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THE ROLE OF METAMORPHOSIS IN GREGO-ROMAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

By

David Walter Leinweber

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

1992

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF METAMORPHOSIS IN
GRECO-ROMA RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

By

David Walter Leinweber

This work traces beliefs in metamorphosis which manifest a commonality in the diverse milieu of Greco-Roman religion. Metamorphosis was the idea that an external religious power could fundamentally change some or all of the human condition's basic limitations. Metamorphosis beliefs were manifested in a variety of ways, including folklore beliefs in shape-shifting, transformation of perspectives which occurred through ecstatic states, healing, rejuvenation through blood, and the resurrection of the dead. The prevalence of such ideas is abundantly attested in literary and archaeological sources.

No work has focused exclusively on the role of Metamorphosis in later ancient religion. In doing so, this thesis argues that metamorphosis should be given a more central role in studies of the various "Hellenistic" religions. Metamorphosis should be seen as an element which helped to attract the diverse peoples who found spiritual satisfaction in the newer faiths. Hence this thesis also provides support for the early twentieth century work of scholars like Franz Cumont, A.D. Nock, and Gilbert Murray, who all emphasized human spirituality as an important causal factor in the diffusion of the new cults. The

metamorphosis, in all of its various guises, promised hope to many inhabitants of the ancient world. It was one of the greatest common themes of a profoundly religious age.

We returned to our places,
these kingdoms.
But no longer at ease there,
in the old dispensation,
with an alien people worshipping their gods.

T.S. Eliot

The Journey of the Magi

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INTRODUCTION

This is the history of an idea: the metamorphosis. In both Greek and in Latin, the word metamorphosis means transformation, as it does in English. Transformation is one of the greatest gifts which any religion can offer its adherents. Without it, any religion's survival would be hard. Transformation strikes the most deeply personal chord in human beings, and promises the most compelling kind of religious hope: that the human condition can be changed in fundamental and meaningful ways. This is the great appeal which the world's successful religions offer their devotees. One cannot account for the tremendous success of the Greco-Roman faiths, and ultimately Christianity, without careful consideration of metamorphosis.

This thesis outlines and explores the major strands of metamorphosis which can be said to have existed in Greco-Roman religion. In doing so, it takes the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius as its prime source of inspiration. The work is sometimes remembered for its more tawdry episodes—although even these provide invaluable glimpses into ancient popular culture. But the fable told by Apuleius is much more than just an ancient piece of compelling albeit dubious literary entertainment. Alongside such significant works as the New Testament, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and Hesiod's *Theogony*, the *Metamorphoses* is one of the greatest literary sources for ancient occidental religious

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history. Its title was apt, for the novel synthesized the two greatest extremes of metamorphosis which religion and folklore could offer. These were, respectively, fundamental transformation of the body and mind.

In its early books, *The Golden Ass*—as Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* is commonly called—deals with metamorphosis of the body. The chief protagonist Lucius is turned into an ass after dabbling in sorcery. Such transformations characterized classic folklore accounts of shape-shifting which figured heavily into western notion of witches and shape-shifting. (During these same early passages of the novel, the great sorceress Panthia also turned herself into an owl, or an owl-like creature.) Lucius' plight, with his unfortunate metamorphosis into the shape of an ass, was clearly perceived as the consequences of his dabbling in the fiendish and murky world of the ancient occult. This shape-shifting account typifies a frequent form of religious or supernatural metamorphosis—a supernatural power which could change the body's shape, its most basic physical attribute.

The end of Apuleius' novel has a more abstract form of metamorphosis. After having endured many trials and tribulations in ass form, Lucius is restored human shape by the goddess Isis. This was a reversal of the simpler shape-shifting metamorphosis which had occurred earlier in the novel. But this restoration of human shape was accompanied by a metamorphosis of more spiritual proportions. Having regained his human shape, Lucius' spirit was also transformed. He became a fervent devotee of Isis, was initiated into the mysteries, and commenced to live a more enlightened and pure life. This transformation of Lucius' inner-self was fully as significant as the transformation of

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his physical shape. Hence, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* takes us full circle. The conversion of Lucius fully entails his entire being. In the beginning of the novel, a man was turned into a beast. By the novel's end, a beast has been turned into a man. In this, the metamorphosis described in *The Golden Ass* was one of the most profound and fundamentally transcending religious experiences which antiquity could offer to its citizenry.

Expanding on the metamorphosis described in Apuleius, this thesis seeks more fully explore to the role which metamorphosis played in ancient religions—ranging from the simple shifting of the body's shape to the abstract transformation of the inner-self. To develop a manageable topic, I have selected the most representative manifestations of metamorphosis for closer examination. The success of the Greco-Roman cults—success which often came at the expense of the older, more venerable religions of the "classical" world—were in part fueled by a belief in metamorphosis—by the belief that the human being could basically change, or be changed. Sometimes the desired ends of this change were merely enhanced power, as in many of the simple shape-shifting folklore tales discussed in chapter one. At a more elevated level, however, metamorphosis sought less nefarious or carnal ends. There was the belief that the human consciousness could be enlightened, which often occurred in the context of ecstatic states. Chapter two focuses on these ecstatic states, and the role which they played in transforming the human spirit. Metamorphosis ideas are also prevalent in the many healing cults of later antiquity -- notably that of the Greek medicinal god, Asklepios. Here, the role of dreams in

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harnessing divine powers was as familiar as that of ecstasy had been in transforming the νοῦς. This is the focus of chapter three.

The other forms of metamorphosis discussed here were concerned with nothing less than the fundamental essence of human life itself: the belief that both the mind and the body could, through religious means, reach a fundamentally perfected state. Such concepts took on a variety of forms. It was believed that blood had regenerative powers, a subject addressed by the fourth chapter. Blood was considered a potent liquid capable of transforming life itself, offering both rejuvenation and revivification. Finally, the notion that men and women could become god is explored in the fifth and final chapter. This was a sophisticated reversal of the notion inherent in the *Metamorphoses*' early chapters: that men and women could become beasts. It was arguably the most enlightened and greatest development of ancient religious history. It appears in two distinct ways. First, Emperor worship was a rather new touch in occidental religious culture. Second, the greatest metamorphosis belief of all, the resurrection of the dead, appeared. In this particularly compelling belief system were combined all the great themes of ancient metamorphosis into one composite whole. The risen believer was given both a transformed body and a transformed spirit. The human essence, with all its psychological quirks and physical foibles, was forever transformed. Metamorphosis was one of ancient religion's greatest developments, and one of its most powerful ideas.

This thesis frequently employs terms which need to be carefully defined. Several terms will be defined as they appear in the text. Others appear with sufficient regularity to warrant their careful consideration at the outset. The first such term is "religion," a

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term often used and seldom considered. "Religion" derives from the Latin word *religio*, which generically refers to scrupulousness, or moral steadfastness. *Religio* came to take on sacred overtones, connoting a holy alliance between a human being and the gods, or God. The word, however, did not initially include the necessary supernatural component with which it is often imbued today. This work defines religion as the practical application of some philosophy to one's life. In the interests of focusing on a more narrow range of issues, I have not included discussion of "quasi-religious" philosophies such as rationalism, cynicism, stoicism and epicureanism, though consideration of these schools of thought would provide many useful new insights into a more expansive work on metamorphosis. For our purposes here, I have limited the definition of religion to forms of belief specifically involving the agency of some external and supernatural force. My work includes consideration of not only "traditional" Greco-Roman religions, ranging from the Homeric Pantheon to Christianity, but folklore as well.

The distinction between folklore and "traditional" Greco-Roman religions must be considered, too. I make this conceptual distinction by distinguishing between "popular" religion, and "formal" religion. In using terms like folklore, popular culture or petty religion, this thesis generally refers to such topics as witchcraft and magic. In his useful work *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, John Ferguson distinguishes between magic and religion, arguing that magic involves a series of rituals which if "correct in every detail the desired result must follow unless countered by a stronger magic." In religion,

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Ferguson argues, the result depends upon the will of the gods.[1] I also assert that popular religions generally lacked the centralized and hierarchical orders of priests and priestesses which usually characterized the more traditional religions.

There are gray areas between these two gaps, of course. Folklore aspects of magic and witchcraft clearly re-appear in the more formal brands of Greco-Roman religion. Hecate, for example, was a major and, I would argue, "formal" deity in ancient religion. But while Hecate was a relatively significant figure from classical Greek religion in her own right, she also lent her considerable influence to the various forms of "goddess" worship which characterized much Hellenistic religion, e.g. Isis, Diana/Artemis, Atargatis, and others. Nonetheless, Hecate appeared as a major figure in many "popular" religious accounts. She was clearly the patron goddess of many of the nightwitch beings discussed in the body of this text. Similarly, religions which became more or less "formal" invariably stemmed from popular religion. The cult of Dionysus which Euripides described in *Bacchae* is clearly popular, informal religion. Yet the sect of Dionysus became a major religion with more formal overtones linkages to the old Olympic Pantheon. New Testament Christianity is popular religion as well. Indeed, events such as the trial of Christ, or the trial of Socrates, can be seen as classic confrontation between popular and formal religion. While such gray regions between popular and formal religion do not always make for seamless categories, my thesis generally tries clearly and explicitly to distinguish between folklore and formal religion.

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[1] Ferguson, John, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), 158-59.

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Another clarification which must be made is the distinction between what have traditionally been labelled "oriental" cults, and "occidental" cults. In exploring aspects of metamorphosis, this thesis focuses much on the so-called "Hellenistic" religions, sometimes referred to as "oriental" religions. While the term "oriental" generally has fallen out of fashion, I do, on occasion, use it as another adjective for "eastern." The term "oriental religions" merely connotes those religions whose origins were neither Greek nor Roman, but the older cultures which lay to the East: Hebrew, Mesopotamian, Persian, and Egyptian. I make no qualitative judgement about these cultures or their religions, as did Cumont, whose work will be discussed below. Neither do I consider the neolithic origins of many of these beliefs, which would no doubt considerably muddy the waters of the more clearly defined cultures of the historical era. In later antiquity—the twilight centuries of the Hellenistic and Imperial eras—the more regional beliefs of the old religions were mixed into a cosmopolitan stew. The lines separating what had once been definable as Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian religions were thinner.

Aspects of metamorphosis occur in every ancient religion with which I am familiar. In the interests of creating a manageable topic, and fashioning a representative collage of ancient religious life, I have focused on select religions. This includes, of course, some discussion of the old "Olympian" religion traditionally associated with Classical Greece. Though the heyday of the Olympian deities can be said, generally, to be prior to my period of focus, it is impossible to engage in any meaningful discussion of Hellenistic or Greco-Roman religions without requisite consideration of classical antecedents. As mentioned earlier, my thesis also considers the record of folklore—

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magic, witchcraft, and "popular" religion. Here metamorphosis themes are particularly abundant, and hint at many similar notions from formal Greek religion. Other religions given consideration here are those of Dionysus, Mithras, Asklepios, the Hellenistic Egyptian faiths, and Christianity.

My inclusion of Christianity into this religious milieu also warrants clarification. Largely because of modern considerations, serious study of Christianity has sometimes been ghettoized into seminaries, or parochial education. Part of this exclusion is certainly understandable. Christianity is still a living faith, while most other ancient religions are not. To the extent that I am able, I have tried to strip away two thousand years of Christendom, and look at Christianity with the same sort of distance with which I examine other religions. Since the assumption of my thesis is that metamorphosis was essentially a positive thing in most of its manifestations, I speak well of Christianity, as I do many of the other ancient Greco-Roman religions. I am not out to praise Christianity. But above all, what I do not want to do is mindlessly to denigrate Christianity, or to take the easiest and commonest route of all, which is to ignore Christianity. Its version of religious metamorphosis was too powerful to ignore, and too much a part of the larger context of ancient religions. Christianity is a sensitive subject in a way that the religions which died with antiquity are not, but that fact must not dissuade serious scholars from considering it along with the other religions of the day.

In terms of periodization, the religions upon which this work focuses are primarily a product of the great religiously diverse age which flourished between the death of Alexander the Great, and the rise of Christian orthodoxy in the Roman Empire. This age,

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as ephemeral as its specific dates may be, has elicited some of the twentieth century's greatest works of religious scholarship. Too, it has elicited a major debate among historians regarding the nature of the religious conversion which occurred. Specifically, the debate has focused on the role of personal spirituality in the new faiths. This can generally be said to contrast with the work of a breed of more recent historians who tend to explain away great religious movements as emanating from social, psychological, or even economic forces.

Three of these earlier historians have provided particular inspiration for the approach used here: Franz Cumont, Gilbert Murray, and A.D. Nock. The strength of all these historians was their ability to synthesize the diverse data emanating from later antiquity's various religions and produce compelling and digested theoretical arguments. They are particularly relevant to this work on two counts. First, all had special sensitivity to the uniquely diverse religious age which bridged the gap between the ancient "classical" world and Christendom. Second, they had a sensitivity to human spirituality which sometimes has seemed lacking in the modern and the post-modern ages. When I discuss the significance of metamorphosis in providing appealing ideas to spiritually hungry individuals, I am echoing the work of these earlier historians—their emphasis upon the importance of religious ideas and their attraction to individuals on a personal level.

Franz Cumont's *Les Religions Orientales dans la Paganisme romaine* remains one of the most influential and important works on ancient religion ever produced. With prodigious research ability, Cumont's interpretative skills made him truly noteworthy. His

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notions of "orientalism" supplanting occidentalism hint at later French intellectual schools, notably that of Braudelian *mentalité*. In *Les Religions Orientales*, Cumont argued that the incoming oriental cults were freshly exotic replacements for what were increasingly perceived as dry and cold ancient faiths.[2] Sometimes Cumont's thinking involved a too simplistic dichotomy between orientalism and occidentalism. Nonetheless, the more basic tenets of his 1905 thesis remain still provocative: that the traditional indigenous faiths of Greece and Italy had become stale. As staid replicas of their former selves, the old religions had become dryly interwoven with the mechanical formalities of civic-state devotion and the cynicism of much "classical" culture. Cumont even argues that Rome offered absolutely nothing to the East—an idea which is difficult to take seriously, though it could be argued that Rome offered far more in terms of social administration than in powerful religious ideas.

Against the backdrop of the dead and dying faiths of Greece and Rome, Cumont's oriental religions proved an irresistible force. Facilitated by the increased trade and increasingly cosmopolitan economy of the Hellenistic world, the old faiths of Egypt, Syria, Persia, Asia Minor and other regions in the Ancient Near East mingled with those of western conquerors to produce truly compelling new cults, or hellenized versions of old cults: Sarapis and Isis, Cybele and Attis, Mithras, Atargatis, and literally hundreds of others.

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[2] *"Il y a peu d'années on considerait comme un dogme historique la théorie de Fr. Cumont et de son école: l'Orient avec sa vitalité religieuse exubérante a submerge l'Occident religieusement peu développé et passif."* From the French summary which concludes a Dutch article by Vandebeek. cf. Vandebeek, I., *"De Interpretatio Graeca Van de Isisfigur,"* in *Studia Hellenistica*, 4, Louvain, 1946, 145.

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Cumont's emphasis on orientalism was fascinating, but problematic. More important was his emphasis on personal spiritual needs. Cumont failed to connect the great conversion in aggregate spiritual life to any "secular" or social cause. The great transformation in Greco-Roman religion arose not from impersonal socio-economic forces, military conquest or political coercion. Rather, he argued that the new cults prevailed over the old ones simply because they were more successful at satisfying basic human spiritual needs. In the eyes of this writer, Cumont's acknowledgement of humanity's inherent religious needs constitutes his greatest legacy.

What Cumont also understood was that the era he was describing was an utterly unique period in ancient religious history. This was the very period explored by A.D. Nock in his significant work *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*. Here, Nock chronicled the great religious transformation which so profoundly affected the culture and society of later antiquity. Appropriately quoting "Man does not live by bread alone," Nock also stressed religion's importance in casting light on "many of the impulses which lie below the level of consciousness."[3] Like Cumont, Nock emphasized the attraction which the new cults, many oriental, wielded for the inhabitants of the Hellenistic and Imperial worlds. He made useful distinctions between types of religion. First, there were traditional beliefs, wearing both formal and informal guises. Such beliefs informed any social unit's world view. In antiquity's early millennia, most of these belief systems were fairly localized.

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[3] Nock, Arthur Darby, *Conversion: The Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 1-2.

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Any group invariably develops religious or superstitious views concerning such basic topics as morality, mortality, and the supernatural realm. This response was compounded in an innocent age. Unknown quantities such as medicine and agriculture were understood in almost entirely religious terms. Hence, these traditional beliefs comprised the religious milieu into which a man or woman was born and lived out his or her life; it was part of the cultural baggage which all human beings inherit. Second, however, Nock also saw some religions as "prophetic" in nature. Prophetic religions were centered around a "founder" espousing a rupture with traditional beliefs, and a heartfelt embracing of new creeds and/or forms of religious experience. Christ and the Buddha were such prophets. So was Socrates.[4]

Nock defined prophetic faith as demanding personal "conversion"—or a re-structuring of one's most fundamental priorities and a profound change in one's most basic philosophy. Ancient conversions, like those of Saul of Tarsus's Damascus Road experience and the conversion of Lucius in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, are only two of the most famous examples.

Nock's greatest strength was his subtle depiction of a "middle country" existing between the two extremes of cultural and prophetic religion, a conversion *à la* the prophetic faiths which ultimately transformed antiquity's various cultures. Much of this conversion stemmed from Macedonian and Roman military conquests. These imperial actions created cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism exerted a relentless pressure on ancient

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[4] Nock, *Conversion*, 5.

society, gradually culminating in a cultural conversion no less dramatic than the personal conversion of Paul.

Nock's "Great Conversion" provided historians with a major interpretative question. It was one of the greatest social and cultural revolutions of all time. Virtually the only major religion to emerge from antiquity intact was Judaism, though it was by no means unscathed by contact with the several multi-national empires under which it had been dominated. Ultimately, Christianity and Islam, both prophetic religions which were also very much products of their age, culminated this great conversion with their ascendancy over the other competing faiths of Hellenistic culture.

For Cumont, the transformation in ancient religion had been a product of orientalism. For Nock, it was a kind of social revolution in which prophetic religion merged with cultural religion. But, despite their differences, both Cumont and Nock emphasized the religious dimensions of religious history, and included spirituality as a primary force in religious culture. Both also were well aware of the unique combination of circumstances which resulted in the conversion to Christian (and later Muslim) culture.

A third historian, likewise from the twentieth century's earlier decades, also compares with Nock and Cumont in these regards. This was Gilbert Murray, whose *The Five Stages of Greek Religion* remains an important work. Those same transforming tendencies which Cumont had labeled orientalism, and which Nock had ascribed to prophetic religion, Murray attributed to a newer mysticism. The old Greek pantheon deities were pooled in with the "traditional gods, from Hercules and Dionysus up to Zeus and Cronos," gods who, he asserts, were "simply old-world rulers who had . . . been

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[5] Murray
1951), 153.

[6] *ibid.*, 1

transferred to the ranks of heaven."[5] Against these traditional gods, and then against the great age of Hellenic philosophy, he pits the newer mysticism—epitomized above all by Christianity:

> Anyone who turns from the great writers of classic Athens, say Sophocles or Aristotle, to those of the Christian era must be conscious of a great difference in tone. There is a change in the whole relation of the writer to the world him. The new quality is not specifically Christian: it is just as marked in the Mithras worshippers as it is in the Gospels and the apocalypse . . . It is hard to describe . . . It is a rise of asceticism, of mysticism...a loss of self-confidence, of hope in this life and of faith in normal human effort . . . it is not so much to live justly, to help the society to which he belongs or enjoy the esteem of his fellow creatures: but rather, by contempt for the world and its standards, by ecstasy, suffering and martyrdom, to be granted pardon for his unspeakable unworthiness, his immeasurable sins. There is an intensifying of certain spiritual emotions: an increase of sensitiveness, a failure of nerve.[6]

Murray pointed to two great strands of religion. The one range was labeled the "Great Schools," of Greek philosophy, culminating in Plato and his distinguished successors. The other range was Christianity, culminating in Paul. The former was largely the product of Greece proper, while the latter largely emanated from Hellenized Jews. The "Failure of Nerve" constituted the "lower country" lying in between the two extremes. The central thrust of the Failure of Nerve theory, then, was to show how a "period of religious

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[5] Murray, Gilbert, *The Five Stages of Greek Religion*, (New York: Doubleday Books, 1951), 153.

[6] *ibid.*, 119.

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[7] *ibid.*, 1

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[9] *ibid.*, 7

history, which seems broken, is really continuous, and to trace the lie of the main valleys which lead from one range to the other."[7]

When Murray pitted "The Great Schools" against "the Failure of Nerve," he pointed to a *kulturkampf* which Nietzsche, Rohde (and later E.R. Dodds) had identified as a struggle between intellect and emotion—between rational consciousness and irrational impulses.[8] What warrants note, however, is that Murray identified with Christianity what Rohde and Nietzsche linked to Dionysus. To the emphasis on myth and emotion which was placed on Dionysian faith—the mysticism and allegory—Murray added not only the asceticism and esotericism inherent in Christianity, but guilt and insecurity as well.

Murray's larger focus of "The Failure of Nerve" was the Hellenistic Age. The Hellenistic Age, above all, was precipitated by a collapse of the traditional Greek religion, according to Murray. All of this had its seeds in the calamitous events of 404 B.C. wherein the "Beloved City" of Pericles had become tyrannical, and lost its soul along with the war. Hence, to Murray, the destruction of Athens wielded far more significance than the victory of Sparta. Above all, it destroyed the ideal of the πολις which Athens had epitomized. Since traditional Greek religion had been centered on the πολις, primarily, it was bankrupted by the Peloponnesian War.[9] Hence a moral and spiritual vacuum was created in Greek society, paving the way for the great religion of the Hellenistic Age, of which Christianity was the most effective.

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[7] *ibid.*, 121.

[8] Dodds, E.R., *The Greeks and the Irrational*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

[9] *ibid.*, 77.

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These emphases on spiritual vacuums, dead old religions and the like, explained much about the advent of the new mystic religions. Perhaps it was most succinctly described by E.R. Goodenough. In *The Church and the Roman Empire*, he wrote, "No religion can have any general appeal which does not at least seem to offer to men what they feel they deeply need. Christianity was and is no exception to the rule." Continuing, he adds, "It (Christianity) succeeded at first fundamentally because it offered to the Graeco-Roman world into which it came, and of which it was largely a product, the kind of comfort and inspiration men were seeking."[10]

Such historians appealed much to the religious sensibilities which were much more prevalent in scholarship then than they are now. More recently, scholars like Ramsey Macmullen and Walter Burkert have done much to remind historians not to over-simplify complex social and psychological processes by using trite religious simplisms.[11] In particular, Macmullen's *Paganism in the Roman Empire* challenged the view espoused by scholars like Cumont that the Roman Empire was a kind of theistic melting pot, likening it instead to a good rich Irish stew.[12] As had Toutain's work *Les Cultes Païens*

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[10] Goodenough, Erwin R., *The Church in the Roman Empire*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1966), 4-5.

[11] Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987); cf. *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[12] Macmullen, Ramsey, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1981), vi.

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dans l'Empire Romain, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* derided Cumont for too quickly glossing over the many regional disparities in the new cults' diffusion.[13]

Macmullen also cautioned against an over-enthusiastic view of the "spiritual-fortitude-spiritual weakening" school of interpretation. Referring to Cumont as the "high-priest of the oriental cults," *Paganism in the Roman Empire* described the emphasis which scholars like Cumont or Nock placed on spirituality as "too vague," further reasoning that "moral attributes and inner-thoughts are not only almost entirely hidden from us, but not even investigated through such data as could be used."[14] Similarly, in his *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, Macmullen likewise carefully distinguished between history, and theology—the latter being the field which he believed Nock and Cumont to have studied, as opposed to the former. Though Macmullen's work can seem to hint at irreligion, his notes of caution need to be remembered. Nonetheless, the role which personal religious experience played in the new cults' popularity cannot be so easily dismissed.

In 1961, V. Wessetzsky produced *Die ägyptischen kulte zur Römerzeit in Ungarn.* It was the first volume in a useful and important publication *Études Préliminaires aux*

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[13] Toutain was Cumont's contemporary nemesis. The two battled over the degree to which the Hellenistic (i.e. oriental) cults actually supplanted the older gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome. In Cumont's day, the geographic universality of "*les religions orientales*" was challenged by Toutain, who argued that archeological evidence simply did not support Cumont in this regard. Many of the rural regions offered no evidence of the eastern cults whatsoever. Toutain, J., *Les Cultes Païens dans l'Empire romain*, (Paris: 1911), vol. 2., 5-34; cf. Cumont's review of Toutain in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, LXVI (1912), 125-29; Heuten, G., "La Diffusion des Cultes égyptiens en Occident," in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 104, 1931, 409-16; Macmullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 116.

[14] Macmullen, *Paganism in Rome*, 123.

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Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain (*EPRO*), edited by M.J. Vermasseren. This particular series has given increased weight to archaeological evidence. It has produced studies, many of them regional, exceptionally rich in empirical evidence. Thus it has provided opportunities to address the broader questions which have been raised by earlier twentieth century scholars.

At this point in my research, I have limited myself, for the most part, to the rich resources of ancient literature. In so doing, I have left no doubt fertile ground unexplored till some later date. Some attention has been given to material culture, though more careful consideration of archaeological findings is a task I am reserving for later revisions of my work. The record of art history is also something I plan to examine. I must point out, also, that my inclusion of inscriptions into the body of the text has been, for the most part, sporadic. Here and there are scattered references to the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, or to the compilations of Epidarus inscriptions which the Edelsteins compiled. But overall, my work has limited itself to "literary" sources. These yielded more than enough pertinent information to keep me busy for the past two years. Nonetheless, I intend to expand my research by including other types of sources, as soon as is possible. The translations provided in the body of the text are, generally, my own. Translated texts which I consulted, especially those from the *Loeb Classical Library*, are listed in the bibliography along with other primary and secondary sources.

This dissertation's central contention is that the varied textures of Greco-Roman religion during the Hellenistic era cannot be fully understood without serious consideration of the role which religious ideas play in the spiritual life of individuals.

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More, ideas regarding the metamorphosis of the body and soul manifest an important and attractive commonality in many cults. The idea that an external religious power could fundamentally transform someone, physically *or* spiritually, has to be considered one of the truly inspiring ideas of ancient religion. The metamorphosis' potential for meaningful change was what lured Lucius and his servant-girl friend Fotis to peer into Pamphile's chamber, then dangerously and tragically experiment with her unknown magic potions. It was what induced Aelius Aristides to spend decades of his life in the Asklepion in Pergamum, seeking illusory notions of holistic well-being. It was the force which struck Saul of Tarsus blind on the Damascus Road, and compelled him to finish out his life promising new Christians a perfected body, and a final resurrection from death. Metamorphosis was a hypnotically attractive notion, and one of the most profound common themes of a great religious age.

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CHAPTER 1

SHAPE-SHIFTING METAMORPHOSIS

The belief in a human metamorphosis took a range of forms. *The Golden Ass* begins its narrative with a woman who turns into an owl, and a man who turns into an ass. These are examples of shape-shifting, and a primitive form of belief in the metamorphosis. It was an exceedingly popular image in ancient and European folklore. Such accounts can generally be said to indicate more nefarious forms of the metamorphosis. Nonetheless, the ability to shift one's shape was a powerful and coveted skill. It was especially prevalent in folklore accounts of nightwitches, lamiae, and the stories of lycanthropy which came out of Greece.

LAMIAE

Lamia was a somewhat obscure figure from the lower stratum of Greek mythology.[1] Though a fairly minor character, her story provides a particularly elemental

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[1] For more extensive reading on Lamiae, cf. Nilsson, Martin P., *Greek Folk Religion*, (New York: Harper Torchback Books, 1940), 98; cf. Tisserant, M. Halm, "Folklore et Superstition en Grèce classique: Lamia torturée?," in *Kernos: Revue Internationale et Pluridisciplinaire de Religion Grecque Antique*, 2, (1989), 67-83; Snowden, Frank, *Blacks in Antiquity*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 19970), 155; Seltman, C.T., "Two Heads of Negresses," in *American Journal of Archaeology*, XXIV, (1920), 14-15;

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account of shape-shifting beliefs. Too, she came to be generically associated with a general type of nightwitch figure with shape-shifting capabilities.

Her own metamorphosis was not a pleasant one. Originally the beautiful daughter of a Libyan king, she was seduced by Zeus. Subsequently, she bore the great old god children. However, Hera, mad with envy, killed Lamia's children.[2] The Libyan princess turned ugly with grief and anger. She was said to have devoted the rest of her existence to devouring children.[3] Several variations of this mythological theme exist. She became a kind of fairy tale figure, used by mothers and nannies to induce good behavior among children.[4] Sometimes she was said to have the ability to pluck out her eyes.[5] In some literature she appeared as a seductive, vampire-like creature who preyed on handsome young men. The most famous example of this version of the Lamia theme is taken from Philostratus' *Life of Apolonius*. Here a Lamia appeared as a beguiling enchantress of Phoenician descent. In a variation of the "unknown lover" theme common in folklore, the beautiful lady met and completely fascinated a youth, Menippus, so that a marriage was

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Gruppe, Otto, *Greichish Mythologie und Religiongeschicte*, (New York: Aron Press, 1975), II, 1487.

[2] There are shades of this myth in Apuleius' rendering of the Cupid and Psyche myth. Here, the love goddess denounces the maiden as a *succubus*. "Indignant Venus exclaims forcefully," denouncing "Psyche, that usurper of my beauty. *Tunc indignata Venus exclamavit vel maxime: Psychen illam meae formae succubam.*" Apuleius, *Met.*, V. 28.

[3] Diod. Sic., 20. 41.

[4] Lucian mocks those who, like children, still fear the Lamia, and the Mormo, another horrific female figure associated with childhood fables. Luc., *Lover of Lies*, 3; cf. Dio Chrys., *Or.*, 55; Strabo, 1. 28. 8.; Horace, *Ars P.*, 340.

[5] Plut, *De Cur.*, 2.

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hastily planned. On the wedding day, Apolonius convinced Menippus that his comely fiance was really a Lamia, who was planning to devour him shortly after the marriage.[6] The theme was treated by nineteenth century poet John Keats in his haunting work "Lamia."

The various images which went into the Lamia figure heavily in the depictions of witches which recur throughout ancient literature. For example, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* was nicknamed *The Golden Ass* for its depiction of the adventures of an unfortunate man who has been turned into an ass. The circumstances surrounding this unfortunate event are fraught with examples of shape-shifting. After parting ways with Aristomenes, Meroe and Panthia, Lucius continued his travels. He spent time at another inn, this one owned by the wealthy Milo. Before going to Milo's inn, Lucius was warned by the servant girl Fotis and by his own cousin Byrrhanea regarding the wicked wife of Milo, Pamphile. In many ways, she was the same sort of nightwitch creature whom Apuleius introduced in the characters of Meroe and Panthia. Lucius was told that she wielded a deadly penchant for young men.[7] However, a new twist was added. Pamphile was a shape-shifter. Hence, readers confront the second most famous example of shape-shifting found in *The Golden Ass* (the first being that of Lucius, of course). Accompanied by another servant girl,

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[6] Phil., *VA.*, 4.25; Consider also that such evil spirits were apparently attracted to physical beauty and youth, as were many of the witches discussed in this work. For example, also in Philostratus, it is reported that while Aponius was in India, he was approached by a woman whose sixteen year old son had been possessed by a δαίμων for several years. Aponius told the woman that the spirit was smitten by her son's good looks. He subsequently rebukes the δαίμων with a threatening letter. cf. *ibid.*, 3. 38.

[7] Apul., *Met.*, 2.5; 2.12; 3.15.

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Lucius watched Pamphile through a window as she stripped off her clothes, and sprinkled some kind of powder on herself.[8] This changed her into an owl-like creature who subsequently flew out the window. Enamored with the possibility of shifting his own shape, Lucius crept into Pamphile's room after she had flown away. Helped by the servant girl, he mimicked the sorceress' actions which he had just observed. Instead of turning into an owl, however, Lucius turned into an ass. Moreover, he was unable to regain his human shape. Thus began the meandering adventures of man/ass Lucius, which constituted one of antiquity's most powerful religious fables.[9]

Pseudo-Lucian's version of the same story described this portion of the fable, with many of the exact same themes.[10] Again, a perverse metamorphosis comprised the core of the tale. Lucian's rendering of the tale also took place in Thessaly. The young man was on business. He had been invited to the home of Hipparchus in Hypata, a town in Thessaly.[11] When he met a well-dressed woman named Abroea in the street, she warned

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[8] Stripping off one's clothes was a common theme in more modern shape-shifting folklore, notably that of the werewolf. Werewolves were often said to strip off their clothes before undergoing their metamorphosis. Petronius offers a story demonstrating this and other important characteristics from early werewolf lore. Pet., *Sat.*, 61.

[9] Apul., *Met.*, 3. 20-21; cf. Lucian, *Trans.*, 12: 12-13..

[10] Apuleius began his *Metamorphoses* by stating that "we begin a Greek tale; *Fabuluam Graecanican incipimus.*" He also refers to his story as one in the Milesian mode. This is usually thought to refer to Aristides of Miletus, who wrote a collection of sexually explicit accounts in the first century A.D. The story of Lucius and his unfortunate transformations were more than likely common fables in antiquity, especially in Greek-speaking regions. Apul., *Met.*, 1. 1.

[11] Lucian, *Lucius*, 1. 1; The "young man on business" seems to have been a common motif by which Hellenistic and Imperial authors could spin a long and adventuresome narrative. Consider that the protagonist in Petronius' *Satyricon*, was also travelling for entrepreneurial reasons. This more practical theme in many later stories contrasts sharply

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him about the wife of Hipparchus. This was the character corresponding to Milo, the innkeeper in Apuleius, and the husband of the great sorceress Pamphile. Abroea warned Lucius that Hipparchus' wife was a cunning sorceress, one who cast her eye on all handsome young men. Again, the parallels with Apuleius are striking.[12]

As in Apuleius, one sees again the moral undergirding of the story, despite the novel's lechery and borderline pornography. The transformation sought was a kind of perverse inversion of more uplifting metamorphoses available in the more ethical and abstract religions. Hence the moral component of transformation beliefs was apparent—though the morals may be have been more readily observed in the breach than in the practice. Rather than heed Abroea's advice, Lucius was excited to learn that the occult excitement and experimentation he sought was so close at hand.[13] Indeed, if it was illicit pleasure he sought, the inn of Hipparchus was something of a jackpot—sin city for the weary traveler. Lucius decided that before encountering the powers of Hipparchus' wife, he would have his way with the servant girl Palaestra, Lucian's equivalent of Fotis.[14] It is at this point in the novel that metamorphosis came to take a central role in the fable's plot. After much graphic sex with Palaestra, Lucius asked her to help him spy

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with the 'Odyssey' and 'Pilgrimage' themes of earlier lore.

[12] *ibid.*, 1. 4; cf. Apul. *Met.*, 3. 15.

[13] Lucian, *Lucius*, 1. 5.

[14] The name Palaestra is perhaps something of an off-color witticism. It is suspiciously close to the Greek word for wrestling school, παλίστρα, which makes a kind of sense, if one reads about the gymnastic sexual decathlon instruction which Lucius received in the servant girl's tutelage. *ibid.*, 1. 5.

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on Hipparchus' wife.[15] A few days later, Palaestra informed Lucius that the witch was going to turn herself into a bird. They went and spied on her through a crack in the door of her bedroom. As in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the sorceress stripped off her clothes, then rubbed herself with an oil.[16] Subsequently, she became a "nightraven" or a κόραξ νυκτερίνός; Apuleius uses the word "*bubo*" or owl. "*Fit bubo Pamphile.*"[17] Here, Lucius stripped and Palaestra daubed him with the enchantment ointment. He turned into an ass. And as in the Apuleius account, he was told to eat roses and be cured.[18]

It is evident that both versions of the ass/man story have powerful elements of human metamorphosis, even linking them with a kind of crude morality. More, there are elements of shape-shifting themes which can be demonstrated to exist elsewhere in Greco-Roman folklore. In shifting her shape into that of an owl, Pamphile hints at elements of the *Strix* myth. *Strix* is a Latin word generally translated "screech owl." During antiquity, however, the *Strix* became closely linked with nocturnal, vampiric witch-like creatures, notably that of the Lamia.[19] The most famous incidence of such syncretism is found in

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[15] *ibid.*, 1. 11.

