

# **Serious or Humorous?**

Religious Passages in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

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### INTRODUCTION

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* tells the story of Lucius, a young man, who travels to Thessaly, led by his curiosity for magic. At first he only listens to stories about magic, but soon he becomes the main character in his own magical story. Lucius accidentally turns into an ass, and has all kinds of adventures. He is unable to speak like a human being; however, he is still able to think and reason like a human. He is mistreated, overloaded, stolen and kicked around, at least in the first ten books. Book XI is the turning point in Lucius' story; his miseries seem to come to an end when Lucius prays to the moon goddess and Isis appears, takes pity on him and decides to help him. Lucius eats the roses of one of her priests and becomes a man again and even an initiate into the Isis cult.

This perspective portrays the *Metamorphoses* as a beautiful conversion novel of a man who is lost in his ways, punished for his curiosity, and finally finds himself as an initiate into the Isis cult. However, the *Metamorphoses* does not end there. Some scholars look at Book XI in a different manner. They claim that Lucius is still the same curious young man, who has learned nothing from his miserable adventures. Furthermore, he is being taken advantage of by the Isis priests, just as he has been taken advantage of by his masters in his time as an ass. No less than three times he has to pay for new initiations. He then ends up in a group of priests that is historically speaking only of secondary importance. Looking at the story in this way, one can also interpret the entire novel<sup>1</sup> as ridiculing all religion; as one big comedy.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when studying the *Metamorphoses*, scholars have always posed the question whether one must read this novel as a serious conversion story or as a comic story, that is, as a satire on religion.

This question, however, has mostly been about Book XI and the Isis cult. Most scholars do take the first ten books and the many religious passages they contain into consideration, but they do not give them nearly as much attention as they deserve. In the search for an answer to the question whether the *Metamorphoses*' was intended to be a serious conversion novel or a comic novel, one must not only look at the ending, but also the beginning and the middle. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus mainly on the religious passages in the first ten books in an attempt to find an answer to this question. I will not, unlike some scholars have done with the first ten books, ignore the existence of Book XI, for a story is not a story without an ending. I will, however, not tender it as much as the first ten books, for Book XI has already had a lot of

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this thesis I will not discuss the question of genre, but I gladly refer the reader to Finkelpearl (2001), Harrison ed. (1999), Walsh (1970) and Scobie (1969).

<sup>2</sup> Hunink (2003), 252.

attention in Apuleian scholarship. Of course, one must also consider passages from a different nature, e.g. philosophical and learned passages, which will be discussed shortly in chapter four. Nevertheless, the emphasis should be on the religious passages and the religion they represent in a historical context. In comparing literature to history, we might discover the true meaning behind these passages.

In this chapter I will first give an overview of scholarship on Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* concerning religion. Subsequently, I will discuss the term 'religion' and what definition I give it in my thesis. Lastly, I will provide an overview of the chapters this thesis contains, and explain the approach to each chapter.

### **Status Questionis**

The question of how to interpret religion in the *Metamorphoses* has been an old question with many answers. Curiously enough though, most questions so far have been restricted to Book XI. An influential theory about the meaning of Book XI has been Winkler's narratological reading in his work *Author & Actor* (1985). He argues that the Isis passage can be read in two different ways and that the narrator deliberately leaves enough ambiguity in order for both ways to be equally possible. Whether you read the ending as seriously religious or comically is up to you, the reader. Accordingly, the reader's own religious beliefs or sceptical mind are important in this aspect. Winkler's theory can also be described alternatively: "Apuleius has given us a kind of toolbox full of parts that we can reassemble in any number of different ways. Thus the *Metamorphoses* is a sort of do-it-yourself novel."<sup>3</sup>

Twentieth century scholarship in religious readings of the *Metamorphoses* has essentially taken two forms. The first concentrates mostly on the passages that seem to represent Isiac myth and actual cult practice. A system of allusions to Isiac cult pervades the text and anticipates its culmination in Lucius' initiation into the Isiac cult in Book XI. Merkelbach (1962), for example, claims that the novel is an elaborately encoded mystery text, fully intelligible only to initiates. This approach based on locating Isiac symbolism inevitably privileges Book XI as an almost independently standing episode, without explaining the role of the first ten books. The second form of twentieth century scholarship focusses on the moral ideas of sin, punishment and redemption, thus reading the *Metamorphoses* as a moral allegory. Lucius' sufferings as an ass are a punishment for letting himself being led by his desire for sex and his curiosity about magic.<sup>4</sup> Festugière (1954), for example, reads the story as a contrast between Isis and Fortuna, with Isis as the big winner. Thus reading the *Metamorphoses* as a story that starts with sin

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<sup>3</sup> Shumate (1996), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Walsh (1970), Tatum (1969).

(where Fortuna has the upper hand) and ends with redemption – the passage of a sinner’s miserable condition to a pure and sanctified life.<sup>5</sup>

More recent scholarship is still divided on how to interpret the religious passages. Shumate (1996), building in part on Festugière, argues that Book XI should be taken seriously and that it is intended as a sincere story of religious initiation and conversion. She argues that Lucius’ crisis before his conversion to Isis is not moral, but rather epistemological. Considering sex as being morally problematic is purely a Christian influenced view; sex was not considered a sin in antiquity. Lucius’ pursuit of sexual and magical adventures is symptomatic of a much more general failure and fits into the pattern of crisis and conversion. A collapse of the familiar world precedes the convert’s reconstruction of a new world and world view along religious lines. The process of conversion replaces the old world for the new.

Hunink (2003) introduces the problem as it is presented in modern scholarship. He acknowledges a deeper message of the story of the human being as small and weak, as prey to many dangers of himself and others. He cannot save himself, but needs a voluntary act of mercy from a god. The religious texts in the final chapters seem to be intriguing and authentic, thus supporting the interpretation of the novel as a mystical initiation novel. Nonetheless, Lucius does not change throughout the story. When he has returned to his human form he is still led by curiosity and naivety, of which the Isis priests make good use. If the Isis priests make fun of Lucius, this suggests an entirely new meaning to the ending of the novel and the novel as a whole. Does this book scoff at all religion or does it praise religion as the final destination of man? Hence, some argue that Book XI should be read as a comic parody of cult devotees like Lucius. Van Mal-Maeder (in: Hofmann and Zimmerman eds. 1997), for example, argues that the end of the story is missing, and would have returned to a more comical tone. Keulen (2003) reads Book XI satirically, connecting it with an equally satirical reading of the story about Socrates in Book one.

Winkler says in his introduction that "Book XI posing as an answer makes I-X a question. Lucius’ adventures retroactively become a problem at the moment when the last book claims to be not only a conclusion to them but a solution of them."<sup>6</sup> Why has this question Winkler talks about never been asked? Religion in Book XI has had much attention, while the other instances of religion in the first ten books were discussed occasionally. This has mostly been done in research on Book XI - since you cannot discuss the last book of a work without discussing the preceding books - and in more historical books about magic. Rüpke (2007), in his *Companion to Roman Religion*, states that if you want to learn something about religion in the imperial period,

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<sup>5</sup> The treatment of the status questionis on religion in Book XI has been loosely based on Harrison (2013), 166-168 and Shumate (1996), 11-13.

<sup>6</sup> Winkler (1985), 9.

you should look at Book XI of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.<sup>7</sup> As if there are no other passages in the entire *Metamorphoses* that could contribute to religion in the imperial period. As a result it seems as though the other ten books are just for show.

### **Definition of 'Religion'**

Before explaining the methodological approach used in this thesis, a definition of the term 'religion' will be provided. An important aspect to start with is the absence of 'the Roman religion'. Religion in Rome absorbed numerous gods and with them came stories about them, practices to venerate them, and even their priests, who accompanied them, or priesthoods that were invented on the spot. A good example of this religious multiplicity can be found in Book XI.1-5, where Isis introduces Lucius to her astounding multiple personalities as seen by different people of the Roman empire: To the Phrygians she is the Pessinuntian Mother of the Gods, to the Athenians the Cecropian Minerva, to the Cyprians she is the Venus of Paphus, to the Cretans she is Dictynna, to the Sicilians the Ortygian Proserpina, to the Eleusinians she is Ceres, and to others Juno, Bellona, Hecate, or the Rhamnusia Goddess. However, only the Ethiopians, Africans, and the Egyptians honour her with true rites and call her by her true name: Isis. Isis identifies herself with most of the great goddesses of pagan antiquity, claiming that despite different local names and local rituals, all people worship the same divinity. No wonder people in antiquity were confused about which god to pray to.<sup>8</sup> This convergence of different religions in the concept of Isis is just one example of the lack of 'the Roman religion'. There was a discordant unity of Mediterranean religions. Many inhabitants of the empire were aware of its diverse and rich religious traditions, and an exchange among these traditions had been going on long before Apuleius was born.<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this research, however, we need to come to an agreement on the term 'religion'. I will, therefore, join Rüpke's view on religion, that 'religion' is conceptualised as human actions and communications, performed on the presupposition that gods existed who were part of one's own social or political group and existed in the same space and time.<sup>10</sup>

Within this view we also place the aspect of magic. Is it possible to distinguish religion and magic? With the exception of the Christian attitude toward 'magic', the Romans produced no precise definition of what magic was and what was not.<sup>11</sup> According to Johnston (2007), 'magic' in antiquity almost always referred to someone else's religious practices. The term 'magic'

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<sup>7</sup> Rüpke ed. (2007), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Rüpke ed. (2013), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Johnston ed. (2007), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Rüpke ed. (2007), 4-7.

<sup>11</sup> Rüpke ed. (2007), 387.

distanced those religious practices from the norm, that is, from one's own practices, which constituted religion. This distance was of good use to magicians: it could lend them glamour and authority, for example in claiming that their spells had been invented by the legendary Egyptian magicians. To people not acquainted with magic, however, this distance usually implied charlatantry, alliances with dark gods and demons, and coercion of gods to whom other pious people prayed.<sup>12</sup>

The Romans had come to disapprove of magic by the middle of the first century BC and in all likelihood earlier. These magical practices were not proper religious behaviour. Some thought these magicians were nothing but charlatans, others were prepared to believe that the rituals were effective.<sup>13</sup> Apuleius' view on magic and knowledge of magic will be discussed in chapter four.

The scholarly quest to divide magic from religion, which began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, originates from a similar desire to divide the unacceptable from the acceptable. Whereas now, most scholars of religion concede that a reliable means of dividing magic and religion or a way of defining magic will never be found. Just as there is not a single, clear, detailed description of 'religion', there is none of 'magic' either. Many gods and religious leaders were reputed to employ techniques that we might call magical, but when we examine these techniques, we discover that they differ from other religious practices more in details than in substance or attitude. We can explain many differences between magical and religious practices by noting that the magician was more or less a "technician of the sacred," someone who knew more about how to approach the superhuman world than ordinary people did.<sup>14</sup>

It is not hard to see the connection between these men educated in the superhuman world and Pythagoras, Plato and their followers. This brings us to the next distinction: between religion and philosophy. Philosophers who based their ideas on Plato's, but who believed that Plato was the intellectual heir of Pythagoras, had a growing interest in the occult from the second century BC onwards. From the late second century AD, it became difficult to distinguish philosophy and magic. The relationship between philosophical discourse and religious practice changed fundamentally with Plutarch (end first, beginning second century AD): He was not only a philosopher, but also a priest at Delphi. Ritual practices were not mere metaphors or objects for analysis to him, but they also provided a valid affirmation of philosophical considerations. For Plutarch, the traditional form of ritual was a source of information of a higher order. A new view on rituals came into existence at the same time when Platonic philosophers began to include precise instructions on how to perform certain rituals in their teachings, called

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<sup>12</sup> Johnston ed. (2007), 140-141.

<sup>13</sup> Dickie (2001), 141.

<sup>14</sup> Johnston ed. (2007), 142.

theurgy.<sup>15</sup> To affect union with the divine and to heighten their perceptual powers, Platonist philosophers used techniques and rituals derived from the magician.<sup>16</sup>

What we can take from this is that religion, magic, and philosophy were intertwined. Religion seems to be the all-embracing term, but they all relate to each other on many levels. This makes our task at hand, looking at religious passages, a lot harder. Ultimately, what is a religious passage and what is not? Consequently, I have chosen to pay attention to cults in my second chapter and magical practices in my third chapter, thus separating the two aspects of religion. I will not devote an entire chapter to philosophical passages, due to the lack of them in the book. However, I will look at philosophical passages in combination with my analysis of the author himself in the fourth chapter.

## **Contents and Methodological Approach**

The following section is devoted to explaining the contents of this thesis. In my second chapter I will take a look at the religious passages where gods play a part. I will subdivide the gods into two groups: the classical Greek-Roman gods and the other gods. My methodological approach will be historical. Do the different religious stories coincide with the historical and religious reality we claim to know? I will compare the different stories with other sources about religion in the Roman Empire in the second half of the second century AD. I will examine whether religious stories that seem bizarre to us can logically be explained. Additionally, I will investigate whether the truthfulness of a story says something about a story being seen as seriously religious or satirically comic. In the third chapter the same approach will be upheld as employed in chapter II. However, the subject of the chapter will change to magic and dreams.

The fourth chapter will be a chapter of context. After we have taken a look at the historical context of the religious passages, it is important to also take a look at the historical context of the author. Who was Apuleius? Both Apuleius as priest and Apuleius as philosopher will be discussed. If Apuleius really belonged to a cult, could he have written a comic work about cults? Moreover, chapter IV will consider the tradition of the ass-tale. Apuleius is not the first who thought about writing about a man who turned into an ass. I will look at the other stories themselves and at what others wrote about them in their own interpretation. Finally, the meaning of Apuleius' choice to place himself in this tradition will be probed, as well as its influence on the role religion plays in his work.

In the conclusion I will give a summary of the preceding chapters and highlight the main lines of argument, which may sometimes be hard to do in the chapters themselves, considering

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<sup>15</sup> Rüpke ed. (2013), 233-234.

<sup>16</sup> Dickie (2001), 202.



the different nature of especially the fourth chapter. I will formulate an answer to my research question: “Are the religious passages in Books I-X of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* intended to give a serious religious meaning to the work or are they used for humorous purposes?”

## CHAPTER II

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### GODDESSES

In this chapter the most elaborately described cult passages in the *Metamorphoses* will be studied. Two methods will be applied to each case: I will take a look at the cult itself and the historical context, in order to get an idea of the manner in which the cults were perceived in Apuleius' time. Secondly, I will take a look at the way the cults are presented in the *Metamorphoses* and how they relate to the Isis cult in Book XI, which is the most elaborately described cult in the novel. Before the different cults will be treated, I will first expand on the meaning of religion and cult. Next I will discuss the Isis cult. Thirdly, the role of Fortuna in the novel on the basis of her cult will be treated. The story of Cupid and Psyche containing allusions to the cults of Venus, Ceres and Juno follows. Lastly, I will look at the cult of Dea Syria, the Syrian goddess. After the passage on the Isis cult, this is the most elaborate passage of a cult that can be found in the *Metamorphoses*. As the reader will have noticed, I have chosen only female goddesses. This does not mean that there are no references to male gods, as there are, for example, to Mars, Apollo, and the God of the Laugh. But these references are scarce and do not give away much about their venerations. A treatment of the male divinities would, therefore, fall beyond the scope of this thesis. To conclude this chapter, I will give a summary of the goddesses of the first ten books in comparison to Isis and interpret their relations in this research's context.

