was the one man who knows the gods' secret nature, the only man with the intellect to grasp things divine and the ability to expound them.

The language of the passage recalls earlier praise for Praetextatus in the *Saturnalia*, and Macrobius expects a reader to mirror Praetextatus' audience in their amazement of ancient learning displayed in his speech. The praise comes specifically for his memory, learning, and piety (*hic memoriam, ille doctrinam, cuncti religionem*). Praetextatus is not astounding for the novelty of his argument, but for the breadth of learning and his ability to explain it all (*qui solus divina et adsequi animo et eloqui posset ingenio*). Macrobius seeks to use the character of Praetextatus, which he clearly models on reality with some embellishment, to promote the importance of antiquarian knowledge. Praetextatus' connection with mystery cults allows for an in-depth philosophical discussion of religion that relies heavily on ancient sources and traditional modes of thought. As far as sources go, there is no definitive way to tell whether Macrobius had seen Praetextatus' funerary monument. Even if he had not seen the monument, Macrobius must have been aware of sources that refer to the same qualities of the pagan senator that Paulina refers to in her poem. Mystery cults play an important part in the creation of Macrobius' character because they reinforce Praetextatus' philosophical and religious learning. These traits are indispensible for the antiquarian minded Macrobius, and the *gravitas* Macrobius confers on Praetextatus in these qualities are the reason why Macrobius specifically calls the period of the senator the *saeculum Praetextati*.

**VI. Conclusion: Praetextatus' Death, Afterlife, and Remembrance**

Before Praetextatus was commemorated with a fictionalized portrait of the *Saturnalia,* his close family and friends sought to immortalize the senator after his death. Both Paulina and Symmachus attempted to memorialize Praetextatus in similar ways. According to Symmachus in *Relatio 11*, written soon after Praetextatus' death, the passing of the senator was such a tragedy that the whole city mourned.[452] Symmachus, true to his traditionalist nature, went through traditional avenues and submitted a request directly to the emperor to have a statue erected. *Relatio 12* attempts to convey the importance of Praetextatus as a role model for posterity. His example would act as an incentive for others to achieve high honors in civic matters.[453] Symmachus' description of his friend in *Relatio 12* mirrors what Paulina writes on the funerary monument. Paulina also presents her husband as a role model,[454] saying that all Romans look to her as an example after his death because of his influence on her (*Optant, probantque nunc viri nunc feminae, quae tu magister indidisti insignia*). Symmachus also characterizes Praetextatus as uninterested in worldly rewards (*Non quod ille praemia terrena desideret...qui gaudia corporis…ut caduca calcavit*).[455] This idea of the fleeting nature of earthly rewards is conveyed in his monument through the phrases *sed ista parva* and *quae tu caduca ac parva semper autumans.* The use of *caduca* is used in both texts to mean

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[452] Barrow, *Prefect and Emperor,* 72-76. Barrow states that *Relatio* 11 was written sometime shortly after Praetextatus death in late 384. He states that *Relatio* 11 was sent by special messenger to inform the imperial court of the arrival of *Relatio* 10, which, as Barrow says, is "the more formal of the two" (76).
[453] Barrow, *Prefect and Emperor,* 78-81 does not give an exact date for the *Relatio* 12, but the clear implication is that Praetextatus has only recently died.
[454] It is difficult to conclude whether Symmachus would have known about the poetry on the Funerary monument at this point. He might have mirrored the sentiment that Paulina presented the funeral speech for her husband (treated below). It might also be his own thoughts stemming that find their source in his descriptions of Praetextatus as concerned with scholarly pursuits.
[455] *Relatio 12.* "…not because that man desired earthly rewards…as he passed over pleasures of the body as fleeting things."

fleeting suggests that Symmachus may have heard Paulina's poem before he wrote this *relatio*. *Relatio 12* presents a picture of Praetextatus that matches closely what Symmachus said about him in his letters and the portraits on his funeral monument. Symmachus' speech, as well as a collection of Praetextatus' speeches, were considered by Valentinian II, who deemed the reputation of the senator was worthy of a statue on the forum.[456] Fragmentary evidence shows the remains of a statue in the Roman Forum, [457] and Praetextatus was allowed an honor not afforded to many, with most having statues erected in the Forum of Trajan at this time.[458]