[16] As the not-so-subtle overtones of this story indicate, an element of sexual perversion often appeared in some of these shape-shifting accounts. One recalls the story of Pasiphae, who rejoiced to become the '*adultera*' of a bull, and regarded with jealousy the comely cows. She so desired to become a bull that she wore purple gowns and went up to wander among the mountain herds. Too, she envied Europa and Io, for the one was a cow, and the other was born of a cow's mate. Ovid, *Ars Amitoriae*, 1. 295; cf. also, Plutarch, *Agis*, 9.

[17] Apul., *Met.*, 3. 21.

[18] Lucian, *Lucius*, 1. 11, 14.

[19] Oliphant, S.G., "The Story of the Strix," in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 44, (1913), 133-49.

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Jerome's *Vulgate*. Isaiah originally referred to the demonic Lilith.[20] This Hebrew demoness, who was said to be the first wife of Adam, manifested many vampire/Lamia qualities. Since Adam had left her for Eve, she was believed to reserve a particular loathing for happy lovers and children. By later antiquity, she was linked with Lamia, so that when the Old Testament was translated into Latin, the Hebrew Lilith became "Lamiae."[21] Moreover, the original King James version of the Bible translated the passage as screech owls, while the Revised Standard Version simply used the more generic "night hag."[22] Such linguistic flexibility reflected a synthesis of what were once clearly defined and separately conceived figures. By the end of the classical period those various notions regarding women, the supernatural and evil were synthesized into a kind of generic female archetype. Embodied in this still formative literary and mythological model were many of the characteristics later to be linked more specifically with vampires or witches. A metamorphosis ability was chief among their powers.

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[20] Isaiah 34: 14.

[21] Of course, there is a wealth of ancient near eastern and Hebrew scholarship addressing this rich folklore tradition. Only a few of the more useful and important sources can be noted here. Perhaps the most thorough is Raphael Patai's chapter on Lilith in his work *The Hebrew Goddess*. Ginzberg's work is also invaluable. Patai, Raphael, *The Hebrew Goddess*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 221-254; cf. Ginzberg, Louis, *Legends of the Jews*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1925), vol. I, 65. Volume 5 of Ginzberg's work notes the confusion of Lilith with Lamia. cf. 5, 87; cf. Caquot, André, "Anges et Démons en Israël," in *Génies, Anges et Démons*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 117.

[22] When appropriate and/or necessary, the goddesses themselves would take-on the "hag" visage. Recall than Juno turned into an old hag to visit Semele, the mother whose dalliance with Jove ultimately produced Bacchus. Ovid, *Met.*, III. 273-286.

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[24] *ibid.*, 63.

The *Strix* (pl.= *striges*) had one of the more important blends of human and animal characteristics in Greco-Roman folklore. Generally, the word was associated with witches. Petronius tells of *striges* who began to screech so that you would think a dog to be following a hare.[23] After such screeching witches startled a group, a strapping Cappadocian went out to inspect the commotion. He came back bruised to a pulp, having been touched by the unseen phantoms. Meanwhile, a mother in the inn discovered that her baby had disappeared—and was replaced by a bundle of straw. The big slave died a few days later. He had gone mad.[24]

Perhaps the most detailed story regarding the *strix* is found in Ovid. This concerned the very early Roman goddess Carna, who was the deity of hinges. The hinge, of course, easily was linked to the comings and goings of daily life, especially home life. Hence, Carna was the goddess of the hearth. Her name may have etymological connections to the word *caronis*, or flesh. Either Ovid or a now forgotten convention confused her with Cardea, the goddess of hinges whose name was derived from the word for hinge, *cardonis*. In *Fasti*, where Ovid discusses the Roman calendar—unfortunately, the final six books/months are not extant—Ovid states that June 1st was the sacred day given to Carna. He himself states that information about the mythical origins of her power and origins were largely lost.

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[23] "*Putares canem leporem persequi.*" Pet., *Sat.*, 63.

[24] *ibid.*, 63.

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The story of Carna and the *Strix* tells much about ancient beliefs in shape-shifting. Alernus was an ancient grove near the Tiber's mouth. Here a nymph named Cranae used to hunt—an activity which apparently roused her passions more than the attentions of her many suitors. When pressed by one of these, she was wont to take him out of the light to a dark cave—an activity which her amorous admirers naturally favored as well. Once in the woods however, she would hide in the brush. After she tried this with the deity Janus, he said she should be the goddess of hinges, since she was so found of opening the closing the door of possibility.[25] Janus finally caught Carna and had his way with her. In return for seizing Carna's maidenhood, Janus, true to this word, made her the goddess of hinges. Hence, Crana became a goddess of the home and hearth, since the hinge was so readily linked to the doorway. More, the god presented her with a single white thorn.

This story sets up another tale regarding Proca, the ancient king of Alba Longa. The Proca story makes the link between the *strix* and transformations into owl-like creatures clearer. Indeed, in introducing the tale, Ovid reports that *striges* meant screech-owls (*avidae volucres*). *LCL* translator Frazer translates this as birds, but the word used is not *avis*, but *volucris*, which can refer to virtually any flying thing, chiefly birds or insects. So though the word *strix* come from owls, meaning birds, these are not normal

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[25] Janus was considered the god of gates and doors. Indeed, the very word Janus (ianus) also meant passageway, or gate. Hence, one notes Janus Patulcius, the deity who opened doors, and Janus Clusivius, the deity who closed doors. cf. Livy, 1. 19. 2; An ancient hymn to Janus is preserved in Varro, 7. 27; cf. also, Ogilvie, R.M., *The Romans and their Gods in the Age of Augustus*, (London: Croom Helm, 1969), 11; Schilling, Robert, "Janus: Le Dieu Introducteur, Le Dieu des Passages," in *Rites, Cultes, Dieux de Rome*, (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1979), 220-262.

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birds.[26] Neither are the *Strix* Harpies, though they were descended from the Harpies. They were said to have large hooklike claws and to attack nurseless children. Using their pointed beaks to rip the throats of children, they drank their blood.

Ovid does not know whether these beasts were born thus, or were turned into these forms through sorcery. He does tell, however, that they came into the home of Proca, where there was a five-day-old infant. The Striges attacked the infant. The nurse went to Cranae (Carna) and pleaded for help. Cranae touched the doorpost three times with arbatus leaves, also the threshold. She sprinkled the entrance with charmed water. Finally, she left some sowguts out for the birds as a sacrifice. The child got his color back. This story has strong symbolism regarding thresholds, which figured heavily in later European accounts of vampires and shape-shifters.

Carna was associated with both the buckthorn and the thresholds. The Greeks believed that buckthorn or whitethorn fastened to a door or outside a window kept evil spirits and ghosts from the house.[27] This belief was a fascinating precursor to later

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[26] Recall too the daughters of the mythical king Minyas. They refused to grant recognition to Bacchus as the divine figure he was, saying "he was not among the 'true gods' (*sed non est Bacchus in illis*)." For their scorn of Bacchus and his holy festivals, the girls were turned into bats, night creatures "hating light (*lucemque perosae*)." Ovid, *Met.*, IV. 274-75, 389-415.

[27] In more recent eras, thorns were frequently placed in the coffins of the recently deceased to ward off evil spirits or the onslaught of vampirism. Barber, Paul, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 53. cf. Whitethorn was the wood used, along with Hawthorn, to make the stake which was pounded through the heart of a vampire. Summers, Montague, *The Vampire:His Kith and Kin*, (New York, 1929), 203-04. Recall, also the atheist Bion, who suffered a deathbed religious conversion, requesting buckthorn to be attached to the doors. Diog., Lae., *V. Phl.*, 1v. 54-57.

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European beliefs regarding the thresholds of the home, notably that the devil, or vampires, could not enter through the threshold of a home without someone inside inviting them.[28]

This link between shape-shifting, vampires and witches was an important one. In later European folklore, all three sorts of creatures would clearly be fused and confused, as is evidenced by the frequent link between vampires and werewolves. No doubt these linkages derive from the earlier centuries of occidental antiquity. One recalls Circe, one of the first '*femme-fatale*,' nightwitch creatures to have been described in Greek literature. This compelling and powerful being clearly used elements of shape-shifting in her bag of magical tricks. Homer's *Odyssey* reports that her palace on the island of Aeaea was surrounded by a retinue of fearsome wolves, and lions—creatures who were, in actuality, men whom she had bewitched with drugs.[29]

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[28] Note that the threshold has long been associated with folklore. This hardly seems surprising, since it was so clearly linked with the security of the home. This tradition continued into early modern eastern Europe, where it was sometimes believed that a vampire was unable to cross a home's threshold without being invited. In an often insecure age, to cross the threshold uninvited was a kind of domestic rape—a violation of what little privacy and sanctity ancient society was able to offer families. Along with Carna (Cardea), Janus was traditionally considered the god of doors. Consider, for example, that Apuleius goes out of his way to point out that Meroe and Panthia had passed over (*evaserant*) the threshold (*limen*) of the room in which Socrates and Aristomenes were sleeping. "Just then they crossed the threshold and the doors re-swung back to their original position. "*Commudum limen evaserant et fores ad pristinum statum integrae resurgunt.*" Even more telling is Lucan's account of the great nightwitch Erictho. As powerful as she was, it was forbidden Erictho to rest her head in the city or under a roof. Still today the custom of "carrying the bride across the threshold," survives in England and Scotland, from the old days of Roman Britain. Apul., *Met.*, 1. 14; cf. Lucan, *Bello Civile*, VI. 567-70; Laing, Gordon, *Survivals of Roman Religions*, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963), 33.

[29] Homer, *Od.*, X. 209-220.

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[32] *ibid.*, 2.

There are other clear precursors to shape-shifting and vampire folklore. In many regions of Eastern Europe, it was believed that shape-shifters could not cross salt walter, or "running water."[30] Some obscure predecessor of this belief appears in *The Golden Ass*. After the terrible and vampire-like nocturnal attack sustained by Socrates in the beginning of the novel, Meroe stopped up the wound in the young man's throat with a sponge. Then, Panthia admonished that he "take care not to pass over a river." When Socrates failed to heed this mandate, his wound re-opened, and he expired.[31] The link between running water in Apuleius and more modern superstition is too tenuous to comment on in anything less than cursory fashion. Still, in general terms, the similarity can hardly be coincidental.

Still other elements which the witches of *Metamorphoses* exhibit bore resemblance to modern shape-shifting folklore, and must be considered. At one point, Apuleius reports that the witches of Thessaly were closely linked with death, corpses and crypts. Lucius remarked that not even the graves were safe, and that the witches would go into the cemeteries to gather bones and slices of flesh from the recently deceased.[32] This hints at the not-so-subtle cannibalistic qualities of Lamiae. Indeed, Thessalian witches would

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[30] As will be noted below, water was used in purifying ceremonies prior to funerals, which may account for some of these ancient and longstanding ideas. Lucian, *On Funerals*, 12; Summers, Montague, *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin*, (New York: University Books, 1960), 208; cf. Wild, Robert, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 145.

[31] "*Cave . . . per fluvium transens.*" Apul., *Met.*, 1. 13-14.

[32] *ibid.*, 2. 20.

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bite off the flesh of dead men's faces and use it in their magic spells.[33] Ovid too describes Thessalian witches as old, ghoulish hags haunting the graveyard.[34] He writes of haemonia, thereby describing many of the characteristics associated with "old" Thessalian sorcery. Those included many of the horrific notions described by Apuleius, and familiar to more recent horror themes: spirits rising from tombs, witches, who seek to split the very earth with their "infamous incantation (*infami carmine*)."[35]

This ghoulish image of witches haunting graveyards borrowed much from Hecate, who possessed many vampiric characteristics herself. First, Hecate had strong nocturnal qualities, and was linked with moon goddesses like Diana, Selene, Artemis or the Syrian Atargatis. Euripides referred to her as the "queen of the night."[36] A prayer preserved by

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[33] Recall that Thessaly was considered the seat of witchcraft in the western ancient world. The popular Thessalian lore had a clearly occult connotation. Medea's most famous spell-casting took place in Thessaly, as reported in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Also, Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* equates the region Haemonia (Haemonia=early term for Thessaly) with old sorcery and witchcraft, which the author claims have no power against gods like his patron deity Apollo: "*Viderit, Haemoniae siquis mala pabula terra et magicas artes posse iuvare putat. Ista veneficii vetus est via.*" "If anyone believes the evil potions of the Haemonian region to be able to help, he shall see. Such is the ancient way of sorcery." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII. 160; cf. Ovid, *Remedia Amoris*, 248-252.

[34] Lucian's version of the same story told by Apuleius, commonly *Transformations*, also sets these early and horrifying events in Thessaly. Again, the protagonist is on business. He has been invited to the home of Hipparchus, instead of Milo. There is all the sexual titillation in the early chapters too, coupled as it is with an interest in magic and sorcery. The wife of Hipparchus (Milo) is also said to be attracted to handsome young men. Lucian, *Trans.*, 1. 4.

[35] "*Non Anus infami carmine rumpet humum.*" Ovid, *Remedia Amoris*, 250. *Anus* interchangeably means old woman, hag, or witch.

[36] Euripides, *Med.*, 395.

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Origin describes her as an enemy of the sun.[37] And like the hags reported by Apuleius, she was said to wander among the tombs, and even to drink blood. Too, she was said to make the dogs bark when she approached.[38] The belief that an animal could recognize a shape-shifter, vampire or a witch was prevalent throughout medieval and early modern European history. In certain regions of eastern Europe, it was believed that a white stallion who had never mated could recognize a vampire's grave, or that dogs could sense unnaturally evil individuals.[39] More, Hecate was associated with suicides, and, in many regions, suicides were thought to become vampires, or roam the earth as restless spirits.[40]

Finally, Hecate was frequently the goddess called upon by other sorceresses who were making spells or potions. Sometimes there were forms of shape-shifting in these magic charms. She appeared in the famous myth of Arachne. After Athena lost her weaving contest with Arachne, she used a plant named Hecatean to sprinkle on Arachne, to turn her into a spider.[41]

Apuleius includes another story in *The Golden Ass* which resembles later vampire folklore, and hence is significant in any discussion of shape-shifting. Ass-Lucius was sold

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[37] Or., *Phil.*, 72.

[38] Theoc., 2. 10-17.

[39] Villeneuve, Roland, *Loup-Garous et Vampires*, (Paris: La Palatine, 1963), 137-38.

[40] Cavendish, Richard, *The Powers of Evil in Western Religion, Magic and Folk Belief*, (New York: Putnam's 1975), 98.

[41] "*Post ea discedens sucis Hecateidos hervae sparsit.*" "After saying these things, she sprinkled her (Arachne) with the juices of the Hecatean herb." Ovid, *Met.*, VII. 194.

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t an auction to a poor gardener. Meanwhile, a man from a neighboring village shared the umble hospitality of the gardner. On the next day, the guest promised to return the favor ith some gifts. Lucius was sent on the seven mile journey to the next town. Here again, ucius was witness to a horrific tale—a story within a story being the device frequently sed by Apuleius to spin his meandering tale.

The master rode Lucius to the next town. Even before the main story began, range omens were observed while the gardener and his former guest supped. A hen laid t an egg, but a live chicken; the ground under their table burst asunder, and a shower blood spurted forth; wine in the host's cellar began to boil; a great frog leapt out of dog's mouth. These events indicated that the upcoming happenings were going to be mere occurences, but occurences with supernatural overtones. The omens could be guries of the man's son's upcoming death, but they also hinted at a natural order that d been disturbed. Meanwhile, a servant brought word of disaster. The host had three ns who were well bred and educated. They had gone to defend a poor man with whom y sympathized. The man's hut bordered on the property of another young man, and he le his cows and trampled his crops repeatedly. More, confusing some illusionary border abble, he was trying to take the poor man's land for himself.

In the "legal" battle which ensued, the poor man gathered friends to serve as nesses, and showed them the borders of his property. The three sons of the gardner were among these potential witnesses. The rich man however, proved recalcitrant. en one of the brothers challenged his legal rights to the property, he called out his s, whom he had fed on the flesh of carrion in his fields. The dogs attacked the

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brothers. Significantly, Apuleius described the carnage which ensued as a *nefaria daps*. Daps meant feast, but also had a religious connotation—a sacrificial banquet, or festive religious meal. This is the use of inverted religious metaphor common in later vampire literature, in which Christian sacraments such as baptism and marriage were often blasphemed, or mirrored by evil.

A vicious fight ensued in which two brother were killed—one by the dogs, and the other by the spear of the rich young ruler. But before the third remaining brother and the noble clashed, the poor brother used an interesting metaphor in denouncing the aristocratic landowner:

> Reap thou your rewards from the destruction of our entire family, and nourish your insatiable cruelty with the blood of three brothers.[42]

This story has elements which would emerge in later vampire lore, like the stories about Dracula the noble, and the Hungarian countess Elizabeth Bathory. In such stories, there was a noble figure who sucked the surrounding peasantry in more ways than one. The blood of the peasantry can be understood synonymously with the labor of the peasantry, with their sweat and meager wealth, which were readily exploited by the leisurely classes and privileged aristocracy. The vampire motif in such a context is a metaphor for the parasitical class relationship which was the characteristic of medieval social structure and the feudal land-holding systems. (Indeed, the "peasants storming of the castle" has become immortalized in scores of horror novels set in feudal Eastern Europe, for just such reasons.) The son's final tirades at the noble just before his violent

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[42] *Fruere exitio totius nostrae familae et sanguine trium fratrum insatiabilem tuam crudelitatem pasce. . . .* Apul., *Met.*, IX. 39-39.

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death fit this pattern, in which the parasitical blood-sucking metaphor is used to describe social inequity. The local lord sucks the economic and/or spritual life and vitality from his neighboring peasants.

One other story, drawn from Ovid, sheds light on both the magic potions of Thessaly, and witch figures like Hecate. It too involved shape-shifting. Glaucus, a sea-god, was in love with Scylla. He had been a fisherman. On some remote shore he had fished. There a large rock projected out into the water. On one side was water, on the other side, vegetation. Glaucus noticed that when he placed his caught fish on the vegetation, they would spring back to vigorous life after eating the herbs. They would jump back into the sea. He tried it himself, and became a merman. He fell in love with Scylla, who rejected him, whereupon he sought out Circe for magical aid. Circe however offered her own charms to Glaucus, who rejected them *"propter amorem eius pro Scylla."* She did want not to harm Glaucus, but wanted to hurt Scylla. Thus she mixed herbs together, singing the incantations of Hecate.[43]

Along with the *Strix*, other examples exist of strange mythological creatures who were part bird and part female. Often, as in the case of the *Strix*, such beings were quite horrific and/or malevolent. No doubt the most famous of such examples is taken from the Gorgo, the Medusa. This noted and ugly beast/woman was derived from an account in

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[43] Ovid, *Remedia Amoris*, 248-50; Circe, like her mentor Hecate, also attracted dogs. cf. Ovid, *Met.*, XIII. 848-970.

Hesiod.[44] The blood from one her veins was said to be used by Asklepios for healing, blood from another to do injury.[45]

Not all horrific human/bird creatures were female. Ovid tells of Daedalion, brother of Peleus, husband of Thetis. He was turned into a bird when his daughter Chione stirred the passions of both Apollo and the son of Mercury. Both slept with her, and she bore twins. Chione however became proud, and boasted of her superiority to Diana, who shot Chione with one of her arrows. Her father, seeing the girl die, went mad and fled to the top of Mount Parnassus, evidently in order to kill himself. Apollo pitied him, and turned him into a hawk. However, the man remained mad with grief and rage, and became a hawk-like creature who spent his time terrifying the other birds.[46] This is something of a masculine counterpart to the Lamia story. A father's grief—as opposed to a mother's grief—leads to both a supernatural transformation and a hardening of the spirit, now malevolent.[47]

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[44] Hesiod, *Theog.*, 270; cf. Homer, *Il.*, 5. 738.

[45] Apollodorus Mythographus, 3. 120; In the archaic period, the Gorgon was generally depicted as the famous horrific figure still associated with her. During the Classical era, however, she became more of a tragic figure. cf. Pausanias, 2. 21. 5; Cicero, *Verr.*, 4. 124.

[46] Ovid, *Met.*, 289-345.

[47] Another story in Ovid also describes a man whose shape is shifted to that of a woman's. The blind Theban soothsayer Tiresias had once been walking in the woods. Here, he came across two serpent mating. Striking them with his staff, he was suddenly changed into a woman. Eight years later, Tiresias came across the two serpents again, who were participating in the same activity as before. He struck them again and was restored his male form. Subsequently, he took sides with Jove in divine marital squabbles. For this, Juno made him blind. Ovid, *Met.*, III. 325-338.

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Lamiae, *Strix* and other nightwitch figures were by no means the only beings to pursue more malevolent forms of the metamorphosis. The most famous shape-shifter in western culture, the werewolf, must also be considered. Here again, the power of metamorphosis was used for nefarious and perverse purposes. Nonetheless, it was an immensely powerful transformation for those who sought it.

In Lucan's *Bello Civile*, when Pompey sought out out the great Thessalian nightwitch Erictho, the evil sorceress was depicted as fighting with wolves over graveyard corpses.[48] It was indeed a horrifying image—one which will impress modern readers as much as it no doubt impressed ancient ones. It was not just the incidental reference to wolves as scavengers of the dead, or the understandable belief that the wolf was one of mankind's most ancient enemies. Rather, it was the placement of the wolf in this whole macabre scene, replete with witches, graveyards, and dead corpses coming to life. Indeed, this relatively little known tale from Lucan showed the wolf as one of occidental superstition's most ancient and familiar malevolent faces. In short, in the pantheon of horrific figures and archetypal characters who went into Western Civilization's Halloween culture, the wolf was second to none. More, since the ancient days of Greece and Rome, particularly noteworthy wolves have often been given human characteristics, while especially evil individuals have often been linked to wolves. More careful exploration of

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[48] Lucan, *Bello Civile*, 552-53.

this truth reveals the origins of one of the most venerable shape-shifting beings in the vocabulary of European folklore and popular culture: the werewolf.[49]

Werewolf lore was an age-old feature of the ancient world; one of the most venerable shape-shifters in antiquity. The oldest folklore stories regarding something like werewolves which can be found in occidental antiquity derive from the Greek region of Arcadia. It was a region full of lore regarding wolves.[50] This was an ancient region of the Peloponnesus. Strabo reports that the Arcadian tribes were believed to be the oldest Greek tribes, naming the two groups Azanes, and the Parrhasians.[51] By the time the famous geographer was living, Arcadia had many deserted cities. The old temple of Zeus

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[49] In Greek culture, the wolf was often associated with trickery and deceit, δολος. Hence, it is no coincidence when the *Iliad*'s 'Dolon' wears wolf-skin to spy on the enemy. This also hints at other examples to be discussed below, wherein donning animals-skins is part of the prelude leading to shape-shifting. Too, Pindar's *Pithia*, 2, notes the general treachery of the wolf. In Virgil's *Aeneid* Circe turns some of the men into wolves. After Patroclus has begged Achilles loan him his armor, Patroclus leads the Myrmidons into battle, whom Homer describes as "carnivorous wolves, λύκοι ὥς ὠμοφάγοι. Diodorus Siculus reports that the Egyptians venerated the wolf. Homer, *Il.*, 16. 155-160, 10. 334; Eur., *Rhes*, 204; Pindar, *Pit.*, 2. 82-85; Diod., Sic, I. 83; cf. Buxton, Richard, "Wolves and Werewolves in Greek Thought," in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, ed. by Jan Bremmer, (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 64; for a good general study, cf. Mainoldi, Carla, *L'Image du loup et du chien dans la Grèce ancienne d'Homere à Platon*, (Paris: Éditions Ophrys, 1984); cf. Detienne, Marcielle, and Svenbro, Jesper, "Les Loups au festin ou la Cité impossible," in *La Cuisine du Sacrifice en Pays Grèc*, (Paris: Centre de Recherches comparées sur les Société Anciennes, 1979), 215-237; Block, Ride, "Le loup dans les mythologies de la Grèce et de l'Italie anciennes," in *Revue de l'instruction publique en Belgique*, 20, 1877, 145-158; Summers, Montague, *The Werewolf*, (Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966).

[50] Strabo reports another story, which was more incredible and probably more ancient, was told regarding the origins of Rome. According to this myth, Rome was an Arcadian colony, which is interesting, given the wolf imagery surrounding the two cultures. Strabo, 5.3.3.

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Lycaeus was still slightly revered—but many of Arcadia's old cities were ruined and/or deserted. Too, it was historically a region rich in sheep. This is interesting, since horrific stories of wolves would seem to fare well wherever the populace depended upon sheep for a significant portion of their livelihood. Homer reports that the region was rich in sheep (πολύμηλον).[52] Similarly, Pausanias notes that Arcadians (Pelasgians=Arcadians) were known for their sheep-skin coats, which he asserts had been introduced by the old king Pelasgus, and which he notes were still worn during his lifetime in Euboea and Phocis.[53] Too, the Arcadian city Manitea was allegedly the placed where Rhea had given birth to Poseidon. She had hid him there with a flock of lambs, in order to keep him safe from Cronus' appetites.[54]

Arcadia was replete with wolf imagery and lore.[55] The most famous ones surrounded the mythical king Lycaon, the son of Pelasgus.[56] He was reputed to have

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[52] Homer, *Il.*, 2. 605.

[53] Paus., VIII. 1. 5.

[54] Meanwhile, Rhea told Cronus she had given birth to a horse, and gave him a foal for supper instead of baby Poseidon. *ibid.*, VIII. 8. 2-3.

[55] For an excellent overview of Arcadian lore, geography and history, cf. Jost, Madeleine, *Sanctuaires et Cultes d'Arcadie*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1985), 258-267.

[56] Lycaon's father Pelasgus was reputed the first inhabitant of the Arcadian region. He taught his people to live in huts, wear sheep-skins coats, avoid eating toxic plants, and eat acorns. So the father of Lycaon—who was something of a proto-typical werewolf, as shall be observed below—was associated with benevolence and herbivorism. During his reign, Arcadia was called Pelasgia. Paus., VIII. 1. 1. The land was called Arcadia after Callisto (daughter of Lycaon, granddaughter of Pelasgus) came to the throne and its dwellers were Arcadians, instead of Pelasgians. Paus., VIII. 4. 2; cf. also, Piccaluga, G., *Lykaon: un tema mitico*, (Rome: 1968).

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lived during the age of Cecrops, a pre-historical Athenian king. Here, Pausanias includes a kind of inversion of the biblical Cain and Able story. Both Cecrops and Lycaon worshipped Zeus—in fact, Pausanias reports that Cecrops was the first to name Zeus the supreme deity, which indicates that his legend may well derive from the days when the old cthonic gods were first supplanted by the Olympian Pantheon. Cecrops refused to sacrifice "any living thing" on Zeus' altar.[57] Pausanias reports that "Lycaon bore the baby of a man to the altar of the Lycaean Zeus and poured blood on the altar. And immediately, they say that he became a wolf instead of a man."[58] Ovid tells that Arcadia's reputation was so inflamed with the stories of Lycaon's atrocities that Jove/Zeus himself went to visit, disguised as a mortal. After performing some miraculous signs (Ovid does not say what), he was worshipped by the common folk, so that Lycaon determined to test the divinity of the stranger. He planned to kill him while he slept. But first he took a prisoner, cut his throat and boiled him to serve to Zeus. When he served the god this gruesome repast however, Jove was angered, and Lycaon turned into a wolf.[59] Ovid reports that he retained elements of his human appearance.[60]

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[57] "...ὁπόσα ἔχει ψυχήν." *ibid.*, VIII. 2. 3.

[58] "Λυκάων δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν βωμὸν τοῦ Λυκαίου Διὸς βρέφος ἤνεγκεν ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἔθυσε τὸ βρεφος καὶ ἔσπεισεν ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ αὐτὸν αὐτίκα ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ γενεσθαι λὺκον φασὶν ἀντὶ ἀνθρώπου." *ibid.*, VIII. 2. 3.

[59] Ovid, *Met.*, I. 199-245; Plato briefly mentions this account of Lycaon too, in his *Republic*, where it serves as a kind of moral metaphor for good kingship. He is discussing the problem of when the protector becomes a tyrant—likening it to when the protector's behavior too closely resembles the shrine to Lycaean Zeus in Arcadia. He too recalls the myth that whoever tastes of cannibalism. He notes that whoever tasted the bits of human flesh which were reputedly mixed in with other sacrificial meats became a wolf. This is important too in a social sense. In medieval and early modern times, vampires and werewolves were seen as aristocratic parasites. cf. Plato, *Rep.*, VIII. D-E.

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Pausanias stated that he believed the myth of Lycaon, saying it had been a story from the early days.[61] He also believed that the story reflected an earlier, hoary age when gods and men co-mingled, and visited each other's homes.[62] He also reports a folklore belief (λεγουσι) that since the time of Lycaon, a man was metamorphosed into a wolf at the time of sacrificing to Lycaean Zeus. If the wolf-man abstained from eating human flesh, he would not remain a wolf forever, but would regain human form at the end of that time. If he did try human meat, he would be lycanthropic forever.[63]

The name of Lycaon was related to the Greek word for wolf, λύκος. So too were the titles of the many institutions Pausanias reports that the king founded. Lycaon founded the city of Lycosura, which he placed on the mountain called Mount Lycaeus. He surnamed Zeus Lycaeus, and instituted a games festival in his honor, called Lycaean Games (ἀγῶνα λύκαια). Also, Pausanias reports on a town named Lycuria which was near the boundaries of Pheneus and Cleitor.[64] This was probably the region which

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[60] *ibid.*, I. 236-240.

[61] "...λέγεται δὲ ὑπὸ αρκάδων ἐκ παλαιού." Paus., VIII. 2. 4.

[62] Augustine reflects similar views. He too notes the Lycaon story, citing as his source Pliny, whose information Augustine believed to be derived from the fourth century B.C. sculptor Scopas. Aug., *De Civ. Dei.*,XVIII. 17; cf. Pliny, *NH*, 4. 21.

[63] Pausanaias, VIII. 2. 6.

[64] *ibid.*, VIII. 19. 3.

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produced the obscure Arcadian poet "Lycian Olen," to whom Pausanias refers.[65] Too, the father of Arcadian Polybius was named Lycortus.[66]

In addition, the root for wolf—λύκ—appeared abundantly in Arcadian names and words. Here, one especially intriguing point emerges: kings with the "Lyc" prefix in their name seem to have fared poorly in the eyes of history.[67] More specifically, they were sometimes seen as cruel. Conversely, the reigns of such rulers were often sandwiched in between kind and benevolent rulers, who did not have the "lyc" prefix in their names. For example, we read that Lycurgus, the eldest son, ruled the kingdom after the death of his father Aleus. Pausanias reports him as being a treacherous ruler who was known for killing a certain warrior named Areithous in an unfair fight.[68] A closer examination of the king list provided by Pausanias reveals much in this regard:

> —Pelasgus: Introduced huts, warm clothing, and taught which plants were good to eat. Linked with herbivorism. Said to have introduced the eating of acorns and oak trees.[69]

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[65] *ibid.*, VIII. 21. 3.

[66] *ibid.*, 19. 1.

[67] Ulysses' grandfather in the *Odyssey*, a man apparently known for thievery and cunning, was named Auto*lyk*os. Homer, *Od.*, 19. 394; Buxton, "Wolves and Werewolves," 64.

[68] *ibid.*, VIII. 4. 10.

[69] Many inhabitants of Arcadia/ Pelasgia kept this dietary regime with an almost religious zeal, causing the Pithian priestesses to refer to the men there as "acorn eaters (βάλανηφάγοι). The folk of the area identified three sorts of trees of "oak" trees. The second type was named "edible oaks (τας φηγος)." With regard to the subsequent reign of Lycaon, this point is especially interesting. Lycaon's crime of cannibalism not only was generally offensive, but it occurred in a region where religious dietary restrictions hint at vegetarianism. Lycaon's contemporary Cecrops would not sacrifice anything with a spirit in it—anything animal, that is. *ibid.*, VIII. 1. 6; VIII. 2. 2-3.

—Lycaon: Cannibal. Tried to kill Zeus. Was cursed by the gods by being turned into a wolf, etc.[70]

—Nyctimus: Eldest son of Lycaon. His reign was a time of building in which Lycaon's other sons founded cities in the region.[71]

—Arcas: Namesake of Arcadia. Introduced cultivation and bread baking. Divided his land among his three sons Azan, Apheidas, and Elatus.[72]

—Cleitor: Probably re-unifier of Arcadia, after its division between the sons of Aras.[73]

—Aepytus: son of Elatus. Succeeded to power since Cleitor had no children. Killed by a snake bite.[74]

—Aleus: Built sanctuary in Tegea to Athena Alea. Made Tegea the capitol.[75]

—Lycurgus: Unfair fighter, treacherous.[76]

This king list provided by Pausanias is generally a list of stable, even benevolent rulers. The rulers which provide grist for Arcadia's gruesome reputation all have the "lyc" prefix in their name. Pausanias himself seems fairly oblivious to the region's gruesome reputation, reporting his careful descriptions of geography and culture without much

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[70] *ibid.*, VIII. 2. 1-4.

[71] *ibid.*, VIII. 3. 1-2.

[72] Elatus migrated to Phocis and founded Elateia. He may have provided the link Pausanias makes between Arcadian sheep-skin coats and the coats worn in Phocis during his own time. *ibid.*, VIII. 4. 2-4.

[73] *ibid.*, VIII. 4. 5-6.

[74] *ibid.*, VIII. 4. 7.

[75] *ibid.*, VIII. 4. 8-10.

[76] *ibid.*, VIII. 4. 10.

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attention to the area's importance in the history of nascent western folklore. He did intentionally seek out the town of Nonacris, named after the wife of Lycaon. He also notes an Arcadian clan, the Cynaetheans, who had a spring in their area which was famous because a drink of its water would heal a man who had been bitten by a rabid dog.[77] Here again, one notes the prevalence of dog and wolf lore in Arcadia, as well as the oft debated link between rabies and lycanthropy. Pausanias notes that the site was in barely visible ruins. But for the most part, Arcadia was just another of the regions Pausanias discussed. The prevalence of lycanthropy is little noted.

Another important shape-shifting fable also comes from Arcadia. It concerns Lycaon's daughter Callisto, which is interesting, since it demonstrates yet more misfortune which seems to surround Lycaon, uniquely. This fable was apparently one of the many generic, widely told folk tales of the Greeks (λέγω δὲ τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπὸ ἑλλήνων).[78] Callisto was loved and seduced by Zeus. Ever-knowing of her husband's dalliances, Hera turned Callisto into a bear, which Artemis, showing her support for Hera, promptly shot with one of her arrows. Zeus, according to Pausanias, then turned Callisto into the Great Bear constellation described by Homer.[79]

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[77] *ibid.*, VIII. 19. 2-3.

[78] *ibid.*, VIII. 3. 6.

[79] Pausanias also reports that Callisto, after being turned into a bear by Hera, bore a son in her womb. This was apparently Arcas, since no other son is mentioned. Before Artemis shot Bear-Callisto, Zeus sent Hermes to rescue the unborn infant before turning Callistro into a constellation. Despite the myth about Callisto's metamorphosis into a constellation, the Arcadians apparently also claimed that they knew where Callisto had been buried. *Ibid.*, VIII. 3. 6-7; cf. Homer, *Od.*, 5. 272.