#### Religion and Cult

In scholarship on Roman religion, a distinction has been made between civic religion and cults. Civic religion is usually understood as supplemented by or even in competition with cults. Interest is focused on the so-called 'oriental' cults or religions such as those of Isis, Mithras, or the Syrian deities. In the Roman Empire, religious practices were part of the cultural practices of daily life. Banqueting followed sacrifice and starting a journey called for small sacrifices and prayers. Religion was not restricted to temples and festivals, but permeated all areas of society.<sup>17</sup> Due to the mobility of merchants, soldiers, slaves, and literature, the Hellenistic and imperial period saw a rise of religious options in the form of gods, temples, and groups. It is a fundamental characteristic of the Mediterranean type of polytheism that one selects a deity to address, depending on the situation. So people chose different deities in different situations. An exception to this veneration of multiple gods are cults. These generated religious groups with

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<sup>17</sup> Rüpke ed. (2007), 5.

the concept of exclusivity. This ability of cults to create social bonds is mostly a feature of the imperial period, but it has its Greek antecedents. Rüpke, however, emphasises that the intense internal interaction of these communities and the degree and range of exclusivity have been grossly overvalued in scholarship on religion in the last decades.<sup>18</sup>

Initiation cults were no more than one option among many practices offered by ancient polytheism. From the seventh century BCE onward until the prohibition of Theodosius of pagan cults at the end of the fourth century CE, it was possible for one to be initiated into the mysteries of a specific deity or a number of deities.<sup>19</sup> Johnston adds that mystery cults not only tolerated, but sometimes even supported, multiple memberships among initiates. One reason for this may be that the advantages the cults promised were received not so much by entering into a community of people who would support one another, as by making the personal acquaintance of one or more gods. In a polytheistic system, the more gods one knew, the better. Mystery initiations focused more on the individual as an individual than on the individual as a new member of the group. There was some notion of community among the initiates, for example in communal feasting and the joined secrecy, but the bond between initiates was not one of co-dependence, but rather of shared privilege.<sup>20</sup>

Disagreements on the definition of the mystery cult in antiquity among scholars of religion remain. It is difficult to identify a model of mystery cults in antiquity, for there were many variations among individual cults. Burkert defines mystery cults as initiation ceremonies, cults in which admission and participation depend upon some personal ritual to be performed on the initiand. Secrecy and, in most cases, a nocturnal setting are concomitants of this exclusiveness. Initiation into ancient mysteries did not signify a rise on the social ladder. Any change was defined not in social, but in personal terms: a new state of mind through experience of the sacred by the relation of the initiate to a god or goddess. All mystery cults promised to improve the living conditions of the initiated. To sum up, mysteries were initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal, and secret character that aimed at a change of mind through experience of the sacred.<sup>21</sup>

In an attempt to distinguish a concrete notion of mystery cult, Johnston gives us five criteria that many cults shared, and that seem to be roughly based on Burkert's description. The first is that mystery cults demanded secrecy; initiates were forbidden to relate their experiences. Secondly, mystery cults promised to improve the initiates' situation in the present life and/or after death. Thirdly, initiates gained these advantages by establishing a special relationship with divinities during initiation. The fourth is that mystery cults were optional supplements to civic

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<sup>18</sup> Rüpke ed. (2013), 4-6; 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Rüpke ed. (2013), 216.

<sup>20</sup> Johnston ed. (2007), 107.

<sup>21</sup> Burkert (1987), 7-11.

religion, rather than competing alternatives (this is why we call them ‘cults’, rather than ‘religions’). Lastly, myths that told tales of the cults’ divinities were associated with the cults.<sup>22</sup>

In the second century AD there was a revival of interest in the ancient mystery cults. Broadly speaking, these mysteries involved an initiation in which the problematic nature of an existence ruled by Fortuna (or the Greek Tyche) was not denied, escaped, or controlled, but rather transformed into an existence ruled by a goddess in her guise of ‘True Fortune’.<sup>23</sup> The deities of these mysteries were not new, but had been known from the earliest of times, transformed by and into their new roles of the Roman Empire. In the myths of the mysteries, these transformed deities, mostly goddesses, are represented as wanderers whose journeys lead them from an existence of humanlike suffering to a transformed existence as celestial saviours. They become the universal goddess. In the *Metamorphoses*, stories about some of these universal goddesses, like the Egyptian Isis, the Greek Demeter and the Syrian goddess, are told. The story of the wanderings, sufferings, and final homecoming of the deities offered the possibility that one’s own wandering and suffering might come to an end in a divine homecoming under the protection of the deity. Thus, the story of the wandering deity becomes a paradigm of salvation for the individual initiate.<sup>24</sup>

## Isis

The following passage will look into the Isis cult in Book XI, before the reader’s attention is directed to the most prominent cults in the first ten books. The Egyptian Isis was already well-known outside of Egypt since the fifth century BCE, as can be seen in the travelogues of Herodotus.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the fourth century BCE she was already honoured in the Athenian port of Piraeus. The Hellenistic Mysteries of Isis eventually became a universal cult, recognising no racial or geographic distinctions. The cult was fashioned after the example of the Eleusinian Demeter, with whom the Greeks identified her. According to Plutarch, the Mysteries of Isis, like those of Demeter, were founded by the goddess herself to immortalise her struggles. The cult included daily rituals, the annual celebrations of the Isiac liturgical year (the Fall Festival of Search and Discovery and the Spring Festival *Navigium Isidis*), lavish processions in Isis’ honour, popular familiarity with the story of Isis and Osiris, and popular moralistic testimonials like in Apuleius’ novel: “Do not be an ass; the religious life under the protection of the great goddess is

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<sup>22</sup> Johnston ed. (2007), 98-99.

<sup>23</sup> Martin (1987), 58-59.

<sup>24</sup> Martin (1987), 17; 59.

<sup>25</sup> Herodotus, *Historiae* II,42; 48; 145.

better." (*Met.* XI,7-12).<sup>26</sup> The cult survived until the imperial prohibition of paganism at the end of the fourth century CE.<sup>27</sup>

Book XI of the *Metamorphoses* is the fullest account of information on initiation into the Isiac mysteries<sup>28</sup>. Let us now examine this account more closely, led by Johnston's criteria for mystery cults. The first criterion was that of secrecy. Anyone initiated into a mystery cult was required to keep secret whatever they experienced during their initiation. We already meet this criterion in Book XI, where Photis mentions to Lucius that secrecy is a natural part of cults.

*"Paveo" inquit "et formido solide domus huius aperta detegere et arcana dominae meae revelare secreta. Sed melius de te doctrinaque tua praesumo, qui praeter generosam natalium dignitatem, praeter sublime ingenium, sacris pluribus initiatus profecto nosti sanctam silentii fidem."*<sup>29</sup>

(*Met.* III,15)

"I am afraid," she [Photis] said "and I fear terribly to uncover the hidden places of this house and expose the mysterious secrets of my mistress. But I presume better things from you and your learning, you, who besides the noble rank of your birth, besides your sublime character, certainly knows the sacred trust of silence, because you have been initiated into many cults."<sup>30</sup>

The author, however, tells us everything about the hidden mysteries of Photis' mistress, by whom Lucius turns into an ass. If he would have kept silent, there would be no *Metamorphoses*. In Book two, then, the narrator insists on keeping secret what was said and done during Lucius' initiation, but the author continues to present much of what is known of initiation into the Mysteries of Isis.<sup>31</sup>

*Quaeras forsitan satis anxie, studiose lector, quid deinde dictum, quid factum. Dicerem si dicere liceret, cognosceres si liceret audire.*

(*Met.* XI,23)

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<sup>26</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 27.

<sup>27</sup> Martin (1987), 72; 77-79.

<sup>28</sup> Johnston ed. (2007), 104.

<sup>29</sup> All Latin texts are taken from Hanson, J. ed. and trans. (1989), *Apuleius, Metamorphoses* (LOEB), London.

<sup>30</sup> All English translations are my own, based on Hanson, J. ed. and trans. (1989), *Apuleius, Metamorphoses* (LOEB), London.

<sup>31</sup> Martin (1987), 79.

Maybe you search with enough concern, my diligent reader, what was said and done next. I would if I it were permitted to tell, you would learn if it were permitted to hear.

Lucius is, however, promised a better life and a better death by Isis through initiation in her cult, the second criterion. All his past perils will be over if he dedicates his life to her.

*“Plane meminervis et penita mente conditum semper tenebis mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula adusque terminus ultimi spiritus vadata. Nec iniurium, cuius beneficio redieris ad homines, ei totum debere quod vives. Vives autem beatus, vives in mea tutela gloriosus, et cum spatium saeculi tui permensus ad inferos demearis, ibi quoque in ipso subterraneo semirotondo me, quam vides, Acherontis tenebris interlucentem Stygiisque penetralibus regnantem, campos Elysios incolens ipse, tibi propitiam frequens adorabis. Quodsi sedulis obsequiis et religiosis ministeriis et tenacibus castimoniis numen nostrum promerueris, scies ultra statuta fato tuo spatia vitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere.”*

(*Met.* XI,6)

“You will clearly remember and you will hold forever hidden deep in your mind that the remaining course of your life is controlled by me until the end of your last breath. Nor is it unjust, to owe her all the time that you will live, by whose benefit you have returned to the world of men. But you will live happily, you will live glorious under my protection, and when you have completed your life’s span, you will descend to the Underworld, where, also in the sub-terrestrial hemisphere, you will see me, whom you see now, shining among the shades of Acheron and ruling in the innermost recesses of the Styx, and you, living in the Elysian fields, will constantly worship who favours you. But if by diligent subservience and devout service and persistent celibacy you will have won the favour of our god, you will know that I alone am able to prolong your life beyond limits set by your fate.”

The third criterion also fits, for Lucius has a special relationship with Isis. She speaks to him every night in his dreams.

*Nec fuit nox una vel quies aliqua visu deae monituque ieiuna,*

(*Met.* XI,19)

There was not one night or even a nap without a vision or admonition from the goddess.

The fourth criterion is also true for Lucius, since he is initiated into three cults in total. He does not have to choose one religion; the different cults can co-exist.

*“Nihil est” inquit “quod numerosa serie religionis, quasi quicquam sit prius omissum, terreare. Quin assidua ista numinum dignatione laetus capesse gaudium, et potius exultat futurus quod alii vel semel vix conceditur, teque de isto numero merito praesume semper beatum.”*

(*Met.* XI,29)

“There is nothing to fear”, it [nocturnal prophecy] said, “about this long series of rituals, as if something had been omitted earlier. Seize delighted the glory of the gods with that everlasting respect, and be happy because you will become three times what is scarcely given to others only once, and from that number you should rightly consider yourself forever blessed.”

The fifth criterion, the association of myths that told tales of the cults’ divinities to their cults, is seemingly unrecognisable in the novel, but there are references to these myths, as we will see later on in this chapter.

## **Fortuna**

A personified Fortune was widely worshipped by the third century BCE and possessed temples in nearly all the major Greek cities. Fortuna has been described as the most important deity of the Hellenistic era because of her universal sovereignty over mortals and immortals alike. ‘Fortune’ means chance or luck, both good and ill.<sup>32</sup> Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century AD, describes Fortuna as follows:

*Invenit tamen inter has utrasque sententias medium sibi ipsa mortalitas numen, quo minus etiam plana de deo coniectatio esset: toto quippe mundo et omnibus locis omnibusque horis omnium vocibus Fortuna sola invocatur ac nominatur, una accusatur, rea una agitur, una cogitatur, sola laudatur, sola arguitur et cum conviciis colitur: volubilis, a plerisque vero et caeca existimata, vaga, inconstans, incerta, varia indignorumque faultrix. Huic omnia expensa, huic omnia feruntur accepta, et in tota ratione mortalium sola utramque paginam facit; adeoque obnoxii sumus sorti, ut sors ipsa pro deo sit, qua deus probatur incertus.*

(Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* II,5,22)

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<sup>32</sup> Martin (1987), 22.

Nevertheless mortality has rendered our guesses about the divine even more obscure by inventing for itself a deity intermediate between these two conceptions: everywhere in the whole world at every hour by all men's voices Fortuna alone is invoked and named, alone accused, alone impeached, alone pondered, alone applauded, alone rebuked and visited with reproaches; deemed volatile and indeed by most men blind as well, wayward, inconstant, uncertain, fickle in her favours and favouring the unworthy. To her is debited all that is spent and credited all that is received, she alone fills both pages in the entire account of mortals; and we are so much at the mercy of chance that Chance herself, by whom the divine is proved uncertain, takes the place of the divine.<sup>33</sup>

Pliny, thus, overall upholds the same view on Fortuna as was held in Hellenistic times: she was the ruler over both mortals and immortals. Lucius in Book VII refers to the "men of the old school" (*priscae doctrinae viros*), saying that they were right about Fortuna and her blindness: she favours those who should not be favoured and vice versa.

*Haec eo narrante, veteris Fortunae et illius beati Lucii praesentisque aerumnae et infelicitas asini facta comparatione, medullitus ingemebam, subibatque me non de nihilo veteris priscaeque doctrinae viros finxisse ac pronuntiasse caecam et prorsus exoculatam esse Fortunam, quae semper suas opes ad malos et indignos conferat, nec umquam iudicio quemquam mortalium eligat,*  
(*Met.* VII, 2)

While he [a bandit] told this tale, after I had made a comparison between that happy Lucius and the present misery and the unhappy ass, I sighed from the depths of my heart, and it occurred to me that it was not for nothing that men of the old and former school had imagined and proclaimed that Fortuna was blind and completely bereft of her eyes, she, who always passes her favours over to the wicked and unworthy, and never chooses anyone of the mortals with a sound judgement.

The opening story of the *Metamorphoses* immediately reveals the role of Fortuna in the novel. In this tale, Aristomenes, a travel companion of Lucius', tells him about his meeting with an old friend, Socrates, who had become a beggar. Socrates tells Aristomenes the story of how he was attacked by bandits, managed to escape to an inn, only to fall under the power of a sorceress, named Meroe. Socrates, however, does not blame Meroe for his present condition, but Fortuna:

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<sup>33</sup> Both the Latin and the English are translation, adapted by myself, are from Rackham, H. et al. (1958), *Pliny, Natural History* (LOEB), Cambridge.



*“Aristomene,’ inquit ‘ne tu fortunarum lubricas ambages et instabiles incursiones et reciprocas vicissitudines ignoras.’ ... At ille, ut erat, capite velato, ‘Sine, sine’ inquit ‘fruatur diutius tropaeo Fortuna quod fixit ipsa.’”*

*(Met. I,6)*

*“Aristomenes,’ he [Socrates] said, ‘you are ignorant of the volatile wanderings and unstable assaults and alternating reversals of Fortuna.’ ... But he stayed as he was, his head covered, and said: ‘Let me be! Let Fortuna longer enjoy the trophy that she herself has hung up.’”*

Aristomenes, then, takes Socrates home with him, where they are attacked by Meroe and another sorceress. They kill Socrates and pee on Aristomenes. Aristomenes comes into some ill-fortune by being in contact with magic, just as Lucius will encounter ill-fortune by coming into contact with magic. The rule of Fortuna constitutes a coherent structure by which Apuleius organized his novel.<sup>34</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter I, Festugière states that, assuming that Apuleius had the events at the end of the work in mind from the start, we may consider the whole novel as a story of sin and redemption, a conversion in the proper sense of the word. The passage from a sinner's miserable condition to a pure and sanctified life. He gives two reasons for this interpretation: the first reason is that the misfortunes of Lucius and his moral degradation are evidently the consequences of a sin from which he is cleansed and saved by Isis, through whom he comes to lead a new life. Two reasons are given for the downfall of Lucius: his curiosity about magic and his voluptuous relations with Photis, the young slave of the magician Pamphile. This last storyline is quite unusual for an author of antiquity, for the ancients considered love as a sickness at worst, but never really as a sin. It is, however, the chain of imprudent actions that makes this a sin: his affair with Photis and the dabblings in magic to which curiosity compels him, with Photis as an accomplice. The second reason is the text's clear indications regarding the role of Isis in Book XI in opposition to the role of Fortuna in the rest of the novel. Therefore, a relationship of contrast is intended between these two divine powers, with Isis triumphing in the end. It is a theme of the novel that Lucius is a plaything in the hands of Fortuna. Whenever it seems that Lucius' condition will finally improve, Fortuna intervenes once again, until finally, in the eleventh Book, Isis comes to the rescue.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Martin (1987), 21-22.

<sup>35</sup> Festugière (1954), 72-76.