In an unprecedented move, the Vestal Virgins requested permission to put up a statue of Praetextatus for his service as *pontifex Vestae*, and Paulina enthusiastically expressed her support.[459] Symmachus, however, made it clear that this type of commemoration would be wrong for two important reasons.[460] First, he argues that no *pontifex Vestae* has ever received that honor before, and it would be wrong to let the Vestals award a statue. Second, it was inappropriate for women to confer honors like this to men.[461] Despite Symmachus' protests, the Vestals erected the statue with Paulina's support. In thanks, Paulina set up a statue and inscription of the Vestal Virgin Coelia Concordia in her home.[462]

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[456] Symmachus writes *Relatio* 24 as a response to Valentinian's request for Praetextatus' materials, which Symmachus presumably sent along with this letter. Barrow, *Prefect and Emperor*, 136-137.
[457] *CIL* 6.1779a.
[458] Salzman and Roberts, *Letter of Symmachus,* 95
[459] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus,* 155.
[460] Symmachus *Letters* 2.36.2-3 discusses his opposition to the Vestals' statue for Praetextatus.
[461] Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus,* 56. His arguments against such a statue are further attestations to his strong ideas of traditionalism.
[462] *CIL* 6.2145. The inscription is sure to mention that Coelia was the first to erect a statue to Praetextatus. Paulina is surely making a not-so-subtle jab at Symmachus, whose proposed statue took some time to get approval.

The image of Praetextatus as senator par excellence extends nearly 50 years later to Macrobius' time, and the essential aspects of religiosity and erudition recall the words of both Paulina and Symmachus. Macrobius, however, brings the focus specifically to Praetextatus' connection to religious cults as a major source of his knowledge. Experience in cult is complementary to antiquarian knowledge in the context of the *Saturnalia*. This deviates slightly from Paulina's poem, in which worldly things and study of texts seem to pale in comparison to the greater knowledge attained from mystery initiations.

Not all remember Praetextatus in such a positive light, and Christian authors attack the pagan affiliations of the deceased senator. Jerome, in a letter written to a woman named Marcella concerning the death of a Christian woman named Lea, echoes some of the phrases in Paulina's poem.[463] Jerome uses the phrase *ante paucos dies*, specifically referring to a procession that the senator made a few days before both Jerome's composition of the letter and Praetextatus' death.[464] Jerome denies that Praetextatus has gone to heaven but instead is in the darkness of Tartarus.[465] He seems to mimic the funerary poem in a few different ways. First, his use of the phrase *in lacteo caeli palatio* recalls Paulina's claim in the poem that the gate of heaven is open to the wise.[466] Cameron argues that Paulina claims outright in her poem that Praetextatus is in heaven, and Jerome is probably embellishing the words of a different poem in which Paulina makes this claim more explicitly. If the words *caeli* and *lacteo* are inverted, it creates the

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[463] Thomas Comerford Lawler, *The Letters of St. Jerome,* trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York: Newman Press, 1963), 5-7. Jerome came to Rome in 382 and served as Damasus secretary. Jerome left Rome in 385 after Damasus died.
[464] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus,* 160. Jerome *Letter* 23.
[465] Jerome makes these claims in *Letter 23* in section 3.
[466] Cameron, *Last Pagans,* 304 and Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus,* 160-1. Line 8 of the poem on the back of the monument includes the phrase *porta quis caeli*.

greater part of an iambic senarius, the meter used on Praetextatus' monument. The connection to a lofty place in the sky and the notion of an afterlife, which appears in the poem, suggests that Jerome may actually be referring to Paulina's words not by direct quotation but in paraphrase. The closeness of his diction to iambic senarii indicates that he is imitating Paulina, as Cameron says, but it is unnecessary to create a hypothetical poem to which Jerome would be referring. It is equally likely that Jerome is making a comment on the general sentiment of the line.