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[83] *ibid.*, 11
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Several other werewolf-like metamorphosis stories also existed in antiquity. Apuleius tells the story of the robber Thrasyleon, who donned a bear-skin to help himself and his fellow thief gain entrance to the home of a certain Demochares, who collected exotic beasts. This shows some similarity with later stories of werewolves donning wolf-skin to facilitate their metamorphosis. Thrasyleon was ultimately cornered by some men and slain. Apuleius never says that he was a shape-shifter, but the costume seemed to have worked fairly well, since the behavior of the man inside grew appropriately animalistic.[80]

Ovid too tells a story which does not necessarily specifically imply the werewolf, but which does indeed have the wolf acting as the dispenser of divine wrath.[81] Here, a wolf comes and ravages Trachis as a retribution for Peleus' murder of Phocus. The wolf kills not out of hunger, but out of malice and bloodlust.[82] The king's wife Alcyone pleads with her husband not to fight the wolf. She and Peleus climb a tall lighthouse tower and pray to Nereid—the local sea goddess. Only when Peleus's entreaties stir his wife Thetis does Nereid turn the wolf into marble.[83]

Other stories are far more specific in describing shape-shifting. Philostratus, in his life of Apollonius, tells of the time that a plague was raging in Ephesus. Apollonius was

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[80] Apul., *Met.*, 4. 21.

[81] The English word "monster" is derived from the Latin verb *monstrare*, which means to show, or point out. Thus, the monster was a device by which the gods "showed" their anger with humankind.

[82] Ovid, *Met.*, 11. 345-409.

[83] *ibid.*, 11. 384-390; Nereid was also associated with Psamathe, who was the mother of slain Phocus.

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summoned. He led a group of the Ephesians down to the famous theater, where an image of an avenging deity was erected. A ragged beggar stood nearby, and Apollonius, with his prescience, told the crowd to stone him. The crowd reluctantly did. Subsequently the beggar's demonic nature was quickly revealed. When he had been sufficiently stoned, Apollonius bade the crowd remove the stones, whereupon they found a great Molossian dog. This too hints at later werewolf lore, in which the metamorphosis reverses itself after the death of the shape-shifter. That the dog was rabid may hint at some remote link between hydrophobia and the belief that a man could become a beast.[84]

But the most specific example of modern werewolf folklore is found in Petronius. One of Trimalchio's dinner companions tells the following story. He had been a slave living in a home belonging to Gavilla. Here, he fell in love with Melissa, the wife of Terentius, the innkeeper. After the innkeeper's death, the youth was joined by another friend—a soldier.[85] The two went among the graveyards where the soldier friend stripped himself, urinating around his clothes in a circle.[86] Obviously, this behavior evoked images of canine territorial procurement. Then his friend turned into a wolf, and

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[84] Philostratus, *VA.*, IV. 10; remember as well the Arcadian well whose waters were believed to cure men and women of rabies. cf. above, ff. 56.

[85] In a remarkably modern-sounding idiom, Petronius writes that the soldier was as "brave as hell—*fortis tamquam Orcus.*" Pet., *Sat.*, 62.

[86] Stripping off one's clothes figures heavily into many of these werewolf and shape-shifting accounts. As noted previously, Apuleius' Pamphile stripped-off her clothes before changing into an owl. Too, Pliny gives an account of Arcadian lore which depicted a member of a family who stripped off his clothes, swam across the river, and turned into a wolf. If he avoided eating human flesh for nine years, he would regain human shape. Along with the 'stripping' motif, one also notes the presence of "crossing running water" which has been previously noted. Pliny, *NH*, 8.81. cf. Apul, *Met*, III. 21.

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ran off to the woods. More, his clothes had turned to stone, apparently as a result of the werewolf's action. The story, as told by Petronius, is remarkably like similar accounts of the modern horror genre:

> The moon shone as if at noon. We came among the gravestones. My man began to venture toward the stones. I sat singing, and counting the stars. Then, as I looked again at my comrade, he undressed himself and put all his clothes near the road. I was too scared to breathe. I stood as if dead. And he suddenly became a wolf—do not think me to jest about it. After he was a wolf, he began to howl and fled into the woods.[87]

The terrified young man made his way back to Melissa's house, where the frightened young lady reported that a wolf had burst into the inn, slaughtering the sheep.[88] One of the slaves had pierced the wolf's neck with a spear. The next day the young man headed to his home. Passing the place where the soldier had left his clothes, the young man found a pool of blood. Obviously the wounded wolfman had been there. Upon reaching his home, the young man found the soldier lying in bed with a doctor attending a wound in his neck. Immediately, he knew his friend to be a werewolf: *"Intellex illum versipellem esse (pellis-* clothed in skins.)."[89]

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[87] *Luna lucebat tamquam meridie. Venimus inter monumenta. Homo meus coepit ad stelas ire. Sedeo ego cantans et stelas numero. Deinde ut respexi ad comitem, ille exuit se et omnia vestimenta prope viam posuit. Mihi anima in naso erat; stabam tamquam mortuus. At ille subito lupus factus est. Nolite me iocari putare. Postquam lupus factus est, ululare coepit et in silvas fugit. ibid.*, 63.

[88] Recall the natural link between sheep and wolves that appears here again, as well as in the report of Pausanias. cf. above. ff. 37.

[89] *ibid.*, 64.

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CONCLUSION

The metamorphosis beliefs outlined in this chapter could perhaps be considered quite primitive. They were the ones most readily associated with folklore and popular culture. These tales told during the Hellenistic period were clearly pre-cursors to later legends of vampires and werewolves. But they were more than just that. They were the most elemental manifestations of shape-shifting beliefs found in a variety of other guises. They all reflected a basic belief in forces capable of fundamentally changing a human being's most readily evident attribute: his shape. The beliefs outlined here express this notion in a brutally self-evident way. Men and women could change into various beasts, including bird-like creatures and wolves. And as often as not, to procure such a transformation was to procure a special power which elevated one person above the other. Early accounts of "shape-shifting" revealed a power associated with bad but strong people; malevolent witches, jealous gods, evil kings. Such beliefs had a great appeal for many people, albeit for less than noble reasons. Shape-shifting was the petty occult's blasphemous inversion of the more sacred metamorphoses offered by other faiths. Still, they reflect rudimentary beliefs in something quite profound—a belief in the potential for metamorphosis. This was the belief which played a central role in many of the religions found in later antiquity. It was a belief that a power existed which could fundamentally alter the human condition in a range of ways. It was an idea which could offer hope, as well as terrify.

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CHAPTER 2

PAGAN ECSTATIC METAMORPHOSIS

Versions of metamorphosis found in shape-shifting folklore did indeed fascinate. But they were almost exclusively focused on the physical body. Such a limited focus of transformation could never hope to satisfy thinking men and women. The more sophisticated realm of metamorphosis occured mentally, or spiritually. This was a more intertesting proposition. Human consciousness is an enigma. This was as true in antiquity as it is now. From Plato's famous cave, to Paul's dark glass, the finite limitations of human reason and insight were a curse which most religions somehow sought to alleviate. In Greco-Roman religion, a whole range of beliefs came to surround the struggle of human beings to achieve a more enlightened consciousness. Many ancient western religions came to offer experiences which could fundamentally impact the νοῦς, leaving individuals forever changed. This was one of the greatest achievements of the metamorphosis. The means by which this enlightenment was often gained was the ecstatic state.

The ecstatic state was one of the most readily observable phenomena found in both ancient folklore and ancient religion. Such states took on several forms, including dreams. Ecstasy touched on a variety of issues, including prophetic visions, spiritual revelation,

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and the manipulation of human free-will by divine or otherwise supernatural beings. The trance state had clear antecedents in the Classical World, but achieved maturity in the Hellenistic Age, where it responded to a wide variety of personal human needs. Chief among these was the simple need of many individuals for a new and enhanced outlook on life—to see the world through rosier spectacles. This need helps to account for the success of Hellenistic mysticism, and ultimately, Christianity. But not all ecstatic experiences brought welcome forms of expanded insight. Sometimes such states were horrifying, especially to those less educated for whom supernatural beings and occurences were so often petty and horrifying. These forms of trance will be considered first.

AUTHORITARIAN TRANCE IN WITCHCRAFT AND FOLKLORE

The metamorphosis of the mind was not always surrounded with the pleasantries of abstract and mainstream religion. Sometimes the trance-state was a violent intrusion into mortal thought life—a kind of psychological rape. Indeed, ancient folklore is replete with stories attesting to the power of the supernatural realm to manipulate the mind of men and women. Before looking at the larger manifestations of ecstatic states in Greco-Roman religion, similar accounts of trance-states in petty folklore and myth must be considered. Many of these derive from stories of witchcraft which were popular during the hellenistic and imperial periods. Again, one of the most important sources for such stories is the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius. Apuleius describes the three great enchantresses of his novel, Meroe, Panthia and Pamphile as classic "nightwitches," who draw on several

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of the great mythological themes of trance inducing powers which antiquity granted to its most powerful sorceresses. Of these, Meroe and Panthia exhibit skills of what to observers of more modern folklore will appear as the hypnotic skills often associated with such occult beliefs as demonic possession and vampirism.[1]

The novel's protagonist Lucius was born a gentleman, but his business in Thessaly had taken him on a tour of the streets, the baths, and the inns that were all part of the rich folk life enjoyed by the empire's lower-classes.[2] The social stratum in which magic and mythology blended into a rich brew which was actually a kind of folk religion. Ultimately, Lucius' adventures, both as man and ass, led him to the more universal and abstract cult of Isis. Indeed, the goddess was clearly presented as a balm for the great ills caused by Lucius' dabbling in the murky and often fiendish theology of the masses. But that fact in no way diminishes the power and significance of the events described in the novel's first three books.

The major incidents of witchcraft occurred in Thessaly, which is described as the birthplace of sorcery and magic.[3] The first being with supernormal powers encountered

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[1] As chapter 1 have already noted, vampires—or beings which are close ancient equivalents to more modern notions of vampires—were themselves frequently associated with metamorphosis, or shape-shifting.

[2] Apul., *Met.*, 1.23.

[3] *ibid.*, 2.1; The belief in Thessaly as the seat of powerful witchcraft is mentioned by other ancient authors as well, notably Lucan, whose *de Bello Civile* notes that the witches there were powerful enough to compel the gods themselves to obey their spells and wishes. The great sorceress Erictho was said to be able to call the gods away from all altars but her own (VI. 445-455). Moreover, the region was believed to produce a wealth of herbs which were potent ingredients in any magic potion. Medea herself was said to have collected plants there (VI. 435-440). The plants were strong enough to thwart fate, as they were able to shorten a man's life-span, despite his allotted fate (VI. 610). Lucan,

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[5] *ibid.*,

in the book is Meroe. Her story was related to Lucius by Aristomenes. While travelling, Aristomenes has met an old friend, Socrates, in the baths. Socrates had just come from the home of Meroe, where he was a guest. Significantly, he already appeared to have been subject to some kind of attack which sucked away some of his life force. He was so "meager and sallow" that Aristomenes barely recognized him.[4] Socrates related how he had visited a certain Meroe. More, there are implications that Meroe had bewitched her quite handsome young guest. Here, already, readers see subtle evidence of trance induction, or at least authoritarian manipulation of the human psyche. Socrates claimed that although Meroe was quite aged, he found himself attracted to her. Indeed, in telling his story, Socrates scarcely seemed able to believe his own actions; not only did he take Meroe to bed, but he gave her all his possessions.[5]

That night, Aristomenes and Socrates shared a room in Meroe's house. Meroe came for revenge, apparently angered that Socrates had spoken ill of her in his conversation with Aristomenes. With her was her sister and ally in witchcraft Panthia. Next occurred a veritable vampire attack. Many comparisons with vampire mythology can be made here. The hags cut Socrates's throat with a dagger, collecting his blood in a bladder, while a terrified Aristomenes feigned sleep. In terms of blood, comparisons with modern vampire literature are obvious. In addition to the collecting of blood, beliefs in

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[4] Apul., *Met.*, 1.6.

[5] *ibid.*, 1. 7.

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[6] *ibid.*, 1

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hypnotic induction and trance states, which it was believed vampires could induce in their victims, are also apparent.

To the surprise of his companion Aristomenes, Socrates awakened, alive, the next morning, complaining of shadowy and horrible nightmares. Also, he appeared to have had even more of the life sucked out of him.[6] Several important points emerge from this story. First, though the hags' entrance is described as noisy and even violent, Socrates did not awaken. Here, Apuleius may be describing an ability that witches were believed to have—hypnotizing their victims, so that they helplessly succumbed without resistance. Indeed, the witches of Thessaly were said to be able to charm people to sleep, specifically, those individuals guarding corpses which the witches hoped to molest.[7] There is little other plausible explanation as to why a young man like Socrates would submit to such an attack from two older women.

The next morning, Socrates had vague recollections of the prior night's horrors. This seems a clear enough description of something which modern psychologists have labeled a "simple or initiatory trance." People thus immobilized are more or less catatonic. At the same time, they are, at some level, conscious of activity surrounding them, and will remember it the next day as if a dream.[8] Such a state went on to become a common theme in literature. It plays a particularly significant role in Victorian works, where it was

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[6] *ibid.*, 1. 12-13.

[7] *ibid.*, 2. 22.

[8] As an important work on this too-little understood topic, cf. Mayo, Herbert, "Trance Sleep, Somnambulism, and Trance-Waking," in *The Origins of Dracula*, ed. by Clive Leatherdaly, (London: William Kimber Books, 1987), 191.

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used by a moralistic audience to justify their own fascination with evil and/or sexuality. A comparison of Apuleius with similar scenes in Gothic horror works may be unorthodox, but is extremely instructive in this regard. In *The Golden Ass*, upon waking, Socrates appeared "emaciated, and with the pallor of boxwood."[9] Moreover, he harbored surreal recollections of the previous, terrifying night:

> . . . yet truly, while sleeping, I saw in my dreams that I was slit in the throat. I felt the pain of my slit throat, and I thought my very heart to be wrenched from me; and now I am weakened in spirit, my knees tremble, my gait is unsteady, and I want some food to strengthen my spirits.[10]

There is a great similarly between this scene in Apuleius, and a famous scene in the Victorian novelette *Carmilla*, by the Irish writer Sheridan Lefanu. Here, the young heroine Laura describes her dim recollection of a nocturnal attack by the vampire Carmilla:

> I had a dream that night that was the beginning of a very strange agony. I cannot call it a nightmare, for I was quite conscious of being asleep. . . I saw, or fancied I saw, the room and its furniture just as I had seen it last, except that . . . I saw something moving around the foot of the bed, which at first I could not distinguish . . . I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast.[11]

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[9] Apul., *Met.*, 1. 17.

[10] ". . . *verum, tamen et ipse per somnium iugulari visus sum mihi. Nam et iugulum istum dolui et cor ipsum mihi avelli putavi et nunc etiam spiritu deficior et genua quatior et gradu titubo et aliquid cibatus refovendo spiritu desidero.*" *Ibid.*, 1. 18.

[11] Lefanu, Sheridan, *Carmilla*, in *Novels of Mystery from the Victorian Age*, (New York: Pilot Press, 1945), 598.

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A similar passage can be found in Bram Stoker's definitive work *Dracula*. In her journal, Mina Murray records a strange experience related by her friend Lucy Westerna, who is being victimized by Dracula:

> I didn't quite dream; but it all seemed to be real. . . . Then I had a vague memory of something long and dark with red eyes . . . and something very sweet and bitter all around me at once . . . and there was a singing in my ears, as I have heard there is to drowning men; and then, everything seemed to pass away from me.[12]

Another tale from the often meandering *Metamorphoses* appears later in the novel, again implying the subtle manipulation of human will by sorcery. Here, the novel describes a certain baker's wife who had been caught in adultery. Subsequently, she divorced her husband, and undertook to the "familiar arts of women, (*familiares feminarum artes*)" which were synonymous with witchcraft.[13] Armed with these newfound skills, the spurned adulteress then decided to do one of two things: either she would win back her husband's love, or she would have him attacked by a spirit. Failing in the first endeavor, the sorceress conspired to send the spirit of a woman killed violently to destroy her ex-husband.[14] One day, at noon, then, a disheveled, ragged, half-naked woman with unkempt hair mixed with cinders appeared at the baker's. The woman gently took the baker by the hand. Here again, as in the case of Aristomenes, the lack of a

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[12] Stoker, Bram, *Dracula*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1981), 104.

[13] Apul., *Met.*, IX. 29.

[14] Note again the linkage between these ancient beliefs and more modern folklore notions. Violent and/or untimely deaths were traditionally the ones which prompted restless spirits to linger among the living. More, sometimes suicides were said to become vampires. Cf. Cavendish, Richard, *The Powers of Evil in Western Religion, Magic and Folk Belief*, (New York: Putnam's, 1975), 98.

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struggle must be noted, despite the woman's horrific appearance. Pretending that she had a secret, she lured him into a private room. Later, however, neither of them returned, so that the servants, now done with chores, knocked on the door. When there was no response, they finally broke down the door and entered. The mysterious and terrifying woman was gone, while the man was hanging dead from the rafters.[15]

Again, this seems a use of some kind of trance-state, hypnosis, or simple demonic possession. There is no mention of a struggle, either in the Baker's entrance into the room, nor while he was in there. Hence, the subtle implication seems to be not that he was forcefully hanged, but that he was somehow seduced into suicide. After all, he had cooperated docilely with the woman up to entering into the room. Why would suggestibility and submissiveness have diminished upon his entering the room? The suggestion of suicide is further enhanced when his spirit later appeared to his daughter in a dream, and told her that he went to hell. Suicides often were believed to go to hell. More important, he told her that he was bewitched (*larvatus*), and that thus "she sent him forth to hell."[16]

Other stories also depict witches who charm the wills of mortals with apparently hypnotic powers or spells. Such a state was caused by a variety of means, including potions and incantations. In trying to rejuvenate Aeson, father of Jason, for example, Medea brought him out for her magic rituals. Here, Ovid reports that the old man was

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[15] Apul., *Met.*, IX. 30.

[16] ". . . *ad inferos demeasset.*" *ibid.*, IX. 31.

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"stretched in full sleep by her incantation."[17] The ablative *carmine*, of course, comes from the Latin word "*carmen*," or song. The word can also mean recitation or incantation, as it probably does here, though the musical connotations should not be overlooked. Music was sometimes associated with inducing trance states, or bewitching men and women. The sirens' "song" is perhaps the most famous example. The famous story taken from the *Odyssey* has elements of hypnotic induction. Here again, one sees the kind of mixture between authoritarian hypnosis and erotic seduction observable in Apuleius, and, later, in classic European vampire lore. It is important to note that not only do the sirens tempt Odysseus with clear sexual and sensual evocation, but they offer, albeit disreputably, a refreshing and "relaxing" respite from his weary travels. "They know," they assert, his long and arduous toils at the walls of Troy. This story should be seen in psychological terms, rather than just in sexual ones. The sirens seem to offer Ulysses peace, and the obvious temptation they offer is to submit—to surrender to their haunting, musical call.[18]

Music appears again, much later, in another one of the Greco-Roman world's relatively few references to anything which could be construed to resemble formal hypnotic induction. The writer, again, is Apuleius, whose *Apologia* contains what E.R. Dodds believed to be the only clear example of formal hypnotic induction in antiquity.[19]

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[17] ". . . *in plenos resolutum carmine somnos*. . . ." Ovid, *Met.*, 7. 252.

[18] Homer, *Od.*, XII. 184-191.

[19] One would hope that in light of the many examples offered that Dodds's rather sweeping statement could be somewhat reconsidered. Dodds, E.R., *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 200.

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[23] *Ibid.*,

[24] *ibid.*,

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While courting a wealthy woman in Oea, site of modern Tripoli, Apuleius was accused of witchcraft. Specifically, it was alleged that he had taken a young boy off alone somewhere and bewitched him with incantations.[20] Though vehemently proclaiming his innocence, Apuleius did concede that he had heard children may be lulled into an oblivious state through the use of music or sweet smells.[21]

Music appeared again as an instrument of enchantment in Ovid, when Mercury charmed the one-hundred eyed Argus to sleep, using a combination of music, and a long-winded narrative regarding the origins of the reed.[22] Somewhat similarly, Jason used both an enchanted potion and a long recitation to lull to sleep the dragon-like monster guarding the Golden Fleece.[23] And again in Ovid, the mythologist reports that Medea, after rejuvenating Aeson, went on to work her magic with Pelias. Here, again, one reads that the old man had been placed into a "death-like sleep ("*neci similis . . . somnus*)," through the use of magic words and incantations.[24]

Potions were often used to induce this sleep-state as well. This has already been observed above in mention of the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece.[25] Alcohol played a key role—indeed some would say central role—in the Bacchic rites. In referring

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[20] Apul., *Apol.*, 42.

[21] *Ibid.*, 43; too, the devotees of Bacchus were said to have been called to the mountains by music. Euripides, *Bacchae*, 680-700.

[22] Ovid, *Met.*, I. 680-270.

[23] *Ibid.*, VII. 149-158.

[24] *ibid.*, VII. 326-327.

[25] cf. ftn. 22.

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to the nightwitches of Thessaly, Lucan wrote that they could corrupt men's minds without any potion—thereby implying the presumptive use of potions, at least on the part of some witches. The strength of Erictho and the witches of Thessaly was that they did not need such aids.[26] Moreover, Ovid shows Demeter putting a young child to sleep with the use of poppy juices, a story which may hint at the use of opium.[27]

The simple use of the fixating gaze, or authoritarian command, could also produce states of trance. Aulus Gellius reports that certain African peoples could cast spells by voice and tongue (*voce atque lingua*) which were capable of having devastating effects upon such natural phenomena as crops. Similarly, he asserts that people among the Illyrians could kill with their mere gaze—an odd precursor of European beliefs in the "evil eye." Women and men possessing this gift were said to be identifiable by two pupils in each eyeball.[28] Finally, Lucan reports that Thessalian witches could attract unmarried men by the "magic turning of the twisted thread"—a clear reference to visual fixation and enchantment.[29]

Finally, one of mythology's most famous enchantresses must be mentioned: Circe, as depicted in Homer's *Odyssey*. She combined many of the characteristics of psychological enchantment discussed thus far. Moreover, there are overtones, albeit subtle

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[26] Lucan, *de Bello Civile*, VI. 458-460.

[27] Ovid, *Fasti*, 4. 531-34; Kritikos, P.G., and Papadaki, S.N., "The History of the Poppy and of Opium and their Expansion in Antiquity, in *Bulletin of Narcotics*, XIX, 1967, 23.

[28] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, IX. IV. 8; cf. Pliny, *NH.*, VII. 8; Augustine, *de Civitate Dei*, XVI. 8.

[29] *"Traxerent torti magica vertigine fili."* Lucan, *De Bello Civile*, Vi. 458-460.

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ones, of the kind of supernatural trance induction found in the later stories of Meroe, Erictho, Medea, and others. The island of the *femme fatale* is presented as a kind of lotus cave, where the men are lured by the potential of soft living, wine and female companionship. Circe's most fearsome power is her ability to make the men forget their native lands. This is accomplished not only with feminine beauty and material luxury, but drugs as well.[30] This power lures the men into her palace, whereupon she changes them into swine—after they have eaten her drugged repast, and had Circe wave a wand over each of their heads.

One sees the same kind of emphasis on human will, and the surrender thereof, that is witnessed in the story of the sirens. Some may even see misogynous overtones in such stories—a kind of *vagina dentata* motif, warning strong, warrior-like males against the dangers of flabby living in the arms of beautiful women. This element does enter the Circe story. But the danger is real and apparent at the outset, as evidenced in the suspicions of Odysseus' companion Eurylochus, who refrains from entering Circe's home, because of "suspecting a plot (ὀισάμενος δόλον)."[31] Circe's lure is no simplistic magic hocus-pocus. Circe herself implies that there is more of a psychological aspect to her spells, when she tells Odysseus—who did not turn into a swine as the other men do, thanks to the help of Hermes—that his mind (νοος) is inflexible—that he has the mental fortitude to withstand her spells.[32] The passage in its original Greek means something

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[30] ". . . that the ancestral home might be wholly forgotten; . . . ἵνα πάγχυ λαθοίατο πατρίδος αἴης." Homer, *Od.*, X. 235.

[31] *ibid.*, X. 258.

[32] "...σοὶ δέ τις στήθεσσιν ἀκήλητος νόος ἐστίν." *ibid.*, X. 329.

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[33] *ibid.*,

[34] *ibid.*,

like "your heart is strong," for it literally reads the "mind in your chest"; in other words, the mental spirit (νοος) that resides in a warrior's breast. Later, Odysseus not only overcomes sexual temptation, but he overcomes physical appetites in general, refusing to eat from Circe's abundant banquet table until he has convinced her to return the shapes of his men—which she does, also making them younger, thinner and more handsome.[33]

Odysseus resisted the psychological seduction of one of antiquity's most beautiful and powerful witches. Like the trance inducing spells of other witches like Medea, Meroe and Erictho, Circe's magic was not simply the manipulation of mere nature, but the overcoming of men's wills. Hence, even though Odysseus resisted surrendering himself to Circe only with the direct warning and help of Hermes, his victory over Circe is one of mythology's great examples of a mortal's overcoming a supernatural creature. More, Odysseus as a man, in an obvious undertone of the myth, resisted Circe's potent sexuality. When he finally bedded her, it was on his terms. He not only outsmarted a goddess, he channeled his male sexual impulses. It was no small coincidence that this lover of Circe was the only man to hear the Siren's song and live to tell the story.[34] But Homer's age was an age of heroes. In the later tales of Apuleius and others, petty mortals like Socrates and the Baker would lose both their lives and their souls in the face of such subtle but unrelenting power. This was the dark side of the trance-like state, and the metamorphosis of the νοῦς which often accompanied it.

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[33] *ibid.*, X. 382-387.

[34] *ibid.*, 333-347.

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TRANCE AND METAMORPHOSIS IN PAGANISM

How did the trance-like state help to achieve a metamorphosis of the mortal νοῦς? Clearly the trance was an important part of Hellenistic folklore. Similar states existed in the religion of Greece, and the subsequent Hellenistic world, appearing in sacred mythology and in the rituals of religious life. Trances were crucial components in the transformation of human psyche which occurred in much Greco-Roman literature. The trance state was a feature in a kind of metamorphosis power which had a full spectrum of transforming potential. These forms of consciousness ranged from a state capable of increasing a warrior's fighting abilities to a state filling a mother with such religious fervor that she was willing to kill her own son.

Probably the most important term relating to the trance state derives from the Greek word ἔκστασις, etymologically related to the English word ecstasy. ἔκστασις is a compound term formed from two basic Greek words. First, the εκ is from the adverbial prefix εξ, which means "from out of," literally, as it does in English.[35] Στασις derives from the Greek verb ιστημι, which means "to stand." Generally, Greek words which add an σις ending to the root word imply an abstract connotation, similar to English nouns ending in "ing."[36] Hence, stasis means, literally, a standing. Thus, in modern legal vernacular, stasis means the place where things stand, or established precedent. ἔκστασις, then, means, literally, a standing outside of oneself—a state of being "beside oneself."

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[35] cf. exodus, exit, expatriate etc.

[36] For example, the word catharsis (κάθαρσις), which means a cleansing.

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By its very definition the term ecstasy implied a profound metamorphosis of consciousness. Still, much controversy surrounds the role of ecstasy in Greek and Hellenistic religions. More specifically, there is the whole issue of when and how this important feature of ancient religion arrived into the western world. It is most generally believed that the practice of attaining or experiencing ecstatic states came from the cult of Dionysus, during the Classical period. Homer, for example, is often said to contain no example of ecstatic religion. One of the leading scholars focusing on this important topic is the Frenchman Jeanmaire, who argued that no example of demonic possession was to be found in Homer.[37] Still, examples of divine manipulation of mortals' psyches are found in Homer—aside from the many dream sequences.

It has already been observed how possession or the use of authoritarian trance states are subtly implied in the Homeric myths of both Circe and the Sirens. Other even more explicit examples exist. Virtually all of them involve some metamorphosis in human consciousness, or perception. Indeed, heroic acts of courage characteristic of the age often derive from divine dabbling in the human psyche. The anthropomorphic, meddling gods for which Homer is so famous dabble not only in the physical affairs of humans, but in their volition and spirits as well. Early in the book, in fact, Hera put it into Achilles

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[37] "Rien ne prouve que les Grecs, avant le soi-disant intrusion de la religion de Dionysos, aient interpreté les accès de folie furieuse ou mèlancolique autrement que comme la conséquence d'un etat demoniaque, de l'intervention d'une puissance divine, δαίμων." Jeanmaire, H., *Dionysus: Histoire du Culte de Bacchus*, (Paris: Payot, 1951), 109; Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 67.

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[42] *ibid.*

"soul" to call an assembly to discuss the plague by which Apollo was ravaging the Achaens in revenge for the abduction of Chryseis.[38]

Dodds, too, noted that early implications of possession appear in the *Odyssey*—for example when Melanetho refers to beggar Odysseus as ἐκπεπαταγαμενος, which is a participle deriving from the verb ἐκπατάσσω, which means, literally, to "knock out."[39] The connotations are clearly that the disguised king of Ithaca was "knocked out of his senses," which has at least some resemblance to later use of the term εκστασις. Elsewhere, Odysseus is again referred to by one of the suitors as ἐπίμαστον ἀλήτην (ἐπιμαίομαι=to be touched), or the touched vagabond.[40]

Other examples from Homer include far more explicit evidence of supernatural beings who "touch" the minds of men. These examples often include direct intervention by the great Olympian deities themselves. The most famous example comes from the *Iliad*. The great Achaean warrior Diomedes was depicted as being helped in battle by Athena, who favored both him and the Greeks.[41] Before Diomedes embarked into the fury of battle, Athena promised she would grant courage, strength and valor to Diomedes. Subsequently, when Diomedes went to battle, he was taken by a vigor (μένος).[42] Given this heightened state of warlike arousal, Diomedes wounded both Aeneas and his

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[38] "ἐπὶ φρεσὶ." Homer, *Il.*, 1. 54; recall also the passage in Exodus in which God hardened Pharaoh's heart.cf. Exodus 11: 11-12.

[39] Homer, *Od.*, 18. 327; Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 67.

[40] Homer, *Od.*, 20. 377.

[41] Homer, *Il.*, 5. 5.

[42] *ibid.*, 5. 125.

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[43] *ibid.*,

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[46] *ibid.*

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protector, Aphrodite.[43] Later, again with the help of Athena, Diomedes achieved his greatest feat: he wounded the immortal god Ares.[44] This was indeed one of the greatest heroic deeds found in the *Iliad* or anywhere else in classical mythology.

Perhaps the most telling testimony to the divinely inspired fury which prompted Diomedes to such great deeds comes from the Trojan archer Pandarus. This son of Lycaon, i.e. Pandarus, reports to Aeneas that he "knows not if he (Diomedes) be a god."[45] Too, he asserts that "if he is the man whom I bespeak . . . he rages not thus without some god."[46] The significance of the word μαίνεται here is hard to overemphasize. It is directly linked to the word "mania," which plays heavily in later Greek religious culture. The word expresses a frantic or delirious quality, which later would be prevalent in Hellenic faith, especially in ecstatic and emotional religions like that of Dionysus.

In Homer, the word seems especially linked to war and represented a characteristically archaic form of metamorphosis: the transformation of ordinary men into heroic warriors.[47] The word appears rarely, and mostly in the context of an odd sort of battle hypnosis. But again, the link between the trance-state and metamorphosis seems clear. Indeed, later Greek texts, most notably those associated with Dionysus, show the

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[43] *ibid.*, 5. 121-380.

[44] *ibid.*, 5. 846-864.

[45] "...οὐκ οἶδ' εἰ θεός ἐστιν." *ibid.*, 5. 184.

[46] *ibid.*, 5.185.

[47] Jeanmaire, *Dionysus*, 109.

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state to be a highly important part of religion. The most important of these texts is the *Bacchae* of Euripides, which is the story of Dionysus' arrival into Thebes from the East—though many scholars see him as indigenous to Greece. Even here, the relationship of "mania" to warfare lingers on. The blind soothsayer Tieresias states that the "mania" of Dionysus is similar to the "mania" of Ares. Hence, when soldiers at the battle front are struck with the touch of a spear, "this mania also is from Dionysus."[48] Indeed, Dionysus appears as the most minor of figures in the *Iliad*, but clearly is perceived by Homer as divine, and as part of the Homeric pantheon.[49] Moreover, the connotations of Dionysian madness already seem to have been extant, as evidenced by Homer's reference to "mad Dionysus (μαινομεξοιο Διωνύσοιο)."[50] Thus could divine μανία transform the Greek warrior.

Sometimes the transforming trance-state was linked to a form of virtual death—or some similar condition in which the mind temporarily left the σῶμα. This was not unlike some of the zombie-like conditions made famous in Voodoo lore. It was a precursor to beliefs in astral projection. Herodotus recounts the stories of two men, Aristeas and Hermotimos, who had rather telling "out of the body experiences." Aristeas entered a shop in his native Proconnesus, and dropped to the ground as though dead. When rumors of the death and impending funeral began spreading, a stranger came up and said that he had seen Aristeas on the road to Cyzicus. Returning to the shop, his relatives found Aristeas'

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[48] "μανία δὲ καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ Διονύσου πάρα." Euripides, *Bacchae*, 304-306.

[49] Kraemer, Ross, "Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 79, 55-80.

[50] Homer, *Il.*, 6. 132.

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body was gone. For six years the man was missing. Finally, he returned home, with a long poem, an arimaspea, which told how he had been possessed by Apollo and how his spirit had journeyed the earth.[51] A similar story was told by Herodotus above regarding a certain Hermotimos.[52] In both these stories, the soul is freed from the body for a time, and is able to travel. This no doubt reflects some obscure belief in ἔκστασις.[53]

More typically, μανία figured in the sort of trance state which became linked to prophecy and divination. This state was more clearly connected with metamorphosis, since the gift of prediction was an expansion of normal human mental powers. The link was evident in the etymological correlation between the word μανία and the word μαντικός, which corresponds to the English word mantic. Bonds also existed between this word and the word Mantis, which means seer. Significantly, oracular or mantic divination appears little in Homer. The notable exception is the presence of Tieresias, the blind prince of Thebes. He was a great soothsayer—so great that Persephone granted that he keep his divination powers even in death, even though the other dead souls were only shades. It was he whom Circe advised Odysseus to visit in the underworld, in order that he might petition the sage's counsel.[54]

Thus, a major strand of the Dionysian μανία was linked to divination. This in and of itself was a major power which religious tranformation could offer the especially

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[51] Herodotus, 1. 14.

[52] Apollonius, *Mirabilia*, 3.

[53] Bremmer, Jan, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 83), 25-29.

[54] Homer, *Od.*, 10. 490-495.

zealous. Hence, responding to Pentheus' denunciation of the new cult, Tieresias says, "This spirit is a seer. For the mad Bacchic state holds much divining art."[55] Similarly, Tieresias again links μαντικη with Bacchic possession, saying that "whenever the powerful god should come into the body, he causes his seers to bespeak coming events."[56] Plutarch too said that Dionysus was an important part of ancient oracles.[57] In this sense, the Bacchic trance equates with the Apollonian seers and their pithy foretelling.[58] Hence, prophetic trance states, or "frenetic divination," played a central role in ancient religious thinking.[59] Cicero referred to the ancient belief (*vetus opinio*) that men are able to divine the future, noting that the Greeks call this gift μαντική.

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[55] "μὰντις δ'ὁ δαίμων ὅδε. τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον καί τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει." μανιῶδες=mad; μαντικη=the art of divination; cf. Euripides, *Bacchae*, 298-99.

[56] "ὅταν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸ σῶμ'ἔλθῃ πολύς, λέγειν τὸ μέλλον τας μεμηνοτας ποιεῖ." Note the idiom for possession: ἔρχομαι ἐις σῶμα. Euripides, *Bacchae*, 300-301.

[57] Plut., *Mor. Symp.*, 7. 10. 2; Livy reported that, after its arrival into Rome, the Bacchic trance state was still a central part of the cult's rites. Livy, 39. 13. 12; Otto, Walter, F., *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. by Robert B. Palmer, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), 143.

[58] Cicero reports that the Roman forefathers had thought that the brain, when in an unconscious state, was essentially motivated by two central states: one was frenzy, the other was dreams. The Romans believed that the chief vehicle for frenetic divination was the Sibylline Oracle. Cic., *De div.*, I. II. 4.