*“Multis et variis exanclatis laboribus magnisque Fortunae tempestatibus et maximis actus procellis, ad portum Quietis et aram Misericordiae tandem, Luci, venisti. Nec tibi natales ac ne dignitas quidem, vel ipsa qua flores usquam doctrina profuit, sed lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus voluptates, curiositatis improsperae sinistrum praemium reportasti. Sed utcumque Fortunae caecitas, dum te pessimis periculis discruciat, ad religiosam istam beatitudinem improvida produxit militia. ... In tutelam iam receptus es Fortunae, sed videntis, quae suae lucis splendore ceteros etiam deos illuminat.”*  
(Met. XI,15)

“You, Lucius, led by many and different endured toils and by Fortuna’s big tempests and mighty storms, you have finally reached the harbour of Peace and the altar of Mercy. Neither your ancestry, nor even your reputation, or the flowers of your education have been of any help to you, but due to the danger of blooming youth, you slipped into slavish pleasures and brought back the sinister reward of your unfavourable curiosity. Nevertheless, the blindness of Fortuna, while she tortures you with the most terrible dangers, has brought you to this holy state of happiness in her careless war. Now you have been taken under the protection of Fortuna, but a seeing Fortuna, who with the lustre of her own light illumines all others, even the gods.”

Lucius is not only subject to the abuse of wicked Fortune, Fortuna, but is also recipient to the aid of the Fortuna who can see, Isis. This sympathetic aspect of Isis was also known as *agathe tyche*, meaning Good Fortune, a virtue commonly attributed to her.<sup>36</sup>

### **Cults of Venus, Ceres, and Juno**

The tale of Cupid and Psyche is told by an old woman, the housekeeper of a band of robbers, to the kidnapped bride Charite in an attempt to console and distract her. The tale goes as follows. Because of her superhuman beauty, Psyche, the most beautiful of three royal sisters, is worshipped as a Venus on earth. This provokes the wrath of the real Venus, who orders Cupid to punish Psyche with love for a wretched creature. The oracle of Apollo tells Psyche’s father to prepare for a wedding with a non-human bridegroom, and to expose her on a rock. Psyche, then, is carried away by Zephyr and awakes in the garden of a divine palace with invisible servants. Every night, she is visited by her similarly invisible husband, who warns her that she must not receive her sisters. But Psyche is sad and Cupid gives her permission to see them. The sisters, however, green with envy, decide to destroy her happiness. Cupid warns her again not to listen

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<sup>36</sup> Martin (1987), 22.

to her sisters, who will try to convince Psyche that her husband is a dangerous snake. Psyche is, however, persuaded by them and tries to look at her husband with a lamp out of curiosity. She discovers that her husband is the god Cupid and falls in love with him, after she accidentally pricks herself with one of his arrows. Cupid awakes, burned from a drop of oil from the lamp, and leaves Psyche angrily, for she has disobeyed him. Psyche starts wandering for her lost love, but first takes revenge on her sisters, which leads to their deaths. Venus becomes angry when she hears about the affair between Cupid and Psyche. Psyche asks Ceres and Juno for help, but it is in vain. She surrenders to Venus and has to perform four tasks for her. The fourth task causes her death, when she looks into Persephone's box, which is said to hold eternal beauty, but actually contains eternal sleep. Cupid rescues her and convinces Jupiter to support his marriage to Psyche. Psyche is carried to Olympus and made immortal.<sup>37</sup>

It has often been remarked that the story of Cupid and Psyche is situated at the exact centre of the novel, but this is not quite correct. The tale is at the centre of Books I to X. However, Psyche's descent to the Underworld (VI,17-20) is in the centre of Books I to XI.<sup>38</sup> This central place for the *katabasis* is an unmistakable reference to epic *katabaseis*, such as those of Odysseus (the centre of Homer's *Odyssey*), and of Aeneas (the centre of Vergil's *Aeneid*). In the main narrative, Lucius, having undergone many hardships, experiences a *katabasis* in the final book, after which he is united with Isis. The culmination of Psyche's hardships also consists of a *katabasis*, after which she is united with Cupid. The structural position of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, and especially of Psyche's *katabasis*, supports the idea that at least one of the functions of the tale of Cupid and Psyche is that Psyche's adventures are a mythical projection of the adventures of Lucius.<sup>39</sup>

In the first ten books of the novel there is mostly no room for divinities as characters in the main narrative or in the inserted tales. It is only in Book XI that Isis appears as a character interacting with Lucius. In this respect too, the tale of Cupid and Psyche and the eleventh book of the novel stand out as different from the other parts. On the other hand, the way the goddess Isis interacts with Lucius contrasts with the attitude of the Olympic gods and goddesses towards Psyche. Isis comes to the rescue of Lucius after his prayer in XI,2, while Venus in the tale of Cupid and Psyche is offended and vengeful, a jealous goddess. When Psyche begs for refuge and aid from the wrath of Venus, first from Ceres, then from Juno, they both refuse to help her.<sup>40</sup> Let us, therefore, take a look at the goddesses in this story, and compare them to Isis.

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<sup>37</sup> Zimmerman et al. (2004), 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> Zimmerman et al. (2004), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Zimmerman et al. (2004), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Zimmerman et al. (2004), 14.

## Venus

Venus is the goddess of Love, and the mother of Cupid. She is jealous of the mortal Psyche, for she is worshipped as a Venus on earth, while the real Venus in heaven is forgotten.

*Paphon nemo, Cnidon nemo, ac ne ipsa quidem Cythera ad conspectum deae Veneris navigabant. Sacra differuntur, templa deformantur, pulvinaria perteruntur, caerimoniae negleguntur; incoronata simulacra at arae viduae frigido cinere foedatae. Puellae supplicatur et in humanis vultibus deae tantae numina placantur;*

(Met. IV, 29)

No one sailed to Paphos, no one to Cnidos, or even Cythera<sup>41</sup> for a vision of the goddess Venus. Her rites were postponed, her temples ravished, her cushions grinded, her ceremonies neglected; her statues were without a garland and her empty altars besmirched by cold ash. It was the girl that people worshipped and in a human face the power of such a goddess was appeased;

The cult of Venus spread from Sicily to Asia Minor, and from Thebes to Sicyon and Laconia. Her cult was located in two kinds of places. Foremost were the islands: Cythera, Cyprus and Crete. Her second type of locus were mountains: notably Mount Ida, the Acrocorinth at Corinth, and Mount Eryx in Sicily. Venus' fruits and flowers also have widespread historical and comparative implications. They link Venus, the goddess of sensuous love, with Ceres, the goddess of maternal love. The poppy is shared by them, just as the pomegranate is shared by Venus and Proserpina. Mentioned frequently in Homer and Sappho and widespread in cult, she was especially known as the patroness of marital love, of the arts of love in legitimate wedlock. Many of the myths and expressions about Venus' sexuality, on the other hand, make her the symbol of the unfaithful or otherwise dangerously passionate wife or mistress. Other texts document her strong maternal side. To sum up, at various times Venus stands for the passionate legitimate wife, the dangerously passionate and wayward female relative, the sister, and the loving mother. Venus is first and foremost the patroness, not of motherliness and motherhood, but of the arts of love and of longing and persuasion.<sup>42</sup>

In Lucius' prayer to the moon goddess, Venus is one of the universal goddesses he names while unknowingly addressing Isis (*Met.* XI,2). Just as Isis is separated from and searches for her beloved Osiris, Venus is separated from and searches for her beloved Adonis. He is loved by

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<sup>41</sup> This are sites of the most famous shrines of Venus in antiquity. Paphos is on Cyprus, Cnidos on the coast of Asia Minor, and Cythera is an island south of the Peloponnese.

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich (1978), 74-75; 84-85; 150.

Venus and entrusted to Proserpina, who then refuses to give him back. Jupiter eventually resolves the conflict by decreeing that Adonis shall live above ground a third of the year, below it a second third, and wherever he wishes for the remainder (ultimately, this means eight months with Venus). Adonis' annual comings and goings obviously symbolize the seasonal vegetative cycle, and in many parts of the eastern Mediterranean his death was mourned annually in city-wide rites. Most scholars and many ancient authors accept the parallelism between Adonis and Venus, and Osiris and Isis.<sup>43</sup>

## Ceres

The Eleusinian Mysteries, the mysteries of Demeter (Latin: Ceres) are the oldest attested mystery cult and probably the model for all others. In fact, their name, *ta mysteria*, is the origin of the phrase "mystery cult," meaning a voluntary, secret, initiatory cult open to different classes of people.<sup>44</sup> The meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries is often named as one of the best kept secrets of history. It has often been interpreted as an agricultural myth in which the Corn Goddess alternately withholds and guarantees the fertility of the earth.<sup>45</sup>

The official story of the Eleusinian cult is told in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, dated from the seventh century BCE. Demeter was considered a member of the Olympian family by Homer, who called her the daughter of Cronos and Rhea. While Persephone (Latin: Proserpina), Demeter's daughter, was plucking flowers one day, Hades appeared and carried her away to his Underworld. Demeter wandered about searching for her daughter. She arrived at Eleusis, disguised as an old woman, where she was found by the daughters of Celeus, Lord of Eleusis, and invited by their mother, Metaneira, into their home as a nurse for her newborn son. Demeter raised this boy as a god, hiding him in the fire at night to burn away his mortality. When Metaneira discovered what the nurse was doing, she confronted her and Demeter revealed her true identity.

After this conflict between the two mothers, one terrestrial and one celestial, each acting out of concern for their child, Demeter left and resumed her wandering. The people of Eleusis then built a temple and an altar in honour of Demeter. Demeter deprived the Olympian deities of their sacrificial offerings, for all the harvest died. Zeus eventually intervenes and decides that Persephone could be with her mother for two-thirds of the year and with Hades for the remaining one-third. The grateful Demeter then restores the fertility of the earth so that once

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<sup>43</sup> Friedrich (1978), 69-70.

<sup>44</sup> Parca and Tzanetou eds. (2007), 165.

<sup>45</sup> Martin (1987), 68.

again, sacrifice could be offered to the gods; and, as a special favour, she showed the Eleusinians the conduct of her rites and taught them all her mysteries.<sup>46</sup>

Although devotion to Demeter was widespread, her mysteries remained bound to the sacred precincts of Eleusis. By the seventh century BCE, the city of Eleusis had been annexed by Athens, yet the Eleusians retained control of their mysteries. Athens was the political, social, and intellectual centre of the Greek world, Eleusis the centre of the mysteries. The influence of Eleusis through the annual celebration of the Mysteries of Demeter remained long after the demise of Athenian political dominance, to be finally eclipsed by Christianity in the fifth century CE. The public performance of the Eleusinian Mysteries began with the Lesser Mysteries, celebrated each spring in Athens, dedicated to Persephone upon the occasion of her return to the underworld. The celebration of the Greater Mysteries, dedicated to Demeter, took place in the latter part of September.

Something of the initiation itself is suggested by the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: it proclaims the initiate as 'happy' (line 480). Most interpreters primarily take this happiness as referring to the afterlife, but the Greeks were not much concerned with the afterlife and it would seem, therefore, that the Eleusinian initiates' happiness embraced a transformed mode of terrestrial life. Happiness, however, implies more than worldly prosperity. Initiatory happiness is also an appreciation by the Eleusinian goddess of the agrarian life through participation in her share of 'divine honour'.<sup>47</sup> These aspects fit Johnstons criteria of mystery cults well, after all, they promise a better life and afterlife for the initiate and they endue glory to the initiate by acquaintance with the goddess.

While Demeter continued to be worshipped as a Greek deity in Egypt, her personality easily accounts for her becoming "a translation and extension of Isis". Herodotus reports that "in the Egyptian language Demeter is Isis" (2.156). The two are mother-goddesses, both preside over agricultural abundance and human fertility, and each is associated with mystery cults.<sup>48</sup> There is the possibility that the story of Demeter, who sought and brought back her daughter from the realm of death, was generated as an accepted parallel to the myth of Osiris, who was dismembered and made whole again by his wife Isis.<sup>49</sup> The myths of Demeter and Isis exhibit similar motifs: the goddess wandering in quest of familial completion, the heavenly queen coming to a terrestrial home in an earthly queen's palace, the confrontation of the unrecognized goddess by the horrified mother resulting in her son's loss of immortality, the epiphany of the goddess, the restoration of the lost family member, and the final establishment of her celestial

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<sup>46</sup> Martin (1987), 63-68.

<sup>47</sup> Martin (1987), 62-69.

<sup>48</sup> Parca and Tzanetou eds. (2007), 199.

<sup>49</sup> Zimmermann et al. (2004), 203.

home.<sup>50</sup> No wonder Lucius prays to Ceres as well, when he addresses the universal goddess in *Met.* XI,2 and Isis answers.

Lucius is not the only character confronted with Ceres. Psyche encounters Ceres as well in the *Metamorphoses*. Psyche sees a temple and wonders if her *dominus*, her beloved Cupid may be living there. A description follows of what Psyche sees in the temple, which signifies it turns out to be Ceres' temple instead of Cupid's. All the agricultural tools are just lying around and so Psyche decides to organise them, for she believes that she ought not to neglect any god's shrines and rituals (VI,1). Ceres sees Psyche taking care of her temple and tells her that she should be thinking of her own safety instead, for Venus is looking for her everywhere. Her initial motive to go to the temple is to look for her husband, but this motif disappears as soon as Ceres tells her of Venus' wrath and Psyche prays to Ceres, and later Juno, to help her. Psyche asks Ceres for a safe place to hide from Venus. But Ceres refuses and phrases her refusal in legal language.

*'Tuis quidem lacrimosis precibus et commoveor et opitulari cupio, sed cognatae meae, cum qua etiam foedus antiquum amicitiae colo, bonae praeterea feminae, malam gratiam subire nequeo. Decede itaque istis aedibus protinus, et quod a me retenta custoditaque non fueris, optimi consule.'*

(*Met.* VI,3)

'I am truly moved by your tearful prayers and I long to help you, but she is my relative, with whom there is an old alliance of friendship, and, furthermore, a good woman, and I cannot cause a bad favour. So leave this temple at once, and count yourself lucky, that you will not have been held and kept by me.'

Ceres' denial of Psyche's request comes as an anti-climax after Psyche's highly stylized and formulaic prayer, with its allusions to the elevated mythological atmosphere surrounding Ceres, not only because of her blunt refusal, but also due to her sudden use of informal language. Ceres' use of language resembles that of a bourgeois Roman matron. She is concerned about offending her near relative, Venus, whom she calls a *bona femina*. Whatever the kinship between Ceres and Venus is according to the tradition, the noun *cognata* used for a mythological kinship between gods is humorous. It is a word from everyday language, one of the many elements which create a sharp contrast between Ceres' informal speech and Psyche's elevated prayer. In comparison to this passage of Isis, the biggest difference is that Ceres refuses the prayer of Psyche, while Isis decides to act according to the prayers of Lucius.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Martin (1987), 79-80.

<sup>51</sup> Zimmermann et al. (2004), 365-381.

## Juno

After Psyche has been rejected by Ceres, she continues her journey, sees a shrine in a valley, and enters:

*Tunc genu nixa et manibus aram tepentem amplexa, detersis ante lacrimis sic apprecatur:  
'Magni Iovis germana et coniuga, sive tu Sami, quae sola partu vagituque et alimonia tua  
gloriatur, tenes vetusta delubra; sive celsae Carthagini, quae te virginem vectura leonis  
caelo commeantem percolit, beatas sedes frequentas; seu prope ripas Inachi, qui te iam  
nuptam Tonantis et reginam dearum memorat, inclutis Argivorum praesides moenibus;  
quam cunctus oriens Zygiam venerator et omnis occidens Lucinam appellat: sis meis  
extremis casibus Iuno Sospita,'*

(*Met.* VI,3-4)

Then she knelt and embraced with her arms the warm altar, she dried her tears and prayed as follows: 'Sister and wife of the great Jupiter, whether you hold the ancient sanctuaries of Samos, which alone takes proud in your birth and cries and nursing; or whether you visit the blessed sites of noble Carthage, who venerates you as a virgin who goes through the sky on the back of a lion; or whether you watch over the famous walls of the Argives close to the banks of Inachus, who remembers you as the bride of the Thunderer and queen of goddesses; you, whom all the East adores as "Yoker" and all the West calls "Bringer into Light": may you be Juno the Saviour to me in my most extreme misfortunes.'