Kahlos proposes that the letter does specifically refer to the monument through Jerome's use of the phrase *uxor infelix*, referring to the wife of the dead senator who falsely believes her husband is in heaven. [467] This phrase relates to the way Paulina describes herself in the poem as *felix* and *maesta coniunx.*[468] Jerome is then blending these different phrases into one in his letter. Jerome wrote this letter shortly after Praetextatus died, and it is unlikely that the monument have been built in the few days between Praetextatus' death and the composition of the letter, so the poem itself could have been circulated in some other way. Kahlos suggests that Paulina's poem was part of a *laudatio funebris,* a funeral speech. Before the *laudatio* given at the funeral proper was subsequently shortened and put on the monument, [469] Jerome could have heard about this speech and adapted it for his own purposes. This explanation accounts for why elements

[467] Kahlos also claims Jerome is adapting the line *porta quis caeli patet.* Jerome attacks Paulina in *Letter* 39. In section 3 of that letter, he calls Paulina foolish for propitiating the altars of the heathen gods for the sake of her husband. He calls her the devil's handmaiden (*ancilla*) which is comparable to *famula divis* on the monument. He also says of her *infidelem maritum fingit caelum* "she places her unfaithful husband into the sky." Jerome *Letter* 23. *nunc desolatus est, nudus, non in lacteo caeli palatio, ut uxor conmentitur infelix, sed in sordentibus tenebris continetur.* "He is now alone, naked, not in the milky place of the sky, as his unhappy wife falsely claims, but he is held in foul shadows." The text comes from Centre Traditio Litterarum Occidentalium, CETEDOC., and Brepols (Firm). *Library of Latin texts. Series A.* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). The translations are my own.

[468] Back poem lines 39 and 40 for *felix* and line 38 for *maesta coniunx*.

[469] Kahlos, *Vettius,* 161.

of Paulina's poem appear but are not exactly quoted by Jerome. Jerome clearly mocks Paulina's hopes for her dead husband, and he uses Praetextatus as an example of the follies of pagan practice and meaningfully uses paganism as a defining characteristic of Praetextatus. In opposition to the funerary monument, Jerome presents Praetextatus as a fool who clung to heathen practices. As Praetextatus was a good model for Paulina and Symmachus, Jerome looks at Praetextatus as a bad model of improper religious behavior. Ultimately, paganism draws Jerome's attention and vitriol to Praetextatus in order to act as a stark contrast to Jerome's Christianity. It is precisely Praetextatus' public pagan image that continues to be a defining characteristic of the senator.

The same sort of abuse is evident in the anonymously authored *Carmen contra paganos*. References to Symmachus in line 114 establish a late fourth century date for composition.[470] The poem is 122 lines of hexameters attached to a copy of Prudentius found in Paris (Parisinus latinus 8084). The poem is of unknown authorship,[471] and the subject of the attack has long been debated.[472] Alan Cameron and Maijastina Kahlos, however, believe that the poem must be referring to Praetextatus, considering the political offices and cult affiliations mentioned in the text and those in the poem to Praetextatus.[473]

[470] Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, 173.
[471] Cameron, *The Last Pagans*, 309-319 vehemently argues that Damasus penned the poem, but others argue that the quality of the work does not fit the sophistication of Damasus style. See Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus*, 164; Daunta Shanzer, "The Anonymous Carmen Contra Pagonos and the Date and Identity of the Centonist Proba," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 32 (1986): 241-242; J.F. Matthews, "The Historical Setting of the 'Carmen Contra Paganos' (Cod. Par Lat. 8084)," *Historia Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 19(1970): 464 points out the "persuasive incompetence of the writer." See also Dennis Trout, *Damasus of Rome: The Epigraphic Poetry: Introduction, Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26-38 for a discussion of Damasus and the CCP and a review of Cameron's arguments.
[472] Matthews, "The Historical Setting," 475, C. Robert Philips III, "The Compitalia and the "Carmen Contra Paganos,"" *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 37 (1988): 384-383, and Altay Coskum, "Virius Nichomachus Flavianus, Der Prefectus und Consul des "Carmen Contra Paganos," *Vergiline Christiana* 58 (2004) all posit Virius Nicomachus Flavianus as the target of the poem.
[473] Kahlos, *Vettius Agorius Praetextatus*, 165-167, Cameron, *The Last Pagans,* 273. Shanzer, "The Anonymous Carmen," 238-240 makes the case for Praetextatus as the target.