[59] "La Divination intuitive est, pour le vulgaire, un art pratique; elle répond, avec la prophétie, au besoin de connaître l'avenir. Mais en même tempes, elle nous met en relation avec le divin. Aussi lorsque ces faits sont recontrés par une philsophe à tendances religiouses, il négligera les résultats pratiques pour insister sur l'essence même de l'acte divinataire, qui est un certain mode d'union avec le principe supérieur, il y cherchera non plus la prévision, mais l'intuition des principes. Bréhier, Emile, *Les Idées Philosophiques et Religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie*, (Paris: Librarie Philsophique, 1950), 196.

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Continuing, he asserted that the Romans improved upon the Greeks, giving the gift a name, *divinatio*, which came from the same root word which informed the Latin adjective divine, *divinus*.[60]

Perhaps the best of many examples of this connection between divination and ecstasy comes from the Sibyl at Cumae, who brought Apollonian divination to Rome.[61] One story, preserved by Ovid, is particularly telling. In one of ancient mythology's famous tales, Aeneas takes the golden bough (*ramus aureus*) and descends into Orcus. Wanting to see his father's ghost, Aeneas enters Cumae and seeks out the Sibyl. Ovid reports that the Sibyl kept her eyes turned down, then "raised her (head), furious from divine inspiration."[62] The word used here is *furor*, which is Latin's closest corresponding word to either μανία, or ἔκστασις.[63]

But the most important aspect of Bacchic ecstasy was not oracular in nature. An emotional element of the Bacchic furor had its role in enhancing personal religious experience—its role in providing a kind of social escape for the practitioners of the cult.

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[60] Cic., De div., 1. 1. 1.

[61] She had been a fair maiden beloved by Apollo, who offered bribes to obtain her love. Though she never surrendered to Apollo that which he most wanted, she was given gifts by the smitten deity anyway. Looking at a pile of sand, she asked that she be allowed to live for as many years as there were grains of sand in the pile—but she forgot to ask that she stay "forever young." She tells Aeneas she has already endured seven centuries of life, and will have to endure many more. Ovid, *Met.*, 14. 130-52; Park. H.W., *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, ed. by H.W. Park, (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[62] ". . . *erexit . . . deo furibunda recepto.*" Ovid, *Met.*, 14. 108.

[63] cf. "What do you do, oh demented one, which furor is with you." "*Quid facis, o demens? Quis te furor.*" Ovid, *Met.*, 3. 641.

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In terms of metamorphosis, this was even more significant than the gift of divination. To be ecstatic—to "stand outside" of oneself—was to be freed from the most basic realities of physical existence. It was a liberating transformation.

The "Bacchic state" was important to practitioners in and of itself.[64] Aside from offering meaningful change in perspective, it was pleasurable. It both enhanced spiritual life and provided an occasional outlet from social and cultural constraints. This explains the emphasis on personal religious experience, and on mysticism, which can be said lacking in Homeric religion.[65] This emotional component no doubt accounted for much of the cult's popularity, which continued well into the Roman period. Bacchus's use of spiritual ecstasy and his rather physical, primitive world view were no doubt part of the attraction.[66] Also, wherever the Bacchus went in antiquity's later centuries—to the

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[64] The issue of what function or purpose the ecstatic state served was also debated in early Christian circles? Was its function practical or personal? Was it to serve the spiritual community through prophetic utterances, or was it to provide an enhanced personal sacred experience for the individual? This issue is one of the most famous issues which the Apostle Paul discussed in his first letter to the infant church at Corinth. cf. 1 Cor. 11-14.

[65] The dating of the cult's emergence in Greek culture, as well as its origins, are important issues which will not be debated here. This paper accepts Nilsson's assertion that Bacchus did not come to Greece until "just before the historical age." Nilsson, Martin P., *Greek Folk Religion*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1940), 35.

[66] ". . . innombrables sont les sarcophages (aux IIe et IIIe siecles) qui mettent le mort sous le sauvegarde des figures dionysiaques. Il pouvait prètendre à devenir universel, unissant l'extase spirituelle à une philisophie biologique du monde. . . ." Bayot, Jean, *Histoire Politique et Psychologique de la Religion Romaine*, (Paris: Bibliothèque Historique, Payot, 1957), 215.

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[70] *ibid.*,

orient, or the *Latinus Mundus*—the art and iconography which accompanied him retained a clear Greek/Hellenistic tone.[67]

That Bacchus should retain Hellenic appearance throughout his tenure as a living god is appropriate. The μανία which he offered to the Hellenistic and Roman world was decidedly Greek. Socrates, quoted by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, said that "the greatest goods come to us from μανία."[68] Similarly, apparently defending the state of μανία from critics, Socrates said, "they (those who had gone before) supposed mania neither a shame nor a disgrace."[69] Apparently the liberating potential of such a state was a powerful attraction which the cult of Dionysus wielded. Mania no doubt also accounts for the hostility with which the cult was sometimes viewed, both in Rome, and apparently, if there can be any truth read into Euripides' *Bacchae*, in Thebes and all Greece as well. Indeed, the play opens with Dionysus boasting that he "drove all Cadmus'(the King of Thebes) women raving forth (ἐξεμηνα, from εκμαινω=drive mad, enrage) from their homes."[70]

As the play progresses, the link between personal, inner metamorphosis and ecstasy is made increasingly clear. The cult exerted an hypnotic fascination. Lured by the Bacchic siren call, devotees flocked to the mountains to roam the slopes in feral abandon,

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[67] Foucher, Louis, "Le Culte de Bacchus sous l'Empire Romain," in *Aufstëig und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II. 17. 2. 1981, 684-701, 684.

[68] "τα μέγιστα τῶν αγαθῶν ἡμῖν γίγνηται δία μανίας." Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a; cf. Simon, Bennett, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*, (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 185-87.

[69] ". . . οὐκ αἰσχραν ἡγοῦντο οὐδε ὀνείδος μανίαν." *ibid.*, 244a.

[70] *ibid.*, 36.

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mesmerized by raw emotions and passions which the cult had loosed from social fetters.[71] "Sweet it is to roam the mountains" (ὀρειος=mountain living), sings Euripides at one point, referring to the wild pleasures which could await one in the cult.[72] Indeed, the very nickname by which Bacchus sometimes was known—Βρόμιος (Bromius), or the "Clamour King"—indicates just the kind of revelries with which his worship was associated.[73] There was no doubt much dancing and music.[74] Often the revelries were followed by heavy sleep, thus the iconography which often depicts sleeping Bacchus.[75]

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[71] The home region of the Bacchic rites was Cithaeron, a mountain in southwest Boetia. No doubt this mountain site's name bears some link with the Greek word *Kithara,* which refers to an ancient stringed instrument. Both musically and linguistically, the *Kithara* was the forerunner of the modern guitar. This fact serves to highlight the traditional bond that Dionysian mythology has always had with music. *ibid.*, 62-63; Ovid, *Met.*, 3. 700-705.

[72] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 36-37.

[73] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 65; 84; 115; 143; et al; For discussion of the term **Bromius**, see Nilsson, Martin P., *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age*, Sweden; Lund, 1957), 50, 62, ff. #92; cf. Guépin's chapter on "Bacchic Joy." *The Tragic Paradox: Myth and Ritual in Greek Tragedy*, (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968), 108-109.

[74] Pausanias wrote that he never understood why Homer called Panopeus "excellent for dancing" until he went there and saw the Thyiades (Thyiades=Bacchae), Attic women who traveled to Parnassos every year where they held sacred dances with the Delphic women. (Note that Homer apparently knew of these rites.) Paus., *Description of Greece*, 10. 4.3; cf. Evans, Arthur, *The God of Ecstasy: Sex Roles and the Madness of Dionysus*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 13; Too, Otto wrote that music and dance were "the deepest expression of the Dionysians mania." Otto, *Dionysus*, 143; cf. Lawler, Lillian, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, (London: A. and C. Black, 1964), 74-76; For discussion of the daily use of music and hymns in the temple life of later paganism, in general, see, Nilsson, Martin, P., "Pagan Divine Service in Late Antiquity," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 38, 66.

[75] Ovid depicted the god: "He was seen to stagger, heavy with unmixed wine and sleep." "*Ille mero somnoque gravis titubare videtur.*" Ovid, *Met.*, 3. 608; Also, recall the scene in which the Bacchic women Ion, Autonoe and Agave are discovered the morning

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Indeed, the restful, heavy sleep which followed the festivities was also part of the attraction. Teiresias points out that the God gave the gift of sleep, and the "forgetfulness" (λήθη) of daily ills.[76] The "irrational" quality of these rites is further emphasized by Cadmus, when he pits the Bacchic states against the Greek word for reason; λογος. "Not even logic strikes down these things," he bewails.[77]

Part of the methods used to induce the manic state may have been the simple imbibing of mass quantities of alcohol. In terms of the metamorphosis, this drunkeness did not merely include the transformation from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde for which liquor is well noted. Alcohol was used in many cults which sought to induce dream or trance states.[78] In some situations, other drug use may even be implied.[79] There were exceptions, of course. In his *Life of Apollonius*, Philostratus reports that dreams and divinations were the most godlike of human faculties. Hence, interpreters of dreams

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after some of their revelries, sleeping in an exhausted heap. Euripides, *Bacchae*, 680-711.

[76] "ὕπνον τε λήθην τῶν καθ'ήμέραν κακῶν δίδωσιν." *ibid.*, 282; the word here, λήθη, which means forgetfulness, is used by Aelius Aristides, several centuries later, in a startlingly familiar context. Aristides will be given much more treatment below, in chapter three, including his use of this particular word. It should now be pointed out that he used λήθη to describe a state which involved the "forgetfulness of all troubles." The word is again used in a religious context, in reference to personal sacred experience, and in describing a meditative state which borders on trance-like.". . . παντῶν . . . λήθη ἐν τῶν δυσχηρῶν." Ael. Arist., XLVII. 39.

[77] "οὐδεὶς αὐτὰ καταβαλεῖ λόγος." Euripides, *Bacchae*, 203.

[78] Consider the papyrus record of a cure by Sarapis, in which the Libyan Thrason was instructed to drink a pitcher of unmixed wine before falling asleep to dream up his cure. *Greek Literary Papyri*, I, ed. by D.L. Page, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 96.

[79] cf. Kerenyi, Karl, *Dionysus: Urbild des unzerstorbaren Lebens*, (Munich: Langen Müller, 1976), 316.

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always sought to know when a dream was seen. If it was seen in the early hours of sleep, it may have been muddled by alcohol.[80] But other sources clearly indicate the use of intoxicating drinks in many cults. Chief among such cults was that of Bacchus. The great change in personality and behaviour accompanying drunkenness was believed to have some effect on the divine νοῦς.

Hence, even intoxication was sometimes equated with Bacchic metamorphosis. Bacchus was the god of fruit and vines, no doubt reflecting linkage with ancient Greek agrarian/fertility rites. Permissiveness and an abandonment of cultural morals were part of these agricultural festivals in many ancient societies. The metamorphosis was understood in terms of the agrarian growth cycle. Agricultural festivals invariably involved loosened strictures on sexuality and public conduct in general. At the barley festival in the Old Testament book of Ruth. Moabite Ruth declares her intent to meet in the cornstalks with anyone in whom she finds favor.[81] Such practices apparently appeared also in the religion of Bacchus. Rumors of misconduct among the Bacchic devotees were rampant. Some actions may have been misconstrued, or largely misconstrued—as were similar accusations launched against Christians during the first centuries A.D. Nonetheless, one has to assume that where there is much smoke, there may be at least some fire. The general ancient populace seems to have equated Bacchic rites with drunkenness. Wine invariably takes a central place in contemporary descriptions of the cult and its rites. Pausanias reports that in Elis, the Eleans worshipped Bacchus with

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[80] Philostratus, *VA.*, II. XXXVII.

[81] Ruth 2: 1-3; cf. Kraemer, "Ecstasy and Possession," 57.

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[86] *ibid.*

[87] *ibid.*

[88] *ibid.*

the greatest zeal, and even asserted that the god himself attended their sacred festival, the Thyia. There, at a temple outside the city, the priests would place empty pots. This was openly done in the presence of any cynics who wished to inspect. The temple doors were shut. In the morning the pots would be full of wine.[82] The Andrians also believed that every other year at their feast, wine would flow spontaneously from the god's temple.[83]

Other sources are even more specific regarding the use of wine in Bacchic religion. In *De Corona*, Demosthenes tries to malign the reputation of Aeschines by linking him to the cult of Sabazios—which was frequently compared to that of Bacchus—by accusing him of mixing their drinks for them.[84] In Euripides' *Bacchae*, the chorus sings that the "wine bowl (κρατὴρ) cast sleep about men."[85] Pentheus states that the wine bowl comprised the center of attention in Bacchic festivities.[86] Bacchus himself is described at one point as "wine-colored (οἰνωπὸς)," which may mean either saturated with wine, or that he had the drunkard's beet-red face.[87] Indeed, the very ground at Cithaeron itself was said to flow with wine, ῥεῖ δ'οἴνῳ.[88] Finally, another Euripides

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[82] This miracle bears some startling comparisons with Christ's first miracle, in which he changed the water into wine during the wedding feast at Cana. John 2: 1-11; cf., Prower, E.S., *Water into Wine: A Study of Ritual Idiom in the Middle East*, (London: John Murray, 1956), 61-66.

[83] Paus., *Description of Greece*, VI. 26. 1-2.

[84] Dem., *De Cor.*, 258-59.

[85] ". . . ἀνδράσι κρατὴρ ὕπνον ἀμφιβάλλῃ . . ." Euripides, *Bacchae*, 385.

[86] *ibid.* 220.

[87] *ibid.*, 236.

[88] *ibid.*, 142-43.

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play, *Ion*, also shows how prevalent the assumptions were regarding drinking among the Bacchic revelers. Here, Xuthus relates to Ion his experiences with the Bacchic cult. He reports that he spent the evenings with Delphian girls who were Bacchic initiates, or maenads. Ion shows the assumptions of drunkenness which most Greek society imposed upon the cult by asking if the maidens were sober or not. Xuthus reports them to have been ecstatic with the pleasures (πρὸς ἡδοναις) of Bacchus.[89]

According to the myths, the Bacchic metamorphosis was especially sought by those for whom the idea of basic change was the most compelling; anyone whose social function left them unfilled. The cult was particularly popular among women—at least, early on.[90] As to why this was, one can only surmise. Perhaps they sought a liberation from social constraints. In the 1960s, many women were dissatisfied with "traditional" roles which European and American culture had allotted them. They tried to enact meaningful social change through theoretical feminist critiques of modern life and political activism. But many were also powerfully attracted to the counterculture, which provided more immediately satisfying alternatives to gradual emancipation. The liberation which many women experienced in the counterculture was a profound metamorphosis. Above all, it was a personal transformation, one which transcended the world of social and political change. Rejecting the dominant culture for a counterculture was immediately empowering, for individuals.

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[89] Euripides, *Ion*, 550.

[90] The Greek term for the female priests of Bacchus was μαινάδες, a word which, like so many words in the Bacchic vocabulary, also derived from μαντα. Dodds, E.R., "Maenadism in the *Bacchae*," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 33, 154-76.

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Such transformation by means of a counterculture was also prevalent in the Bacchic stories from ancient Greece. No doubt many Greek women were attracted to the cult by a release from societal constraints which it provided. Bacchic women were said to wander the slopes of Cithaeron with unkempt hair, rejecting social standards of grooming and beauty imposed upon them.[91] In place of careful Theban grooming, they adorned their hair with wild ivy. Too, their breasts were full of milk, and they were said to suckle wolves. Thus they graced the mountain slopes, with cries of praise to Bacchus on their lips.[92] The cult offered one of the most raw and powerful religious experiences of its day, which accounted for much of its popularity among women and men. The descriptions of mountain roaming reveal the casting aside of civilized affectations. Freedom was one of the sect's chief traits.

The loosening of social constraints would by no means be attractive to women alone. Men were affected as well.[93] Consider Pentheus, who while in the Bacchic frenzy, shook loose his hair, so that Bacchus accused him of resembling Agave. Still, the specific role of women in the cult does demand attention. Diodorus Siculus reported that it was especially popular among women. Women in many Greek cities used to gather for the frenzied ὄργια.[94] It has already been noted how the *Bacchae* begins with Bacchus's

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[91] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 680-711.

[92] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 680-711.

[93] *ibid.*, 931.

[94] Τά ὄργια refers to sacred rites and mysteries. There are not necessarily any sexual connotations. Still, sexual rites, or allegations of them, were a part of the legacy of these and other like rituals, as evidenced by the etymological derivatives which τά ὄργια has spawned in the English tongue. Diod., Sic., 4. 3; Lissargue, François, "The Sexual Life

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[97] *ibid.*

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boasting of his effect upon the women of Thebes, and how they have taken to running on the slopes of Cithareon.[95] Similarly, in *Bacchae*, Cadmus asks the blind Theban soothsayer if they are the only ones (μόνοι) willing to visit the rites. Use of the masculine μόνοι probably implies that few men participated in the Theban rites—at least, initially and/or traditionally.[96] And again, one of the accusations which Pentheus launches at Bacchus is that he "brings new consciousness (νόσον καινὴν) to our women."[97] The *LCL* translator renders νόσον καινὴν as "strange madness," but νοος means mind, or understanding. Pentheus may not be complaining here of the Bacchic states in particular, but just that the cult had a liberating, consciousness-raising effect upon the Theban women.[98] A new consciousness is not necessarily the same thing as trance or ecstasy.

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of Satyrs," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient World*, ed. by David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 58-59.

[95] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 36; cf. "Un des gestes symptomatiques de la folie de Dionysos...est de jeter les femmes mariées hors de la maison. loin de la cité, dans une course à travers les forêts et les montagnes où tout ce qui vit, animal ou être humain, est pris en chasse par la meute sauvage." Detienne, Marcel, *Dionysos Mis à Mort*, (Paris: Gallimand, 1977), 10.

[96] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 195-96.

[97] *ibid.*, 354-55.

[98] Consider also the myth of Proctus, mythical king of Argos. His daughters refused to honor Dionysus and went mad, believing themselves to have turned into cows. Proctus summons the soothsayer Malampous, to whom he promises if he can restore the girls' sanity. Not only does Malampous fail, but madness strikes the other Argolide women, driving them from their homes, à la Euripides. Detienne calls this mania an "epidemic." Appollodorus, Bibliotheca, 2. 2. 2; Vergil, *Eclogues*, 6. 48; Detienne, Marcel, *Dionysus at Large*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1; cf. Viam, F., "Mélampous et les Proitides," in *Revue des Etudes Anciennes*, 1965, 25-30.

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[100] *ibid.*

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As depicted by Euripides, Bacchus exerted an almost hypnotic attraction to women. He offered them a metamorphosis of the mind. More to the point, he offered them a metamorphosis of their lifestyle. At one point, he is seen an alien from Lydia, and an enchanter, a transfixer or a juggler (γόης=enchanter, juggler).[99] γόης in this context, of course, could just as easily be translated "seducer."[100] He has a "sensitive" quality which pits itself against the more rational—hence, cold and analytical—Appolonian religion. This quality moves Pentheus to describe the deity as "the effeminate stranger," or more literally, the "girlish-shaped stranger."[101] From this perspective, there is more than a little sexual jealousy and insecurity present in Pentheus' complaint that the deity had taken their women up to the mountains, where they were "faking" Bacchic ecstasy.[102]

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[99] "λεγουσι δ'ὥς τις εἰσελήλυθε ξένος γόης ἐπῳδος Λυδίας ἀπὸ χθονός." Euripides, *Bacchae*, 234-5.

[100] *ibid.*, 234; the word γοης is also used in the New Testament to describe evil men who will deceive the infant church: charlatans and deceivers. II Timothy 3:13; the adjective accompanying γοης also merits attention: ἐπῳδος. Literally, it means to act as a charm. It derives from a combination of the adverbial prefix επι, on, and the word for song, ωδή. Ωδή, as well as meaning song, can also mean magic, or incantation, as does the Latin word for song, *carmen*. This connection between music and religion/magic is important, not only for the obvious linguistic reasons, but because it reveals the probably important role which music played in many ancient superstitions and faiths. Too, as has been seen, music was believed to have the ability to entrance people, and enthrall them. Remember the Sirens (Homer, *Od.*, 12. 184-91), the spells of Medea on Aeson (Ovid, *Met.*, 7. 252), and Mercury's use of music to charm the one-hundred-eyed Argus to sleep (Ovid, *Met.*, 1. 680-270). Also remember the linguistic link between the mountain of Cithaeron and the word for guitar, which also attests to the use of music for religious and mystical purposes. cf. above, ftns. 18; 19; 62.

[101] Put into nominative case, this phrase is "ὁ θηλύμορφος ξένος" the female-shaped stranger. Θηλύς = effeminate, female. *ibid.*, 230-235.

[102] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 218.

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The trance-like state which proved so liberating is intriguing—one of the truly fascinating and enigmatic problems found in the study of ancient religions. What was it? Again, the best Greek source for scholars is probably Euripides' *Bacchae*. In Latin, one must consult Ovid's rendering of virtually the same myth, more or less, in his *Metamorphoses*. The core event in both these myths is Pentheus' being literally ripped asunder by his own mother and sisters. In describing the trance state, or hinting at it, Euripides largely uses forms of ἐξίστημι and μαίνομαι. Ovid largely uses the word furor. Careful consideration of the relevant elements within these stories is warranted.

The core myth of Bacchus's birth is narrated in Ovid and assumed in Euripides.[103] Zeus/Jupiter wooed the mortal Semele, impregnating her with his child. Juno, jealous as ever, visited Semele. Wearing a disguise, Juno aroused Semele's curiosity regarding the true nature of her nocturnal, immortal lover.[104] Since Semele questioned his divinity, Zeus is compelled to kill her—which he did, with a lightning bolt.[105] The unborn infant, Bacchus, was ripped from Semele's womb and sewn up in Jove's thigh, where he continued his gestations. His foster mother became Semele's sister Ino, upon his birth.[106]

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[103] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 940.

[104] This is a variation of that familiar mythological motif, the "unknown lover." In particular, the questioning of the god's identity resembles the Cupid and Psyche myth, probably given its most famous treatment in Book Two of Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*. cf. Apul., Met., II.

[105] Ovid reports that Zeus used one of his more gentle lightning bolt, *tela secunda*, which unfortunately for Semele, proved just as lethal as would have the ***tela prima***. Ovid, *Met.*, 3. 300-307.

[106] *ibid.*, 310-315.

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Ovid's rendering of the myth of Pentheus and Agave contains further enlightening information on the nature of these Bacchic ecstatic states, and their role in the metamorphosis. Here, in the murder of Pentheus by Agave, his own mother, is displayed the full power of the Bacchic *furor*. Many elements comparable to the authoritarian trance states implied in folklore witchcraft tales are also manifest. Pentheus was presented with a captured slave, Acoetes from Maconia. Acoetes informed Pentheus that he was poor, and the son of poor people.[107] His arduous toils had earned him his sole possession, a boat and crew. On one voyage, one of his crew, a certain Opheltes, brought aboard a prize he had found in the way of booty—a young boy who "was seen to stagger with sleep and unmixed wine."[108] This was clearly Dionysus, though only Acoetes recognized him to be divine, and tried to dissuade his crew from bringing the bound Bacchus aboard ship. But the rif-raf who were his crew insisted. Once on board the vessel, Bacchus awoke, and demanded to be taken to the isle of Naxos.[109] This the men swore by the gods to do. But they quickly proved deceitful and changed course. Bacchic ivy then entwined the ship, holding it dead still in the water. The men began turning into fish, and

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[107] Note this important class-element which Ovid injects as a sub-element of the story: Bacchus as the protector and benefactor of the economically poor Acoetes, as opposed to the conservative, self-sufficient aristocrat Pentheus. This theme is found in a range of the newer religions which became popular in later antiquity, most notably Christianity, which was immensely popular with the poor and downtrodden.

[108] Ovid, *Met.*, III. 590-608.

[109] *ibid.*, III. 620-636.

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jumped overboard. Left alone, then, on the ship with Bacchus, Acoetes changed course and set sail for Naxos, where he became a fervent devotee of the new deity.[110]

Hearing this story, Pentheus mocked the new god and ordered Acoetes tortured. But the god intervened and rescued the slave from such cruel torments. Thereupon, Pentheus went to Cithaeron, where the god's sacred festivities made the hills resound with the throaty cries of orgiastic worship. This is the point at which the story preserved in Euripides's *Bacchae* and the one told by Ovid begin overlapping. Pentheus' own mother Agave was there at Τά ὄργια. When she saw him, shouting "Come sisters," she led a throng of women who literally tore Pentheus limb from limb with their bare hands.[111]

This incident provides some of the most telling information regarding the nature of the Bacchic trance state. It was an immensely powerful force, capable of producing profound personal transformation. Hera herself implied this when, confronted with the ascendancy of the new god whose mother (Semele) was the object of so much of her envy, she asserted, "He (Dionysus) has more than shown how much fervor might prevail by the murder of Pentheus."[112] The furor was already evident early on in the tale of Acoete, even before the true nature of the deity was revealed to him and his crew. When he attempted to convince his mutinous crew to take the god to Naxos, they mocked him, saying, "What furor holds you."[113]

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[110] *ibid.*, 640-692.

[111] "*Adeste sorores*!" *ibid.*, III. 713.

[112] "*Quidque furor valeat, Penthea caede satisque ac super ostendit.*" *ibid.*, IV. 429-430.

[113] "*Quis te furor.*" *ibid.*, III. 641.

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This then is the implicit message of the Pentheus myth: Not only was the Bacchic cult a comfort to disaffected groups like women and the poor, but the states of possession it offered were so strong, they could induce a mother to brutally dismember her own son. Thus, the metamorphosis of the νοῦς had serious and lethal implications. *Furor* or *mania* was imposed upon mortals by the gods, seemingly without regard for their own wills. Despite the humanitarian and gentle overtones of the Bacchic myth, something of the terrible authoritarian trance states of occult magic can be found as well. Consider, for example, Bacchus's use of the imperative verb form ἔκστησον when he announced his intentions to "Ecstasize" Pentheus from his senses (φρενῶν).[114] Indeed, the god declared that while in this state which is "outside of reasoning, (ἔξω τοῦ φρονεῖν.)," Pentheus would don women's clothing and attend the rites. Pentheus had little choice in the matter. This was a kind of "siren call" which Pentheus was apparently powerless to resist.

Agave's perception of reality was clouded as well. In Ovid, she told her sisters she saw a wild boar (*aper*), who was really Pentheus.[115] In the *Bacchae*, the messenger's report which chronicles Pentheus' fate described how Bacchus called out to his women followers at Cithaeron to avenge the Theban King's blasphemy. At first, the women sprang up, but seem not to have heard the god's message. But on the god's second call,

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[114] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 850.

[115] Even her running is described as frenetic, with Ovid reporting that "She was the first one running with an insane rushing." "*Prima est insano concita cursa.*" *ibid.*, III. 711; 714-715.

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Agave and her sisters leapt up to do the god's bidding, "frenzied by the god's breath."[116] They were like religious zombies. Bacchus's need to command twice no doubt indicates the immense nature of the task he was commanding, which required the ecstatic state to dominate completely every shred of the women's rational, human instincts. Even then, the murder was only accomplished with the women completely oblivious to their actual behavior. Agave saw a wild beast, not recoginzing her own son Pentheus, even when he called out to her to identify himself.[117] This is how powerful the transformation in Agave was.

After the murder, more telling characteristics of the ecstatic state in which the women have been are revealed. A fundamental transformation of the perspective has occured. Agave felt good about having slain the wild animal which threatened Bacchus and his band of revelers on Cithaeron. Her perception of reality was so distorted that she held up Pentheus' head. She believed the head to be that of a lion, stating that she wanted to find Pentheus, who she knew would be proud of her achievement, and would want to make a trophy out of it.[118] Cadmus had to confront Agave with the head twice before she came out of her delirium. After the mania left her, she suffered extreme remorse.[119] She remembered neither why Pentheus would have gone to Cithaeron, nor even why she and her *sorores* went. Cadmus' response to her inquiry was very telling: "Ye raved."

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[116] "...θεοῦ πνοαῖσιν ἐμμανεῖς." Euripides, *Bacchae*, 1087-1100; 1095.

[117] *ibid.*, 1120-25.

[118] *ibid.*, 1210-1215.

[119] *ibid.*, 1270-80.

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Here, the verb μαίνομαι, related to the noun μανία, is used. ἐμάνετε. All Thebes was "Bacchus crazed," ἐξεβακεύθη.[120] With her reason restored, there was no sense that this action, however difficult and tragic, had to have been undertaken; no sense that the god's honor and sanctity was to be held even higher than family and civic duty. She was a woman who had been psychologically raped by Bacchus, and compelled by his seductive ecstasies to do something her conscious mind would never have permitted. If there were some dark, subliminal level at which her devotion to Bacchus surpassed even her maternal instincts, it was not reflected in her sorrow at what she had done.

It must be remembered that Pentheus himself had only gone to Cithaeron while under the controlling influence of Bacchus' trance-state. Bacchus, speaking to the audience, had promised that he would addle the senses of the king of Thebes. He did. As he entered, Pentheus was clearly experiencing distorted perception. Bacchus convinced Pentheus to dress as a woman in order that he could see the rites.[121] Pentheus reported that he saw two suns, two Thebes, and that Bacchus was a bull.[122] Bacchus told him,

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[120] *ibid.*, 1293-94; too, a verbal derivative of μανία is used by Pentheus himself to describe a servant who brings in bound Bacchus, and reports of the Theban prison doors opening miraculously. "Μαινεσθε." "Ye rave." Here, the word as used by Pentheus has an odd connotation, both implying simple "lunacy" and the effects of the god upon the messenger. *ibid.*, 451.

[121] There is a prurient interest in the rites which Pentheus displays. In his rather secular analysis, Euripides is no doubt emphasizing this when he has Pentheus dress as a woman, and traipse off into the woods to witness what he believed would be lewd activities among the females.

[122] *ibid.*, 918-922.

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[125] *ibid.*,

"Now you see what it is necessary that you see," an ancient precursor to that French notion, "on ne voit bien qu'avec le coeur. L'essentiel est invisble pour les yeux."[123]

Another point worthy of mention is that the trance state gave unnatural strength, both to Pentheus and to Agave. Here, this also hinted at more physical elements of the metamorphosis, in which not only the νοῦς was enhanced, but the σῶμα as well. Pentheus, wanting to see what he believed would be pornographic female activities, grabbed a pine tree and bent it down to earth. Sitting on top of it, he let it float back to an erect position, whence he hoped to see the Bacchic activities more clearly.[124] With Agave, Euripides was even more explicit. First, she was obviously Pentheus' match in combat, as evidenced by the outcome of the struggle. More, she tore out Pentheus' limbs, usually a task reserved for Hercules or the Golem, as it required great physical strength. Euripides explicitly stated that the deity gave Agave strength, which made violence easy.[125]

One other story, preserved in Ovid, showed how closely the authoritarian trance states found in witchcraft coincided with those described in the stories of Bacchus. This concerned Tisiphone and Hera. Tisiphone was one of the Furies. She was a classic horrific figure, rivaling Medusa, whose repulsive traits she closely mimicked. She had a writhing, knotted nest of venomous snakes for hair. They were continually biting her face, so that it was swollen and purple, with open, bleeding, festering sores that never healed.

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[123] "νῦν δ'ὁρᾷς ἃ χρή σ'ὁρᾶν." *ibid.*, 924.

[124] *ibid.*, 1059-79.

[125] *ibid.*, 1127-28,

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Hera, still seething with envy over Zeus's affair with Semele, now desired to avenge herself upon the house of Cadmus. More specifically, she sought to harm Ino, the stepmother of Bacchus, and her husband Athamos.

Thus Juno sought out Tisiphone. In carrying out Juno's work, Tisiphone "took a torch dripping with evil blood, and donned a garment red with liquid gore."[126] Then, having concocted a magic potion (which included conventional items like blood, hemlock and tears), and using her magic torch, she had her serpents bite Athamas and Ino. Here, the similarities with the myth of Pentheus and Agave are striking. Like Agave, Athamas was *furibundus*, and in a mental condition which completely altered his perception of reality.[127] Agave had perceived her own son Pentheus to be a wild boar, which she subsequently ripped to pieces. Athamas claimed to see a lioness with two cubs, whereupon he pursued his wife, and grabbed his baby son, Learchus, to dash his brains out against a rock. Mother Ino could only look docilely on this scene, shouting "Ho Bacchus!" Then, as "madness had made her strong," she jumped from a cliff into the Ionian sea.[128]

This myth of Ino and Athamas has important similarities with that of Pentheus and his mother Agave. On the one hand, Tisiphone was a mere mythological monster, bearing elements of the nightwitch. On the other hand, Bacchus was an Olympian god, possessing both a complex myth and abstract theology. He was one of later antiquity's most popular

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[126] *Tisiphone malefactam sanguine sumit inportuna facem, fluidoque crurore ruventem induitur pallam.* Ovid, *Met.*, IV. 481-82.

[127] Ovid, *Met.*, 512.

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Becoming a Christian was synonymous with metamorphosis. Indeed, Christianity was a religion which emphasized conversion—a dramatic turning-away from one's old-self, and one's old way of thinking. Nothing could symbolize fundamental transformation more than the several great "conversions" of the New Testament: Paul, the chosen twelve, the Ethiopian eunuch, to name just a few. But the Christian conversion generally involved more than just a conscious repentance. It was a fundamental conversion of the divine νοῦς. This was one of the great acts of metamorphosis found in Greco-Roman religion. It was often achieved through the advent of ecstatic states.

The culture from which Christianity emerged must be considered. The Jewish faith had undergone dramatic transformation during the pre-Christian era's last centuries. An added dimension of mysticism evolved in the faith of the Old Testament. As well as employing classic ecstatic states of the sort found in Graeco-Roman culture, there was also a heavy emphasis on visionary experience. This is an important distinction. In Greek and Roman mythology, the gods could and did appear among mortals. Their activities among men ranged from the revelation of truth to copulation. But despite the prevalence of ecstatic states in later Graeco-Roman religion, especially after the advent of Bacchus, the revelatory vision seems a peculiarly oriental phenomenon. St. John's vision on the isle of Patmos is one example. Occidental mortals encountered their gods in more decidedly physical ways. Aeneas, Orpheus and Odysseus all literally went to hell, for example, to meet with Pluto, and the dead. In the West, gods and goddesses were forever turning up

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on battlefields, or in bedrooms, in decidedly physical ways. Even the bright visionary light which was said to conclude the Eleusinian rites did not have the complex and convoluted visionary qualities which one sees in the more mystic eastern faiths.[128]

Nonetheless, the impact of hellenic culture on eastern religion cannot be overemphasized. The exchange transpired on a two-way street. The interactions between East and West had produced myriad shapes and forms of new local faiths, many of them modifying and distilling elements from the old regional pagan systems. New and unprecedented cults were flung throughout the ancient world. More, the body of shared knowledge became increasingly diffuse and varied. Ancient ideas were eagerly traded back and forth by merging cultures. Thus, local cultural homogeneity made possible by geographic isolation became less and less frequent. After the conquests of Alexander, Greek philosophers began to compile the great old wisdom of the Orient. Works like the writings of Baroussa and Manetho synthesized the millennia's wealth of knowledge accumulated by Near Eastern peoples, making ancient world views more accessible to the new age. Works like the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which was a compendium of diverse treatises on alchemy, magic, astrology, and other renderings from Babylonian and Egyptian religion, also helped to spread this cultural diffusion.[129]

As was so often the case, Jews were caught in the middle. The influences from both East and West were immense. Some historians have even spoken of "Jewish

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[128] Plut., *De prof., virt.*, 10.

[129] Nock, A.D., "Early Gentile Christianity in its Hellenistic Background," in *Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation*, ed. by A.E.J. Rawlinson (1928), 60-61.