Here, Juno is learnedly and accurately invoked by Psyche with a syncretistic mixture of references to Greek, Roman, and Punic cult-centres, titles and functions. Samos is an island in the eastern Aegean. At Carthage, the Romans assimilated the Punic goddess Tanit, calling her Juno Caelestis. Argos was a city-state in the Peloponnese; its personified river Inachus was the father of Io, whom Jupiter raped and Juno mercilessly persecuted. The titles Zygia (Greek, meaning Yoker) and Lucina (Latin, meaning Bringer into Light) refer to Juno's primary function in the Greco-Roman world, that of woman's protector in marriage and childbirth.<sup>52</sup> The words *aram tepentem* suggest that a lively cult was maintained in this sanctuary, in opposition to the cult of Venus that has been neglected. This prayer, just as the one to Ceres, can be seen as the predecessor of the prayer of Lucius to Isis in XI,2. The correspondences reveal that both prayers

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<sup>52</sup> Hanson (1989), 318-319.



have been faithfully conceived according to traditional prayer formulas. Nonetheless, just like Ceres and unlike Isis, Juno does not answer the prayer of her supplicant.

*'Quam vellem' inquit 'per fidem nutum meum precibus tuis accommodare. Sed contra voluntatem Veneris, nurus meae, quam filiae semper dilexi loco, praestare me pudor non sinit. Tunc etiam legibus quae servos alienos perfugas invitis dominis vetant suscipi prohibeor.'*  
(*Met.* VI,4)

'In faith, how I wish,' she said, 'to accommodate my will to your prayers. But the will of Venus, my daughter-in-law<sup>53</sup>, whom I have always loved as a daughter, shame does not permit me to oppose. And besides, I am obstructed by laws that forbid to give shelter to the fugitive slaves of others without the consent of their masters.'

Juno acts similarly to Ceres. She refuses to help Psyche, although she wishes she could, but she cannot counter Venus. Just as with Ceres, Juno's answer to the highly stylized prayer of Psyche is informal and framed in legalistic language. In the same way as Ceres is presented as a Roman matron by her language, Juno presents herself as a mortal as well, by saying that she is bound by the Roman legislation about runaway slaves.<sup>54</sup> These two refusals are one of the passages where Apuleius makes comic reference to Roman law. In the tale of Cupid and Psyche, this kind of legal jokes are absent from large parts of the tale, but only present in scenes where Olympian deities make their appearance (5,29; 6,7; 6,9; 6,22; 6,23). According to the commentary of Zimmerman *et alia*, these episodes inspired Apuleius to invoke the atmosphere of Menippean and Roman satire, which abound with similar parodic scenes with Olympian gods.<sup>55</sup>

## **Dea Syria**

Dea Syria, the Syrian goddess, is the name for the goddess Atargatis in the Graeco-Roman world. She is related to other Near Eastern mother goddesses such as the Babylonian and Assyrian goddess Ishtar, the Phrygian Cybele, and the Phoenician goddess Astarte. As the once localized goddesses emerged from their regional origins to become international deities in the Hellenistic world, they became sympathetically associated with one another through their common

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<sup>53</sup> Vulcan, Venus' husband, was Juno's son.

<sup>54</sup> *Codex Iustinianus* VI i 4, *Lex Fabia*: 'Whoever shall harbour a runaway slave in his house or in his land without the owner's knowledge shall return him, together with another slave of equal value or twenty solidi.'

<sup>55</sup> Zimmerman et al. (2004), 385-394.

antitheses to the rule of Tyche or Fortuna. Initiates into her cult were usually from the lower ranks of society, mostly slaves and merchants, and her ecstatic rites were connected to all sorts of wrongs and excesses. Inscriptions from Beroea and Phistyon show that Atargatis is associated with the liberation of slaves: she buys the slave in order to give him freedom; she becomes his patron. Her worship spread from her centre at Hieropolis-Bambyce in northern Syria into Egypt and Greece by the third century BCE, and then into Italy and the West. According to Suetonius, the cult arrived in Rome in Nero's time.<sup>56</sup> The two major sources for her worship are a treatise, *On the Syrian Goddess*, by Lucian of Samosata, a writer and satirist of Syrian birth from the second century CE, and Book VIII of the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>57</sup>

Although the Syrian goddess is one of the divine characters of the *Metamorphoses*, shares characteristics with them, and is identified outside of the novel in other contexts with Isis, she is not put on the same level as the other goddesses in this novel. On the contrary: she is mocked. Where Isis is associated with Lucius' salvation, the Syrian goddess is associated with Lucius' ill-fortune. In the cult of Isis the emphasis is on moderation, abstinence, and chastity, in sharp contrast to the homosexual practices of the priests of the Syrian goddess, their obtrusive begging, kleptomania, and unscrupulous use of oracles. Lucian's description of the image of Atargatis in her temple at Hieropolis (*Syr. D.* 32) is nevertheless similar to Apuleius's description of Isis and the many different names attributed to her (*Met.* XI,2). Lucian wrote that in the Greek idiom she 'is certainly Hera, but she also encompasses some aspects of Athena, Aphrodite, Selene, Rhea, Artemis, Nemesis and the Fates'. According to Lucian, Atargatis must be Hera, because he interprets the image of her husband as Zeus. By extension, she was compared to the ancient Greek Earth Mother, Rhea, and also with Athena, who was born out of the head of Zeus. Furthermore, the image of Atargatis in Hieropolis wore a girdle with which, according to Lucian, they adorn only celestial Aphrodite (*Syr. D.* 32). Nemesis, who had fled the amorous advances of Zeus by assuming various nonhuman forms, especially that of a fish, reminded Lucian that although the image of Atargatis at Hieropolis was of a complete woman, he had seen a fish's tail (*Syr. D.* 14). The rays surrounding the head of Atargatis suggested to Lucian her celestial quality as Selene, the Greek moon goddess, a lunar nature associated also with Artemis and Nemesis. Like Tyche (Fortuna) and her classical predecessors, the Fates, Atargatis wore a turreted crown and carried, like Artemis, the distaff. Like Isis, the lunar Queen Atargatis was able to overcome the capricious rule of Tyche. It is likely that Apuleius intended his description of the Syrian goddess to be compared to that of Isis.<sup>58</sup>

The Dea Syria cult is presented several times in the *Metamorphoses*. The first striking fact is that Lucius' contact with the priests of the Syrian goddess is attributed to Fortuna. This

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<sup>56</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 56.

<sup>57</sup> Hunink (2003), 244; Martin (1987), 81, 84; Hijmans et al. (1985), 286.

<sup>58</sup> Martin (1987), 81-82; Hijmans et al. (1985), 287.

immediately puts Lucius' contact with this goddess in a special, unfavourable light. A reference to Fortuna is standard in the *Metamorphoses* whenever a new, disastrous event in Lucius' life occurs, but because this reference has been preceded by a long period of silence, special emphasis is given to this reference. This aspect becomes even more significant when we reach Book XI, where Fortuna is also mentioned, but now in connection with the redemptive power of Isis (*Met.* XI,10).

The second point of comparison is the description of the priest that follows: he is bald. Religious baldness was mandatory for the initiates of the Dea Syria cult on certain occasions.<sup>59</sup> The baldness of this priest is contrasted with the baldness of the Isiac priests in Book XI. In this cult, shaving of the head also has a religious meaning; it expresses the desire for cleanness and purity, and was thus connected to celibacy.<sup>60</sup> However, the priest of the Syrian goddess, has not shaven his head, he is just bald and tries to compensate for his baldness. This makes him seem a little ridiculous.<sup>61</sup>

*et emptorem aptissimum duris meis casibus mire repertum obiecit. Scitote qualem: cinaedum et senem cinaedum, calvum quidem, sed cincinnis semicanis et pendulis capillatum, unum de triviali popularium faece, qui per plateas et oppida cymbalis et crotalis personantes deamque Syriam circumferentes mendicare compellunt.*  
(*Met.* VIII,24)

And a buyer, perfect for my harsh misfortunes, amazingly found, she [Fortuna] placed in my path. Learn how he was: a homosexual and an old one at that, even though he was bald, he had grey ringlets of hair hanging round his head, one from the ordinary scum of society, who, banging their cymbals and rattles through the city streets and towns and carrying the Syrian goddess, force her to beg.

As mentioned above, Atargatis is connected with the liberation of slaves. According to the inscriptions, the goddess buys the slaves to give them their freedom; she becomes their patron.<sup>62</sup> It is, therefore, curious that the Syrian goddess in the *Metamorphoses* also buys Lucius, who is naturally a slave in his ass form, through her priest, but does not set him free. On the contrary, the priests use him for the ass he is and so he remains a slave. It is, however, impossible to know if Dea Syria saw the person Lucius in the ass as Isis does in Book XI. The priests certainly did not and thus treated him as an ass is supposed to be treated. This passage seems to refer to the Isis

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<sup>59</sup> Lucian, *De Dea Syria* 55.

<sup>60</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside Et Osiride* 4.

<sup>61</sup> Hijmans et al. (1985), 287-289.

<sup>62</sup> Hijmans et al. (1985), 295-296.

passage, where Lucius is also taken under the protection of a goddess and has to serve her for the rest of his life, just like a slave.

*“teque iam nunc obsequio religionis nostrae dedica et ministerii iugum subi voluntarium. Nam cum coeperis deae servire, tunc magis senties fructum tuae libertatis.”*  
(*Met.* XI,15)

“Dedicate yourself now to obedience to our cult and place yourself under the voluntary yoke of her service. For as soon as you will have started serving the goddess, you will feel the fruit of your freedom more.”

The Galli, the priests of the Syrian goddess, are presented in the novel as perverts: eunuchs who paint their body and wear many robes, who spend their days having sex (passively, with an audience, even with animals), misbehaving themselves by eating abundantly, drinking copious amounts of alcohol, and making a living through deceit and cons by wandering from place to place with an image of the goddess on Lucius’ back.<sup>63</sup> Having fallen into a frenzy climaxed by their self-mutilation, the Galli became eunuch servants of Atargatis and Cybele, “feminine” in their service to the Great Mother. Their transformation was signified by referring to one another in the feminine gender (*Met.* VIII,26), by the wearing of women’s clothing (*Met.* VIII,27), and by performing traditionally female tasks (*Syr. D.* 27).<sup>64</sup>

As crowds gathered, they would cut their arms in a frenzy with the swords and axes they carried, and flog themselves with scourges. In response to their ecstatic performances and resulting divinations, the excited crowd would offer money and food to the goddess through her servants (*Met.* VIII,27-29). Lucian reported this same orgy of blood-drawing and lashing as preparatory to a practice of castration (*Syr. D.* 50).<sup>65</sup> After this act, the priests grow tired, cease their butchering and take up a collection. They receive copper coins, silver coins, wine, milk, cheese, spelt, wheat, and barley, and place all these on Lucius’ back: *horreum simul et templum incederem* “I was a travelling storehouse and temple in one.” (*Met.* XIII,28). The itinerant priests force the Syrian Goddess to beg. These priests live off the profits they receive from their cons. Isis’ priests also live by their cult and although it is of course possible to find examples of pursuit of gain even among them, we cannot detect any regret or complaint in Lucius’ words as to the extent of his financial contribution to the cult of Isis or Osiris. He even says that rich as he is, he would never be rich enough to be able to make sufficient sacrifices (*Met.* XI,25). Thus the purity

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<sup>63</sup> Hunink (2003), 244; Martin (1987), 81.

<sup>64</sup> Martin (1987), 84.

<sup>65</sup> Martin (1987), 83.

of Isis' cult, which turns out to be profitable for its followers, is clearly contrasted to the rapacity of the Dea Syria's priests, who force their goddess to beg.<sup>66</sup>

When these itinerant Syrian priests came to a village, they sometimes succeeded in persuading the inhabitants to let them make the sanctuary of the Mother Goddess their headquarters. This is not surprising, since temples in general, and especially the temples of Oriental deities, tended to be places where a variety of dubious characters came together.<sup>67</sup> A passage from IX,9-10 shows this clearly. After the priests have left town, they are overtaken by a group of armed riders, who seize them by the throat and call them filthy temple-robbers (*sacrilegos impuros*). They begin to beat them and put handcuffs on them. The priests are accused of having stolen a golden goblet from the shrine of the Mother of the Gods (Cybele). One of them finds the goblet in the bosom of the goddess on the back of Lucius.

Lucius, as the narrator of what he sees the priests do, does not hide his disdain for them. Just a few more examples of the horrible deeds they perform, according to Lucius, will follow.

*Paucisque admodum praegustatis holusculis ante ipsam mensam, spurcissima illa propudia ad illicitae libidinis extrema flagitia infandis uriginibus efferantur, passimque circumfusi nudatum supinatumque iuvenem exsecrandis oribus flagitabant.*

(*Met.* VIII,29)

After only a few vegetables had been tasted before the main course, those most dirty bastards were driven wild with nefarious passion to the worst crimes of illicit lust, and spread all around the naked young man, lying on his back, they desired him with their cursed mouths.

*Pauculis ibi diebus commorati et munificentia publica saginati vaticinationisque crebris mercedibus suffarcinati, purissimi illi sacerdotes novum quaestus genus sibi comminiscuntur. Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata consulentes de rebus variis plurimos ad hunc modum cavillantur. Sors haec erat: Ideo coniuncti terram proscindunt boves, ut in futurum laeta germinent sata.*

(*Met.* IX, 8)

After they had stayed there for some days and were fattened by public generosity and were stuffed by the many profits of their soothsaying, those very chaste priests thought

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<sup>66</sup> Hijmans et al. (1985), 290-291.

<sup>67</sup> Dickie (2001), 233.

of a new kind of profit for themselves. After a single prophecy was written out for more cases, they fooled the very many who consulted them over various matters in this way. The prophecy was this: Cattle yoked together plough the earth, in order for the delighted seeds to germinate in the future.

We can, in my opinion and that of the authors of *Groningen Commentaries*, safely assume that Apuleius meant to cast on the priests and cult of the Dea Syria as unfavourable a light as possible, and to represent the servants and cult of Isis as pure and true, by contrasting the two cults. If this is the case, Book XI should not be regarded as an appendix to the *Metamorphoses*, but as an integrated part of the novel.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

It is striking that the goddesses who have received the most attention in the first ten books of the *Metamorphoses*, have a lot in common with Isis, according to their myths, but not so much according to the novel. Fortuna, whose role is omnipresent throughout the novel, is contrasted with Isis as the bringer of bad fortune, while Isis is depicted as the bringer of good fortune, who in the end liberates Lucius from his domination by Fortuna. Within the frame of the story of Cupid and Psyche, a woman who wanders the earth in search of her beloved, just as Isis wandered the earth in search of her beloved Osiris, we see three goddesses: Venus, Ceres and Juno. Venus too has searched the earth for her beloved Adonis, just as Ceres has searched the earth for her daughter, Proserpina. Ceres and Isis have often been seen in antiquity as one and the same, for the myths surrounding them exhibit a lot of similar motifs. In the *Metamorphoses*, Psyche asks both Ceres and Juno to help her, but both answer her that they would, but cannot, because of the wrath of Venus, who is close to them. If we compare Psyche's prayers to Ceres and Juno with Lucius' prayer to Isis, we see that Psyche's prayers remain unanswered, while Lucius' are replied. Both Venus and Ceres are called upon by Lucius in the final book, when he prays to the universal goddess, but it is Isis who answers.