The poem attacks paganism in general before focusing on the recently dead senator (*metas tandem qui pervenit ad aevi* (27) and *iaces parvo donate sepulcro* (111)). Praetextatus is attacked for his pagan affiliations and ridicules at some lengths his participation in the mystery cults as useless in preventing his death.[474] The anonymous author also attacks the mourning wife, who foolishly looks to the pagan gods to help her dead husband. Her actions, the author tells us, expedite the pagan senator's one-way-trip to Tartarus (*praecipitem inferias miserum sub Tartara misit*). The poem's attacks all revolve around the impiety of the pagan Praetextatus. Even the cruelty that the poet reports is attributable to Praetextatus' pagan beliefs. The CCP does much of the same things as Jerome's letters in denigrating the senator for his beliefs in the pagan gods. Praetextatus' paganism is a constant in both, and each, though disparagingly, links Praetextatus with paganism. The derogatory Christian depictions of Praetextatus hone in on paganism and his mystery cult associations as Praetextatus' key attribute and follow the same trends as the funerary monument and the *Saturnalia,* thought the Christians emphasize the negatives and undercut Praetextatus' intellectual capabilities.

Ultimately, scholarship and religiosity are indispensable aspects of Praetextatus' character in all representations of him. The pagan nature of his monument and the heavy emphasis on mystery initiation that have attracted many scholars to this senator are important to Praetextatus' (or maybe, more accurately, Paulina's) representation of himself. The private and personal nature of the mysteries allow for introspective study and have some connection to a knowledge that seems to stand above what Praetextatus learned from antiquarian texts. Macrobius best illustrates this connection between religion and philosophy, and intellectualism, in the *Saturnalia,* and he expands to some

[474] Lines 98-109.

degree the ideas present on the monument. Just as the other subjects of this study, Praetextatus, in his monument and in the *Saturnalia*, intimately ties mystery cults with some type of philosophical knowledge. His success as a priest and literary figure comes from his knowledge of philosophy which wonderfully complemented his religious participation. He seems to approach mystery cults in the same way that Plutarch prescribes in his *On Isis and Osiris*, namely that only the philosophical and educated mind can truly appreciate and understand the merits of these cults.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Writing about mystery cults is just as transformative as mystery initiation. That is, as the initiation ritual is meant to transform an individual through an experience of the sacred, the exegesis of the ritual and its philosophical meaning transforms the author's public image. In the present study, each author shows his knowledge of Plato, who offers a means of unraveling the complex threads of clandestine knowledge hidden in the mystery material. Mystery cults, in this way, are important self-fashioning tools because of the wide array of interpretive possibilities of this rather diverse body of material. This study has examined various texts from different time periods, produced by people who were living in Greece, North Africa, and Rome. Yet, despite the differences among the subjects of the present study, mystery cults are the cohesive element that bind this disparate group. Each author appropriates mystery cults in his writing in order to display his philosophical acumen. By putting an intellectual twist on a popular religious form, these authors effectively take possession of these religious cults by asserting the need for philosophical education as a prerequisite for proper participation in cult. Moreover, the line between "religion" and philosophy is blurred to the point that to study one is to study the other.

Mystery cults contain meaning beyond the philosophical, and historical context informs the message an author conveys about himself in the text. Imperial politics surely play a role in this type of self-fashioning, and the promotion of certain cults, like Isis', by the imperial regime directs attention to certain cults. The exotic façade of the foreign gods is an intriguing aspect of these mystery cults, and the authors here have translated the otherness of these cults into something relatable, something that is immediately

intelligible to a Greco-Roman audience. Ironically, the authors rely on the "oriental" gods to promote an image of themselves that is Greco-Roman at its core, informed by Greek *paideia* and Roman tradition. In this way, mystery texts are (auto)biographical because they rely on the author's presentation of his experiences in a calculated way that aims at self-presentation.

Plutarch's *On Superstition* and *On Isis and Osiris* are works that posit the need for philosophical introspection in a religious context, especially in the context of mystery initiations. *On Superstition* is a key text that establishes the religious framework that Plutarch uses as the basis of his other philosophical discussions of religion. He argues that superstition, an excessive fear of the gods and anything beyond human control, is a condition more dangerous than atheism. Whereas atheism leads to apathy, superstition can lead to any number of dangerous results, fueled by irrational thinking. What constitutes true religion lies somewhere between these two extremes, and, for Plutarch, reason and philosophical learning are essential to the proper understanding of religion. Reason staves off the disorder of the soul that fear and excessive emotion cause. In other texts, Plutarch points out that the ordered soul is the product of pursuing the divine, an act only accomplishable for one who has read Plato.