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mysteries," in reference to this new eclectic theism.[130] Macabees, of course, displayed the plight of the tiny but resilient people in their struggle against Hellenistic culture. Still, the Septuagin was produced largely because so many Jews outside of Syria-Palestine were now more comfortable with Greek than Hebrew. As for the Orient, Judaism was now seen by many as just one more of the many local religions of the Ancient Near East. The *Corpus Hermeticum*, for example, shows how much Hebraic culture was now part of this melting pot, since it lists Genesis as a sacred text.[131] Moreover, apocalyptic literature signified a tremendous oriental influence on Judaism proper. Such literature generally involved special visions and revealed glimpses of history's eschatology. This form of writing undoubtedly reflected the influence of Persian and Babylonian religion, and such influences were clearly evident in texts like Daniel, Revelation, and scores of apocryphal documents. Hence, the sophisticated and mature Hebrew religion now was stratified into varying strands. Some groups, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, retained a highly traditional and orthodox character. A third group however, while also maintaining Jewish rites and customs, seems to have absorbed the more ephemeral and mystic quality of the age.[132] These were the Essenes.

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[130] Nock, A.D., "The Question of Jewish Mysteries," review of Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, in *Gnomon*, 13, (1937), 156-65; cf. Goodenough, E.R., *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism*, (New Haven: Yale University Pres, 1935).

[131] Nock, A.D., "The Milieus of Gnosticism," review of Jonas *Gnosis und Späpantiker: Geist*, I, in *Gnomon*, 12, 1936, 607.

[132] One example of the Essene eclecticism seems particularly telling. The group followed a meticulous morning ritual which seems to have been centered around the sunrise. This practice very much resembled other contemporary solar cults like those of Sarapis, Sol, and Apollo. cf; Josephus, *Bella Judaica*, 2. 8. 7; cf. Hani, Jean, "Sarapis Dieu Solaire," in *Revue des Études Grecques*, I, 83, 1970, 52-55.

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The Essenes were important in part because they represented a strand of Judaism which bore many similarities to early Christianity. They seem to have adopted some of the mysticism and esotericism which lent themselves to the practice of inducing frenetic or ecstatic states. This personalized kind of mysticism generally was the sort which focused on procuring personal change, or metamorphosis. This change was largely a new development in Judaism. Earlier periods had seen dreams play an important role in Jewish folklore. These dreams had been generally tied to practical and sometimes even political ends, just as in Greek culture the frenetic state had largely been reserved for prophecy, until the advent of Bacchus.[133] After the Diaspora, however, ecstatic states and, especially visions, played an increasingly important role. Evidence of this shift had occurred as early as the prophets—Ezekiel's vision of the wheel and the call of Jeremiah provide vivid examples.[134] But it was later Judaism which really developed fuller qualities of mysticism. Apocalyptic literature from this period frequently involved special vision into an invisible spiritual realm, like Daniel's glimpse into the court of heaven.[135]

Into this milieu came the Carpenter's humble, unpretentious faith. Its primary document was a corpus of assorted narratives and epistles which came to be called the New Testament. Its impact upon occidental culture down to the present age has been enormous. But it had received its own influences from elements of both eastern and

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[133] "Jacob's ladder," Gen. 28; cf. Joseph's famous dream of his brothers' subservience to him, Gen. 37.

[134] Ezek. 37; Jer. 1: 1-10; 24: 1-10.

[135] Daniel 1:7-12; cf. Nock, A.D., "Gnosticism," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 57, (1964), 265.

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western thinking. Chief among these is the role which ecstatic states, many of them startlingly hellenistic in nature, play in the sect's central stories and tenets. As had other earlier faiths, Christianity offered its adherents fundamental inner metamorphoses, transformations of the perspective and the opportunity to change their lives' most basic realities.

The Christian metamorphosis was not especially new, nor was its use of ecstatic states to facilitate metamorphosis. In particular, the trance states in the New Testament bear startling resemblance to those of the Bacchic cult. These ecstatic states were inherently focused on procuring fundamental personal transformation—as had been the case in Bacchic religion. Christian ecstasy offered a profound metamorphosis. Again, the Greek terms employed by the New Testament writers largely described such conditions with the words used by earlier Greek writers like Euripides. ἐξστασίς is by far the most common. Forms of μανια also appear. The dream (ὄναρ) and vision (ὅραμα) were also prevalent. While dream states are to be discussed in the subsequent chapter, careful consideration of these remaining terms and states is warranted.

The transforming powers of Christianity were as fraught with controversy as had been those of Bacchus. Ecstatic or mantic states were sometimes viewed by New Testament observers as forms of mental illness, or demonic possession. When Christ's accusers come to arrest him, saying he is Beelzebub, their charge is that he is ecstatic. In Mark 3:21, he is charged with being "ecstatic," while in Mark 3:22, he is charged with

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having Beelzebub—in other words, being demonically possessed.[136] Consider also the boy with the unclean spirit, who was wont to throw himself in the fire.[137] In the later Apostolic Age, the practice of glossolalia, "speaking in tongues," also elicited such charges. Glossolalia was a classic ecstatic state. Paul himself had this "gift" (χάρισμα), but he carefully warned against its excesses. In I Corinthians, for example, Paul laments that someone has blasphemed Christ while in an ecstatic state.[138] Also in I Corinthians, Paul notes that if all the church were gathered together and all spoke in tongues, and "uninitiated (ἰδιῶτες) or faithless ones (ἄπιστοι) were to enter, they would say, "ye rave." The Greek word here for "ye rave," "μαίνεσθε," is, interestingly enough, the same Greek word Pentheus uses to describe a messenger smitten by Bacchus. It may be possible, though doubtful, that Paul is not using this word to connote insanity. At any rate, the "mantic" aspects of contemporary religion would have been well-known to any one familiar with Hellenistic or Greek religion:

> If therefore all the church should be gathered together and all should speak in tongues, and should enter either uninitiated ones, or faithless, would they not say that "ye raved."[139]

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[136] cf. "καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ παρ'αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αυτον, ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξεστη. καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς οἱ ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύων καταβάντες ἔλεγον ὅτι Βεελζεβούλ ἔχει." Mark 3:21-22a.

[137] Mark 16: 14-29.

[138] 1 Cor., 12: 3; cf. Segal, Alan F., *Paul the Convert*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 35.

[139] "'ἐὰν οὖν συνέλθῃ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πάντες λαλῶσιν γλώσσαις, εἰσέλθωσιν δε ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι, οὐκ ἐροῦσιν ὅτι μαίνεσθε." I Cor., 14: 23.

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A form of μαίνομαι is used again, with similar meaning, by Luke, the writer of Acts. Here he describes captured Paul's defense of himself to Agrippa, who says to Paul, "You're mad (Μαίνη)."[140]

The transformation of drunkenness was sometimes erroneously equated with Christian ecstasy, as it had been with Bacchic ecstasy. In Acts for example, at the famous "Day of Pentecost," all the disciples were praying, when they saw tongues of fire (γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρος) hovering over their heads.[141] Afterwards, in Jerusalem, a great throng of humanity gathered "from all the nations under heaven (ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανοῦ), whereupon Peter reported to an incredulous audience, "These men are not drunk as ye suppose."[142] Finally, the writer of the epistle to the Ephesians wrote to the early church there: "Be ye not drunk with wine ("μὴ μεκύσκεσθε οἴνῳ) in which there is dissipation, but be ye filled in spirit (πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι)."[143]

Another area of comparison with transforming Bacchic ecstasy is minor, but fascinating. That is the use of the metaphor which both Bacchus and several New Testament Christians use regarding the ability of the transformed spirit to transcend prison walls. In cults which both were heavily persecuted by the governments of their day, this metaphor is especially instructive. In *Bacchae*, when Pentheus threatens to jail Bacchus,

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[140] Acts 26:24; cf. Acts 12: 15.

[141] *ibid.*, 2: 1-4.

[142] ibid., 2: 1-15.

[143] Ephesians 5: 18.

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the god replies that "the spirit (δαίμων) will free me whenever I want."[144] This passage, and the whole general spirit of Bacchus' remark, bears uncanny resemblances to Christian stories. The spirit (πνεῦμα, or δαίμων), cannot be contained by the prison cells of human political systems. In a world which did, and does, lack humane forms of government, the statement from Bacchus was virtually anarchistic.[145] This was the power which the Bacchic mysteries claimed—that there was a spiritual essence in humankind which transcended nature (φύσις) and reason (λογός). Certainly then, no prison could contain it. This was another sense of ἔκστᾶσις. If the spirit could be free from the physical body, what good were chains or locked doors. It was an ideal religion for those social groups with little or no hope. The power of the metamorphosis was such that it could liberate the spirit from the body. It was an impressive idea.

Prison figured heavily in the thinking of early Christian writers. It had to. Prison was where so many early Christian writers found themselves. Hence, jail and persecution were integral part of the narrative vocabulary which sprang up around the early church, with its saints, its apostles and especially its martyrs. Above all, the allegiances of the Christian were spiritual, not political.[146] In Philemon, Paul referred to himself as a

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[144] "λύσει μ' ὁ'δαίμων αὐτός, ὅταν ἐγὼ θέλω." Euripides, *Bacchae*, 452-470.

[145] Mercier also argues that Dionysian religion was a form of anarchism: "C'etait une religion 'populaire' et 'orgiastique.' Anarchiste même." Mercier, *Le Retour d'Apollon*, 39

[146] One of Christ's most noted sayings, quoted in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, was "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's. This statement reflects a veritable indifference to government, especially that of Rome. Matt. 22: 15-22; Mark 12: 13-17; Luke 20: 20-26.

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"prisoner of Christ Jesus (δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ).[147] In II Corinthians, Paul boasted of all the hardships he had suffered, including prisons.[148] The entire book of Phillipians was written while Paul was in Roman custody. Here, he asserts that the circumstances of his imprisonment have been a witness and blessing for the infant cause of Christ.[149] In verse 19, he notes that his circumstances, thanks to the prayers of believers, will deliver him.[150] The ultimate spiritual victory over imprisonment was in the Apocalypse of John, who found himself imprisoned on the isle of Patmos "on account of the word of God and the witness (διὰ τον λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ) of Jesus."[151] As this ecstatic vision no doubt testified to contemporaries, the Roman government could imprison the body, but it could not harness the spirit.

The adventurous narratives of Acts are filled with even more such prison references. The power of God rivals prison in not only a spiritual sense, but in a physical one as well. Indeed, Paul's experiences in the Philippian jail, the conversion of the Philippian jailer, are all found in Acts. Paul and his companion, Silas, have been thrown into prison after casting a demon out of a Philippian prophetess. In fact, they were thrown into the innermost part of the prison (εἰς ἐσωτεραν φυλακὴν).[152] Then Paul and Silas

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[147] One should also remember that Philemon was written to encourage the slave Onesimus to return to his master. Philemon 1: 1, 9.

[148] II Corinthians 11: 24-27.

[149] Philippians, 1: 13-14.

[150] *ibid.*, 1: 19.

[151] Revelation 1: 9.

[152] Acts 16: 24.

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hymned God, whereupon a great earthquake came and shook loose their bonds, and broke open the prison. In this story, Paul and Silas did not take this opportunity to flee, but remained and converted the Philippian jailer. Subsequently, Paul made use of his Roman citizenship, whereby he and Silas were freed. The image of the two men singing in the darkest cell of a Philippian jail is one of the New Testament's most powerful.[153] In another tale, Herod had Peter arrested and thrown into prison. The night before Peter's trial, two angels appeared to him. At first he thought he was seeing a dream (ἐδόκει ὅραμα βλέπειν). However, the angels free him, and he fled to the home of some local believers.[154] These stories reflect the powerful belief in spiritual and physical liberation which was part of Christianity's power. In this sense, Christ and Bacchus were kindred spirits.

The Christian ecstatic metamorphosis was profoundly spiritual, as had been that of earlier Greek faiths. This is evidenced by the many New Testament references to the spirit. Indeed, the Christian "Holy Spirit" was a manifestation of the divine being believed to wield enormous powers of transformation. Again, antecedents to beliefs in a transforming spirit are found in classical Greek literature. For example, in telling Pentheus that the spirit would free him from jail, Bacchus had used the Greek term δαίμων. Δαίμων is far less popular a term in New Testament Greek. Indeed, it came to mean demon, a word to which it is obviously related. Early Christians preferred the word

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[153] *ibid.*, 16: 16-40.

[154] Upon arriving, Peter is ecstatic, having just escaped a dreary fate in prison. He is greeted by a certain Rhode, who incredulously questions his enthusiasm with the simple but telling words "Μαίνῃ." "Thou art mad." cf. *ibid.* 12: 9,15.

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πνεῦμα to refer to the spirit of their God. The word was related to the word for breath, as in the English word pneumonia. Passages which imply μανία or ἐκστάσις are often coupled with allusions to "being in the spirit," or being led "by the spirit." Such references are highly significant. They show that early Christianity had largely personalized the frenetic state, giving it an abstract personality in the guise of the Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα ἅγιον). The phrase "in the spirit" frequently refers to the entrance into a trance or revelatory state, as it clearly does in Revelation, when John's great vision of heaven begins with his statement that he was "in the spirit (in heaven)."[155] Paul says that he can be delivered from prison "through the spirit of Jesus Christ (διὰ . . . τοῦ πνεύματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), probably referring more to a spiritual than a physical release.[156] All three of the synoptic gospel writers use forms of "in the spirit" to describe Christ's venture into the wilderness, where he fasted and was tempted. Matthew says that Jesus was led "by the spirit into the desert."[157] Mark says, literally, that the spirit "cast him forth (ἐκβαλλει) into the desert."[158] Luke's rendition of the tale uses the metaphor twice in one verse: Christ was "full of the holy spirit (πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου)," and was "led in the spirit into the desert (ἦγετο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ἐν τῇ

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[155] "εὐθεως ἐγενομην ἐν πνεύματι." Revelation 4: 2.

[156] Philippians 1: 19; cf. above, ftn. 141.

[157] "Τοτε ὁ Ἰησοῦ ἀνήχθη εἰς ἔρημον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος." Matthew, 4:1.

[158] Mark 1: 12.

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ἐρήμῳ)."[159] Paul hints at similar states, when he says that no one is able to say "Lord Jesus (Κύριοῦς 'Ιησοῦς) except that he is "in the spirit."[160]

Sweeping changes and great personal decisions are often accompanied by ἐκστασις. This fact further highlights the link between ecstasy and metamorphosis. The change could be intensely personal, or it could include admonitions which would ultimately effect the entire faith. The use of "word" in reference to Christ's supposed possession by Beelzebub has already been noted.[161] Many other worthwhile examples come from Luke's Book of Acts—arguably the most Hellenistic of the New Testament documents.[162] Peter's vision (ὅραμα) at Joppa, wherein the eating of unclean foods was sanctioned for Jews, is one such case. First, there are implications of both meditation and sensory deprivation accompanying the vision, which often figure into the hallucinatory religious experiences of any culture. Simon Peter had gone up onto a rooftop to pray. In his report, he claimed that he was hungry (προσπεινος) and wanted to eat. Too, he was praying, an activity which involves inward focus and meditation. Secondly, he was on a rooftop, which no doubt provided a panoramic view of the world—a high place, where the sky made God seem more real.[163] Later Peter recalled that he saw the famous Joppa

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[159] Luke 4: 1.

[160] "...εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι 'αγίῳ." 1 Cor. 12: 3.

[161] Mark 3: 21-22.

[162] One of the definitive hellenistic religious visions and conversions, for example, is found in Acts: Paul's vision on the Damascus Road. Acts 9: 10.

[163] Acts 10: 10; cf. Paul was said to be fasting before witnessing the vision which resulted in the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas. *ibid.*, 13: 2.

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vision while "in ecstasy (εἶδον ἐν ἐκστάσει ὅραμα)."[164] This same phrase was used by Paul when he described a vision which instructed him to leave Jerusalem and preach to the gentiles.[165]

One of the oddest and most significant uses of ecstasy comes in Mark's description of the Resurrection story. Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Christ, brought oil to the tomb, with which they planned to anoint the body of Jesus. Here, they saw one of antiquity's most notable images: the stone rolled away from the tomb, and brilliant angelic creatures standing guard at the empty grave. The angels told the two women to go to Galilee, which they did. Here, the author of Mark uses an interesting choice of words. As Mary and Mary departed, he reported that "fear and trembling held them."[166] The word for trembling is fairly standard, τρόμος. More interesting is the choice of words which the author uses to imply an apparently paralyzing, almost surreal fear—ἔκστασις. The word has a lesser used connotation which implies fear—but the kind of fear which can drive one from his or her senses. The women were, literally, "beside themselves" with fright. This is highly important. The first eyewitnesses to the Christian resurrection were people in the throes of an out of body experience. The resurrection story was not only for the ages. It also involved an intensely personal and transforming religious experience for the two women who visited the tomb.

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[164] *ibid.*, 11: 5.

[165] *ibid.*, 22: 18.

[166] Mark 16: 8.

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Still, the use of an ecstatic state to enhance religious experience was not without controversy. At Collosae, arguments erupted over the use of trance and ecstatic states. Here a tiny Phrygian sect of Jewish Christians, probably Essenes, had mixed several themes from Judaism, Christianity, and other more cosmopolitan faiths. Paul dedicated a few verses to chastising them in his epistle Colossians, thereby immortalizing them as the perpetrators of the "Collosian Heresy."[167] From Judaism, the heresy had absorbed restrictions on food, observations of festivals, new moons and the sabbath.[168] From elsewhere, the cult had absorbed visionary experiences, and the worship of angels.[169]

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[167] Lightfoot, J.B., "The Collosian Heresy," in *Conflict at Collosae: A Problem in the Interpretation of Early Christianity Illustrated by Selected Modern Studies*, ed. by Fred Francis and Wayne A. Meeks, (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975), 13.

[168] Colossians, 2: 16.

[169] *ibid.*, 2: 17-18; There is also evidence indicating angel worship in the early part of Hebrews. The worship of angels probably derived from Babylonia and Persia. Diodorus Siculus described the sophisticated notions of Babylonian astrology, and a complex world of spiritual intermediaries who could control destiny and nature. Much apocalyptic literature reveals absorption of these notions by more malleable sectors of Judaic culture. Josepheus wrote that the Essenes had secret books concealing angelic names. In the apocryphal book of I Enoch, the angels have taken on personalities, some of them now famous. Michael hears mortal complaints, Raphael heals maladies, and Gabriel is a virtually omnipotent being. This may be part of a trend in later Judaism in which abstract concepts came to be identified as angelic beings. The most notable example is probably Wisdom, who was given female identity through large parts of Proverbs. Paul himself states at one point that Christ is the wisdom (σοφία) of God. Both Luke and John depict the devil as an angelic being cast out of heaven. Angel worship seems to have survived the first century. Both Origen and Justin refer to angel cults. cf. Hebrews 1: 5-2, 18; Diod. Sic., ii. 30; Josephus, *Bella Judaica*, 2. 8. 7; cf. I Enoch 40: 9; cf. Proverbs 3: 19; I Cor. 1: 24; Luke 10: 18; John 12: 31; Origen, *c. Cels.*, 5. 8; Justin, *Apol.*, 1. 6. 2; Pétrement, Simone, *Le Dieu Séparé: les origines du gnosticisme*, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1984), 81-83; "St. Paul et le gnosticisme: l'Épître aux Colossiens," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, ed. by Ugo Bianchi, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 544; Grant, R.M., "Les Etres intermédiares dans le Judaisme Tardif," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 142.

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The Collosian Heresy must be seen in its broader, Hellenistic context. It constitutes one of the New Testament's most candid snapshots of that rare syncretistic blend of Hellenism, Judaism and Christianity—an eclectic, heterodoxy whose time was so short. Mantic or frenetic states are among the best examples of this fusion. The visionary experience had become important for many Jews of that period.[170] An important one of these was Philo, who displayed many of the esoteric and mystic qualities which could easily be linked to Jewish or Christian ecstatic states. Seeing God while in an ecstatic or trance state had become a theme in many Hellenistic religions.[171] For Philo, then, the divine mind was to be distinguished from the human mind. Ecstasy came when the human light set, as it were, and the divine light shone.[172] Hence, like Paul, Philo saw the body as corrupt—as an entity which was to be transcended, if contact with the divine was to be attained. Indeed, in *De poteritate Caini*, he disparaged the body, even equating it with death.[173]

For Philo, religious conversion could heal the rupture between man and God. The final step of spiritual metamorphosis, then, was to discover God through an ecstatic

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[170] Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 35.

[171] Porphry wrote of Plotinus that Plotinus four times saw God while in a trance state. Porphry, *Vita Plotini*, 23; Murray, *The Five Stages of Greek Religion*, 143.

[172] Philo, *Heres.*, 263; Bréhier notes that in Philo (i.e. Hellenistic Judaism) the ecstatic state was used to attain personal understanding of the divine being. Reason could show the benevolence and power of God, but only intuition and ecstasy could reveal "l'Etre lui-meme." Bréhier, *Les Idées de Philon d'Alexandrie*, 23.

[173] Philo, *De Pot. Caini.*, 25; *Leg. All.*, 3. 69; Williamson, Ronald, *Jews in the Hellenistic World*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 196-97.

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experience, something which Philo scholar Jean Daniélou called the "sortie de soi."[174] Philo discusses the ecstatic experience in *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres.*[175] His writing is sprinkled with references to "out of body" experiences. For example, in *De cherubim*, he undergoes rites, after which he is transported into a spiritual realm where he sees the prophet Jeremiah.[176] He describes the supernatural commands which brought Moses and the Jews out of Egypt as "visions and dreams."[177] The eclectic nature of such mysticism points to the rare heterodoxy which was found both in Hellenistic Judaism, and early Christianity. That is why, as evidenced by the Collosian experience, the potential for "heresy" in such matters was so high. That is why the first century A.D. was such a precious moment in human religious history.

Using ecstasy to procure this ultimate spiritual enlightenment figured heavily in primitive Christianity, as well. Paul's most important allusion to ecstatic or mantic states in the New Testament is found in his reference to "the third heaven (τρίτος οὐράνος)." Here, Paul describes someone, probably himself, who is "caught up" into the third heaven. Paul says that in this clearly ecstatic state, he heard the "unspeakable words (ἄρρητα ῥήματα)." While Paul does not use the specific term ἔκστασις, he does place emphasis on states which can be either in or out of the body:

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[174] Daniélou, Jean, *Philon d'Alexandrie*, (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1958), 193.

[175] Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres*, 69.

[176] Philo, *De cherubim*, 49.

[177] Philo, *De Somn.*, 1; *Vit Moses*, 1; cf. Nock, A.D., "Philo and Hellenistic Philosophy,' in *The Classical Review*, 57, 1943, 77-81.

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[180] *ib*

> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years earlier—whether in the body I know not, or outside of the body I know not, God knows—was snatched up into the third heaven. I know this man—whether with body or without body I know not, God knows—that was snatched up into paradise and he heard the unspeakable words which it is not possible for a man to speak.[178]

Finally, sometimes Paul described the ecstatic state as "Revelation." One such example comes from Galatians, where Paul attributes his awareness of the gospel (εὐαγγελίον) to the "Revelation of Jesus Christ (δι' αποκαλύψως 'Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ)."[179] Similarly, he refers to his Damascus Road experience as an apocalypse.[180] Indeed, 'Αποκάλυψις is probably the most definitive term for the revelatory trance state, as found in the New Testament. It combines two important Greek words: the adverbial prefix άπο, which means, literally, "out of" and a derivative of the verb "to hide," "καλυπτω." The noun derived from καλύπτω is καλυψις. Normally, in Greek, nouns ending in σις designate an abstract projection of the root word's central idea—often corresponding to English verbal nouns ending in ing. The word καλυψις then, means, a hiding away, a concealing. Αποκάλυψις means a revealing, or a disclosure; a taking out of hiding. The idea embodied in the word lies at the very heart

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[178] "Οἶδα ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῳ πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρῶν -- εἴτε ἐν σ΄ώματι οὐκ οἶδα, εἴτε ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, 'ο θεὸς οἶδεν -- ἁρπαγεντα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ. Καὶ οἶδα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπον -- εἴτε ἐν σωματι εἴτε χωρὶς τοῦ σωματος οὐκ οἶδα, 'ο θεὸς οἶδεν -- ὅτι ἡρπάγή εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα 'ρήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρωπῳ λαλῆσαι." 2 Corinthians, 12: 3-4; Deismann, Adolf, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), 79.

[179] Galatians, 1: 12.

[180] *ibid.* 1: 15-16.

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of Hellenistic esotericism. It was the name given to what was arguably antiquity's most famous ecstatic experience: the Apocalypse of John on the Isle of Patmos.

CONCLUSION

To understand the gods or God more fully was one of the greatest gifts which metamorphosis could offer adherents. But it was a kind of understanding which far surpassed the ability of finite human reason or logic to grasp. In this sense, it was a decidedly anti-intellectual form of enlightenment. It came to individuals through divinely inspired forms of ecstasy. It was something which happened to a person, generally at the behest of some external source. Still, transforming ecstatic experiences were phenomena which people ultimately came to seek for themselves. People who experienced the transforming powers of this ecstasy were often left forever changed.

The ecstatic or mantic state was one of the most deeply rooted phenomena in Hellenic and Hellenistic religion. The same concepts which undergirded some of the "nightwitch" folk-tales found in Greek, Roman and Hellenistic mythology appeared also in antiquity's more abstract religions. The cult of Bacchus was chief among these. Subsequently, the ecstatic state went on to play a dominant role in the early Christian church. But as were other Christian borrowings from pagan culture, divine mania was fraught with controversy. It was a central feature in some of the New Testament's leading famous stories—many of which went on to inform major elements of Christian doctrine and ritual. At the same time, it played heavily in the misunderstandings and schisms

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which plagued the early Church, especially at Corinth and Collosae. More important, it demonstrated the sweeping thematic continuity which spanned Graeco Roman religion: that a state existed in which the human psyche could transcend the physical body. Sometimes, as in the stories of witches, and even Bacchus, this state was used by supernatural beings for dubious, even nefarious ends. But too, it was a state in which the human could seek God or the gods, and come to understand the divine self more fully. In the great religious age which bridged the Classical World and Christendom, many men and women were compelled to their faith by impulses which surpassed reason and logic; by irrational, powerful fits which changed their perspectives forever. It comprised one of the most definitive links between early and late ancient religion, and between Christianity and Paganism. It represented one of the great common themes of spiritual metamorphosis.

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CHAPTER 3

HEALING METAMORPHOSIS AND DREAM CULTURE

Thus far it has been observed that religious beliefs in human metamorphosis concerned both the mind and the body. Two fundamental variances of this ancient notion have been explored. First, there were those popular examples of "shape-shifting" metamorphosis found in the folklore of popular culture. Such ideas were almost exclusively concerned with the σῶμα. Second, it has been demonstrated how ἔκστασις could dramatically enlighten an individual's spiritual essence—a kind of metamorphosis for the soul. Ecstatic ideas were almost entirely focused on the human νοῦς. Now it is time to consider a third form of metamorphosis—one combining elements from the first two extremes. This was the healing metamorphosis which was sought by religious adherents in the incubation temples of antiquity. Primarily associated with the cult of Asklepios, ancient healing sects promised complete transformation—not only in physical health, but in personal life as well. And just as the ecstatic state was often the vehicle which accompanied a fundamental transformation in the divine νοῦς, the supplicants at ancient Asklepia used dreams to procure their desired cures. It was the element of Greco-Roman metamorphosis which was the most directly practical in the daily life of ancient people.

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The healing cults of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods uniquely fused religion and medicine. In the starkest of terms, the body's mortal failings—its tendencies to age, to grow weak, and its vulnerability to infirmity—were part of those basic physical limitations which the metamorphosis sought to alleviate. This can be put another way: the belief that one's shape could be shifted, as it were, from sickness to health, comprised one of the most directly attractive and powerful ideas of ancient religious history. The belief that one's personality could be shifted from, say, timidity to boldness also proved tremendously compelling. In short, the healing cults offered a complete metamorphosis; they promised great things to both the inner and the outer man. It was an especially compelling blend of medicinal healing of the body and spiritual food for the soul. Aside from the deification of mortal human beings, and the resurrection from the dead (ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν), this was arguably the most sophisticated manifestation of Greek or Hellenistic shape-shifting beliefs. Antiquity offers many examples of this healing form of metamorphosis. Perhaps the most widespread and representative is that of the cult of Asklepios in ancient Asklepia.

Ancient Asklepia foreshadowed the sanitoria of nineteenth century Europe, providing havens where the chronically ill and/or neurotic could "enjoy bad health" amidst the serenity of impressive temple sites which were routinely secluded and idyllic.[1] By day, the temple's patrons were at leisure to enjoy bathing, athletic games, theater productions, scenic walks, or conversation. At night, they would retire to the "ἄβατον,"

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[1] Kee, Howard, *Miracle in the Early Christian World*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1983), 104.

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a special room generally found in the temple's inner sanctum. Here, in the solemn still of the sanctuary, the shadowy atmosphere redolent with incense, the devotees of Asklepios would sleep. Not surprisingly, after spending days or weeks immersed in such an environment, the sleepers would frequently dream of divine visitation. Vivid dreams seem to have been experienced, including the appearance of Asklepios himself, who administered doctorly and spiritual advice. Aristophanes' *Plutus* provides the best generic account of these "incubation" temples, albeit a sarcastic and irreverent one.

Dreams were one of the commonest avenues by which the gods and God communicated with men—the vehicle by which the gods offered advice and admonitions. They were used by practioners of the healing cults to obtain divine guidance for healing. A popular culture component appeared in many of these beliefs. Cicero wrote that along with frenetic divination, dreams were the other chief means of procuring special knowledge of divine truths and the future.[2] He notes that even within his own memory, the consul Lucius Julius rebuilt Juno's temple in accordance with the dream of a certain Caecilia.[3] Dreams figure heavily in Apuleius' story of Lucius and his quest to regain his

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[2] There was no shortage of skepticism regarding such superstitions then, just as there would be no shortage of skepticism today. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the old maid comforted the young maiden whom the robbers have kidnapped, since she had been having nightmares regarding her lover's safety. The maiden is told that "as the visions of the day are accounted false and untrue, so the visions of the night do often chance contrary." "*Nam praeter quod diurnae quietis imagines falsae perhibentur, tunc etiam nocturnae visiones contrarios eventus nonnumquam pronuntiant.*" As for cynicism regarding incubation and healing, Diogenes the Cynic once remarked that there would had been more votive offerings if all those whom the god had not healed had left their offerings. Apul., *Met.*, IV. 27; cf. Diog. Laet., 69.

[3] Cic., *De div.*, I. 24.

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human shape. At the novel's end, he was advised in a dream to join a procession of Isis on the morrow. He was told that he would see a priest with roses in his hand. Going through the crowd, Lucius was to snatch the roses from the priest's hand. These roses would return his human form. On the morrow, after a remarkably attractive and compelling religious parade, he met the foreordained priest with the roses. Eating the roses from the priest's hand, he finally regained his human shape.[4]

Other stories also reveal the importance which dreams played in ancient religious culture. In Plutarch's *Cleomenes*, a Spartan Ephor received guidance in a dream, while sleeping in the temple at Pasiphaë.[5] Philostratus tells the story that just prior to Apollonius' birth in Tyana, the Egyptian deity Proteus had appeared to his mother. The woman asked about the baby to whom she was about to give birth. Proteus responded, "Me."[6] In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Pentheus implied that Semele had been impregnated by Zeus in a dream, saying, "I wonder whether he (Zeus) bore you nightly or according to sight.[7] In Petronius' *Satyricon*, Quartilla was feeling ill, and asked for a remedy to be given to her in her dreams.[8]

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[4] Later, Lucius wrote that the goddess appeared to him in dreams each night. Apul., *Met.*, 13.

[5] Plutarch, *Cleomenes*, 7.

[6] Philostratus, *VA.*, 1. 4; For more on Proteus, cf. Homer, *Od.*, 4. 385; Virgil, *Georgics*, 4. 387.

[7] "ποτερα δὲ νύκτωρ σ' ἢ κατ' ὀμμ' ἠνάγκασεν." Euripides, *Bacchae*, 469.

[8] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 1. 17.

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Indeed, many Greek and Latin dream passages do not use generic words for dream, ὄναρ, ὄνειρος, or the Latin *somnium*—itself a derivative of the Latin word for sleep.[9] Instead, most ancient textual passages referring to dreams prefer to use some word combination which implies that the dream "seemed to be seen." In Latin, some form of *videre somnis* is often used, which means to see while in a sleeping state. This differs from simply saying that someone "saw a dream," which would be *videre somnium.* Other references to dreams include such phrases as "to see in the quiet," "*videre in quietem.*" In Latin, the noun quiet has connotations which include rest, night, sleep and dream. But perhaps the most direct and accurate rendering is simply "in the quiet"—"*quiete,*" or "*in quietem.*" Again, the emphasis is on the state of being, and not the dream itself. Hence, the ancient concept of dream seems to have been more a surreality than modern concepts

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[9]Quasi sleep states also figure heavily in many in other Greek language accounts in which divine truths or admonitions are made known to mortals. δοκεω figures into many of these accounts, as does βλεπω, the verb "to see." In the *Anabasis*, Xenophon uses the word to describe his dream, also referring to dark, distant thunder which adds that familiar surreal air to ancient dream accounts. One reads that Xenophon "saw a dream." Moreover, he "was not able to sleep. And while it was thundering, it seemed that a lightning bolt fell into home." The Greek text reads . . ."εἶδεν ὄναρ. ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ βροντῆς γενομενης σκηπτὸς πεσεῖν εἰς τὴν πατρῴαν οἰκίαν." The word for sleep is sometimes used to convey this half-waking state as well. The New Testament's account of the transfiguration includes description of a state which seems to have John, James and Peter suspended somewhere between waking and sleeping, as "being heavy with sleep," or "βεβαρημένοι ὕπνῳ" (βαρεω= to burden, weigh down, or depress). A kind of in between sleeping state is also implied during Matthew's account of Joseph's dream foretelling Christ's birth. Here, Matthew tells only that an angel of the Lord (ἄγγελος κυρίου) appeared to Joseph in a dream (κατ' ὄναρ) and announces the Messiah's birth. While Matthew does not ever tell readers that Joseph had, in fact, gone to sleep, he does refer to Joseph's "having rising from sleep," or ἐγερθεὶς . . . ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου." Also, Luke's quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel, in the book of Acts, uses the intriguing word ἐνυπνιασθήσονται: "Your old men "shall dream in sleep." Luke uses δοκεω in his description of Peter's vision in prison. "He seemed to see a dream. ἐδοκει δὲ ὅραμα βλεπειν." Xen., *Ana*, 3. 1. 15; Luke 9: 32; Matt. 1: 20-24; Acts 2:17, 12: 9.

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of dreams—in which the verb "to see" is seldom employed, since it lends an air of reality to the dream state which moderns would never concede.[10] The Greeks had the same sense in their language's descriptions of dreams, usually using some form "he saw a dream (ειδεν ὄναρ)," or "he seemed to see a dream."

In this light, many ancient descriptions of dreams are especially striking. Dreams were often perceived as existing in another realm—a kind of surreal netherworld. The sleeping dreamer was entering this realm. There was a shadowy quality to many dream descriptions which connoted a kind of hazy, even hypnotic state. Such accounts certainly seem to hint at modern notions of lucid dreaming. Cicero relates the poem found in the *Annales* of Ennius concerning Rhea Silva, the Vestal Virgin who ultimately gave birth to Romulus and Remus after a divine dream of Mars left her with a not-so-dreamlike offspring. Here, Cicero quotes Rhea as stating, "a beautiful man was seen by me through

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[10] For Latin terminology regarding sleeping states, Cicero's *De Diviatione* has a lengthy treatise on dreams. It is replete with pertinent samplings of these linguistic phrases, only a few of which can be noted here. For example, "when Hamilcar seized Syracuse, he was seen to hear a voice, ". . . *cum oppugnaret syracusas, visum esse audire vocem.*" *Video* is used again by Cicero in reporting that after seizing Suguntum, Hannibal dreamed that Jupiter called him to a summit of the gods: "Hannibal was seen in his sleep to be called by Jove into a council of the gods. *Hannibalem . . . visum esse in somnis a Iove in deorum concilium vocari.*" "*In quietem*" is also used in a variety of contexts by Cicero: "he was seen in quiet, (*in quitem visum esse*)," or . . . "was seen by him in the quiet ("*ei visum in quiete*"). Too, Cicero sometimes includes elements of both "*in quietem,*" and *videre*, for example writing that "the second 'night' . . . Juno was seen by him—". . . *ei secundum quitem visam esse iunonem.*" (This account also concerns Hannibal, who wanted to carry off a column from Juno's temple, after boring into it and discovering it was gold. Juno appeared to him in a dream and warned him not to—advice which he wisely heeded.) These same passages describing dreams also use forms of *videre somnis*, for example, "to have seen in sleep, ("*in somnis vidisse*"), or "he was seen in somnis (*visum esse in somnis*). cf. Cic., *De div.*, I. XXIV. 50; 49; 48; 53; 52; 49.