Lastly, we have the Syrian goddess. Outside of the *Metamorphoses*, she is associated with Isis, but inside of the novel, there could not be a stronger contrast. Lucius comes into the service of the priests of the Syrian goddess, because of Fortuna. This immediately puts the goddess in an unfavourable light, contrasting her with Isis, who will eventually take over from the bad Fortuna, and perform the role of the good fortune, or so she says. In the myth of the Syrian goddess, she liberated slaves by buying them. Here, she, through her priest, also buys Lucius, ultimately a slave due to his ass form, but she does not set him free, and uses him for the ass he is – assuming

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<sup>68</sup> Hijmans et al. (1985), 297-298.

that the Syrian goddess could see the person inside the ass. Later on, Lucius is also taken under the protection of Isis and remains a slave to her as well, but a voluntary slave. The priests are described as horrible creatures: they act and dress like women, they have an unnatural lust for food, wine and men, they steal and they cheat.

What then, does this unavoidable comparison between the goddesses in the first ten books and Isis in Book XI mean? Apuleius most likely wrote the *Metamorphoses* with the ending already in mind. It cannot be a coincidence that the goddesses who resemble each other so much in their myths, do not resemble each other at all in the novel. It is not the similarities Apuleius hints at, but the contradictions between them. This fits the structure of the novel, where the first ten books seem to differ from the last book in contents and tone. Simultaneously, this aspect of contradiction connects the first ten books to Book XI, for it is impossible to ignore the many comparable aspects. It is as if Apuleius sets a stage, a framework, for the introduction of Isis in Book XI.

This observation in itself does not say much about the question of a serious or comic meaning of the cults, in my opinion. It is more the way that each individual story about a cult or goddess is told, that neigs towards a comic meaning. Lucius emphasizes the fact that Fortuna is blind and favours those who do not deserve to be favoured, while raging against those who do not deserve their ill fortune. Following this line of argument, Lucius seems to think that he deserves a good fortune and has done nothing to deserve his ill fortune. But has he? It is the frivolity in the words of Venus, Ceres and Juno that make me incline towards a comic reading. Venus and her jealousy of a little mortal girl is just the kind of story that fits the depiction of Venus and her character in most classical literature, but it certainly does not fit a serious novel about religion. Ceres and Juno do not get to say much, but what they say, they say in a formal, down-to-earth tone. By presenting themselves as mortals through their words, their use of legal language, and their submission to Venus, they come across as conspiring, every day Roman women. Lastly, only the Syrian goddess is left. She does not have a voice like Venus, Ceres and Juno, but she is represented through her priests. The problem with her cult is that we only have two good sources, of which the *Metamorphoses* is one. This novel does not favour this cult, at all. Maybe the author is serious in depicting the priests of this cult as deceitful 'men' and maybe they were. Perhaps, in his goal to portray them as such, he exaggerated a little, in order to achieve contempt amongst his readers. Or possibly his goal was to make them laugh about the silly, naughty female men. We will never know with absolute certainty, but, following the argument above, I would incline towards a comic reading of the cult passages.

### MAGIC & DREAMS

In this chapter, first an introduction will be given on magic in antiquity. The term will be discussed in relation to religion and cults. Next, the life of magical workers in antiquity will be treated: who were they, what did they do and were they free to do it? These magical issues will be exemplified by Apuleius' works *Apologia* and *Metamorphoses*. Subsequently, the stories of Aristomenes, Thelyphron, and Pamphile and Photis will be discussed in detail on the theme of magic. The applied methodology will be the same as in the previous chapter: the passages will be discussed within their historical context. The second part of this chapter will deal with dreams. First an introduction on the connection between dreams, religion and magic will be given, followed by a treatment of dream interpretation in the second century AD. The passages of Aristomenes, Charite and Isis will be used to treat this theme. However, the focus will remain on the meaning of dreams within the entire novel. To conclude this chapter, the fantastical elements of magic and dreams will be discussed within the context of the main question: the serious or humorous reading of the *Metamorphoses*, discussed from the viewpoint of the religious passages.

#### Magic

Few definitions of magic from antiquity have survived. According to Pliny the Elder, magic was the religion inherited from the Persian Magi. Although Pliny considers many magical incantations as ridiculous, he confesses that some of these were tested by experience and were in fact powerful.<sup>69</sup> According to Apuleius, 'magician' is the Persian word for 'priest' and there can be nothing wrong with being a priest, for priests have the proper knowledge, competence, and experience of ceremonial rules, sacred rituals, and religious laws.<sup>70</sup> According to Eusebius of Myndus (fourth century AD), magic is the study of the various powers of the substances carried out by some lunatics.<sup>71</sup>

Nowadays, we are often satisfied with a definition of magic as mysterious doctrines, images, words, rituals, a series of magical papyri, lamellae, or gems. All these aspects resemble the religious aspects of mystery cults, as we have seen in the previous chapter, thus making it difficult to separate magic from religion. Furthermore, the meaning of the Latin word *superstitio*

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<sup>69</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historiae* 27,26;28,29; 30,8-11.

<sup>70</sup> Apuleius, *Apology* 25.

<sup>71</sup> Eunapius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 474-5.



is close to the word *religio*. The wearing of amulets and lucky charms, the avoidance of unlucky days for important dates – all clear aspects of what we would call superstition – were all part of the Roman life, and consequently of Roman religion, since we have seen that the two are inextricably connected. The word *sacra* is often used in the context of magic and sorcery, and thus seems to be part of the world of religion and cult, for which this word is also used.

The learned magicians who conceived recipes, amulets, or spells were inspired by the most influential holy texts of different religions, e.g. Gnosticism, Solomonic wisdom, Chaldean theology or Theurgy, the Persian religion of the Hellenistic Magi, Hermeticism, and Egyptian religion. Accordingly, one cannot assume that magic existed in the Roman Empire as an independent religion, because the magicians relied on the main contemporary religions. It is difficult to separate the many different levels leading from the great theologians to the communities that performed some rituals in daily life related to the theological bases, and to the private or magical use of the religious beliefs. At an inferior social and cultural level the common people resorted to magical practices that, after all, descended from complex theological theories.<sup>72</sup>

By the middle of the first century BC and probably earlier, the Romans had come to disapprove of the rituals practised by persons claiming to have the power to upset the normal course of nature and the Romans had come to think of these practices as improper religious behaviour. There were some who regarded magicians as charlatans, and some who believed that their rituals were effective.<sup>73</sup> Professional astrologers, soothsayers, prophets, dream interpreters, and magicians – impostors as well as trained experts – could be expensive. There were old women making magic spells for a little money, food, or wine, and there were high-class magicians and dream interpreters whose services were quite expensive. Not only did illiterate women or peasants believe in healing charms, the power of magical incantations and the ability to know the future, but also members of the highest classes called on their service and paid for it accordingly. The context of foreign cults, the concern for the preservation of religious practices and the state's interest, and the fear that religious professionals could make profit from the simple-minded and superstitious people are the reasons for the expulsions of astrologers and magicians, for magicians in the Roman world were not completely free to do as they liked.<sup>74</sup>

There were three forms of constraint that the community imposed on them: the law, police actions instigated by the authorities – either executing magicians or expelling them –, and spontaneous actions of the people to drive out a known or suspected magician who was felt to be a threat to the well-being of the community. The two latter forms of action were more of a

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<sup>72</sup> Rüpke ed. (2007), 338-339; 387-388.

<sup>73</sup> Dickie (2001), 141.

<sup>74</sup> Rüpke ed. (2007), 339-341.

danger to magicians than the possibility of being prosecuted under the law.<sup>75</sup> Only two actual trials in which magicians were prosecuted are known: Tiberius (23/24 AD) and Apuleius. The likelihood is that these were tried under the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis*. This law imposed penalties on those who made evil sacrifices, performed impious sacrifices, or carried out sacrifices at night in order to bewitch or to put a spell on someone.<sup>76</sup> Apuleius' trial took place in 158/159 AD at Sabratha in Africa. He was charged with using magic, spells and incantations, to seduce a rich widow into marrying him. The problem with using this trial as evidence for trials about magic is that it is delivered to us by Apuleius himself in his *Pro se de Magia* or *Apologia*. The speech presents itself above all as a literary text, so we have no way of knowing if the trial actually happened as described or even happened at all.<sup>77</sup> Still, we should pay a little more attention to this work, for it is an important work about magic in the Roman Empire, written by the author of the main work researched in this thesis.

In the narration, Apuleius presents himself as the defendant against a charge of having used magic in order to convince Pudentilla, the rich widow of Sicinius Amicus, to be his wife. Pudentilla and Amicus had two sons, of whom the older had died. Apuleius was accused by the remaining son, Sicinius Pudens, and Amicus' brother, Sicinius Aemilianus. They all had an interest in keeping Pudentilla's money within the family, making money the prime motive for the charges of magic. The proconsul Claudius Maximus acted as judge. Apuleius had gone to Sabratha in order to participate in another lawsuit on behalf of his wife and so the charges brought against him came as a complete surprise.<sup>78</sup> The outcome of the trial is unknown, but Apuleius defended himself with such rhetorical and stylistic brilliance, focusing on legal rationality and magical irrationality, that the reader is convinced that he must have been acquitted.<sup>79</sup>

On the surface, the *Apologia* exhibits a stable and secure world, the world of the Roman Empire where the impartial rule of Roman law is unquestionable. But beneath the surface a different image of the Roman imperial society can be glimpsed, one that might be more historically accurate. Magic was for many a way of dealing with ordinary human anxieties and emotions. All their lives, people in antiquity wore amulets for all kinds of purposes, meaning that all people in their daily lives were constantly reminded of the presence of magical forces in their midst. Belief in the efficacy of magic was strong. Even if something went wrong, it was not the system that was at fault, but the practitioner. The allegation that Apuleius used a love charm to induce Pudentilla to fall in love with him is thus plausible. It came from a recognisable social and

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<sup>75</sup> Dickie (2001), 142.

<sup>76</sup> Rüpke ed. (2007), 339.

<sup>77</sup> Harrison ed. (2001), 12, 21.

<sup>78</sup> Asztalos (2005), 266.

<sup>79</sup> Bradley (1997), 203.

religious context. In its magical, i.e. religious context, the *Apologia* exposes a complex Roman culture in which the irrational is a strong and pervasive element.<sup>80</sup>

Besides the law as a means of fighting against magic, the Roman authorities sometimes took police action against magicians and astrologers and either expelled them all from Rome and Italy or did so individually. These actions are part of a larger pattern of suppressing sacrificial rites felt to be foreign and non-Roman and performed for profit. After 68 AD we hear of no more expulsions of astrologers and magicians from Rome itself. Whether this indicates a real change in policy or a failure on the part of our sources remains unknown. This, however, was not the case in the entire Empire. An edict of 198/199, originating from the Egyptian prefect and addressed to local governors, commands them under penalty of death to root out those professing to know the future. It is specifically directed at two forms of divination: oracular response given in the form of written answers and processional divination. The latter had a long history in Egypt. Images of the gods were taken out of their temples on a tour in the vicinity, while people addressed questions to the statue. The interpretation of the response fell to the priests accompanying the statue. The prefect sees those who attempt to look into the future in these ways as practising the wrong kind of curiosity. The term 'curiosity' here refers to the pursuit of the occult and of that which properly lies hidden from human view.<sup>81</sup> This passage reminds us a lot of the Dea Syria priests who did both things forbidden in this edict. Furthermore, there is the reference to curiosity in relation to a search of the occult, which is the main theme throughout the *Metamorphoses*.

Not only did the authorities have the power to handle unwanted magical situations. The people could take action as well. In Book I,10 of the *Metamorphoses* in the opening story told by Aristomenes, we come across the story of a public outrage about the wickedness of a sorceress named Meroe. She is a woman who runs an inn in Thessaly, and in a meeting it was decided she should be stoned to death. This meeting is not a properly constituted trial, but an informal assembly, instigated by one man. The outcome of the meeting, however, is not as planned, for the witch imprisons the inhabitants of the town in their houses. She agrees to release them if they will abandon their plans and promise to help her, should anyone else think of taking action against her. The instigator of the meeting is, together with his entire house, transported to a mountain top that has no water. The element of fantasy in the story and its setting in Thessaly does not mean that the story in general does not reflect reality. Legal solutions against witchcraft must have been slow and uncertain, causing the people to take matters into their own hands.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Bradley (1997), 203;209; 219.

<sup>81</sup> Dickie (2001), 153; 156-157.

<sup>82</sup> Dickie (2001), 158-161.

The story of the witch Meroe is only the first of many stories in the *Metamorphoses* about witches and sometimes magicians. Not only in Apuleius, but in Greco-Roman literature in general, the male magician is not nearly as popular a character as the female magician.<sup>83</sup> The reader follows Lucius on his journey as he hears one seemingly impossible magical story after another, though Lucius is convinced by them all due to his enthusiasm and curiosity about anything magical. This same enthusiasm and curiosity cause him to be the protagonist in his own magical story. Finally, in Book XI, Lucius seems to give up the practice of magic by agreeing to serve Isis. Isis' religion can be contrasted with magic: witchcraft and magic rely on conscious manipulation in view of instant success, while the Isis cult is all about devotion, submission, and self-sacrifice. It is, however, unclear if he is really ready to abandon magic for good, for magic kept on being appealing to him throughout the story, even after all his sufferings were caused by it. Ironically, there are indications that Isis has a special appeal to Lucius, because she plays such an important role in late Hellenistic magic, mainly because Egypt was a country with a magical reputation. Her name as well as certain rituals and sacred objects from her cult were used by professional magicians.<sup>84</sup>

### **Aristomenes and Meroe (I,2-20)**

Aristomenes tells the story of how he encountered his old friend Socrates at the side of the road. Aristomenes takes pity on him and Socrates tells him about his misfortune in meeting Meroe, an old innkeeper. Aristomenes accuses his friend of cheating on his wife with an old whore, but Socrates informs him that Meroe actually is a witch with powers superior to those of the gods. When Aristomenes does not believe Socrates' words, Socrates recounts several of Meroe's magical deeds. These stories testify to her vindictiveness on both her uncooperative lovers and her opponents when her status as a woman and her authority is denied.<sup>85</sup> Aristomenes convinces his friend out of worry for his safety to spend the night with him. They fall asleep and then two witches burst in, Meroe and her sister Panthia, turning Aristomenes' bed on top of him. Meroe then plunges her sword through Socrates' neck, collecting the blood with a bottle. She pulls out Socrates' heart and Panthia places a sponge at the opening of the wound, saying: 'Listen, you sponge, born in the sea, take care to travel back through a river.' (*Heus tu, spongia, cave in mari nata per fluvium transeas.*' I,13).

The witches leave but only after they have urinated on Aristomenes. According to Scobie (1975), it probably was a popular superstition that urinating around or on someone prevented a

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<sup>83</sup> Dickie (2001), 175.

<sup>84</sup> Luck (2003), 231-234.

<sup>85</sup> Frangoulidis (1999), 378-379.

person from escaping a particular situation.<sup>86</sup> Meroe, instead of also killing Aristomenes, assigns him the role of burying Socrates and thus makes him an accomplice in the latter's death. Aristomenes' involvement in Socrates' death explains his present anxiety and sense of guilt for the murder.<sup>87</sup> Aristomenes worries that people will think he has killed his friend, for no one will believe his story. He tries to escape, but the doorman will not let him. He then tries to hang himself, but the rope breaks.<sup>88</sup> The peeing seems to have reached its goal. Aristomenes falls on top of Socrates, who suddenly awakens. They laugh about their silly dreams and have a good breakfast. Socrates, stuffed with bread and cheese, becomes thirsty on the road and drinks from a pool. But as soon as his lips touch the water, the wound opens up and the 'sponge returns to the river it came from', as professed by Panthia. Aristomenes buries his friend, as was Meroe's goal all along, and flees his home country.

Meroe possesses a lot of the characteristics of a witch. According to Socrates in I,8, 'she can lower the sky and suspend the earth, dry wells and dissolve mountains, raise up ghosts, bring down gods, darken the stars, and light up Tartarus itself.' (*caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fontes durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infimare, sidera extinguere, Tartarum ipsum illuminare*). Furthermore, Socrates says that she can make all men fall in love with her (I,8). Love is her primary concern, as is usual with the witches of the Latin tradition (cf. Photis who makes Lucius fall in love with her and Photis' mistress, Pamphile, who makes all young men fall in love with her). She is said to turn men into animals as soon as they mistreat her (I,9). It seems to be a central theme of the novel that all the major witch sequences of this novel involve transformations into animals. She turns one of her lovers who had cheated on her into a beaver, a rivalling innkeeper into a frog, and a lawyer who had spoken against her into a ram.