*On Isis and Osiris* picks up these ideas of religious rationality and applies them to the cults of Isis and Osiris. Plutarch begins by removing the foreignness of the Egyptian deities and argues that they are originally Greek, an origin that predates the Egyptian trappings associated with the cult. Upon establishing their innate Greekness, Plutarch describes the cults of Isis and Osiris in the terms of Platonic philosophy. Isis is the moving intellect that seeks the truth that is Osiris. Plutarch maintains the philosophically

informed approach to religion that he established in his earlier treatise by describing the cults as only intelligible to the philosophically inclined. He does not promote new rituals for the Isis cult, but rather he encourages philosophical introspection as a key element in understanding what the religious rituals mean.

Plutarch's work in the second-century coincides with greater intellectual trends that promote the study of Greek culture, history, and philosophy. In both the *Lives* and *Moralia*, Plutarch draws on his Greek roots, from his education in Athens and his time spent in Delphi, to argue for the supremacy of Greek culture. Plutarch uses mystery cults to emphasize his Greekness and his philosophical expertise. His discussions of religion assert that Greek philosophy is the only way to understand religious material, and mystery initiations are akin to philosophic epiphany. Because mystery cults are dense with philosophical meaning, as Plato opines in the *Phaedo* (69C-D) it is no surprise that Plutarch uses the mysteries to show off his philosophical acumen. Furthermore, the Platonic elements he sees in the cults reinforce his Greek origins. His discussions of the mysteries highlight the qualities of a Greek intellectual, a character who owes much to Plato.

Apuleius also follows a Platonic thread in his own works. Apuleius wrote in North Africa in Latin some thirty years after Plutarch died, but his works bear similarities to Plutarch's discussions about religion, and Isis again appears as a major focus. Apuleius' *Apology* provides some biographical information about Apuleius and establishes him as philosophically inclined, with a clear preference for Plato. While the *Apology* is a defense speech which is inherently meant to promote a certain image of the speaker in order to get an acquittal, Apuleius presents himself as more of a lecturing philosopher than the

defendant in a criminal proceeding. In fact, he spends much of the speech establishing his philosophical credentials. Importantly, Apuleius claims that what the prosecution present as magic is actually philosophical study. He uses Plato to present the magician and the priest as synonymous, claiming that a charge of magic is like being accused of having vast religious knowledge. Apuleius ties his participation in the mysteries and philosophical study by listing the mystery cults in which he was an initiate, and he claims that he pursues religion as a means of pursuing truth. Apuleius' description of how religion relates to the truth recalls Plutarch's assertion that truth and virtue are the products of seeking God, an intellectual track only available to those who know Plato. Throughout his defense speech, Apuleius champions an intellectual and introspective approach to religion.

*The Golden Ass*, however, presents its main character Lucius as lacking some of the qualities that Apuleius promotes in his *Apology*. The resonances between the speech and the novel become even more pronounced if one reads the novel with the Apuleius from the *Apology* in mind. Apuleius highlights Lucius' familial connection to Plutarch early in the novel and alerts readers to the philosophical undertones of the novel. Lucius' interest in magic recalls the *Apology*, and reflects his curious nature that seems to be philosophically inspired. Unfortunately it is this curiosity that leads to Lucius' transformation into the ass, a fate that Isis finally cures in Book XI of the novel. The Egyptian Isis, portrayed in all her foreign splendor, tells Lucius of her status as the ultimate Platonic deity and offers him a cure for his asinine form. Once Lucius becomes an initiate of the goddess' cult, however, he loses the curiosity that had been a cornerstone of his character and instead becomes a bald and unquestioning servant of Isis.