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idyllic willows to have abducted me to the riverbanks and to new places."[11] Note the slightly hazy, pleasant dreamlike quality implied in the phrase "through idyllic willows, *per amoena salicta.*"[12] This hints at all the elements of subliminal psychology which were not to be articulated for nineteen more centuries. The dream state was perceived as less a feature of the mind's activities during sleep than it was another shadowy realm which the dreamer entered. In this gray and often sweet region, men and women encountered the gods in ways which could change them forever.

In the Asklepios cult, many notions from this milieu of beliefs regarding dreams and divine guidance were enjoined into a full-scale religion, complete with an ethical system, and worship ritual. The cult was the sophisticated culmination of several centuries of beliefs regarding dreams and miraculous healing metamorphoses. Earlier stories taken

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[11] ". . . *nam me visus homo pulcher per amoena salicta et ripas raptare locusquo novos.*" Cic., *De div.*, I. XX. 40.

[12] In Victorian and Gothic literature, the trance-state was often used by moralistic audiences to justify a salacious preoccupation with sex. Dracula's victimizations of Lucy and Mina, for example, were really seductions disguised in the form of authoritarian trance. That way, the girls—and the audience—could explain away the sexual overtones: "The Girls thought they were dreaming," or "They were overcome by the hypnotic powers of the vampire." The virginal maidens being seduced by the Count never seemed quite able to remember fully the details of the prior night's activities. They always seemed to remember it as though it had been a dream, or as though looking at themselves through some hazy, dream-like fog. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the "*sum visus*" was the term used by Socrates to describe the vampiric attack upon him by the witches Meroe and Panthia. There are elements of that here in the Rhea Silva story. The Vestal Virgin recalls her illicit seducer only marginally—as though she were staring at him through pleasant, hazy willows. This way, she can be more detached from the sacrilegious implications of her own activities. The similarities between Victorian vampire literature and this Roman account are striking. Apul., *Met.*, 1. 18; Mayo, Herbert, "Trance Sleep, Somnambulism and Trance-Waking," in *The Origins of Dracula*, ed. by Clive Leatherdaly, (London: William Kimber Books, 1987), 191.

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from mythology, however, depicted divine dreams happening to humans almost inadvertently—as events which happened to them, and were more-or-less beyond their control. The same can be said of the ecstatic state, which generally seems to have befallen passive mortals. Even Paul's Damascus road conversion fits this definition of religious experience. So do the stories surrounding Agave, Pentheus, and other characters from the primary Dionysus myth. Conversely, Asklepios offered a whole practical system in which such dreams could be routinely procured at the bidding of the supplicant. The whims of the gods were less relevant.[13]

Human control was significant in terms of the metamorphosis as well. The transformation in both σῶμα and νοῦς could now be achieved through the dream culture, which offered many of the same regenerative and enlightening qualities as other religions, and employed a much more practical way of attaining them. In a busy and cosmopolitan age, spiritual enlightenment and physical healing could now be acquired whenever the would-be supplicant could fit it into his schedule. And the metamorphosis offered by Asklepios was infinitely practical. It included the basic exigencies of physical health, but could include the healing of personality disorders as well.

Aristides' *The Sacred Tales* provides an especially rich source for the Asklepios cult, both in terms of temple life and personal religious experience. Aristides seems the quintessential supplicant. Born in A.D. 117, he was well-schooled in the Greek tradition

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[13] It was in this sense a move toward convenience in religion, and one which should not be unfamiliar to those acquainted with American religious life. Ancient Asklepia manifest a large-scale turn in ancient religions toward service-oriented religious consumerism.

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of rhetoric, and he left behind him a legacy of truly prolific writing. His first works reveal much devotion to the deity Sarapis, as well as more established Hellenic gods like Poseidon and Apollo. Early on, however, he became convinced his health was failing. Encountering a vision in the Asklepion at Smyrna, he experienced a life-changing conversion of almost 'Damascus Road' proportions. Thereafter, he spent over a decade in the great temple at Pergamum, where he was thoroughly preoccupied with his health, his rhetorical skills, and Asklepios.[14]

If ever there was a candidate for physical and spiritual metamorphosis, Aristides fit the bill. His years at the Asklepion were spent searching relief from spiritual as well as physical maladies. One notes not only the early link which existed between medicine and religion, but between psychology and religion as well. Hence, Aristides' writings reveal perhaps the most intriguing combination between religious healing of the body and soul. The metamorphosis cure sought by Aristides took on a striking range of forms. His problems were by no means limited to the realm of physical health. Much has been written on his personality. He does seem a hypochondriac, ever seeking the fabled 'miracle cure.' At one point, he cited a truly ponderous list of ailments, many of which were plainly psychosomatic. His breath would get "caught in his throat;" he reported "various symptoms in my teeth and ears, and a tension everywhere in my arteries."[15] He

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[14] For the most thorough and concise summation of Aristides' life, Behr, C.A., *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*, (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968), 121-130.

[15] For English translations and for the numerical references, this word has used Aelius Aristides, *The Complete Works*, trans. by C.A. Behr, 2 vols., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981). The Greek text is *Aristides*, ed. by W. Dindorf, 3 vols., (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964); Ael. Arist., XLVIII. 56.

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was so worried about his teeth falling out that he was "always holding up his hands as if to catch them."[16] Aristides was also preoccupied with his career as a rhetorician and clearly displayed frustration in this regard. He seems to have felt some fear regarding public speaking and competition from colleagues, which also encouraged him to feel ill. Perhaps he sought a metamorphosis in his own career, as well as health.[17] Indeed, at one point, a companion, Hermocrates of Rhodes, complained that Aristides would claim having stomach pains to avoid public speaking.[18]

This was the only time Aristides exhibited fear of his own career. In one dream sequence, he fancied himself keeping company with the Emperors Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius. Noting the general comfort of his surroundings, he pointed out that "none of those other fearsome fellows was present."[19] The word here, which Behr translates as "fearsome," is "σοβαρος." Behr equates this word with contempt, and believes that Aristides used it to refer denigratingly to sophist competitors.[20] In other orations, this clearly the case, notably in the *Funeral Oration in Honor of Alexander*, (ἐπι

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[16] *ibid.*, XLVIII. 62.

[17] This linkage between mental health, physical health and career is not as strange as it may first seem. Consider how many modern-day gurus of pop-psychology and popular religion promise both better careers and better health.

[18] *ibid.*, L. 23.

[19] Ael. Arist., XLVII. 46.

[20] Behr, *Aelius Aristides*, 106.

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Αλεξανδρῳ Επιταφος), in which he praised his former teacher by asserting that he (Alexander) "did not ascribe to himself that most fearsome (σοβαροτατος) of titles."[21]

In *The Sacred Tales*, however, the word was used in more than just an insulting capacity. Aristides fantasizes about security, luxury, and the lack of intimidating competition for the Emperors' attention, as evidenced by his claim that "I alone was granted everything, and no one else had even a small part in these honors."[22] The word σοβαρος comes from the verb σοβεω, meaning to scare away, or more literally, to "bustle away" a flock of birds. The adjective can mean pompous, haughty—or, intimidating. So even if Aristides used the word as a "term of contempt," it also seems quite clear that he was much more comfortable without those "fearsome fellows" present.

Such insecurities and personality quirks are highly significant, for they were often the focus of the transformations desired by Aristides. Indeed, the "treatments" Aristides received in Pergamum focused as much on his psyche as on his health. Frequently, this particular aspect of his experience manifests itself in the guise of career aspirations. Indeed, if evidence reveals Aristides as an orator occasionally struck with phobia, he was not without ambition or ego. In fact, during one nocturnal fantasy he compared his own oratorical skills to the military skills of Alexander the Great.[23] Furthermore, he believed that religious life could improve professional life. In *To Plato: In Defense of Oratory*, (περὶ ρητορικῆς) he invoked both Hermes and Apollo to guide him in his oratorical

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[21] ". . . οὔτε τὸ σοβαρώτατον αὐτῷ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐπεγράψατο." *Funeral Oration in Honor of Alexander*, 8.

[22] Ael. Arist., XLVII. 46.

[23] *ibid.*, L. 49.

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endeavors.[24] Similarly, he believed that the pithy priestesses at Delphi, when moved by Apollo, were rendered capable of making public speeches, ruling governments, and instructing others in the sciences.[25] Thus, they were not only given miraculous wisdom, but the confidence and expertise needed to perform speaking, teaching and administrative duties.

Aristides sought such a miraculous personal metamorphosis for himself. Many of his dreams focused on his professional life, not his health. Indeed, he seemed to have mastered a skill modern therapists call "end-result imagery." This technique involved having patients relax, then visualize themselves in an idealized form. Individuals fearful of public-speaking are encouraged to imagine themselves calm and composed in high-pressure situations, or giving eloquent and impassioned speeches. Obese individuals are told to imagine themselves being thin and fit. Such techniques are designed to change patients' concepts of themselves, so that an individual's fantasy life can be translated into reality.[26]

It is significant that Aristides experienced dreams which helped to boost his self-confidence, hence his career. He imagined himself in the most flattering of situations. Once he dreamed of being praised by a young admirer who marveled upon hearing that

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[24] *ibid.*, II. 19.

[25] *ibid.*, II. 41-41.

[26] For a discussion of the use of this technique in modern psychology, cf. Korn, E., and Johnson, K., *Visualization: The Uses of Imagery in the Health Professions*, (Homewood, Illinois: Dow-Jones-Irwin,) 162-63.

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Aristides was so distinguished among men.[27] At another point, he dreamed of reciting some Demosthenes, claiming he "spoke to the Athenians as if he were he."[28] Aristides fancied himself keeping company with the truly great orators and writers of Greece. In one reverie, he reported that Plato and Lysias were visiting his home to enjoy some conversation. He was delightfully surprised when Sophocles and Aeschylus dropped by his house, too.[29] In yet another dream, a philosopher named Rhosander praised Aristides' rhetorical abilities, saying he spoke with more dignity (ἀξίωμα) than Demosthenes himself.[30] The effect of imaging is particularly clear when Aristides reported that this dream "kindled all his later ambition (φιλοτιμία)" so that he was inspired, upon awakening, to practice speaking. His friends, he said, noticed much improvement.[31]

Imaging your own metamorphosis is a technique found elsewhere in Aristides' writings as well. In the religion of Asklepios, the same practices and beliefs applied to physical health, too. Perhaps the most noticeable is "displacement," the visualization technique in which patients imagine their ailments being displaced to some other entity.[32] Another word for this practice is "transference." Transference was a popular

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[27] Ael. Arist., XLVII. 49.

[28] *ibid.*, XLVII. 16.

[29] *ibid.*, L. 57-62.

[30] *ibid.*, L. 19.

[31] *ibid.*, L. 20.

[32] For a useful explanation of displacement, and one accessible to non-specialists in psychiatry, cf. Stein, Calvert, *Practical Psychotherapy in Nonpsychiatric Specialities*, (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1969), 92.

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component of Hellenistic theology, the most famous example being when the "sin of the world (ἁμαρτία τοῦ κοσμοῦ)" was placed on the back of the crucified Christ. The healing cults of the day often applied this same notion to medical beliefs. A case recorded in a papyrus dating from A.D. 3 involved Sarapis, though belief in transference was an all but ubiquitous theme in popular religion. An oracle told Thrason the pauper to fast all night till 4 A.M., at which time he was instructed to drink a full-sized pitcher of unmixed wine.[33] Subsequently, he was to fall asleep. Thrason did as instructed. Upon awakening, his "headache" was miraculously transferred to a nearby Libyan, who collapsed on the spot.[34]

As for Aristides, he displayed an extreme belief in transference, and one that involved far higher stakes than Thrason and his headache. While travelling through the Mysian Plain to Smyrna, he learned that Philumene, his foster sister's daughter, was dangerously ill. Later, he discovered that the girl has died, asserting that her death had

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[33] Wine played a controversial role in incubation. As noted here in the Thrason account, it was sometimes a requisite for receiving sacred healing or guidance. The cult of Dionysus also had elements of this. But too, in dream procurement, its use was sometimes discouraged. Philostratus reports that dreams and divination were the most godlike of human faculties. Interpreters of dreams always wanted to know when the dream was seen—if seen before midnight, or in the early hour of sleep. This was apparently due to the notion that dreams could be muddled by alcohol. Dreams dreamt at morning or just before awakening resulted from a more clean and sober mind. A certain Greek seer named Oecles, who divined in Attica, induced dreams. He required abstention from food for one day, and abstention from wine for three days. He believed this would produce clear-headedness, and receptiveness to divine messages. Phil. *VA*, II. XXXVII.

[34] *Greek Literary Papyri*, I, ed. and trans. by D.L. Page (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1941), 96.

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not taken place without "some divine agency (ἄνευ δαιμοῦ τινὸς)."[35] The precise nature of this "divine agency" becomes gruesomely clear when an oracle reports that the girl's life had been traded for that of Aristides.[36] Here is a truly compelling image: Aristides sucking life and health from the virility of the young. He apparently believed his supreme devotion to the gods entitled him to superior treatment. Yet however vampiric the dream seems, and however casually Aristides seems to have greeted the very real tragedy of the girl's death, he benefitted psychologically, if not physically. After the girl's brother also died during a smallpox epidemic, Aristides again viewed the death as a supplication for his own ailments. Finally, he took transference to its logical extreme, reporting that his relief from a long-running fever coincided with the boy's death.[37]

Elsewhere, the imaging of desired metamorphosis is equally clear, though far less malevolent. Others of Aristides' dreams plainly resemble controversial modern visualization techniques used by cancer patients and therapists. Central themes of such treatments include visualizing the ailment and then the curative treatment.[38] *The Sacred Tales* are replete with such images. As noted, Aristides' complaints are consistently general; his teeth, his circulatory system and his digestive tract particularly fascinated him. He believed that the gods could directly affect his health, at one point asserting that

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[35] Ael. Arist., LI. 18-19.

[36] *ibid.*, LI. 23-24.

[37] *ibid.*, L. 20.

[38] For summation of this technique as applied in modern medicine and psychiatry, cf. Berenson, Susan, "The Cancer Patient," in *Relaxation and Imagery: Tools for Therapeutic Communication and Intervention*, (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co., 1988), 171.

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Asklepios somehow cleansed (καθαρει) his upper-intestinal tract (τὴν ἄνω).[39] Similarly, his dreams are full of images involving the god cleansing or purifying Aristides' body.[40] He dreamed that Asklepios came and drew blood (sixty pints!) from his forehead.[41] He dreamed that Sarapis took a lancet and cut into his face, removing refuse and restoring healthy tissue to the lips and gums.[42] He dreamed he was given some figs which caused him to immediately vomit (κατὰ σπουδὴν ἐμεῖν).[43] Often these dreams were interpreted as medical advice. Hence, after dreaming that he was witnessing the excavation of a large ditch, he sought an emetic, for he "took note of the dumping."[44] Finally, not all Aristides' medical dreams were connected with specifically therapeutic imagery. Pain displacement techniques can be found there, as well. Such procedures involved the patient's "focusing on a pleasant scene that then sets the scene for going further and deeper with specific imagery to relieve pain."[45] Aristides seemed to be

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[39] Ael. Arist., L. 5.

[40] Some of this clearly indicates the presence of psychosomatic illness in Aristides. The notion that the health of the νοῦς can directly influence the health of the σῶμα is far from new. Mind over matter is not just an idea emanating from nineteenth century science and pseudo-science. Philo Judaeus, for example, wrote that the best physicians would not tell the truth to patients who were smitten with deadly disease, because it was believed that if the patient actually believed he would get better, his chances of doing so were greatly improved. Philo, *Quod Deus Immutablis Sit*, XIII. 65.

[41] *ibid.*, XLVIII. 47-48.

[42] *ibid.*, XLIX. 47.

[43] *ibid.*, XLVII. 54.

[44] *ibid.*, XLVII. 46-50; cf. Bonner, C., "Some Aspects of Religious Feeling in Later Paganism," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 30, 1937, 121-22.

[45] Berenson, "The Cancer Patient," 182.

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employing this kind of focusing skill. In one section, in great distress with a toothache, he dreamed that Asklepios ordered him to gather his friends and read them a speech. Upon awakening, he did as the god commanded. He was rid of the pain before finishing.[46]

The correlation between those images conjured by the sleeping Aristides and modern psychological techniques of guided visualization is indeed impressive. But his accounts derive from dreams, not consciously articulated theories. How seriously can scholars take them? In fact, some modern therapists assert that dreams are very much a part of the imaging process. More important, they can "be induced, and when this phenomenon takes place, they become of even greater importance."[47] Such dreams are alleged to have both physical and psychological components. "By using the solution to problems and artistic creations your dream life provides," one psychiatrist writes, "you will enrich your waking life."[48] More, "you will build a capacity for coping with fear producing situations that carries over into the waking state."[49] But such theories are by no means new. In the second century A.D., Aristides wrote, "We employ dreams, not knowing in advance of the evening, surely, what we are going to see, and we know what we must do to be saved."[50]

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[46] Ael. Arist., L. 30.

[47] Korn and Johnson, *Visualization*, 162-63.

[48] Garfield, Pat, *Creative Dreaming* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), 14.

[49] *ibid.*, 17.

[50] Ael. Arist., II. 70.

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The role of dreams, then, seems crucial. Asklepios' adherents sought out dreams as a way of procuring metamorphosis in many aspects of their lives, not just medical health. Clearly, dreams had a religious significance. Aristides himself wrote, "the care of the gods causes mankind to be saved by dreams."[51] Significant dreams appear early in Greek history, such as the reverie (ὄνειρος) Zeus sent to Agamemnon in *The Iliad.*[52] In the New Testament, dreams were frequently regarded as divine messages.[53] Of course, the kind of credulity associated with such dream seriousness did not go entirely unnoticed. Sometimes popular beliefs regarding dreams were heartily mocked and disdainfully scorned. Hippocrates made fun of delirious sleepers who groaned and shrieked all night, and who would suddenly jump from their bed screaming Hecate was attacking.[54] Worse, people afflicted with these sleep disturbances (perhaps Hippocrates is describing epilepsy) were exploited by frauds, who created secure jobs for themselves by selling bogus "cures."[55] It was not to be the only time such individuals were to be accused of profiting

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[51] *ibid.*, II. 75.

[52] Homer, *Il.*, II. 25; Dodds, E.R., *The Greeks and the Irrational*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 122, ftn. 20.

[53] Here are some of the most famous examples: In Matthew 1, "an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream . . . ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ ἐφάνη (ὄναρ=dream)." In Matthew 2, while dreaming, Joseph is told to flee to Egypt. In Acts 18, the Lord speaks to Paul "through a dream (δι' οράματος)" by night. Matt. 1:20; Acts 18: 9.

[54] In a similar light, Lucian wrote of a fever epidemic during the reign of king Lysimachus in Abdera. After it broke, people went "mad with tragedy, shouting iambics and creating a din." "ἅπαντες γαρ ἐς τραγωδίαν παρεκίνουν και ἰαμβεῖα ἐφεγγουντο και μεγα ἐβόων." Hipp., *Sacr. Dis.*, IV. 30; Lucian, *How to Write History*, 1.

[55] *ibid.*, II. 1-10.

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from other people's dreams. In a disturbing reminder that anti-semitism is not a modern development, Juvenal wrote that Jews would sell any sort of dream.[56]

Still, procuring dreams was taken very seriously by many of the faithful. Sometimes dreams were pursued with overtly simple magic, like the belief that laurel leaves on the sleeper's head would cause his dreams to come true.[57] But there was often a more specifically theological or spiritual component. Extensive or otherwise impressive religious rituals could create sacred dreams. For example, after undergoing some rites, Philo Judaeus was carried into a spiritual realm where he saw the prophet Jeremiah.[58]

In light of the powerful forces of metamorphosis which dreams were thought to offer, dreams became something of a field of inquiry in their own rite. Aristides himself makes the assertion that he has been trained in "divine visions," using the Greek phrase θείας ὄσεις.[59] The word θείας is, of course, an adjective designating the noun as holy or divine. The word οψεις is the plural of οψις, a noun derived from the same root, οπ, which is found in the verb οπταυομαι (to see). But when σ is added to π, the letters become ψ for euphonic reasons. Thus what would normally be οπσις becomes οψις: a seeing or a viewing, hence a vision.

But is Aristides referring to what would be conventionally considered dreams? Probably he is, though the question is not without some ambiguity. *The Sacred Tales* lack

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[56] Juv., IV. 546.

[57] Fulg., *Myth.*, 1. 14.

[58] Phil. Jud., *De cherub.*, 49.

[59] Ael. Arist., XLVII. 38.

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commensurate references to sleep and preparation for sleep. Aristides himself admits to not detailing the circumstances in which the dreams occurred.[60] Furthermore, the text often fails to distinguish clearly between dream passages and waking passages. Quite often there is no more warning that a dream passage is occurring than the imperfect of the verb δοκέω, often followed by the infinitive εἶναι, or ονα᾽γίγνεται. Thus one reads, "ἐδόκουν εἶναι μὲν Ἀθήνησιν," or that "μοι γίγνεται ὄψις."[61] Such passing remarks are often the reader's only indication that Aristides has passed from describing waking life to dream life—two states of consciousness which, in *The Sacred Tales*, are often otherwise indistinguishable.[62]

But if specific references to sleeping and dreaming in Aristides are lacking, there is an abundance of indirect evidence from which historians can infer much. In general, the cult's adherents were immersed in an atmosphere conducive to special sacred dreams.

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[60] *ibid.*, XLVIII. 2.

[61] *ibid.*, LI. 56-57.

[62] There was an interesting belief in a "first sleep," the early stage of sleep which the ancients apparently believed to be the deepest stage of sleep. This is probably what is referred to in Cicero's reference to an Arcadian traveller who "being terrified rose up from the first sleep . . . *eum primo pererritum somnio surrexisse.*" *LCL* translator Falconer translated this passage as "greatly frightened at first by the dream, he arose." It probably refers however, to the "*primus somnus*," that first stage of sleep which the ancients believed to be particularly strong, and most vulnerable to dreams. Apuleius referred to this same belief. Here, he reported that the robbers to whom unfortunate ass-Lucius has been enjoined moved at the moonless time of night (*noctis illunio tempore*), "in which it was believed that "affable sleep invaded the hearts of mortals more strongly with its first attack—*quo somnus obvius impetu primo corda mortalium validius invadit.*" At the end of *Metamorphoses*, Lucius fled to the town of Cenchreae, a port on the Corinthian isthmus. Sleeping, he awoke to a full moon—a time when he believed that the goddess Isis had the most puissance and strength. It was a time when animals and inanimate things were made stronger. Cic., *De div.*, I. XXVII. 56; cf. Apul., *Met.*, IV. 18; XI. 1.

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Porphyrius noted that, before going into the temple, followers were expected to achieve purity by thinking pure thoughts.[63] Even the word ἄβατον, referring to the room where Asklepios' devotees slept, is derived from ἄβατος, a verbal adjective meaning "uncrossable," "inaccessible," or "consecrated." Indeed, the word and the room seem strangely reminiscent of the Hebrew's 'Holy of Holies,' into which only the most spiritually pure priests were allowed to enter.[64]

Spending their days striving to maintain spiritual purity kept worshippers' thoughts focused on Asklepios, helping to prepare their minds for dreaming in the ἄβατον. But temple patrons did not think only of the soul. Aristides implied that the infirm were encouraged to focus their thoughts on physical ailments, stating, "desire leads to what will profit them," adding, "they desired to vomit when to do so was going to be expedient."[65] The mind-set which helped to produce sacred dreams was continued upon waking. For Aristides, this took the form of a dream diary. At one point he claimed that the god

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[63] Porph., *De abstent.*, II. 19; cf. Becker, Raymond, *Les Machinations de la Nuit: La rêve dans l'histoire et l'histoire du rêve*, (Paris: Éditions Planete, 1964), 157.

[64] Healing cults surrounding Isis (Isis Hygeia) also demanded a measure of spiritual purity. Plato notes that the confession of sin was a prerequisite for healing with Isis, and other healing religions as well. The poet Tibullus asked Isis to heal him, promising devotion in return for an answer to his request. All this contrasts with Lucian's criticisms that someone could buy good health from the gods for the price of a cow. This is the "*Do ut Des*" form of religion admirably described by Burkert in his chapter "Personal Needs in this Life and After Death." Burkert reminds readers of Plato's assertion that people make promises to the gods when they are ill, or in trouble. Still, one needs always to remember that religion can also lift up peoples' sights as can few other things. Plato, *Symposium*, 201d-212c; *Laws*, 909; Tibulus, 1. 3. 23-32; for more information on the healing properties of the Isis cult, Diod. Sic., 1. 23. 4; Diogenes Laertius, 5. 76; Lucian, *De Sacr.*, 2; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 16.

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ordered him to write down his dreams.[66] This is significant. Some modern researchers believe that dream diaries can enhance the dream experience by teaching sleepers to be conscious of their reveries. More, the dreamer can develop "almost total recall" by, among other things, "valuing the dreams and lying quietly upon awakening . . . lie still and let your dreams flow back."[67]

This infatuation with various divine emissaries no doubt produced acute "lucid dreams" in which "the dreamer is consciously aware that they are dreaming while they seem to be soundly asleep."[68] Such a state would help account for the rather bizarre mixture of sleeping and waking images in many of *The Sacred Tales*' dream sequences, most notably the ubiquitous dream of Asklepios or some other shadowy figure standing by Aristides' bed. Aristides notes a certain philosopher, Rhosander, frequently visited him just before he awoke, a time when most lucid dreams were said to occur.[69]

Another important component used in inducing therapeutic dreams was the sense of the "warm safe place," an image used all but universally by relaxation therapists. Hypnotists and teachers of self-hypnotism recommend that relaxation be linked to specific mental images, frequently a calming, idyllic natural setting; a palace which evokes a strong sense of security and contentment.[70] But whereas modern psychoanalysts have

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[66] *ibid.*, XLVIII. 2.

[67] Garfield, *Creative Dreaming*, 173-74.

[68] *Conscious Mind, Sleeping Brain: Perspectives on Lucid Dreaming*, ed. by Jayne Backenbach and Stephen Laberge, (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), ix.

[69] Ael. Arist., L. 19.

[70] Korn and Johnson, *Visualization*, 90.

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patients lie on sofas in modern office buildings and imagine restful scenes, the priests of Asklepios had created a real, tangible, warm, safe place: the temple complex itself. In this regard, worshippers of Asklepios had discovered the peculiar institution known in modern religious circles as a retreat.

The sites where the ancients went to worship Asklepios—and seek metamorphosis of physical σῶμα and the divine νοῦς—were among antiquity's most beautiful. Aristides himself reports, in *The Panathenaic Oration* (Παναθηναϊκός), that many cities in Asia Minor took great pride in their temples.[71] Strabo states that Epidarus was made famous by its Asklepion.[72] The sense of entering a 'warm, safe place' is poignantly preserved in an inscription found there referring to "entering the golden house of the god."[73] Quite often, temples were constructed outside the city, in rural settings, away from the bustle of urban-life.[74] In Epidarus the sanctuary was about six miles outside of the town.[75] Olive trees grew around the altars.[76] The large sanctuary of Cos was renowned for its rich dark grove of Cyprus trees which surrounded the temple complex.[77]

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[71] Ael. Arist., I. 364.

[72] Strabo, *Geo.*, 8. 6. 15.

[73] Ferguson, John, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), 110.

[74] Plut., *Mor.*, 2862.

[75] Paus., II. 27. 5.

[76] Walton, Alice, *The Cult of Asklepios*, (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1894), 138.

[77] Places, Edouard des, *La Religion Grecque: Dieux, Cultes, Rites et Sentiment Religieux dans la Grèce Antique*, (Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard et Cie, 1969), 108.

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These sites were not only intended to provide peace and quiet for the soul. The naturalistic sanctuary they represented also created the ambience of physical health. This invariably necessitated that the Asklepion be located near the site of clear, healthful springs. Vetruvius wrote about Asklepia's need for healthful locales, pointing out, especially, the need for pure water.[78] In Corinth, also, the Asklepion was located near a spring. Temple patrons seemed to derive satisfaction and even strength from the waters. When Aristides and companions travelled, they sometimes felt compelled to seek out pure water, "unpolluted" by city life. This way, even while travelling, they were able to enjoy the bathing which the god frequently ordered in their dreams.[79] In Pergamum the waters comprised an essential component of the cult's curative powers. Aristides particularly praised the springs there. In *Regarding the Well at the Temple of Asklepios*, (εἰς τὸ φρέαρ τοῦ Ασκλεπιοῦ) and again in *A Panegyric on the Water in Pergamum* (Πανηγυρικὸς ἐπὶ τῳ ὑδατι ἐν Περγάμῳ), he lavishes praise on the water's miraculous properties.[80]

This serene secluded atmosphere figures heavily in the images conjured up in Aristides' dreams. It was the atmosphere which made virtually any ancient Asklepion so beneficial a place for both the σῶμα and the νοῦς. In sequence after sequence, the temple appeared as a kind of haven, where Aristides could find peace and leisure, where he could relax amidst the warm acceptance of friends and admirers. "I dreamed that I was

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[78] Vit., *De arch.*, 1. 27.

[79] Ael., Arist., XLVII. 52.

[80] *ibid.*, XXXIX. 4; cf. LII. 3.

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in the προπύλαια (gateway to the temple) of the Asklepion, and a certain one of my friends greeted me warmly (περιβάλλειν καὶ φιλοφρονεῖσθαι) . . . since he had not seen me in a long time."[81] Many dream sequences open with Aristides finding himself in an Asklepion somewhere, and feeling glad and secure to be where he is. In one, he reports his pleasure (εχαιρον) at being in the temple of Apollo on Mount Milyas. More, in the confusion familiar to anyone who has ever slept and dreamt, he thought the priest of Apollo there was also the priest of Isis in Smyrna. Again there is that image of warmth: "I dreamed we had long been fast friends," he said.[82] The word χαίρω is used again to describe his feeling upon dreaming that he had found himself in the temple of Asklepios at dawn, and he was "glad" because it opened early.[83]

Since so many of Aristides's dreams are initiated with the sort of setting used to induce and deepen hypnotic states, the question of suggestion inevitably arises. This is significant, since an earlier chapter has already noted how ecstatic and trance-like states were vehicles by which the religious follower could transform and enlighten his or her divine νοῦς. In this light, the dream component of Asklepios' cult takes on an added dimension of relevance. As was the case with ecstatic states, supplicants who had vivid dream experiences could undergo dramatic transformations of mind and body. The similarities with trance-like conditions found in ancient religions is striking. Indeed, there may well have been some connection between trance-states, and the lucid dreaming

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[81] *ibid.*, XLVII. 10.

[82] *ibid.*, XLVVII. 24-25.

[83] *ibid.*, XLVVII. 30.

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sought by devotees at the Asklepia. Laboratory research has shown hypnosis to produce acute lucid dreaming.[84] The question which arises can only be framed in the most basic terminology: was anything resembling trance induction used in the cult of Asklepios? If so, this would provide an important link between the incubation temples of Asklepios and the ecstatic experiences described elsewhere in other Hellenistic and Imperial texts like Apuleius, Ovid, Plutarch, and the New Testament. The dream culture of ancient healing cults provided a kind of world where the revelation sought in ecstatic states could be routinely procured. With practice, an experienced dreamer could encounter the divine νοῦς with nightly frequency. It was an ingenious religious method of tapping into the supernatural powers which were believed capable of forever and fundamentally altering the adherents, both physically and spiritually.

The role of hypnosis in ancient Asklepia is controversial. E.R. Dodds denigrated the "crude view" that patients were "hypnotized," or mistook "waking for sleeping and a priest in fancy dress for the divine healer." Rather, he compared Asklepios' cult with "medieval and modern religious faith-healing."[85] What seems odd, however, is that Dodds would make that distinction at all. No such delineation is necessary. A careful reading of Aristides' *The Sacred Tales* reveals both hypnosis and patients confusing "waking and sleeping," as well as forms of faith-healing. The religious zealots of the

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[84] Cohen, David B., and Price, Robert F., "Lucid Dream Induction: an Empirical Evaluation," in *Conscious Mind*, Sleeping Brain, 122.

[85] Dodds, E.R., "Supernormal Phenomena in Classical Antiquity," in *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 169; cf. Edelstein, Emma and Ludwig, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, II, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), 159.

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Hellenistic and Imperial eras were an inquisitive and eager lot, and they were willing to experiment with all sorts of religious experiences. A man who could devote years of his life to nocturnal dreaming of gods and godly advice was a man who almost certainly would have dabbled with whatever forms of trance induction and somnolent experience the ancient world had to offer. The question is, then, just what forms of hypnotic induction were available to the ancients, and which ones were used in the Asklepia.

A previous chapter has already expended much ink documenting the extent and variety of trance and ecstatic experiences available to the ancients. In the case of Asklepia, the question is not the existence of trance-like states which may have existed almost inadvertently. Rather, the charge is that the priests of ancient Asklepia practiced something resembling formal hypnotic induction. It is a highly controversial notion. The linkage between hypnosis and sleep cannot be overlooked. The word hypnosis itself is derived from the Greek word from sleep, ὕπνος—though the word hypnosis, adding σ to give it a more abstract connotation, would not occur for several centuries.[86]

Several passages in *The Sacred Tales*, largely overlooked, also suggest the practice of hypnotic induction. Already it has been noted that methods employed in producing lucid and meaningful dreams frequently resembled those used in modern relaxation therapy. Apuleius had referred to the use of music or verse. Aristides seemed to hint at

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[86] In the story, previously noted above, Apuleius is accused of bewitching young boys through the use of incantations. Though denying the charge, Apuleius does concede that he had heard children may be lulled into an oblivious state through the use of music or sweet smells. Haddock, Joseph, *Somnolism and Psycheism*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 58; Rose, H.J., *Religion in Greece and Rome*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 58; Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, 200; Apul., *Apol.*, 42; Acts 10: 10; 22: 17.

something similar. Feeling quite faith, he wrote a lengthy poem about Asklepios' mythological mother Coronis. Here, he seemed to be almost employing meditation and relaxation techniques, notably chanting. He reports that he stretched the strophe to great lengths and that he sang them in a state of "inward focus." This phrase—κατ ἐμαυτὸν ἐνθυμηθείς—is translated by Behr as "inward focus." But Behr overemphasized the intellectual aspects of Aristides' activities, and devalued the mystical, with this rendering.[87] ἐνθυμεομαι is generically translated "considering" or "pondering," while κατα plus the personal accusative pronoun ἐμαυτον means, literally, "according to myself." Given the unique context of this passage, the phrase clearly implied more a meditative mystic state than a logical or rational one. Moreover, the singing of the lengthy strophe combined with Aristides' meditation seems to have produced an altered state of consciousness, for Aristides reports a "forgetfulness of all troubles (πάντῶν ἥδη λήθη ἦν τῶν δυσχερῶν).[88]

Aristides' assertion that he was trained in "divine visions," as well as his apparently uncanny ability to procure lucid dreams for himself, involves some level of autosuggestion. This is true, despite the Edelsteins' assertion to the contrary. More controversial is the notion of hypnotic states being induced by temple priests. The Edelsteins' in particular, cautioned against such an interpretation, since it was an argument so easily exploited by cynics and anti-religious types.[89] This is certainly

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[87] Ael. Arist., XLVII. 73.