This use of magic in competitive contexts reminds the reader of the culture of binding curses, in that she uses her power to resolve conflicts of trade (the innkeeper), law (the lawyer), and love (her lover), which are the three principal categories into which curse tablets fall. Socrates also relates the story of Meroe capturing an entire town in their houses (I,10) as related earlier on in this chapter. Just as she binds a baby into his mother's womb (I,9) and Aristomenes into the inn (I,15). Furthermore, it is a recurring theme of ancient literature that men who encounter witches do not return home, - with the exception of Odysseus who does finally return home in spite of his encounter with the witch Circe. Meroe only had to sleep with Socrates once

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<sup>86</sup> Scobie (1975), 109.

<sup>87</sup> Frangoulidis (1999), 375.

<sup>88</sup> This is the first of a series of many attempted suicides in the novel, of which some succeed and some do not. See Scobie (1975), 113.

to enslave him, and prevent him from ever returning home (I,6-7). Aristomenes, terrified after his encounter with the witches, decides never to return home again (I,19).<sup>89</sup>

According to Frangoulidis, Socrates' punishment by Meroe seems to resemble an animal sacrifice rite. First, just as, according to the ritual, the animal goes to the sacrificial site on its own initiative, Socrates agrees willingly to spend the night in the inn with Aristomenes. Furthermore, by turning Socrates' head to the left, Meroe fulfils the ritualistic detail of the animal's implicit consent to the slaughter. Moreover, the collecting of Socrates' blood in a bottle after inserting her sword in his neck (I,13) corresponds to the sacrificial procedure of cutting the animal's throat and collecting its blood in a basin. Finally, Meroe pulling out Socrates' heart suggests the ritual detail of using the animal's intestines:

*Nam etiam, ne quid demutaret, credo, a victimae religione, immissa dextera per vulnus illud  
ad visera penitus cor miseri contubernalis mei Meroe bona scrutata protulit,*  
(Met. I,13)

Even, in order not to deviate, I believe, from the ritual of sacrificing a victim, after she had put her right hand through that wound, deep into his insides, after the intestines of my miserable comrade had been searched, Meroe pulled out his heart;

According to Halliday, the belief of magical murder in which the victim is apparently uninjured but in reality has had his internal organs removed by a magician or witch, was widely distributed in antiquity.<sup>90</sup> This fragment adds a horrifying and comic tone to the narrative, because it is a man and not an animal that is being sacrificed.<sup>91</sup>

At the end of the tale the sceptical travel companion of Aristomenes again expresses his disbelief in the story, while Lucius reasserts his belief in it and characterizes the tale as charming. This reflects the opening of the story, where the travel companion had already called Aristomenes a liar.

*Ne istud mendacium tam verum est quam si quis velit dicere magico susurramine amnes  
agiles reverti, mare pigrum colligari, ventos inanimes exspirare, solem inhiberi, lunam  
despumari, stellas evelli, diem tolli, noctem teneri.*  
(Met. I,3)

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<sup>89</sup> Ogden (2009), 135-136.

<sup>90</sup> Halliday (1927), 54-55.

<sup>91</sup> Frangoulidis (1999), 381-382.

That lie is just as true as if someone should say that by a magical softly spoken spell fast rivers are reversed, the sea slowed down, dead winds blow, the sun impeded, the moon drop her dew, the stars disappeared, daylight banished, and the night held.

It is ironic that the travel companion dismisses the story as pure fiction, claiming it is no more true than magic, for the magical features he describes in his comparison are the exact features later used to describe the powers of both Meroe and Pamphile. Lucius, on the other hand, is readily inclined to believe any magical story he hears in his search for magic. According to Scobie, Lucius' attitude here is intended to invite the reader to adopt a similar outlook in preparation of accepting the more fantastic events to come.<sup>92</sup> By doing so, Lucius fails to understand the dangers of magic, which Aristomenes' tale abundantly makes clear. The tale of Aristomenes indicates from the start the powerlessness of humans to understand the supernatural and counteract its effects, as all their efforts produce the opposite results.

The beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, thus, alludes to the ending of the story, where Isis intervenes, for humans are not able to counteract the effects of magic, but gods are.<sup>93</sup> The stories told of Meroe are related either by Socrates, the man who cheated on his wife and then left Meroe, or by Aristomenes, who is declared crazy by his travelling companion. There is a sense of humour that underpins the witches' cruelty. It is hard to discern whether the reader should take these stories seriously or laugh at them. Lucius does both: he admires the story for its literary value and believes the story, but he does not take the story itself and the dangers of magic it relates seriously. Maybe the reader is supposed to pick sides: the reader can choose the travel companion and read the entire novel sceptically, or the reader can choose Lucius and read the novel with an open mind about magic.

### **Thelyphron (II,21-30)**

Thelyphron, when short of money in Thessaly, hears an old man announcing a reward for protecting a corpse that night from mutilation by local witches. Despite being warned that the witches change themselves into animals and put guards to sleep, and that he would have to make up any losses to the dead man from his own face, he courageously takes on the task. When he is guarding the corpse at night, he sees a weasel in the room and tells it to go away, but is then plunged into a deep sleep. He awakes at dawn, but finds the corpse unharmed, to his relief. As the dead man is carried off for burial, his uncle rushes up and accuses the widow of murdering his nephew. The uncle finds an Egyptian priest to reanimate the corpse, so it could tell them the

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<sup>92</sup> Scobie (1975), 120.

<sup>93</sup> Frangoulidis (1999), 389.



truth. The corpse rises and tells the surrounding crowd, including Thelyphron, that his wife had indeed killed him to be with her lover. The dead man also tells of last night how the witches, transformed into animals, unsuccessfully tried to elude the guard and finally put him to sleep. They had summoned the corpse, but Thelyphron – who had, coincidentally, the same name as the dead man – rose up first from his death-like sleep and put his face through a hole in the door. They sliced off his nose and ears and gave him wax substitutes instead. Thelyphron then touches his nose and ears, shocked as they indeed fall off.<sup>94</sup>

Ogden (2009) notes that it is curious that the witches would make it difficult for themselves by attempting to cut off dead Thelyphron's facial parts from outside the room and through a hole in the door, when they can simply enter the room in animal form. That would also have prevented the confusion between the dead and the living Thelyphron. It is unlikely that the witches would have considered the body parts of the living Thelyphron an acceptable substitute for those of the dead one. Their possession and manipulation of these body parts would not give them control over the ghost of the dead Thelyphron. Wax is an appropriate material for the fake nose and ears, since it was commonly used to make the voodoo dolls that represented entire fleshy bodies.<sup>95</sup> The acquisition of human parts is a commonplace of ancient witchcraft, cf. Aristomenes' tale where the witches remove the heart and blood of Socrates.<sup>96</sup>

According to Ogden, there was a close association between witchcraft and poisoning, and since the widow is revealed to have poisoned her husband, it is possible that the widow herself might be presented as a witch. She may even be identified with the witch who transforms herself into the weasel. If this is the case, once again the witches' magical powers are employed primarily in the service of love.<sup>97</sup> However, there are not many other clues indicating that the widow might be portrayed as a witch. It is possible to state that the poisoning might be an allusion towards witchcraft, but there is not enough prove to claim that the widow must, therefore, be seen as a witch.

The Egyptian prophet Zatchlas in *Metamorphoses*, Book II,28-30 is called upon by the father of a young man who has been murdered, to raise his son from the dead, so that the son might reveal what had happened to him. The figure of Zatchlas is a good example of the itinerant sorcerer. When common people needed help in magic-working, you would expect them to consult their local magician, but there are not many sources attesting this. The magician about whom the

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<sup>94</sup> Murgatroyd (2004), 493.

<sup>95</sup> Ogden (2009), 139.

<sup>96</sup> Scobie (1975), 108.

<sup>97</sup> Ogden (2009), 140.



sources do tell us is the itinerant sorcerer.<sup>98</sup> Zatchlas does as he is asked and gets the corpse to explain his fate. Zatchlas's bald head and linen garment are typical of the Greek notion of an Egyptian priest.<sup>99</sup> Zatchlas, however, might sound foreign, but is in fact not an Egyptian name. The 'Egyptian' turns out to be a young man dressed as an Egyptian priest. In antiquity, it was believed that Egyptian religion was essentially magic and that those who had access to its secrets were particularly powerful magicians. No wonder people passed themselves off as Egyptians in order to collect a considerable fee.<sup>100</sup>

A sorcerer who claimed he could bring a man back from the dead was probably not an unfamiliar sight in antiquity. He simply put an assistant into a trance and then 'brought him back to life'. The crowd, once it had seen a man apparently die, only to be revived by the magician, would have been readier to believe that the man might be able to help them. Another popular technique to make a dead body speak must have been ventriloquism. This technique goes back to the fifth century BC. Those who heard the voice were convinced they were hearing the voice of a dead person, a god or a demon speaking. The story of the 'Egyptian priest' shows that by the second century AD the technique of ventriloquism must have been adapted as to make those surrounding the corpse believe that the corpse was speaking.<sup>101</sup>

### **Pamphile and Photis (Book II & III)**

Pamphile, Lucius' hostess in Book II and III, possesses not only an enormous taste for young lovers, but also a considerable knowledge of witchcraft. It is her transformation into a bird that leads Lucius to explore her magic himself, with all the known disastrous consequences.<sup>102</sup>

Lucius is warned twice of Pamphile's magical powers, first by his aunt Byrrhena (II,5) and then by Photis, Pamphile's servant girl (III,15). Both warnings, however, have no effect whatsoever, for they only excite him more. Byrrhena describes Pamphile as a witch of the first order, an expert in sepulchral incantation, able to drown all the light of the starry heavens in the depths of hell and plunge it into Chaos, seducing young men and binding them to her. If, however, they do not respond to her affections, she changes them into rocks or animals or completely annihilates them. His aunt's warning, however, has quite the opposite effect on Lucius, for he is only more curious and eager to learn from her (II,6).

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<sup>98</sup> Dickie (2001), 224.

<sup>99</sup> Ogden (2009), 140; cf. Herodotus II,37.

<sup>100</sup> Dickie (2001), 229.

<sup>101</sup> Dickie (2001), 238.

<sup>102</sup> Müller-Reineke (2006), 648.

Later on, Photis warns Lucius as well. Telling him some of the same things his aunt already warned him about.

*iam scies erae meae miranda secreta, quibus obaudiunt manes, turbantur sidera, coguntur numina, serviunt elementa. Nec umquam magis artis huius violentia nititur quam cum scitulae formulae iuvenem quempiam libenter aspexit,*  
(*Met.* III,15)

Shortly, you will know the admirable secrets of my mistress, because of which ghosts obey [her], stars are tangled up, gods are coerced, and the elements serve. And never does she lean more upon the powers of this art than when she has looked full of lust upon some young man of an attractive posture.

Pamphile is given some of the same powers as Meroe, commonplace to a Thessalian witch. Just as Meroe turned men into animals as soon as they upset her, Pamphile, according to Byrrhena, turns men into animals when they do not respond to her affections. Like Meroe, Pamphile is presented by Photis as more powerful than the gods, able to bring ghosts to submission, and control the heavenly bodies and the elements. Pamphile as well seems to direct her magical powers to the achievement of love, as both Byrrhena and Photis attest. Photis' description of Pamphile's magical rites reminds the reader of the mysteries. Photis' words in III,15 'I am terribly frightened to uncover the secrets of this house and unveil my mistress' hidden mysteries.' (*formido solide domus huius operta detegere et arcana dominae meae revelare secreta.*) evoke the imagery of a secret inner sanctuary. Furthermore, Lucius is forbidden by Photis to reveal her mistress' secrets, just as an initiate of a mystery cult is forbidden to reveal those secrets.<sup>103</sup>

Photis is a servant of Pamphile. Although she is not by a long shot as powerful a witch as her mistress, she does present herself as one. In III,16 Photis relates to Lucius the story of how Pamphile has ordered her to steal the hair of a handsome young Boeotian boy, with whom Pamphile is deeply in love, in order to use it for a magic spell on him. Photis tells how she was caught by the barber and then says to Lucius: 'we have a very bad reputation in town anyway for practising the black arts.' (*quod alioquin publicitus maleficae disciplinae perinfames sumus*). Notice the use of the plural 'we'. The barber then threatens to hand Photis over to the magistrates. This shows that magic was indeed punishable by law, as attested in the introduction to this chapter.

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<sup>103</sup> Ogden (2009), 144-145.

Furthermore, Lucius compares the power Photis holds over him to the effects of magic, which the following passage clearly shows:

*Sum namque coram magiae noscendae ardentissimus cupitor, quamquam mihi nec ipsa tu videre rerum rudis vel expers. Scio istud et plane sentio, cum semper alioquin spretoem matronalium amplexuum sic tuis istis micantibus oculis et rubentibus bucculis et renidentibus crinibus et hiantibus osculis et fragrantibus papilis in servilem modum addictum atque mancipatum teneas volentum. Iam denique nec larem requiro nec domuitionem paro et nocte ista nihil antepono.*

(*Met.* III,19)

I have a most burning desire of knowing magic at first hand, although you yourself seem to me not unskilled or inexperienced in these things. I know and feel that clearly, even though I was always in other circumstances someone who despises embraces of women, you, with those sparkling eyes of yours and reddening cheeks and shiny hair and desirous lips and fragrant breasts, hold me, willingly, bought and bound like a slave. In fact, I now do not miss my home nor am I preparing my return, and I prefer nothing more than this night.

Photis has him under her spell, just as the other witches in the *Metamorphoses* use their powers for the purpose of love. Photis has bound Lucius, just as the other witches are able to bound ghosts and men. Lastly, the theme of men not returning home after an encounter with witches is clearly visible in this passage: because his love for Photis, Lucius does not miss his home and is not planning on going back there. However, we must not be as quick as to regard Photis a witch, for she is only one in the eyes of others, but does not perform any magical acts.

## **Dreams**

This section will be about dreams and what people in antiquity believed dreams to be. However, the concept of 'believing' in the context of ancient religion is a somewhat controversial topic. It is usually assumed that religion and religious practice are part of a wider thought-system of 'belief'. Religion starts with faith. Other scholars have come to the conclusion that believing is doing and that belief and faith did not exist in the Roman religion. The only religious requirement was the strict observance of rituals. Roman religion is primarily concerned with cult. Lately, scholars continue to emphasize the importance of ritual in ancient religion, but argue that this does not automatically exclude belief from the ancient religious experience. The

argument of the absence of belief does not hold with reference to the position of dreams in the ancient world, for dreams rarely form part of regular religious practice. For the most part, rituals relating to dreams are either isolated rituals carried out under special circumstances or reactions to particular dreams. The ritual stems from the belief or idea that the dream has some kind of divine or magical significance. Therefore, in the case of dreams, ritual and belief cannot easily be separated. Without the belief, there would be no ritual.<sup>104</sup>

Roman religion was mostly a private, domestic religion, making dreams as a private experience fit within this concept of religion. The problem, however, remains that it is not only inaccurate to describe a group of people as all believing something, but also to describe a single person as wholeheartedly and consistently believing something. With references to ancient dreams specifically, ancient attitudes are unstable, inconsistent and dependent on mood, varying according to circumstance. During the second century AD, people from across the Roman Empire increasingly turned to religion and religious activity, and belief in religion became stronger. An increase in the belief in religion also meant an increase in interest in superstitious activity, an important part of religion, such as dream divination. Two of the most important Roman texts on dreams were written in this same period, more dream reports appear in historical literature, and there is an increased number of dedicatory inscriptions set up in obedience to commands received in dreams.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, dreams are an important theme in the ancient novel. Like stories, pictorial images, oracles, and omens, dreams provide symbolic material for the novel's protagonists to decipher. In addition, dreams commonly serve to mark present time by providing a future dimension. They thus play an important role in advancing the ancient novel's plot. The dream was already in antiquity seen as consisting of contradictory elements and thus became a model for the treatment of literary texts of a similar character. Antiquity's approach to the dream as a text thus foreshadows the way modern interpreters address the issues of reading the *Metamorphoses*, a contradictory text *par excellence*.<sup>106</sup>

Homer first distinguished between dreams that 'find no fulfilment' and those which 'bring true issues to pass'.<sup>107</sup> In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates suggests that although dreams generally reflect a bestial element in human nature, moderate living and justness of the mind would permit the soul in sleep to grasp the truth.<sup>108</sup> The only complete work on dreams to survive antiquity is the *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus (second century AD). Like Plato, Artemidorus understood that a morally pure soul could discern dreams through its true place in

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<sup>104</sup> Harrisson (2013), 2-5.