He seems to ignore the philosophical bread crumbs that appear in the novel for unthinking reliance on what appears to be a manipulative human element in the cult. While he is quick to call out the priests of the Syrian goddess for their fraud, he refuses to see the similarities in his initiations into the cults of Isis and Osiris. Isis' presence in *The Golden Ass* is Apuleius' commentary on proper religious behavior, and Lucius is an example of what not to do. As Plutarch argued that linen robes and a bald head do not make a true Isiac initiate, Apuleius seems to be in agreement. As Lucius stops asking questions, he loses his opportunity to gain a philosophical understanding of what he is doing as an initiate. Without that understanding, his actions and the accompanying symbols are empty gestures. Lucius, in a way, is a failed Apuleius, almost the antithesis to the Apuleius on display in the *Apology.*

Although nearly two-hundred years separate Praetextatus from the previous two authors, mystery cults and philosophy (although not explicitly Platonic) are still an essential part of his constructed image. Unlike the other subjects of this study, however, Praetextatus' extant works amount only to two short poems. His wife's poetry represents her husband by promoting his pagan affiliations in an era when Christianity has become the dominant religion. Immediately, the religious offices listed in his *cursus honorum* on the front of the monument connect him to a traditional Roman past. Paulina in the poem on the back of the monument, however, emphasizes the mystery cults in which she and her husband were initiated and describes her husband as seeing worldly things as trivial. The poem on the monument's back side reinforces the importance of mystery cults and describes Praetextatus as learnedly (*doctus*) worshiping a multifaceted divinity (*multiplex numen*) through his participation in cults. The idea of the *multiplex numen* recalls

discussions of the nature of the supreme God in both Plutarch and Apuleius, suggesting Platonic resonances on the funerary monument.

Other authors, both contemporary and later, repeatedly present paganism as the defining element of Praetextatus character. Symmachus in his letters to Praetextatus laments Praetextatus' long absences from Rome and suggests a level of neglect of Praetextatus' priestly duties. Symmachus emphasizes the civic nature of religion and explicitly connects civic cults with ideas of traditionalism. Additionally Symmachus praises the scholarly pursuits of his friend, noting that Praetextatus' long vacations are an excuse to study.

The version of Praetextatus in Macrobius' *Saturnalia* likely does not represent the "real" Praetextatus, but Macrobius still emphasizes paganism and antiquarianism as important aspects of Praetextatus' character. Macrobius' Praetextatus derives his authority and intellectual prestige from his knowledge of pagan religion. His lecture on solar theology recalls the *multiplex numen* featured on the funerary monument, and his audience marvels not at the novelty of Praetextatus' ideas but also at the breadth of his religious knowledge. As it was for Plutarch and Apuleius, intellectualism, as it is connected to mystery cults and religion, is one of the defining characteristics of Praetextatus.

Even the Christian attacks on Praetextatus rely on paganism as the defining characteristic of Praetextatus, though they undercut his intellectualism. Jerome claims that Praetextatus could only be in Hell, and his place in the heavenly realm is only his wife's wishful (and misguided) thinking. The *Carmen contra paganos* attacks Praetextatus in the same way, arguing that only a fool would worship the immoral pagan

gods. The anonymous author also takes pointed aim at Praetextatus' mystery affiliations. He claims that Praetextatus appears foolish for going through the ritual of the taurobolium and "mourning" for the dead Osiris as an initiate of Isis' cult. Again, the heart of the issue for these two Christians is Praetextatus' broad pagan affiliations, but his status as an initiate in the mysteries is another means of attacking the senator.

Mystery cults are repeatedly used as self-fashioning tools that generally allow for intellectual self-presentation. Each author presented in this study addressed the intellectual merits of mystery initiation in a (Platonically) philosophical way. The idea of a supreme Platonic deity who represents philosophical truth appears repeatedly, and the mysteries offer an opportunity for the philosophically initiated to pursue this truth. It is the versatility of these cults that makes them attractive means of self-representation. Time and space both affect the message an author conveys, and the same material that made it possible for Plutarch to emphasize his Greek heritage allows Praetextatus to show his allegiance to Roman traditionalism. Ultimately, mystery cults provided the means of presenting a particular image to an audience through the various philosophical and cultural associations of the cults. The philosophical trends are surprisingly consistent for each subject of this study, and the meaning associated with mystery initiations is able to bridge the Constantinian divide. The adaptability and the openness to interpretation of mystery cults are the means by which Plutarch, Apuleius, and Praetextatus bolster similar aspects of their public images.

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