[88] *ibid.*, XLVVII. 39.

[89] Edelsteins, *Asclepius*, 158-65.

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understandable, even honorable. Opponents of theism have often labeled leaders of the world's great religions as frauds or magicians—or merely emphasized the few charlatans at the expense of the many sincere believers.[90] Still, facts are facts. There is at least one incident in *The Sacred Tales* which can be construed as a classic case of hypnotic induction.

Aristides and some comrades travel to Smyrna. There, he dreams. He sees a figure who seems at once to be both Asklepios and Apollo. The figure stands before his bed, extends his fingers and "calculates (συλλογισάμενος)" the time, saying, "You have ten years from me and three from Sarapis."[91] Already several points warrant mention. First, Aristides seems quite confused as to the identity of the visitor by his bed. Perhaps it is a priest. More important is the strange reference to calculating time with the fingertips. Ostensibly this referred to the years Aristides had spent in devotion to both Asklepios and

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[90] There was no shortage of frauds and charlatans in ancient religion. Lucian wrote of a prophet of Asklepios, Alexander, who was apparently quite a rouge. According to Lucian, Alexander realized at a very young age that hope and fear were central emotions governing all human activities. The man or woman who could learn to harness and control these emotions in others would subsequently be able to tap into immense wealth and power. Alexander apparently mastered this art. He would prophecy healing to dying men—presumably for a price—then recant his prophecy at the last minute, just as the supplicant was about to die. Too, Lucian describes him as having fiery, glowing eyes and a sweet voice. Both these qualities no doubt lent Alexander a charismatic and even hypnotic air. This seems significant in light of questions regarding the use of hypnosis among other priests of Asklepios. There were, by the way, plenty of medical frauds as well. (I must resist the temptation to make yet another modern analogy). Cynical Lucian wrote of physicians who tried their best to look the part, sporting such medical baubles as ivory pill-boxes and golden scalpels. These were, however, entirely for show. Lucian contrasts such frauds with real physicians, who may not have the prettiest equipment, but do know what they are doing. Lucian, *Alexander*, 3; *The Ignorant Book Collector*, 29.

[91] Ael. Arist., XLVII. 18.

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Sarapis, respectively. But such an act would also necessarily involve some maneuvering, even gesticulating, of the hands. Hence, one sees overt similarities between this specific incident and methods of hypnotic induction extensively employed during the nineteenth century. These involved having the patient fixate his gaze on the therapist's fingertips, which were subsequently wiggled or quivered as suggestions were made.[92] And of course, counting of some sort or another comprises a virtually universal theme in hypnotic practice. One cannot rule out the possibility that the shadowy, confusing figure at Aristides' bedside is a priest, employing ancient and now forgotten techniques of hypnotic induction.

The technique seems to have worked. The figure at Aristides' bedside apparently creates in him a state of complete somnambulism, a deep hypnotic state which includes the "ability to keep the eyes open and get up and walk about."[93] Bearing this in mind, a comparison between a scene in *The Sacred Tales* and one suggested script for inducing complete ambulatory hypnosis is instructive. Aristides writes:

> Standing before my bed in this form, when he had extended his finger and calculated the time, he said "You have ten years from me, and three from Sarapis. . . ." He said that "this was not a dream (οναρ) but a waking state (υπαρ)," and that I would also know it. At the same time he commanded that I go down to the river and bathe.[94]

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[92] Edmonston, William, *The Induction of Hypnosis*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1986), 175.

[93] Chertok, L., *Hypnosis*, trans. by D. Grahm, (New York: Permamon Press, 1966), 117; Mayo, Herbert, Trance Sleep, Somnambulism, and Trance-Waking," in *The Origins of Dracula*, ed. by Clive Leatherdaly, (London: William Kimber Books, 1987), 191.

[94] "ἐν τουτῳ τῷ σχίματι στὰς ἔμπροσθεν τῆς εὐνῆς προβαλὼν τοὺς δακτύλους καὶ χρονους τινὰς συλλυγιάμενος, ἔχεις, ἔφη, δέκα ἔτη παρ' ἐμοῦ καὶ τρία παρὰ τοῦ Σαράπιδος...ταῦτα δὲ εἶναι οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ, εἴσεσθαι δὲ καὶ αὐτον. καὶ

This quotation has numerous similarities with the following script, designed to be used by professional hypno-therapists:

> You are relaxed . . . you can open your eyes without waking up. At first, everything will seem confused, and then things will get clearer. You will go on sleeping, and, still asleep, you will be able to get up and walk about. . . . Now open your eyes very slowly. You see things all blurred. But they get more and more distinct, and everything now seems quite clear.[95]

There are several similarities here. First, both passages have the distinct commanding tone which mark traditional authoritarian hypnosis. More important is the ambulatory somnambulism implied in both texts. The figure at Aristides' bed, for example, asserts that "this is not a dream, but a waking state (υπαρ)." In its simplest definition, the word υπαρ means reality. But another meaning, clearly in use here, connotes a "waking state."

Both passages also refer to increasing clarity which the subject will experience. Chertok suggests that things would initially seem "blurry," but soon become clearer. *The Sacred Tales* seems to imply the same thing, the figure telling Aristides that he would come to realize the nature of his condition. Indeed, the verb the figure uses, ειδεσθαι, the future infinitive of οἶδα, to know, also implies a kind of "coming to" from within a profoundly deep trance-state, and an attainment of lucidity and clarity.

More telling are the strings of events which Aristides experiences following his dream. Upon awakening, he acts immediately to carry out the command given him in his

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[95] Chertok, *Hypnosis*, 117.

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dream, almost as if compelled by some post-hypnotic suggestion. He reports that it was the very peak of winter and the weather was freezing.[96] Still "being full of warmth from the vision of the god (ἔτι τῆς θέρμης τῆς ἐκ ὄψεως τοῦ θεοῦ μεστος ὤν)" he strips off his robe and jumps into the freezing river.[97] Significantly, Aristides claims an utter disregard of the frigid water, reporting instead that his skin had a rosy hue, and there was an incredible lightness throughout his body. Here, one recalls that insensitivity to pain comprises an important part of the deepest hypnotic conditions. Experiments have shown individuals hypnotized thus have shown truly remarkable indifference to pain, including ice-cold water and even branding irons on the skin.[98] Similarly, Aristides reports feelings of inner warmth (ἀλέα διηνεκὴς) while he was swimming in freezing water, and also during the remainder of the day. Αλεα generally refers to the warmth and radiant light of the sun, another common image in relaxation and hypnotic imagery. More important, there is a rise in body temperature during hypnosis, particularly waking hypnosis.[99]

Aristides also appeared to experience time distortion, another marked characteristic of hypnosis.[100] Throughout the experience, Aristides med oblivious to the hour, most clearly indicated by his exclamation, "Who could say what came next!," as well as the

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[96] Ael. Arist., XLVIII. 20.

[97] Note again the use of ὄψις. Cf. *ibid.*, XLVII. 37.

[98] Inglis, Brian, *Trance*, (Toronto: Grafton Books, 1989), 78-80.

[99] Edmonston, William, *Hypnosis and Relaxation: Modern Verification of an Old Equation*, (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1981), 154.

[100] Sparks, Laurence, *Self-Hypnosis*, (New York: Wilshire Books, 1962), 108.

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fact that he did nothing the rest of the day save worship Asklepios.[101] Too, there appears an element of surrealism, also quite typical of trance states. Aristides' assertion that he "saw things but did not see them," hints at a description of mesmerism often cited by patients of modern therapy: "Things seemed unreal."[102] Finally, Aristides cited a euphoric sense of well being, "ἄρρητος εὐθυμαι."[103] Behr again translates this phrase "inexplicable contentment," again deleting the religious overtones of the words. Actually, ἄρρητος is derived from ῥήτος, an adjective with a passive meaning connoting "spoken," or "said." And as with many adjectives ending in τος, the word also refers to possibility—hence means speakable. The apositive α negates the word, just as it does in the word *atheist* or *amoral*. Hence, the word literally means unspeakable, or holy, just as the word ἄβατον means literally an area "inaccessible" or "consecrated." Indeed, this same word appears in 2 Corinthians in the passage where Paul describes being caught up into the "third heaven," whereupon he heard unspeakable words (ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα.)[104] Both Paul and Aristides described an ecstatic state which bears many similarities with hypnotic trance, as defined by modern psychology. In this state, they were able to procure metamorphosis for themselves.

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[101] Ael. Arist., XLVIII. 22.

[102] Ael. Arist., XLVVIII. 23; cf. Edmonston, *Induction of Hypnosis*, 367.

[103] Ael. Arist., XLVIII. 23.

[104] 2 Cor. 12: 4.

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CONCLUSION

In antiquity, the incubation temples provided one of the most practical avenues by which supplicants could seek out and procure metamorphosis. This involved the use of altered states of consciousness in which it was believed that god (Asklepios) could offer advice concerning health, career, and general personal well-being. The Asklepia provided some of the most rewarding and beneficial acts of metamorphosis available to the ancient world's religious supplicants. But their benefits, however tangible, were decidedly of this realm: transformation of physical and mental health, career and even personality. They were powerful gifts which the god could offer his devotees. They were arguably almost entirely secular gifts. It can be argued that to offer greater rewards to mortals, ancient religion had to look beyond the confines of the human life and the mortal sphere. To do this, ancient religion ultimately offered to mortals the greatest act of metamorphosis of all: the ability to become god, and live forever.

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CHAPTER 4

REGENERATIVE METAMORPHOSIS THROUGH BLOOD

It has been said that "Blood is the life." Today, more than ever, science has demonstrated this old European adage to be true. Yet centuries before the discoveries of medicine, ancient religion and popular culture had evolved sophisticated belief systems which very much understood blood to be the life-giving liquid we know it to be today.[1] Many Hellenistic/Imperial cultures reveal stark beliefs in the regenerative powers of blood. This is significant in terms of the metamorphosis. More abstract forms of metamorphosis involved the transformation of both σῶμα and νοῦς into idealized forms. Ultimately, this involved the injection of some redemptive element into ancient religious life. The consciousness could be not only enlightened, but fundamentally saved. The σῶμα could be not only healed, but raised from the dead into an idealized (τελεος) state. In this regard, the role which blood came to play in many metamorphosis belief systems was crucial.

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[1] Harris' work asserts that the ancient Greeks never understood the blood system to be circulatory in nature, despite what he describes as "superior methods of inquiry." Harris, C.R.S., *The Heart and Vascular System in Ancient Greek Medicine*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 1-2.

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Ancient religious beliefs in blood have two important themes directly relating to the metamorphosis. First, blood was often seen as having regenerative powers. It could rejuvenate those who employed its powers, either physically or spiritually. To this end, its powers were harnessed, usually in some ritualistic way, sometimes involving the literal drinking of blood. A second and related theme is that the blood and/or life of one living creature could be sacrificially offered as a propitiation for the blood and/or life of another living creature. This is transference. The concept of transference was a prevalent one in antiquity's religious life. Indeed, its most obvious legacy is still with us today in the powerful guise of the Christian Lamb, whose blood was offered on behalf of humankind. But this same powerful idea is manifested in myriads of other cultures and belief systems of the ancient world. Sometimes it is found in the powerful faiths of later paganism, which rivaled Christianity in power and popularity. Other times it is found in the quite petty but colorful world of popular culture, and the fascinating local superstitions and beliefs in magic which comprised the folk religion of the common people.

LIFE AND SACRIFICE

In some forms of metamorphosis belief, blood was synonymous with life—life itself being a precious commodity in the often harsh ancient world. And as is so often the case, religion occasionally demanded the sacrifice of that which is most precious. Human sacrifice was still practiced and rumored to be practiced in the periods of later antiquity. This is significant, since the idea of either physical or spiritual renewal by the consuming

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of blood—in one form or another—is very similar to human sacrifice. In both cases, the life-force of one being is believed transferred to another being, sometimes divine, sometimes human. It is this core belief which is evidenced in a variety of practices, ranging from the elemental formulae of sorcery to the beautiful imagery of the Christian Lord's Supper. The belief, both literal and symbolic, that blood offers life and renewal—or that the life of one can be offered for the life of another—is one of antiquity's most prevalent religious beliefs, and one which clearly survived into the medieval and modern periods.

Human sacrifice in antiquity was not confined to hoary folktales about Abraham and Isaac, or other such rites.[2] Elements of the old customs survived in the cultures of many peoples down into the heyday of the Greco-Roman period. In parts of Africa, it was believed by some Greeks that children were sacrificed to Saturn/Cronus.[3] Tertullian refers to these same practices, noting that they continued unabated right up until the consulship of a certain Tiberius. The date is hazy, but similar references in Plato and Augustine indicate this was probably a hellenized version of the old Carthaginian human sacrifices.[4] The Pontic Tauri and the Egyptian Busiris were reputed to immolate strangers.[5] The Gauls were thought to sacrifice human beings to Mercury, while the Romans themselves were believed by later Christians to have buried Greeks alive in an attempt to soothe

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[2] Genesis XXII:1-13.

[3] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, XXX.3.

[4] Plato, *Minos*, 315; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, vii.19.

[5] *ibid.*, XXX.4.

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angry gods.[6] Also, Tertullian recalls that Herodotus had written that some Scythian tribes ate every dead man upon his death.[7] Here, Tertullian is probably erroneously recalling details of Herodotus' reports on the Massagetai, in which he notes that when a man was too old to support himself, his kin gathered around and sacrificed him to the gods, along with some of his cattle. A feast would be held, featuring the deceased man's flesh as the main course. Herodotus notes that people who died prematurely of disease were buried.[8] No less tolerant an emperor than Claudius was still forced to oppose the Gallic Druids' custom of human sacrifice, banning it.[9] Even the Romans were reported to have buried captured Greeks alive in an attempt to appease angry gods.[10] If Latinophiles have a hard time swallowing that story, it must be remembered that Roma's warlike nature is hard to overemphasize.

As for Greece, if Hellenic human sacrifice seems only a remote possibility by the heyday of Greek civilization, there are elements of it which are early, but deep-rooted. The most famous of these probably comes from Homer. As with the Romans, the context

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[6] *ibid.*,XXX.4; cf. Tertullian, *Apolgeticus*, which similarly reports that the Gauls sacrificed people to Mercury, though he specifies that these people were invariably the elderly. Tert., *Apolog.*, IX.4-5; for the relationship which exists between the markedly similar texts of Minucius Felix's *Octavius* and Tertullian's *Apologeticus*, see Hinnisdaels, Georges *L'Octavius de Minucius Felix et L'Apologétique de Tertullien* (Brussels: Publications de l'Academie, 1922).

[7] Tert., *Apolog.*, IX.4-5.

[8] Herodotus, I.216.

[9] Pliny, *NH*,29.53-54.cf. Huzar, Eleanor G., "Claudius, the Erudite Emperor," in *Aufsteig und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 32.1.II.,612-650,649.

[10] Min. Fel., *Oct.*, XXX. 4.

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for this brutality is war. Here, after Patroclus has been killed, Achilles arms himself once again and races to the Scamander River, where the Trojans have fled in a futile attempt to escape his wrath. Homer reports that Achilles took twelve Trojan warriors captive, with the intention of sacrificing them at the fresh tomb of Patroclus.[11]

The famous story of Lycaon must also be noted. Lycaon was ruler of Arcadia, home of some of western culture's most ancient werewolf stories. The story is that Lycaon sacrificed a child, who was immolated next to some animal parts. This act angered Zeus, who turned him into a wolf. Thus were born the obscure rites of Zeus Lycaon. Participants in the rituals ate the victims. Whoever ate of the human flesh was turned into a wolf for nine years. He would regain human form at the end of this time—if he had abstained from eating human meat.[12] This gruesome story wields great significance, for it combines elements of Lycanthropy, cannibalism and bloody sacrificial rites which were to become important themes in western folklore.

Not only men satiated themselves on the blood of humans. The gods themselves were known to do the same. Again, Jupiter seems to have been the chief culprit. Among the most compelling examples in this regard are the ancient festivals of *Zeus Latiaris*, the *Feriae Latinae*. Here, a criminal was sacrificed to the "Latin Zeus." The origin of these

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[11] Homer, *Il.*, XXI. 26-33; cf. Wathelet, P, "Homère, Lykaon et le Rituel du Mont Lycée," in *Les Rites d'Initiation: Actes du Colloque de Liège et de Louvain-La-Neuve*, ed. by Julien Ries, (Louvain-La-Neuve: 1986) 285-297, 286.

[12] This important topic is given much fuller treatment in the chapter on shape-shifting which appears in this work. cf. Paus, VII. II. 3-7; Plato, *Rep.*, 565; Burkert, Walter, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 84-93; cf. Cook, A.B., *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion*, (1914).

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games were interwoven with mythology, but there can be little doubt as to their antiquity. Strabo does not mention their bloody aspects, but he does mention that after the death of Aeneas and Anchises, Ascanius founded Alba on Mount Albanus, and that it was then that the Latini offered their first sacrifice to Jupiter.[13] Cicero, in quoting the poem by the muse Urania, *Consulate*, reports that these festivals were traditionally celebrated by a consul soon after election, at the discretion of the new leader.[14] These festivals were apparently quite bloody, a fact which prompted the denunciator Minucius Felix to prompt that "Zeus, when Latin, is steeped in blood."[15] Later, he does concede that at least the sacrificial victim was a criminal condemned to death—an "evil and noxious man."[16] And finally, in another reference to the sometimes bloody rites of Ma Bellona, Minucius writes that it was Jupiter Latiaris who instructed Bellona to tinge her sacrifices with human blood.[17]

During the Hellenistic period, the idea that a life could substitute for a life—transference—gained popularity, especially in the practices of the period's various healing cults. This hints at the final victory over death which the metamorphosis ultimately promised. While such beliefs were not always specifically related to blood, their are enough similarities to prevalent religion and folklore beliefs to warrant their

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[13] Strabo, *Geo.*, 5.3.2.

[14] Cic., *De Div.*, I.xi.18.

[15] "*et cum Latiaris, crurore perfunditur.*" Min. Fel., *Oct.*, XXIII. 6-7.

[16] "*et quod Saturni filio dignus est, mali et noxii hominis sanguine saginatur.*" Min. Fel. *Oct.*, XXX. 4; cf. Tert., *Apol.*, IX. 5.

[17] Min., Fel., XXX. 5; cf. above, ftn. 15.

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mention here. One such example comes from the record of a cure by the Graeco-Egyptian god Sarapis, preserved on a papyrus dating from A.D. 3. Here, an oracle has told a certain pauper named Thrason to fast all night till 4 A.M., whereupon he was to drink a full-sized pitcher of unmixed wine. Subsequently, he was to fall back to sleep. Thrason did as instructed. Upon awakening, his "headache" was miraculously transferred to a nearby Libyan, who collapsed on the spot.[18]

Fortunately for the innocent Libyan bystander, Thrason merely had a headache. But cures involving the transfer of infirmity from a diseased individual to a healthy host did not always feature such mild ailments. Sometimes such healing involved deadly and horrific beliefs which echo malevolent sorcery. One example comes to us from the *Sacred Tales* of Aelius Aristides, a second century A.D. sophist who spent several years nursing ill health—and a tendency to hypochondria—at the famous Asklepion in Pergamum. While travelling through the Mysian Plain to Smyrna, he learns that Philumene, his foster sister's daughter, is dangerously ill. Later, he discovers that the girl has died, asserting that her death has not taken place "without some divine agency (ἄνευ δαιμοῦ τινὸς)."[19] The precise nature of this "divine agency" becomes all too clear in one of Aristides' subsequent dreams, when an oracle reports that the girl's life had been traded for that of Aristides.[20] This, then, is a truly compelling image: Aristides as Dracula, sucking life and health from the vitality of the young. More dismaying is the fact that Aristides, one

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[18] *Greek Literary Papyri*, ed. by D.L. Page, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 95-96.

[19] Ael. Arist., *Sacr., Dis.*, LI. 18-19.

[20] *ibid.*, LI. 23-24.

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of the second century's most religious men, and perhaps our best source for the cult of Asklepios, had no remorse about harboring such thoughts and beliefs. He apparently believed that his supreme devotion to the gods entitled him to superior treatment, and that the girl's life had been a gift to him. Indeed, after the girl's brother also died during a smallpox epidemic, Aristides again viewed the death as a kind of supplication for his own ailments. Finally, he took this transference to its logical extreme, reporting that his relief from a long-running fever coincided with the boy's death.[21]

BLOOD AND LIFE

Blood was often synonymous with life, the final and greatest gift which Greco-Roman metamorphosis offered mortals. This was readily evidenced by scores of cultural attitudes and beliefs regarding life and blood which appear in both Roman and Greek culture proper. These took the forms of both metaphorical religious symbols, and literal beliefs which were manifested in practice. Blood could be linked with a person's essential character. For example, Aulus Gellius related that when a soldier of Rome had somehow dishonored himself, his vein was opened and blood was let to spill. Gellius implies that this custom was based on an old belief that linked blood and spirituality. If a man's spirit was somehow unclean or unworthy, the problem could be remedied to an extent by letting out some of his unclean or unworthy blood.[22] The notion is remarkably similar to beliefs

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[21] *ibid.*, L. 20.

[22] Aulus, Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, X.8.

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about impure blood which were translated into European medical practice, and which continued until the nineteenth century. Lucian reported a similar belief among the Greeks. He wrote that during the reign of King Lysimachus, the Thracian folk of Abdera were struck with an epidemic. On the seventh day of the plague however, the fever was broken by a heavy flow of blood from the invalid's nose, as well as profuse sweating.[23] Here again, we see some evidence of a belief that links bleeding—letting out the impure blood—with healing. Similarly, while Aristides was visualizing himself being healed in his dreams, he imagined that Asklepios visited him and drew sixty pints (!) of blood from his forehead.[24]

Other examples show equally the ancients' belief in blood's special properties—its abilities to transform and give life. Lucian wrote of the Toxaris, or blood friendship, a practice apparently not unlike the blood brotherhood enjoyed by southwestern American Indian tribes like the Apache.[25] Another case, the scene described in Sallust, in which the Catilinarian conspirators sealed their traitorous vows by drinking blood, must be mentioned.[26] Other beliefs in blood were more overtly centered on potency, virility and fertility. Hence, Ovid's *Fasti* reports that every October 15th a chariot race was held on the Campus Martius, and that the right horse of the winning team was slaughtered. Subsequently, the blood was mixed with a strange brew, including sulphur, straw, and the

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[23] Lucian, *How to Write History*, 1.

[24] Ael. Aris., *Sac., Dis.*, XLVIII. 47-48.

[25] Lucian, *Toxaris*, 37.

[26] Sallust, *Cat.*, 22.

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ashes of cremated unborn cow fetuses. Then, on April 21st, day of the *Palilia*, the Vestals distributed the mixture as a fertility enhancer. This custom, too, no doubt reflects some ancient belief in the life-giving powers of blood.[27] Also from Gellius we read the famous story regarding the Tarquatus *gens*. Here, the Roman soldier Titus Manlius had just killed a big, strapping Gaul soldier in combat. In the heat of his great victory, he clutched the Gaul's necklace, still gruesome with combat gore, and placed its still bloody jewels around his own neck.[28] Suetonius tells us that the necklace was preserved by the Torquatus *gens* down to the reign of Caligula.[29] Burriss argues that this incident demonstrates the ancient Roman belief that the blood of a worthy conquered foe would pass on the valor of its owner to the victor.[30] This belief, of course, lies at the very heart of virtually any society which has incorporated cannibalism into its military culture. Too, the belief that personal possessions conferred their former owner's powers upon the possessor may be demonstrated here. This notion complements a still prevalent tendency to view blood as a literal and figurative manifestation of vengeance.[31] Burriss may be

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[27] Ovid, *Fasti*, IV. 721-862;cf. Burriss, Eli Edward, *Taboo, Magic, Spirits*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood press Publishers, 1972),36-37.

[28] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*.IX.13.6-19.

[29] Suetonius, *Caligula*, XXXV.1.

[30] Burriss, *Taboo, Magic, Spirits*, 28-29.

[31] Consider the story of Charite, as related by Apuleius in his *Metamorphoses*. Here, she chose Tlepolemus over Thrasyllus, after a long courtship battle. Feigning friendship with Tlepolemus, Thrasyllus slew Charite's husband while the two were hunting, subsequently turning his amorous attentions to the young widow. But the ghost of Tlepolemus appears to his wife in a dream, and tells her of Thrasyllus' treachery. Charite then vows vengeance. After poking out Thrasyllus' eyes, she tells him that her husband's death has been avenged "by your blood (*tuo cruore*)." Apul.,

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making a bit much of this story; however, since Titus' actions can merely be construed as manifesting the simple feelings that any warrior would have had upon defeating a powerful enemy, and the necklace may have been merely a momento of the struggle. The superstitious angle need not be overplayed. Still, the point is worth making.

Some of the most gruesomely explicit examples of beliefs in blood's transforming powers come from the cult practice of the Taurobolium, usually linked with the Magna Mater, which came to Rome from Asia Minor.[32] Franz Cumont argued that the original term had been Tauropolion, which through normally sloppy popular articulation became Taurobolium.[33] By far the most famous ancient testimony regarding these bizarre rites come from Prudentius, who witnessed a Taurobolium during the fourth century A.D. He reports that a trench was dug, and that the high priest (*summus sacerdos*) stood inside it. A platform dotted with large perforations was placed over his head. Subsequently, a large bull was led in, bedecked with garlands. After the bull was placed on the perforated platform above the priest, its breast was pierced with a spear, and the hot blood gushed down on the devotee. Prudentius reports that this gruesome shower was greeted with enthusiasm by the priest, who even opened his mouth to drink some of the warm

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Met., VIII. 12.

[32] Livy, XXV, I; cf. Duthoy, Robert, *The Taurobolium: Its Evolution and Terminology*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969).

[33] Cumont, Franz, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, trans. by Thomas J. McCormack (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1910), 180-81.

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blood.[34] It was believed by the cult's adherents that bathing in and drinking the blood of the slain bull made the practitioners strong.[35]

Sometimes beliefs in blood were accompanied by self-mutilation. The votaries of some sects, especially Cybele, and even the Syrian Atargatis, circumcised themselves, and threw their amputated sexual organs into the nearby rivers.[36] Equally telling, in the story of Lucius the ass, both as related by Apuleius, and pseudo-Lucian, we read of other self-mutilation practices. Here, Lucius the ass has been sold in an auction, finally purchased by Philebus, an old devotee of Atargatis whose duty it was to travel, begging alms on behalf of the goddess. He took ass-Lucius home, where there was a retinue of female adherents who plied the same trade as Philebus. They would dress up the "goddess" and put her on Lucius' back.[37] The goddess was apparently linked in some way with blood,

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[34] Prudentius, *Peristeph.*, 1006-1050; cf. Ferguson, John, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 104-105.

[35] Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, 180-81; Loisy argues that this scene described by Prudentius is not just a standard Taurobolium, but ". . . c'est le grand taurobole célébré le 24 mars par l'archigalle (*Archigallus*=high priest of **Cybele**), ceremonie publique . . . dont l'apparat ne convient nullement aux taurobloes communs." Loisy notes that the passage subsequent in Prudentius describes what he euphemistically labels "la mutilation des galles," because the Taurobolium and the castration of the priests were on subsequent days. Hence, the famous ceremony was probably not an everyday occurrence. Loisy, Alfred, *Les Mystères Païens et Le Mystère Chrétien*, (Paris: 1914),118-19.

[36] Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 47-49.

[37] Here one wonders whether some statue of the goddess is being used, or whether one of the girls herself dressed up as the deity.

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for at some towns her worshippers would cut themselves, spilling their blood in sacrifice to Atargatis.[38]

The emperor Caligula also was reputed to have had bizarre religious tastes, some of which involved the use of blood rites. Many of these ostensibly derive from Caligula's passion for oriental mysticism and the new religions which were flooding into the Empire during the first century A.D.[39] Seneca notes that different sorts of sacrifices were daily brought to Caligula.[40] In his *Lexicon*, Suidas comments on Caligula's fascination with mysterious ceremonies.[41] Koberlein asserts that this ritual combined with a fascination for the Phoenix bird, whose appearance was reported in Egypt upon the death of Tiberius and the ascension of Caligula to the role of emperor.[42] Suetonius reports that the sacrifice of various birds was a characteristic feature of the new regime. More, he asserts

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[38] Lucian, *Met.*, 1.37; Apul., *Met.*, VII. 12-13.

[39] The most important work arguing for Caligula's fascination with oriental, especially Egptian, religion is: Koberlein, E., *Caligula und die ägyptishcne Kulte*, (Beitrage zur Klassichen Philologie, Heft 3, Meisenheim an Glan, 1962), 12-13. Here he argues, among other things, that Caligula's love of Drusilla, his sister, was inspired by his penchant for Ptolemaic incest. cf. Gavin Townend's review of Koberlein in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 54, (1964), 203; cf. also, Cumont, Franz, "La Salle Isiaque de Caligula au Palatin" in *Revue de l'Historie des Religions*, 114 (1936), 127-129; finally, cf. Suet., *Cal.*, 15. 24; Cass. Dio, 59. 9. 2.

[40] Sen., *Tran.*, 14. 9.

[41] Suid., *Lex.*, 1.

[42] Cass. Dio., 58. 27; Tac., *Ann.*, VI. 28; cf. Broek, R. van den, *The Myth of the Phoenix according to Classical and Early Christian Traditions*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972); Habaux, Leroy, *Le Mythe des Phenix*, (Paris, 1939); Schuster, Marialuise, *Der Vogel Phoenix in der antiken Literatur und der Dichtung des Laktanz*, (Vienna: Werl, 1969).

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that in some of these unorthodox rituals, Caligula would sprinkle himself with blood.[43] Indeed, one of Suetonius' characteristic death omens, in the case of Caligula, is blood from a flamingo splattering the Emperor.[44] This sprinkling of oneself with blood not only resembles more well-known rites such as the Taurobolium. It also recalls witchcraft scenes from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in which the hags sprinkle themselves with blood.[45]

Even more explicit were specific Graeco-Roman beliefs in cannibalism or drinking blood which rivaled anything which the "civilized" world scorned in the other barbarian peoples. Some, though not all, of these examples come from hostile sources and can thus be at least somewhat suspect. Nonetheless, at least some people believed the stories, so they are highly significant in any analysis of popular culture. Others are no doubt true. Always the notion that blood can give or revive life is readily apparent. Tertullian scornfully discusses the blood rites practiced by the Ma Bellona (war goddess and sister of Mars) cult. Here, it was reported the thigh of an initiate was cut, the resulting blood was gathered in a shield, and then was drunk by the devotee.[46] Minucius Felix reports similar pagan practices, probably referring to the same cult. Here, in a long discourse intended to show the corruption of paganism, he derides men who drink their own blood, and seek religious fulfillment through their own wounds. "What about him who makes

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[43] Suet., *Cal.*, 57.

[44] *ibid.*, 57.

[45] Apul., *Met.*, 11.1; 11.7; 11.23.

[46] Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, IX.10.

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libations with his own blood, or makes entreaties to the gods with his wounds," he writes.[47]

Of course, supernatural beliefs regarding the eating of certain foods were not so unique in the ancient, or even modern world. Philostratus tells us that eating snake hearts or livers could give the gift of prophecy, for example.[48] In the cult of Asklepios, health could be eaten.[49] What seems odd, however, is that the Romans, for all their sophisticated pretensions, would apparently have extended such beliefs to the eating of human flesh or the drinking of human blood.[50] One of the oddest of such examples surrounds the gladiatorial games of the imperial period. Celsus notes that certain individuals were known to have drunk the blood from a gladiator's slit throat as a cure for epilepsy (*comitialis morbus*).[51] It was also believed that the liver of a slain gladiator,

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[47] "*Quid? qui sanguine suo libat et vulneribus suis supplicat. . . .*" Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, XXII.9.

[48] Philostratus, *VA.*, 1.xx.

[49] Nock, Arthur Darby, "Gentile Christianity in its Hellenistic Background, in *Esaays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. by Z. Stewart, 2 vols., II., 72-76; cf. Plato, *Phad.*, 247.

[50] Even more telling is the drinking of blood which the souls in the underworld apparently had to endure in order to regain enough life to speak with the living. Indeed, Ovid's description of the city of the dead notes that "there were bloodless shades, without body and bones." ". . . *Errant exanguines sine corpore at ossibus umbrae.*" The shades whom Homer depicts as addressing Odysseus in the *Odyssey* also drink blood in order to address the Ithacan king. Both Tieresias, whom Odysseus had venture into the underworld to meet, and the hero's own mother were among those who drank blood in order to speak to the Trojan War veteran. Ovid, *Met.*, IV. 443; Homer, *Od.*, XI. 90-234.

[51] **Comitialis** means referring to the **Comitia**. Hence, **Comitialis Morbus** referred to the disease whose symptoms could impede the functions of the **Comitia**. Celsus, *De Medicina* III.23.7; cf. Pliny, *NH.*,XXVIII.4.10; Tertullian, *Apol.*, IX.10; cf. Hippocrates

if eaten nine times, was likewise a cure for epilepsy.[52] Other beliefs were attached to eating the human flesh of the games' victims. Tertullian denounces those who dine on the flesh of animals who had endured the gladiatorial contests—presumably having satiated themselves on human flesh on more than one occasion. Here, he notes that the "stomachs of the bears themselves are desired, stuffed full of human guts."[53] The exact beliefs which went into such alleged eating habits are largely lost. Nonetheless, one can well assume that they involved the classic motivations of all cannibalism or blood-drinking: that one might absorb the life-force and potency of the person of whom he partakes. For all their gruesome overtones, these basic primal ideas were to survive antiquity and enter into the medieval and modern eras.

BLOOD/LIFE IN MAGIC AND SORCERY

Beliefs regarding blood's regenerative powers are also found abundantly in the witchcraft and sorcery beliefs of the ancient occult. Here, one sees the death and nocturnal imagery associated with images of the nightwitch, as well as the powerful and complex feminine strand which ran through much of ancient paganism. The preserved

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famous description and analysis of epilepsy, in Hippocrates, *Peri Ieras Nousous*, II.129.

[52] Scribonius Largusi, *Compositiones: Compositions de remèdes, ecrites et rassembleés au Ier Siecle*, (Leipzig: Teubner, 1887), 17; cf. Majno, Guido, *The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975), 403.

[53] "*Ipsorum ursorum alvei appetuntur cruditantes adhuc de visceribus humanis . .* ." Tert., *Apol.*, IX.11.

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literary accounts of witches' spells are replete with the use of blood. One of the best examples comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in the story which depicts Medea restoring youth to the aging father of Jason, a truly great act of metamorphosis.[54] This was a favor Jason sought from Medea after securing the Golden Fleece. Medea says that she can indeed help, but only with the help of the "three-formed goddess (*diva triformis adiuvet*)."[55]

The spell cast by Medea is full of occult imagery, much of which will be startlingly familiar to modern readers. She went out to cast her spell during a time of the full moon.[56] Then, calling on three formed Hecate (*Triceps Hecate*) she asked that she be given the power to perform what would be her greatest feat of sorcery—the restoration of youth![57] A chariot came out of the sky, led by a team of dragons. This took her to various fields, where she gathered herbs. Returning, she dug two trenches in the earth. Slitting the throat of a black ram, she drenched the open ditches with blood, adding wine and milk.[58]

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[54] Ovid, *Met.*, VII.160-350.

[55] *ibid.*, 181.

[56] *ibid.*, 181-183.

[57] *ibid.*, 194-214.