<sup>105</sup> Harrisson (2013), 6-8.

<sup>106</sup> Kanaan (2004), 251; 254.

<sup>107</sup> Homer, *Odyssee* 19,560-566.

<sup>108</sup> Plato, *Republic* IX,571-572.

the cosmic order of things. His dream theory exists of three classifications of dreams common in antiquity: the *chrematismos* or oracular dream, the *enhyption* or non-predictive dream, and the *oneiros* or predictive dream. Artemidorus was only concerned with the latter two, for the oracular dream belonged to some specialized cults and rarely occurred apart from their domain. Consequently, he was not concerned with the relation of dream to religious practice.<sup>109</sup>

We know from Apuleius' philosophical works and from his *Apologia* that he did have an interest in the connection between dreams and the divine. Apuleius argues that the soul, especially when young, might go into so deep a sleep that it returns to a primal nature, which is divine and immortal, and may predict the future (*Ap.* 43). He describes *daemones* as messengers between heaven and earth who report human hopes to the gods and bring back messages. Each *daemon* is assigned to a different area, including creating dreams (*De Deo Socratis*, 6). Apuleius claims that divinities want different things in different countries, and if humans get it wrong, they are informed through dreams, oracles and prophecies (*De Deo Socratis*, 14). He describes Sleep and Love as being among a number of superior *daemones* and also states that each person has a personal *daemon* that acts as a guardian and helps the person it is connected to through dreams (*De Deo Socratis*, 16).<sup>110</sup>

Considering how much Apuleius has written on dreams, we must not be surprised that dreams are common in the *Metamorphoses*. Since there is a clear connection between dreams and religion, 'dreams' is a theme that cannot be disregarded in research on religious passages. It fits well into this chapter about magic, for a lot of the magical passages described above are very much related to dreaming, in one way or another. Lucius even says that he believes to be dreaming, on witnessing the magical scene of a woman changing into a bird (III,22). Apuleius thus connects this important moment that leads to Lucius' metamorphosis with a sense of dreaming, confusing reality and fiction.

Harrisson, in her book on dreams in the Roman empire, distinguishes six different kinds of dreams, of which four are present in the *Metamorphoses*: the divine message dreams (XI,3-6; XI,22; XI,26; XI,27; XI,30), the message dreams from the dead (VIII,8; IX,31), the symbolic dreams (IV,27; XI,20; XI,27), and anxiety or wish-fulfilment dreams (IX,19).<sup>111</sup> Because of their frequent experience of weariness, physical exhaustion or intoxication by alcohol, the protagonists reside in a twilight zone between deep sleep and wakefulness. This domain of consciousness has a strong effect on the way the course of events is depicted: the strange incoherence so often noticed by readers of Apuleius makes sense when these episodes are read

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<sup>109</sup> Martin (1987), 48-49.

<sup>110</sup> Harrisson (2013), 164.

<sup>111</sup> Harrisson (2013), 251.

as dream narratives. And even if not accepted as literal dreams, they can certainly be interpreted as experiences with dreamlike roots.<sup>112</sup>

### **Aristomenes**

On the one hand, there is Aristomenes' travel companion who calls Aristomenes' story rubbish, and on the other hand, there is Apuleius, who believes the entire story. But what exactly did Aristomenes experience? Was it a dream or reality? Aristomenes himself explicitly says to Socrates in the story that he has had a bad dream, caused by heavy eating and drinking the previous night. At which Socrates answers with a grin that he dreamt his throat had been cut (I,18). The witches were said to enter around midnight, which is the proper time for apparitions.<sup>113</sup> Although Aristomenes did not actually state that he was dreaming at the beginning, he did say he had fallen asleep.<sup>114</sup>

Aristomenes is initially confused after finding his friend still alive. He reconsiders the whole incident, and finally regards it as a nightmare, caused by excessive wine-drinking. In the context of intoxication by wine, it is striking that the name Meroe can either be derived from *merum* ('wine') or can be a reference to Meroe, an island in the Nile, thus referring to the magical Egypt.<sup>115</sup> Aristomenes refers specifically to the medical evidence supporting his rational explanation of his nightmare. This reference is intentional and meaningful. Apuleius' interest in, and knowledge of medical science is established from passages in his *Met.* (IX,1-4; X,25), and elsewhere. On the other hand, early as well as recent commentators on this passage refer to both Plato and Cicero, whose works contain illustrations of the view that violent dreams are caused by excessive eating and drinking.<sup>116</sup>

Apuleius' use of the dream motif in this tale both captivates the reader and confuses him. The reader will certainly be amused, but will also be forced to question the reliability of the various voices that may be heard in this narrative text. If you compare this story to Thelyphron's story, the latter cannot be as easily dismissed as Aristomenes' story, for Thelyphron can actually show his wounds and thus prove his story. However, Thelyphron's story is received with laughter by his listeners, most likely under the influence of wine (II,31). Again, it is only the entertainment value that appears to count.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Kenaan (2004), 264.

<sup>113</sup> Scobie (1975), 104.

<sup>114</sup> Hunink (2006), 19.

<sup>115</sup> Scobie (1975), 95.

<sup>116</sup> Hofmann et al. eds. (1998), 116.

<sup>117</sup> Hunink (2006), 21-22.

## Charite

In the story of Cupid and Psyche, many strange and mysterious events may be seen. Interestingly, the Cupid and Psyche story is told as a remedy against a horrible nightmare. The old woman of the robbers band tries to console Charite, the young woman kidnapped by the robbers, who has had a terrible nightmare about her husband. On hearing the girl's account, the old woman makes an important observation about dreams.<sup>118</sup>

*Bono animo esto, mi erilis, nec vanis somniorum figmentis terreare. Nam praeter quod diurnae quietis imagines falsae perhibentur, tunc etiam nocturnae visiones contrarios eventus nonnumquam pronuntiant.*

(*Met.* IV,27)

Be of a good spirit, my mistress, and be not afraid of the empty fragments of dreams. Because, first of all, the images of day time naps are said to be false, and furthermore, night time dreams sometimes predict opposite outcomes.

The old woman's first statement, that the images presented by day-time dreams are simply fake, is contradicted by antiquity's great authority in this field, Artemidorus (*Oneirocritica* I,7), who lived in the same time as Apuleius did. Her second statement, that night-time dreams often announce events actually opposite to the truth, is confirmed by Artemidorus (*Oneirocritica* II,60).<sup>119</sup> Why is it that her first statement contradicts the authority on dreams? According to Harrisson, dream books, like dream interpreters, do not appear to have been highly regarded in the Roman world. When dream interpretation of the sort featured in dream books is carried out in other texts, it is usually done by lower-class characters, like the old woman. The fact that she makes a mistake in applying the dream theory can mean that Apuleius wanted to make a statement about dream books, saying that he does not believe in this method of interpretation. It might also mean that Apuleius did this from a literary perspective and regarded the misinterpretation of the dream as fitting to the character of the old woman.<sup>120</sup>

This statement is followed by the statement that stuffing the belly with pastries will make someone mentally depressed and physically weak, thus repeating the theme that eating too much leads to bad visions and dreams.

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<sup>118</sup> Hunink (2006), 23.

<sup>119</sup> Hijmans et al. (1977), 205.

<sup>120</sup> Harrisson (2013), 195.

## Isis

It is only in Book XI that we come across a series of clearly divine message dreams, first by Isis then by Osiris, all of which Lucius obeys. The extremely long series of dreams, Lucius' own doubt of the truth of his experiences, and the contents of these dreams – Lucius has to be initiated in two other cults and has to keep on spending money – incline the reader towards a comic reading. Are these all divine dreams, or has Lucius become carried away following his first genuinely divine experience, and is he now deluding himself? According to Harrison, the author is deliberately ambiguous and he may himself not have a prospective idea of which way the text should be read.<sup>121</sup>

After Lucius' transformation back into a man and his initiation into the Isis religion, all seems well and clear, no more uncertainty and no more ambiguity. Dreams turn out to be a vehicle of the supernatural, and appear not to have revealed lies but truth. There is, however, one problem: Lucius, our storyteller and protagonist, has shown himself throughout the story to be credulous and naïve. In an incessant urge to experience new things due to his *curiositas*, he does not reject any story, as unlikely as it may be. His acceptance of Aristomenes' story in Book I as the truth has shown us this from the start. Lucius is highly impressionable to anything remotely magical or supernatural. So even if the dreams are presented as the truth by Lucius the storyteller, can we really take them seriously? In the end, even Lucius himself might have had some doubts, for by the time he is to obtain his initiation as a priest, dreams are piled up, occurring with a rather alarming frequency. This might say more about Lucius and his burning desire to devote himself to Isis than it says about her divine power.<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the magical stories serve to enhance Lucius' curiosity about magic and show his readiness to believe anything he is told. The way the different witches and stories resemble each other and the focus on love and revenge as the witches' motive – while being more powerful than the gods and able to do anything with their magical powers –, in combination with the dreamlike state and the many dreams throughout the novel, raises the question of reality. It is hard to discern whether the reader should take these stories seriously or laugh about them. Lucius does both: he admires the story for its literary value and believes the story, but he does not take the story itself and the dangers of magic it relates seriously. The reader can pick sides: the reader can choose the side of Aristomenes' travel companion and read the entire novel

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<sup>121</sup> Harrison (2013), 164-168.

<sup>122</sup> Hunink (2006), 27-28.



sceptically, or the reader can choose Lucius' side and read the novel with an open mind about magic. The same choice can be asked of the reader at the end of the novel, when the reader looks at the divine dreams Lucius has due to Isis. One can choose to see these dreams as genuinely divine messages from Isis, and consequently viewing the story as the serious conversion novel. Alternatively, one can choose to focus on Lucius' credulousness and naïveté. Just as Lucius believed every other magical story, he believes these dreams as well. The reader is not forced to pick sides, but is left by the author to make up his or her own mind.

### CONTEXT

This chapter will be a chapter about context. After we have taken a look at the historical context of the religious passages, it is important to also take a look at the historical context of the author and at the religious tradition the author has put himself in. This chapter exists of three parts. The first part will discuss Apuleius in connection to cults and his priesthood. The second will be about Apuleius and his philosophy. The third considers the tradition of the ass-tale. Each part will have its own separate conclusion in which the main question of a comic or serious reading will be treated.

#### Apuleius

Apuleius was born in Madaura in North Africa about 125 AD. He received an excellent education, mostly in rhetoric and literature, in Carthage, and went on to study philosophy in Athens. For a while he practised law in Rome, but then returned to North Africa.<sup>123</sup> This information on Apuleius' life can be recovered from two main sources: his own works, and the writings of Augustine (354-430 AD). Augustine was another writer from North Africa to whom Apuleius' works were familiar.<sup>124</sup> We owe to him much of what we know, or think we know, about Apuleius and his relation to cults.

#### Apuleius and Cults

One of the explanations for the sudden appearance of Isis in Book XI has been to see it as a record of the historical fact that Apuleius underwent a conversion to Isis. Isis is present in the *Metamorphoses*, because she is present in the author's life. Although there exists some information, outside of the *Metamorphoses*, about Apuleius' connection with several cults, none connecting him to the Isis cult.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, it seems strange that so many scholars have focused on Book XI, while Apuleius probably did not even belong to the Isis cult. In this section, first the discussion about Apuleius and his cults and priesthood will be outlined, followed by a treatment of the question what this could mean for Apuleius' intended tone for the novel.

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<sup>123</sup> Luck (2003), 223.

<sup>124</sup> Harrison ed. (2001), 1.

<sup>125</sup> Winkler (1985), 276.

In his *Apologia*, Apuleius asserts that he has been initiated into many religious cults in Greece and has retained the tokens of initiation given to him by the priests (*Apol.* 55.8-9). When he first arrived in Oea he gave a public speech on the god Aesculapius and recounted his familiarity with sacred mysteries (*Apol.* 55.11-12). In a speech directed at the Carthaginians in the *Florida* he mentions that by the time of his return to Carthage, he has taken up an important public priesthood:<sup>126</sup>

*Immo etiam docuit argumento suscepti sacerdotii summum mihi honorem Carthaginis adesse.*<sup>127</sup>

(*Fl.* 16.38)

He even showed, on the evidence of the priesthood I have taken up, that the highest honour in Carthage belonged to me.

Presumably, the identity of this priesthood was familiar to his audience, because Apuleius says nothing more about it. According to Augustine, Apuleius was a *sacerdos provinciae*, a priest of the province (*Ep.* 138.19). It has been assumed that this was the priesthood to which Apuleius himself referred in the *Florida*. The provincial priesthood of the imperial cult was indeed a high honour. As a result of this evidence, it has been generally accepted that Apuleius was at some point in his life the *sacerdos provinciae Africae*. However, according to Rives, this priesthood is not as certain as most scholars have thought. Apuleius may have been a priest in another cult.<sup>128</sup>

By the late fourth century there was a fair amount of interest in Apuleius – he is mentioned by several writers and appears on medallions given away in Rome as part of the New Year’s festivities –, but none of this indicates actual knowledge about Apuleius’ life. Most later writers mention him only as the author of the *Metamorphoses* and *Apologia*. By the time of Augustine, the available information about Apuleius was probably not historically accurate. Augustine, however, could have had other means of gathering information about Apuleius. It is possible that Augustine had access to information not available to us or his contemporary writers. Augustine grew up in Thagaste, some fifteen miles from Apuleius’ hometown, studied there, and was later sent to Carthage (*Conf.* 2.3). It is possible that Augustine’s teachers fondly preserved the memory of their great fellow citizen, Apuleius, and spoke of him to their students.

However, Augustine presents little information about Apuleius that cannot be derived from Apuleius’ writings that are known to us. The only pieces of information supplied by

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<sup>126</sup> Sandy (1997), 8.

<sup>127</sup> The Latin text and English translation, altered by me, are taken from Hunink, V. ed. (2001), *Apuleius of Madauros Florida*, Amsterdam.

<sup>128</sup> Rives (1994), 273-274.

Augustine that cannot be found with certainty in Apuleius' works are the identity of Apuleius' priesthood and that Apuleius was a native of Madauros. Besides the possible autobiographical fact in the reference to Lucius as a native of Madauros, the only description of Apuleius as born in Madauros can be found in the *Peri Hermeneias* 4, of which the authorship is uncertain, and in Apuleius' vague descriptions of his hometown which could refer to Madauros, but also to other cities.<sup>129</sup>

Therefore, there is no real reason to think that Augustine knew much more about Apuleius than we do. We may thus wonder whether he had explicit external evidence for the provincial priesthood, or was simply making an inference from something like the *Florida* passage. It seems logical that Augustine, when reading about an important priesthood, identified this priesthood as the provincial priesthood of the imperial cult. Ultimately, while other important pagan priesthoods seem to have died out in the fourth century. This was not true for imperial priesthoods. So while Augustine's evidence of the priesthood of Apuleius cannot simply be discounted, it is not as decisive as it appears at first sight. Some things just do not add up. Most of the men who attained the provincial priesthood have had long local careers, with the provincial priesthood as the crown of their career, but Apuleius does not fit this pattern. Apuleius probably never held any public office and had no political ambitions.<sup>130</sup>

Consequently, according to Rives, we should not think of a provincial priesthood, but rather of a prestigious civic priesthood. There were at least two Carthaginian priesthoods that fit the description: the priesthood of Ceres and the priesthood of Aesculapius, the latter favoured by Rives. Owing to the inadequate nature of the evidence, an absolutely certain identification of Apuleius' priesthood is impossible. The priesthood of Apuleius has attracted little attention from historians of religion, because it was long thought to have little connection with actual religion. If, however, we suppose that Apuleius was a priest in a civic cult rather than in the provincial cult of the emperor, there is a much more obvious connection between his priesthood and his personal religious concerns.<sup>131</sup>

The facts are that he was, according to his *Apologia*, initiated into many religious cults in Greece, and that he, according to his *Florida* and the writings of Augustine, possessed a priesthood. What then can we say about this in relation to the question of a serious or comic reading of the novel? As discussed in the second chapter, many cults pass by in the novel of which a comic reading is favoured. Apuleius is not said to have been initiated into any of the cults discussed, but we simply cannot know for certain.

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<sup>129</sup> Rives (1994), 276-278.

<sup>130</sup> Rives (1994), 280-281.

<sup>131</sup> Rives (1994), 284-286.

However, assuming that Apuleius was not an initiate in the cults present in the *Metamorphoses*, we can come to several conclusions. The first is that Apuleius may have slandered other cults that rivalled his own cult, but this does not seem likely, considering the nature of religion in antiquity and the peaceful coexistence of cults. The second is that he wanted to describe cults in a serious manner, considering he was an initiate into many cults and it is thus unlikely he set out to make fun of religion.

### **Apuleius and Philosophy**

Apuleius' life occurs simultaneous with the height of the Greek intellectual revival of the Second Sophistic when Greek writers famously sought to revive the past glories of their culture in the rich cities of the Greek Mediterranean under the protection of Roman rule.<sup>132</sup> There is no question that Apuleius was influenced by the Second Sophistic. Besides the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius wrote, as we have already seen, two oratorical works, *Apologia* and *Florida*, but also some philosophical treatises, of which only the authorship of *De Deo Socratis* is unquestionably Apuleius'. Other philosophical works are *De Platone*, *Peri Hermeneias* and *De Mundo*.<sup>133</sup> In this section, philosophy in Apuleius' time will be discussed, followed by the connection between Apuleius and philosophy, and finished by the question of the reading of the novel.

During the imperial times, there was a strong bond between philosophy and religion. Priestly offices in this period were open to, and often held by, philosophers and other intellectuals. This was on the one hand connected to political prestige, but it also offered the opportunity to link religious practices with philosophical discourse.<sup>134</sup> Educated men who collected magical lore or whose philosophical interests extended to the occult are a phenomenon that was already present in the Late Republic. From the second century BC, philosophers whose basic philosophical ideas derived from Plato's, but who believed that Plato was the intellectual heir of Pythagoras and who, therefore, saw themselves as Pythagoreans, seem to have had a peculiar fascination with the occult. The association of Pythagoreanism with magic and the occult goes back to a much earlier date in the Hellenistic period. In the late second century AD, the philosopher with an interest in the occult was a familiar type. From this period onward, it becomes harder to distinguish between philosophy in some of its manifestations and magic. Platonist philosophers borrow techniques and rituals from the magicians to achieve union with the divine and to heighten their perceptual powers.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Harrison ed. (2001), 2.

<sup>133</sup> Sandy (1997), 188.

<sup>134</sup> Rüpke ed. (2013), 219.

<sup>135</sup> Dickie (2001), 202-204.

There is an established scholarly tradition of examining Apuleius' Platonism, both in his rhetorical and philosophical works and in the *Metamorphoses*. In considering the Platonism of the *Metamorphoses*, one of two approaches is normally taken. One approach is to find specific passages in the novel which directly recall ideas that are expressed in the writings of Plato. The other approach is to look at sources more immediate to Apuleius, both in time and in intellectual orientation. Taking the second approach, one can state that Apuleius was hardly influenced by the writings of Plato, but primarily by Plutarch, his contemporary.<sup>136</sup>

The label *Philosophus Platonicus* was attributed to Apuleius by the residents of his native Madauros, in the manuscript tradition, and repeatedly by Apuleius himself. Apuleius' works show that there is no questioning his knowledge of Platonism. But what exactly does this title imply? It is not certain nor likely that Apuleius pursued his philosophical studies in Athens at the Platonic Academy, for it had probably ceased to exist long before Apuleius' stay in Athens. According to Sandy, it is most likely that Apuleius pursued Platonic philosophy with private teachers in Athens. His education did not enable him to function independently as a philosopher capable of formulating his own system of logic. This is too much to expect from any branch of learning in the second century and from private Greek tutors who assumed – with some justification – that their Western pupils were more interested in Plato's writings as a means of improving their literary style than as an evolving philosophical system for conducting their lives. This seems true for Apuleius as well, for in both the *Florida* and the *Apologia* Apuleius' concept of the philosopher embraces that of the man of letters. Whenever he refers to his literary activities he simultaneously emphasizes his philosophical achievements (*Fl.* 9.4; 20.4-6).<sup>137</sup>

What does Apuleius' Platonism mean for the reading of the *Metamorphoses*? According to DeFilippo (1999), the Middle Platonist synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Isiac religion offered Apuleius a handy matrix of meaning-laden symbols and themes. He made skilful use of this matrix to tell the story of a regular guy whose desire to become a beast one day got the better of him, with results that were both comic and disastrous. Lucius is just the typical human being with his own desires and flaws.<sup>138</sup> Although we do not see as many philosophical passages in the *Metamorphoses* as religious or magical passages, Apuleius' philosophical education seems to have served a literary purpose, more in form than in contents. As Sandy states, studying philosophy has probably made Apuleius a better writer.

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<sup>136</sup> Harrison ed. (1999), 270-271.

<sup>137</sup> Sandy (1997), 22; 26-27; 35-36; 179.

<sup>138</sup> Harrison ed. (1999), 288.

## Tradition of the Ass-Tale

The words *sermone isto Milesio* and *fabula graecanica* in the prologue of the *Metamorphoses* are clearly meant to make the reader think about the connection between the novel and other literary forms. The words *fabula graecanica* are almost immediately followed by *lector intende: laetaberis*. The story about to be told will be Greek in some sense and the reader will derive pleasure from it. These two elements may be meant as one, signifying that the 'Greekness' of the story is one of the things which will cause pleasure.<sup>139</sup> But what does Apuleius mean with the word *graecanica*? In the last part of this chapter, first Apuleius' possible sources will be discussed, followed by a short discussion of the meaning of the words *fabula graecanica*, and ended by a conclusion on the main question considering the tradition.

Apuleius most likely used a Greek version of the *Metamorphoses* as the basis for his novel—hereafter referred to as the *Metamorphoseis* –, presumably written by Lucius of Patrae in 14 BC, which he changed drastically. Unfortunately, this Greek original has not been handed down to us. We only have two sources of this work: the short story of *Lucius or the Ass* – hereafter referred to as the *Onos* – ascribed to Lucian of Samosata (second half of the second century AD), which might be an epitome of the original, and the description in Photius' late ninth-century comparison between the original Greek *Metamorphoseis* and the *Onos*. Photius had the advantage of being able directly to compare the two Greek versions. According to him, the *Onos* ridicules the naïve belief in superstition and bodily transformations expressed in the original Greek *Metamorphoseis*.<sup>140</sup>

Therefore, it is impossible to compare Apuleius' work directly with its Greek model. However, if Photius has represented the circumstances of the *Metamorphoseis* and the *Onos* accurately, it should be possible to compare the Latin text with the same words and syntax of the Greek model retained in the *Onos*. An important source for searching the Greek origin in this Latin version of the story is manuscript F (*Codex Laurentianus* 68.2), which serves as the basis of all the extant manuscripts of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.<sup>141</sup>

According to most scholars, Apuleius labelled his book as a *fabula graecanica* to allude to its derivation from the Greek *Metamorphoseis*. Mason (1999) disagrees. He argues that most scholars have ascribed too many passages to the *Metamorphoseis*. According to him, the case that the *Onos* was an epitome of the *Metamorphoseis* and that it was the *Metamorphoseis* which Apuleius adopted, rests ultimately on relatively few passages. Therefore, the claim that *fabula graecanica* alludes to the *Metamorphoseis* is based solely on assumptions about the original,

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<sup>139</sup> Harrison ed. (1999), 217.

<sup>140</sup> Photius, *Bibliotheca codex* 129.

<sup>141</sup> Sandy (1997), 233-234, 237.

which simply cannot be made, for the original is lost to us, and we cannot by a long shot know if the *Onos* is a summary of the original. It may be the case that some phrases from the *Onos* point to possible inserted stories in the *Metamorphoseis*. But that does not prove that they were the same stories as in Apuleius. Where an incident is reported fully in both extant versions, Apuleius is clearly capable of, and interested in, giving the topic treatment that differs from the Greek.<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, the close connection between *fabula graecanica* and *laetaberis* signifies that the reader is to expect pleasure if he thinks of a wide range of Greek stories, rather than one in particular. Especially since that tale is not well known, for there is not one reference to either of the Greek tales, other than Photius' account, that we know of. Lastly, Mason considers Photius' opposition of the two Greek works. He finds Photius' contrast between the Lucius of the *Metamorphoseis*, who believes in metamorphosis, and Lucian of the *Onos*, who makes fun of Greek superstition, difficult to accept. Photius' statement can be explained first by assuming that the character Lucius in the *Metamorphoseis* made a statement of the same nature as the Lucius in the *Metamorphoses*, Book I,20: *ego vero ... nihil impossibile arbitror* ('I truly think nothing is impossible'). Second, one must not forget that Photius' report was based on his reading of the *Metamorphoseis*, so it is likely Photius did not have the *Onos* with him at the time and had to work from memory.<sup>143</sup>

What does the interpretation of the Greek source tell us about the reading of the *Metamorphoses*? Because the original Greek is lost to us, we cannot know if Apuleius put himself in the tradition of the Greek author or opposed his tone. Therefore, it is most difficult to answer the question of a serious or comic reading within this framework. One must keep in mind that Apuleius' adaptation of a Greek original is part of a long tradition of Roman reworking of Greek themes. Apuleius has freely adapted the Greek model of the ass-tale. Like other Latin authors and as in his philosophical treatises, he viewed his Greek models as starting points rather than fixed limits.<sup>144</sup>

According to Mason, whether the *Metamorphoseis* should be viewed as a satire on Greek religious or philosophical ideas or as something more serious and believing, depends on one's interpretation of the *Onos*. If one denies that the *Onos*, and thus the *Metamorphoseis*, can be read satirically – which is the most common reading of the *Onos* – it is still clear that Apuleius has altered the tone of the story.<sup>145</sup> However, if one accepts that the *Onos* is an epitome of the *Metamorphoseis* and since the *Onos* is most commonly read as a satire, we can deduct from this that the *Metamorphoseis* most probably had a satirical tone as well, although it is unclear in

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<sup>142</sup> Harrison ed. (1999), 221-222.

<sup>143</sup> Harrison ed. (1999), 223, 226.

<sup>144</sup> Sandy (1997), 242.

<sup>145</sup> Harrison ed. (1999), 223.



which degree. Photius' account does not change this interpretation, for the Lucius of the *Metamorphoseis* is described by him as the same credulous naïve man as the Lucius of the *Metamorphoses* is described by his author. We have seen that this description leads to a more comic reading.

### CONCLUSION

Before an answer to the research question of this thesis can be posed, it is important to take a look at the relationship between Books I-X and Book XI in their religious context. Apuleius makes a comparison that cannot be missed by the reader between the goddesses in the first ten books and Isis in Book XI. These goddesses resemble each other in their myths and cults, but they do not resemble each other at all in the novel. Apuleius does not hint at the similarities, but at the contradictions between them. For example, in real life the cults of the Syrian Goddess and of Isis are much alike, but in the novel they are portrayed differently. This game Apuleius plays with historical and religious reality in his fictional novel connects the first ten books to Book XI, for it is impossible to ignore the fact that a comparison between the goddesses in the novel is asked for by the author. Apuleius cunningly introduces Isis without the reader noticing. Not only are the cult passages used for this purpose, but also the passages about magic and dreams. The curiosity Lucius has for magic throughout the novel and his naïveté in his strong belief leads the reader to also accept the story of Isis. The dreamlike state of Lucius that is emphasized throughout the novel and the dreams themselves lead up to the numerous dreams of Isis at the end. Although Book XI differs from the first ten books in tone, the religious context of the first ten books seems to set the stage for the appearance of Isis in Book XI.

It is important to notice the unity between all the books, since scholars have for a long time disregarded the first ten books, focusing their opinion of the tone of the *Metamorphoses* on Book XI, and thus coming to the conclusion of a serious conversion novel. As is shown in this thesis, one cannot focus solely on one book, but one should pay regards to all of the books. As mentioned in the Introduction, Book XI can both have a serious and a comic undertone, depending on the reader and the scholar. For a long time the view of a serious conversion novel has prevailed in scholarship on Apuleius, but nowadays the view of the comic story seems to have gained more territory. In this research, the same question of a serious or comic reading has been asked concerning the religious passages of the first ten books.

According to the second chapter about cults, the way each individual story about a cult or goddess is told, indicates a comic reading. There is Lucius who is convinced of Fortuna's unrighteousness in raging against him, while he does deserve a little bit of misfortune. Next, there is the frivolity in the words of Venus, Ceres and Juno. Venus is jealous of a little mortal girl and Ceres and Juno present themselves as every day, Roman women. Lastly, there is the story of the Syrian goddess. This novel does not favour her cult, not at all. The reader encounters such

silly figures that he cannot help himself but laugh. Following this argument, the cult passages discussed in this research would lean towards a comic reading.

In the third chapter, we encountered magic and dreams. Through these stories the question of reality is raised. The stories show Lucius' readiness to believe anything he is told. The way the different witches and stories resemble each other and the focus on love and revenge as the witches' motive – while being more powerful than the gods and able to do anything with their magical powers –, in combination with the dreamlike state and the many dreams throughout the novel, raise the questionability of reality. It is hard to discern whether the reader should take these stories seriously or laugh about them. Lucius does both: he admires the story for its literary value and believes the story, but he does not take the story itself and the dangers of magic it relates seriously. The reader is not forced to pick a singular reading, but is left by the author to decide for himself. This vagueness between reality and fiction favours the comic reading more than the serious reading.

There remains the question of Apuleius' intended purpose of the *Metamorphoses*. Chapter IV has served to consider this part of the question. In formulating an answer to this question, it is important to state first and foremost that we simply cannot know with any certainty what Apuleius' intentions were. Nevertheless, we should look at his background and ideas in order to get a more complete image of the novel. Luckily for us, there are several works from Apuleius delivered to us, in which his opinions are stated and from which some information about his life can be deduced. Considering Apuleius' initiation into many cults and his priesthood, one would think he would not write such ridiculous passages about other cults. There is, however, more to Apuleius than his interest in cults. He was a philosopher, a learned man, who used his education for literary means, rather than political or philosophical means. He knew how to write and how to influence his audience. He knew that by choosing the theme of the ass-tale, he put himself in the tradition started by the *Metamorphoseis*. Just like any good Roman author he took the Greek original and made it his own. Assuming that the satirical *Onos* is an epitome of the *Metamorphoseis*, the same satirical tone can be attributed to the *Metamorphoseis*, thus alluding to a comic tone in the Greek original, though it is unclear into which amount. It must, however, be said that we cannot know with certainty that the *Onos* is an epitome, for we do not have the original work to compare it with, but it is likely.

Before stating a definite answer to the research question, it must be repeated that interpretation always remains the prerogative of the reader, and we cannot know the intentions of the author, unless he or she has written them down somewhere, - which is not the case for Apuleius, as far as we know. Having looked at the religious passages of the first ten books in their historical context, I believe that these passages guide the reader more towards a humorous reading of the *Metamorphoses*. The way the goddesses are presented and the way the question of

reality continually rises up in the reader's mind when reading the magical passages, supplemented by the (most likely) satirical tradition of the ass-tale, leads me to favour a comic reading over a serious one.

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