[58] The digging of trenches into which wine, milk and blood are poured is noted as an element of other folklore stories as well. More specifically, these pits thus prepared were often depicted as gateways into Hell or Hades. When Odysseus seeks to visit the underworld, he is instructed by Circe to seek out a certain branch of the River Styx, where he digs a pit into which he pours the libations of milk, honey, wine and water. Blood then is used to culminate the preparations of these magic rites, when the Homeric hero sacrifices black ram and ewe. What the hero has done as Circe instructed, the world of the dead just sort of materializes there on the ground. It does

To her pot of ingredients, she added more materials, many of which will again be familiar to those who have even passing acquaintance with more modern European notions of witchcraft and occultism. She added hoar frost, collected while the moon was full. More, the wing and flesh of the screech owl was included. The screech owl, of course, is the Strix, which was also the Latin word for witch.[59] The Strix was heavily linked with Lamiae, Empusa, Mormo, and a range of other characters possessing nightwitch characteristics. Even more startling, she used the guts (*prosecta*) of a werewolf (*ambiguus lupus*), which, Ovid reports, were wont to change their fierce faces into human ones.[60]

Having concocted this brew, Medea slit Aeson's throat with her knife, and drained his blood. She then filled his veins with her potion, whereupon Aeson became young again. Here, the connection between blood and youth must be noted. It appears again in the next episode of this meandering tale, when Pelias' daughters seek out Medea's powers to make their aging father young again, as she had just done with Aeson. To impress the daughters with her powers, she made an old ram young again.[61] This was accomplished

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not burst open. This is very similar to the Lucian account of Menippus' ritual which also opens up the way to the underworld. Homer, *Od.*, X. 510-530, XI. 34-35; Lucian, *Men.*, 9-10.

[59] Oliphant, S.G., "The Story of the Strix," in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 44 (1913), 133-49.

[60] ". . . *inque virum soliti vultus mutare ferinos ambigui prosecta lupi.*" *ibid.*, 265-270.

[61] *ibid.*, VII. 298.

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by draining away the ram's tired old blood, and replacing it with younger stuff. After this was done, the old ram turned into an infant.[62]

The spell loosely recalls the scene in Apuleius in which the hags collect Socrates' blood in a bladder.[63] Here, there are elements of classic vampire storytelling, though classical notions of vampirism would not appear for several centuries. Nonetheless, the hags in Apuleius do possess elements of this great folklore theme. One recalls the nightwitch Meroe, and her companion Panthia. The story of Meroe is related by Aristomenes, an acquaintance of *The Golden Ass*' famous protagonist Lucius. While travelling in Thessaly, Aristomenes met an old friend, Socrates, in the baths.[64] Significantly, he already appeared to have been subject to some kind of attack which sucked away some of his life force. He seemed so "meager and sallow" that Aristomenes barely recognized him.[65] Socrates related that he had visited a certain Meroe.

Immediately upon meeting Socrates, readers can sense that something was amiss. Clearly the unfortunate young man had already had a devastating encounter with evil. Such scenes, taking place in the early stages of a novel, are common in modern literature of the horror genre. An attack's symptoms appear in subtle ways, and astute readers get

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[62] *ibid.*, VII. 320; Incidentally, Medea proved treacherous on this particular occasion. She discretely put bogus herbs into the pot, and bid the girls to cut their father's throat. When they did, Pelias merely bled to death (334-335). The same story is also told by Pausanias, albeit in much briefer fashion. After their father's death, Pelias' daughters, he asserts, went to Arcadia. Paus., VII. XI. 1-3.

[63] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, ;lkj.

[64] Thessaly was to ancient folklore what Transylvania was to modern folklore. It is invariably described as the home of witchcraft and sorcery. *ibid.*, 2. 1.

[65] *ibid.*, 1. 6.

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a sense that something is definitely wrong, even before the negative forces in the book are specified. Obviously, Meroe, who had still not yet appeared in the story at this point, had drained energy from Socrates.

What happened next to Socrates was little less than a kind of vampire attack. Angered that he spoke ill of her, Meroe came for revenge that same night, while he was sharing a room with Aristomenes, With her was her sister Panthia. For some mysterious reason, Socrates did not awaken, though the hags' noisy entry fully roused, and terrified, Aristomenes, Taking a sword, the Lamiae cut Socrates' throat, collecting his blood in a bladder. Subsequently, they cut out his heart and stopped up the wound in his neck with a sponge. Apuleius noted that the blood may have been stored in the bladder for use in some sacrificial rite.[66]

Apuleius makes no specific reference to the purpose for which Meroe and Pamphile gathered the youth's blood, other than speculation about the possibility of religious or magic rituals. But the link between aged witches and the blood of a youth seems clearly to have had a rejuvenative nature. At least, other stories passed down involving witches and the use of blood often involved the regeneration of youth, potency and even life itself. In this regard, blood was often seen as a powerful fluid, possessing many magical properties. In some cases it could open the gateway to hell itself. Lucian, for example, related that in an attempt to journey to the underworld, Menippus was led by Mithrobarzanes to a remote region, where a pit was dug. Then calling on Hecate and Persephoneia, he slaughtered some sheep and sprinkled their blood around the trench. The

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[66] *ibid.*, 1. 9.

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ceremony achieved the desired results, and the ground was ripped asunder, opening the way to the land of dead souls.[67]

Given that blood was sometimes given power over hell itself, its vital role in one of ancient witchcraft's greatest feats should not surprise anyone.[68] This feat involved the reanimation of a corpse by the Thessalian witch Erichto. The story is recorded in Lucan's *De Bello Civile*, and features Pompey's disappointing son, Sextus.[69] Here, on the eve of Pharsalus, the great opposing armies of Caesar and Pompey have met in Thessaly.[70] Sextus was curious about the future. Not being a good Roman, he spurned the traditional Latin methods of augury such as reading entrails, or the use of omens.[71] Instead, he preferred to use sorcery—a particularly compelling thought for Sextus, since he was

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[67] Lucian, *Men.*, 9-10.

[68] Indeed, Lucan reports that Erictho was something of a blood-drinker/cannibal herself. After noting that she inhabited the empty tomes after the ghosts had been driven away, she was said to have gaurded corpses, and stolen parts of the dead flesh from recently deceased. This report corroborates that of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Here, Lucius remarks that *noe eve* the graves of the cemeteries are safe from these nightwitch creatures, and that the witches would venture out among the graves to gather bones and slices of flesh from the recently deceased. Again, this seems to hint at not-so-subtle cannibalistic qualities which many of the nocturnal sorceresses were believed to possess. Too, Lucius notes that Thessalisn withces would bite off the flesh of dead men's faces and use it in thier magic spells. Such cannibalistic qualities are reminiscent of Hecate. Theocritus asserted that Hecate was said to wander among the tombs, and even to drink blood. Lucan, *Bello Civile*, VI. 510-570; Apul., *Met.*, 2. 20-21; Theoc., 2. 10-17.

[69] Gordon, Richard, "Lucan's Erictho" in *Homo Viator: Classical Essays from John Bramble*, (Great Britain: Bristol Classical Press, 1987),231-241; cf. Rose, H.J., "The Witch Scene in Lucan" in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 44, (1913), l-lii.

[70] Lucan, *De Bello Civile*, VI. 414-15.

[71] *ibid*, VI. 425-430.

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presently in Thessaly, where he knew the greatest witches of the world resided. Subsequently he sought out the greatest witch, Erictho. Erictho resuscitated a dead man who then predicted Pompey's disaster at Pharsalus. Among other things, this was accomplished by fresh blood (*ferventi sanguine*) being poured into fresh wounds (*vulneres nova*) which had been created by Erictho on the spot. After this act, and many magical incantations, the corpse came alive and told Sextus of his father's impending defeat.

One other ancient link between blood, magic and metamorphosis must also be mentioned here. It further involves elements of the nightwitch theme, blood and the moon. Specifically, there are infrequent but consistent references to these sorceresses lowering the moon from the sky. Again, Lucan's description of the Thessalian witches in *De Bello Civile* is useful. Here he reports that these *femmes fatales* could bring the stars down from the sky, and that "the moon paled and glowed with a black and dirty fire."[72] More, these incidents are generally accompanied by descriptions of the moon's changing color—it almost always taking on a bloody tinge. This is only yet another example in the important link between the moon and sorcery. In Seneca's *Medea*, for example, Medea calls upon the moon to aid her in her magic spells. Her invocation includes many bloody images.[73] Ovid's *Artis Amitoriae*, referring to the considerable powers that the ancients attributed to sorcery, stated that witches could make the moon turn red, claiming, "I saw, believe you me, the stars and the firmament steeped in blood; the face of the moon was purple

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[72] *. . . Phoebeque serena . . . pallvit et nigris terrenisque ignibus arsit.*" Lucan, *De Bell., Civ.*, VI. 499-500.

[73] Sen., *Med.*, 770-796.

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with blood."[74] Lunais posits that these reports may have been due to lunar eclipses. She notes that Quintus Curius, in describing an eclipse, noted that "the waning moon hides away the first gleam of her firmament, then it stains all light with the suffusing color of blood."[75]

The moon's turning blood red was also sometimes considered as the supernatural indication of a great or terrible event—an emperor's birth or death, great social change, or some apocalyptic happening, for example. In the East, such stories had been around for a while.[76] The blood-red moon as a plague in Exodus is just the most famous example. The New Testament's Book of Acts has Luke quoting the Old Testament's Joel, saying "your young men shall see visions (ὁράσεις) and your old men will dream dreams . . . the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon into blood."[77] Even today, the moon's turning red as blood is still an obscure but powerful theme in modern folklore. Consider the song "Voodoo Child" by Jimi Hendrix, in which he announces that on the

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[74] "*Sanguine, siqua fides, stellantia sidera vidi; Purpureus Lunae sanguine vultus erat.*" Ovid, *Ars. Am.*, I. 8. 11-12.

[75] ". . . *luna deficiens primum nitorem sideris sui condidit, deinde sanguinis colore suffuso lumen omne foedauit.*" Quint. Cur., *His.*, IV. 10. 2-7; cf. Lunais, Sophie, *Recherches sur la Lune*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 221.

[76] How much of this may be a result of oriental astrology's influence on Graeco-Roman culture is not clear. Heavenly portents foretelling great events were an especially prevalent theme in Persian and Babylonian tales. Such stories were probably behind the famous "Star of Bethlehem" which Matthew reports as greeting the birth of the Christ child. Matthew's gospel was designed to display Christ as a great "king," so a sign from the heavens declaring his death would have been in the classic tradition of oriental biographies chronicling royal infancy and childhood narratives. Matt. 2: 3-5.

[77] ". . . ο ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἷμα. . . ." Acts 2: 20; Joel, 2:28-32.

night he was born, the "moon turned a fiery red." Such references in popular music can be categorized along with other surviving ideas, such as Willie Dixon's "The Seventh Son," as an indication that these ancient superstitious have a life of their own and can survive for centuries. This is a powerful metaphor derived from the beliefs in astrology and witchcraft commonly held by black slaves in the South. In ancient times, this was the case, particularly in the great age of Roman imperialism, which was more suited to the notion of semi-divine beings than the old Republic had been. In one instance, Suetonius has Domitian predict that the moon "will turn red (*luna se cruentaret*)," as an indication of his impending death.[78]

SACRED MEALS AND BLOOD: MITHRAS AND CHRISTIANITY

As has been evidenced, beliefs regarding blood and life comprise an elemental core of Graeco-Roman notions of metamorphosis. Blood could transform men and women, giving them rejuvenation, strength, and even life itself. By later antiquity, these ideas were represented in some of the most widespread cults of the great hellenistic/imperial period. Of these, two warrant especially careful consideration: Mithras, and Christianity. First, Mithras.

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[78] Suet., *Domit.*, XVI. 1.

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Mithras was an ancient Indian deity who entered the Empire via Persia.[79] He is still a figure in the Hindu Pantheon, which prompted one historian to call him "the world's oldest living god."[80] His name was invoked in an ancient near-eastern treaty between the Mittani of Upper-Mesopotamia and the Hittites.[81] Ironically, his massive popularity apparently bypassed Greece. Franz Cumont notes that Greek contains a number of Theophorous (God-bearing) names from Egyptian or Phrygian gods—Serapion, Metrodoros, Metrophilos, Isidore, for example—but that the Greeks never admitted the gods of their ancient enemies to their inner-circle.[82] Persia certainly qualified as an ancient enemy of the Greeks. Thus Mithraism passed right from Asia to the *Latinus Mundus*.

The cult had been brought back by Pompius Magnus during his eastern *Acta*.[83] It was to gain tremendous popularity, especially during eras of the Antonines and Severi.[84] Predictably, the simple yet compelling ideas of Persian dualism proved as

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[79] A useful summary of Mithra's link to ancient Indian religion can be found in J.P. Mallory's *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*, (London: Thanes and Hudson, 1989), 131-133.

[80] Spiedel, Michael, *Mithras-Orion: Greek Hero and Roman Army God*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 1.

[81] *ibid.*, 1.

[82] Cumont, Franz, *Les Religions Orientales dans la Paganisme Romaine*, (Paris: Librarie Orientaliaste Paul Geuthner, 1906), 138.

[83] Plutarch, *V. Pompei*, 24.

[84] Cumont, *Les Religions Orientales*, 130; cf. Vermaseren's remark that "Wo Römer waren (und wo war das nicht seit 1 Jahrhundert!) dahin kam auch Mithras." Vermaseren, Martin J., "Mithras in der Römerzeit," in *Die orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 96-120, 96.

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popular in Rome as they had in the orient.[85] They seemed to explain so many of humanity's perpetual problems, presented a clear delineation between good and evil, and even managed to offer people some hope. Plutarch himself reported that he found these ideas extremely attractive.[86] Mithras has been called the single greatest rival ever encountered by Christianity.[87]

Mithraic imagery abounds with metaphors for transformation and metamorphosis. Many of these images are quite bloody. Mithras had a long and complicated myth, the meaning of which is still hotly debated among scholars. He was reputed to have been born in a cave. The great Persian god, Ahura-Mazda, was embodied in the guise of a bull—that potent beast that figures so often in ancient religions. Mithras and the bull struggled, beginning the fight which has been depicted on scores of Mithrea throughout Roman Europe and Italy. The scene is a familiar one. Mithras sits astride the bull. His

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[85] Cumont, of course, saw all this as further evidence of the superiority of oriental religion and culture over western counterparts. He reported, for example, that when the Persian Sassanid Dynasty had replaced the Parthians, and began to reassert conservative Persian cultural traditions, Rome felt compelled to imitate her. He also noted that Diocletian's court, with its eunuchs and complicated hierarchy, was an imitation of the Sassanids' court. Hence, Mithraism was only one of Persia's many influences on the Roman world. In fact, Cumont ominously asserts, "Jamais, pas même à l'époque des invasions musulmanes, l'Europe ne sembla plus près de devenir asiatique qu'au moment où Dioclétien reconnaissait officiellement en Mithra le protecteur de lEmpire reconstitué." Cumont, Franz, *Les Religions Orientales*, 131.

[86] Plutarch., *De Is. et Os.*, 46.

[87] There are some fairly stunning parallels. The birthday of Mithras, for example, was celebrated during the Fastus of December 25. Also, Mithras was reputed to have been born in a cave, and this scene is displayed in some ancient art as being accompanied by shepherds. cf. Vermaseren, M.J., *Mithras: The Secret God*, trans. by Therese and Vincent Megaw, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 75.

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left arm has grabbed the head of the bull, and is pulling it back. His right hand slits the bull's throat with a dagger.[88] Blood gushes from the wound.

Interpretations of this elemental myth seem infinite.[89] What is relevant here is the significance of the bull's spilled blood. Much of the theology which seems to be depicted in the myth's symbolism bespeaks a belief in the regenerative powers of blood, and the powers of a sacrificed life. Where the bull's blood fell, corn and other verdant life is depicted growing. From the bull's spinal-cord came wheat, and vineyards sprouted from his blood.[90] Clearly, the blood was seen as re-vitalizing life, even saving it.[91] This accounts for the telling inscription found at the famous Mithraeum at Santa Prisca, "You

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[88] Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, 47-48; cf. "Das Töten des Stieres ist also ein kosmisches Ereignis, ein Geschen, das sich auf Himmel und Erde, Götter und menschen, Ewigkeit und Zeit bezeiht. Das ganze Heiligtum ist auf die Steirtötung als Mittelpunkt der Mithras-Legende
gerichtet. . . ."Vermaseren, "Mithras in der Römerzeit," 99.

[89] Cumont argued that the Mithras story emanated from Indo-Iranian religion, and gave it a long and convoluted interpretation. Hinnells, who calls Cumont "nearly a primary source," argues that no Iranian text depicts Mithras slaying a bull, so there is a real paucity of sources from Persia. Cumont, Franz, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, trans. by Thomas J. McCormack (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1910); Hinnells, John, "Reflections on the Bull-Slaying Scene," in *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, vol. II., ed. by John Hinnells, (London: Manchester University Press, 1975), 290-312.

[90] Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, 136-37.

[91] "Infine, l'impreesa del dio tauroctono sembra esaltata come font di 'salvezza' per l'uomo. . . ." Gasparro, Giulia Sfamen, "Il mitraismo Nell'Ambito Della Fenomenologia misterica," in *Mysteria Mithrae: Atti del Seminario Internazionale su 'La Specificità Storico—Religiosa dei Misteri di Mithra, con Particulare Refermento alle Fonti Documentarie di Roma e Ostia* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 327.

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save us by shedding eternal blood."[92] Many reliefs even depict a young dog, leaping at the bull's throat, eagerly lapping up the life-giving liquid.[93] More important, Helios-Sol is depicted at many of the scenes, along with Selene, the moon goddess. This is largely taken to mean that after the bull was killed, Mithras and Sol dined together.[94] Hence, a tradition something like the Christian Lord's Supper emerged, with Mithraic devotees celebrating this sacred meal, the way Christians observed communion. In fact, garbage pits near Mithraea have frequently yielded animal remains to excavators, which are often ascribed to the eating and drinking of blood and flesh.[95]

The Christian communion, or Lord's Supper, is even more compelling. Here, various ancient beliefs in blood's transforming powers—from the most theologically sweeping to the most mundane and vulgar—are distilled into a simple ceremony which went on to become a major sacrament in one of the world's greatest religious faiths.

First, the many comparisons with Mithraic cult meals must be noted, as well as the historical tensions between the two cults, which often had markedly similar beliefs and practices. Indeed, the power of this great religion was soon felt, even by the great Graeco-Roman pagan cults, some of which were ostensibly in their prime. And while many modern religious critics delight in pointing out the many pagan influences upon the

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[92] " *Et nos servasti . . . sanguine fuso.*" Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), 112.

[93] Campbell, Leroy, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 12-13.

[94] Vermaseren, *Mithras: the Secret God*, 140.

[95] *ibid.*, 101-103.

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Christian faith, it must also be remembered that the influence was felt both ways. This was especially true in the case of the Lord's Supper. Tertullian's *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* accused the pagans, probably Mithraists, of copying the Christian Eucharist, as well as beliefs in death and resurrection.[96] So did Justin Martyr's *Apologia Prima.*[97] Such accusations are important, for they show the emerging power of Christianity, and the influence which its powerful ideas exerted on the other cults.[98]

Christian cult meals were not without controversy themselves. Blood and bloody rites were again at the center of the tension. The early Christians' symbolic use of blood and cannibalism imagery prompted some of antiquity's goriest allegations. Probably the most famous early pagan source referring to Christianity is Pliny the Younger's letter to Trajan. While it does not explicitly mention the charges of cannibalism, it does note that it was the habit of Christians to meet at specific times, worship, then eat a meal. Pliny

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[96] Tert., *De praes. haer.*, 40.

[97] Just. Mart., *Apol. Prim.*, 66. Kane argues that one cannot make too much of "eucharistic Mithraism" based on this passage. He argues that the Mithraic meals, with their bread and wine, bore only "superficial similarities" to Christianity. They may have been supericial, but they were also blatant and obvious. Kane, J.P., "The Mithraic Cult Meal in its Greek and Roman Environment," in *Mithraic Studies*, 313-351.

[98] Hugo Rahner notes this important and often unnoticed development in later religious history. Here, he also recalls Cumont, whose *Les Religions Orientales* pointed to the Taurobolium. The Taurobolium priests were apparently accusing Christians of imitating the ***dies sanguinis*** (March 24), and the mysticism surrounding blood. Cf. Cumont, *Les Religions Orientales*, ix; Rahner, Hugo, "The Christian Mysteries and the Pagan Mysteries," in *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 337-401; cf. above, ftn. 35.

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makes no allusion to cannibalism, but he does point out that no food out of the ordinary was eaten, so he probably was aware of the charges.[99]

More explicit information is given in Minucius Felix's text *Octavius*, probably written around A.D. 200. Here, Minucius described how his friend Octavius converted the pagan Caecilius to Christianity. Caecilius related to Octavius that, when he was in Rome for business, he met Octavius. After a few days spent getting re-acquainted, the two went to Ostia—which Octavius reported to be a "most pleasant city (*amoenissimam civitatem*)."[100] In Ostia, Caecilius saw a statue of the hellenistic-Egyptian deity Sarapis, and kissed its hand.[101] The overtly pagan action ultimately brought on a long conversation between the two friends, which focused on the differences between Christianity and paganism.

Caecilius' arguments against Christianity provide some of the most specific ancient references to the accusations launched at Christians. The debate is, indeed, an interesting twist on things, for Caecilius views Christians as surreptitious, deviant and even occultish. Some of the various charges include that the devotees of Christ worshipped the genitalia of their clergy, and the head of an ass.[102]

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[99] Pliny, *NH.*, 10.96.

[100] Min. Fel., *Oct.*, II. 3.

[101] *ibid.*, II. 4.

[102] *ibid.*, IX. 3-4; Tacitus, *Hist.*, V. 3. 4; Tert., *Apol.*, 16. The charges that Christians worshipped the head of an ass, as bizarre as they may seem, also turn up in graffiti—most notably the famous drawing "Alexamenos worships his God" which was found on the Palatine Hill. Here, Alexamenos is mocked in a crude drawing which shows him worshipping a man with the head of an ass, being crucified on a cross.

The bloody charges as described by Caecilius grow. He alleges that Christian initiates confronted an infant which had been covered in dough. The initiate was then instructed to strike what he believed to be merely bread, apparently not knowing the true nature of the little bundle. Of course, the blows killed the infant. Thereupon the congregation swooped down on the poor child like vampires, wantonly licking up his blood.[103] The same charge is also noted in Tertullian's *Apologeticus*. Both Tertullian and Minucius Felix launch a scathing counterattack, pointing out the abundant hypocrisy of the pagan charges. In particular, Minucius Felix points to the Greek practice of infanticide, made famous in the Oedipus stories. More, he harshly condemns the custom by which women used potions to induce abortions.[104] Finally, he notes that in their often cruelly pragmatic behavior regarding babies, pagans were only imitating their often less-than-humane gods, notably Cronus/Saturn, who ate his own children.[105]

Tertullian is even more biting, accusing the pagan denunciators of feeding their own horrific blood-lust with such stories:

> Come. Plunge your sword into a guiltless infant, the enemy of no one, the accused of nothing, the son of everyone, or, if that is the duty of another, stand thou beside the man dying before he lived, await thou the new soul

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[103] ". . . *Huis, pro nefas, sitenter sanguinem lambunt* . . . Min. Fel., IX. 5; consider also the gnostic sect known as the Phibionites, whom Epiphanius accuses of eating unborn fetuses which had been manually ripped from their mother's womb. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 26. 4-5; Benko, Stephen, "The Libertine Gnostic Sect of the Phibionites according to Epiphanius," in *Vigiliae Christianae*, 21 (1967), 103-19.

[104] *ibid.*, XXX. II.

[105] *ibid.* XXX. III.

> fleeing, receive thou the raw blood, fill thou your bread with it, feast on it wantonly.[106]

Tertullian also emphatically asserts that Christians did not even use animal blood in their diets. Noting that Christians were "baited" by being offered blood sausage, he condemned such stories as being the stuff of widespread prejudice and ignorance regarding the early Church. Nor did they eat meat which had been strangled or died on its own ("roadkill"), since they believed the blood therein to be unclean.[107]

But, of course, despite the sorts of vitriolic defenses launched by Christians like Tertullian and Minucius Felix, the fact was that the Christians' Lord Supper did indeed have some rather bizarre overtones—some of which were overtly bloody, if taken at face value. More, the Graeco-Roman world had a history of religious rites which were either semi-secretive or slightly carnal. Such feasts were obviously a part of Greek religion, notably in the Bacchanalia. Here, ironically, the meals raised some of the same sorts of accusations which the eucharist meal would. The famous Livy account of Rome's hostile reaction to the arrival of the Dionysian cult in 186 B.C. does not include specific references to blood or cannibalism, but it does, indeed, show the Roman concern with the Bacchic feasts. Specifically, the feasts were seen to have a licentious quality, which concerned the Republican government enough to issue its famous Senatus Consultum.[108]

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[106] "*Veni, demerge ferrum in infantem nullius inimicum, nullius reum, omnium filium, vel, si alterius officium est, tu modo adsiste morienti homini antequam vixit, fugientem animam novam expecta, excipe rudem sanguinem, eo panem tuum satia, vescere libenter.*" Trans. by author, Tert., *Apol.*, VIII. 2-3.

[107] *ibid.*, IX. 4.

[108] Livy, 39. 18.

Despite the lack of bloodiness evidenced in the charges Livy reports against the Bacchus rites, many important comparisons can be made with the Christian meals. First, there were allegations of sexual impropriety which were frequently launched against the Christian believers, as they had been against other earlier cults coming into the Empire. Minucius Felix and Tertullian had both indicated that there were charges against Christians of orgiastic behavior, and even incest. In one story, which apparently circulated, the Christians would tie a small dog to a lamp. When the dog moved, as dogs are wont to do, it would tip over the lamp, leaving the room in darkness. From there, sexual immorality of every sort was said to ensue.[109]

However bizarre such charges may sound to those familiar with modern orthodox Christianity, the ancients obviously took them very seriously. Indeed, struggles over proper conduct at the Christian meal are an important theme in primitive Christianity. Here again, the close proximity which many such meals had with other pagan rites cannot be overemphasized. In fact, the dining room featured prominently in many pagan temple complexes.[110] More telling is the Greek word by which these meals were called—δεῖπνον. Δεῖπνον is generically translated "supper," or "banquet." Indeed, by the

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[109] Tert., *Apol.*, VII. 1; Min. Fel., *Oct.*, IX. 5. These passages also allege incest. Hence, Wilken describes the Christian feasts as envisioned by pagan critics as "Thystean Banquets." Thystes was a Greek who seduced his brother's wife and ate the flesh of his own sons at a dinner. There were also references to incestuous relationships between mother and son. In 1 Corinthians, Paul makes veiled references to incest, saying he has not heard of such immorality, "even among the gentiles." Athenagoras, *Legatio*, 3. 1; 31-32; 1 Cor., 5: 1; Wilken, Robert, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1984), 17.

[110] Meeks, Wayne, *The First Urban Christians*, (Hew Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1983), 156-58.

time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the term for communion had been become somewhat standardized as the "κυριακον δεῖπνον," the Lord's Supper.[111] However, δεῖπνον does not mean the meager sip of wine and wafer on the tongue which modern Christians associate with communion. It is consistently linked with celebratory, even carnal, feasting. In Mark, the word is used to describe no less a party than Herod's infamous birthday bash for Herodias, which cost John the Baptist his head.[112] In Luke, the word is used to describe a wealthy and hypocritical Pharisee lavishly entertaining guests.[113] Mark uses the term again, when Christ warns against those who like to look respectable, and eat at places of honor "in the banquets (ἐν τοῖς δείπνοις)."[114] Hence, when John uses the word to describe the famous Last Supper (Christ "rose up from the feast"), we can assume that the disciples were enjoying a hearty repast.[115]

The Lord's Supper played an important role in emerging Christian views regarding metamorphosis. But it was still fraught with controversy, even within the ranks of the infant church itself. Paul's epistles to the early church at Corinth readily demonstrate the all-too-literal fashion with which the Greek Christians were ready to celebrate the *Kuriakon Deipnon.* The entire letter is famous for its admonishments concerning drunkeness, sexual laxity and other forms of hedonism associated with pagan *deipna.*

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[111] 1 Cor. 11: 20; 11: 25.

[112] Mark 6: 21.

[113] Luke 14: 12.

[114] Mark 12: 39.

[115] "ἐγείρεται ἐκ τοῦ δείπνοῦ." John 13: 4.

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More, the controversy over meat offered to idols demonstrates the confusion which the first century church had in differentiating between its new religion and the old cults. This probably indicates that the first Christian *deipna* were scarcely distinguished from the old sacred feasts of Greek religion. Paul's famous advice that believers not become "stumbling blocks (πρόσκομμα)" indicates that at least some early Christians were eating meat offered to pagan gods at their meals.[116] Later Christians clearly avoided the practice. Hence, one of the chief anti-Christian charges reported by Pliny in his letters from Bithynia and Pontus was that the areas in which Christianity had gained popularity had witnessed a serious decline in the market for sacrificial meats.[117]

And of course, the problems associated with the *Kuriakon Deipnon* also involved charges of blood and cannibalism. Along with simple pagan distrust of Christians, this was also due to the complex views regarding blood which the new faith manifested. These views involved a kind of schizophrenia regarding the physical body. The flesh was utterly corrupt, along with the physical *kosmos* in general.[118] This, of course, comprises one of the central tenets of the Christian faith. In this decadent physical world, sin was a genetic trait, and the flesh (σαρξ) was ever carnal and doomed to die.[119]

Such inherent depravity was what the metamorphosis sought to heal. Man's corruption was inherited from Adam. But Christ had been the "Final Adam (ἔσχατος

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[116] 1 Cor. 8: 9; 10: 28.

[117] Pliny, *Ep.*, 10. 96.

[118] 1 Peter uses the word **Kosmos** in a particularly degrading way, equating it with the corruption and vanity of the secular world. 1 Peter. 3: 3.

[119] Romans 3: 23; 6: 23.

'Αδάμ)."[120] Hence the great verse in Corinthians, forever immortalized in Handel's *Messiah*: Since by man (Adam) came death, by man (Christ) came also the resurrection of the dead."[121] Thus were posited two physical worlds, one, represented by Adam, in which all nature was corrupt and doomed to eternal death;[122] the other, represented by Christ, was full of life, holiness and beauty.[123] Christ brought a new physical order—or, at least, the new spiritual order was described in the symbolism of metaphorical language regarding the world and the flesh.

Blood was both a symbol of the old sin, and a giver of the new transformation. It was linked with the corruption of the old order, as represented by the First Adam.[124]

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[120] I Cor. 15: 45.

[121] "ἐπειδὴ γὰρ δι' ἀνθρώπου θάνατος, καὶ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν." *ibid.*, 15: 21-22.

[122] "Man is incapable of redeeming himself from the world and the powers which held sway in it. Of these powers, the most important are the flesh, sin, the law and death. Man's redemption...can only come from the divine world as an event. It is something that must happen to man from the outside. Now Christian faith claims that this is precisely what has happened in Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and resurrection." Bultmann, Rudolph, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, trans. by R.H. Fuller, (New York: New American Library, 1956), 198.

[123] The exact physical nature of Christ, the "Second Adam," was problematic. Elaine Pagels points out that Paul implies that the first Adam had been a natural man, while the Second Adam had been a "life-giving spirit." Such a conundrum was at the very heart of the gnostic and orthodox controversies regarding Christ's corporeal nature. 1 Cor. 15: 45; cf. Pagels, Elaine, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, (New York: Random House, 1988), 128.

[124] Hebrews 9 shows Christ as the final sacrifice. He was able to enter the 'Holy of Holies,' the '῾Αγια 'γίων,' by his own blood being spilt and not that of Old Testament sacrifices of goats and bulls. The writer of Hebrews noted that all Hebraic covenants had been sealed in blood, including the first covenant between Moses and the Lord. Finally, the author asserts that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission (of sins). "καὶ χωρὶς αἱματεκχυσίας οὐ γίνεται ἄφεσις." Hebrews 9:

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John talks of the authority of God's name, "which is not of the blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man."[125] The linking of blood and flesh with the old carnal order helps explain much regarding the Christian communion supper. When Christ passed the cup to his disciples, he announced that it represented the "new covenant (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη)" which is "in my blood (ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου)."[126] Hence, when initiates drank the blood or ate the body of Christ, they were partaking in the new order—the one destined to replace the old corrupt κοσμος which had existed since Eden.[127]

Blood itself had undergone a metamorphosis of sorts. An essentially positive image of blood was offered to the Christian devotees. After the regeneration offered by Christ had worked its magic, their blood was again pure. Subsequently, the blood of saints was seen in a highly positive light. In the new Christian world view, "redeemed" blood was viewed as a precious, life-giving commodity. Christian blood remained super-charged with superstition and religious symbolism. It was still the source of salvation and life. The fascination with which it was viewed by religion and popular culture remained unabated. Hence, the image of drinking blood, or somehow harnessing its powers, remained

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10-12, 22; cf. Exodus 24: 8.

[125] ". . . οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδε ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδε ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρος ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν." John 1: 13.

[126] The wording of this passage in the synoptic gospels is very close. Mark and Matthew even have virtually the same structure, both using the genitive absolute to begin the passage. cf. Matt. 14: 22-26; Mark 26: 26-30; cf. John 13: 1-4.

[127] The Gnostics worshipped the feminine side of God as **Charis**, or grace. The gnostic teacher Marcus was reported to have conducted eucharistic communion services in her honor, promising "grace" to all who drank of her blood. Iren., *AH*, I. 13. 2; cf. Pagels, Elaine, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York: Random House, 1984), 51.

powerful. Creatures or beings particularly hostile to Christianity were frequently depicted to be drinking the blood of the saints. It was an ugly and powerful image.

Hence, the new church quickly developed horrific blood drinking figures to replace the old hags like Medea or Pamphile. This is not to say that more popularized notions of witches necessarily died. They certainly did not. But more mainstream evil beings in the ancient Christian "pantheon" showed how powerful and negative the notion of blood-drinking beings could actually be. Indeed, two of the most famous nefarious characters from Christian mythology were said to drink blood: the Whore of Babylon and the Devil himself. In John's apocalyptic revelation on the isle of Patmos, for example, the Whore of Babylon is described as drinking (μεθύουσαν = getting drunk) on the blood of the saints, and on the blood of Christ's martyrs.[128] It is an important image—a veritable Christian parallel to pagan accounts of nightwitches, who themselves were said to have gathered and used blood for their various nefarious rites.

Other evil images of blood-drinkers also surfaced in early Christianity. The Whore of Babylon's malevolence was rivaled in its chilling effectiveness by early images of the devil, who had been largely missing from Old Testament Judaism. By the time of Firmicus Maternus, he was quite a popular object of hatred and loathing. Thus was developed one of western civilization's most famous archetypal literary figures: the Christian Satan. In his *De Errore Profanarum Religionum*, Maternus borrows from the

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[128] "καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖ μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ." Rev. 17: 6.

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book of Revelation to equate Satan with a dragon (δράκων).[129] More, significantly, Satan is included for condemnation along with all the pagan faiths and deities. The Devil is seen as an agent of holocaust and damnation. And as had been the Whore of Babylon, the devil is given the especially chilling characteristic of feasting on Christian blood:

> You creep into the temples and you feast on the miserable blood of the slain enemies, neither by your venoms is the gory slaughter lacking, nor the semi-charred portion of cremated bodies: frequently you stain yourself with the blood of human victims, and by the bloody gore of the Latiarian Temple—and your furies are nurtured by the altar of Carthage and by the blasphemous utterings of parched throats. Doing these things, you boast that you benefit miserable humanity in order that you might destroy it by your cruelty. . . . Oh miserable men! Flee! Flee, and abandon such a contagion as quickly as you are able. It is a dragon which is worshipped. It is not possible to hide.[130]

CONCLUSION

Beliefs in regenerative blood, so pervasive yet subtle, constituted a major pillar of metamorphosis ideas which undergirded much later ancient religion. The various notions regarding blood informing many ancient beliefs were profound metaphors about life and death. Hence, these beliefs regarding blood can be seen as symptomatic of the

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[129] Rev. 20.

[130] "*Serpis in templis et occisarum hostiarum misero pasceris sanguine, nec venenis tuis cruor defuit nec semiustae crematorum corporum partes: humanarum te etiam victimarum frequenter sanguine cruentasi et Latiaris templi cruore vel are Kartaginis rabies tua et siccarum faucium venena nutrita sunt. Tu haec faciens hominibus te miseris prodesse inctas ut crudelitate tua perimas . . . Fugite, o miseri homines, fugite, et contagionem istam quanta cumque potestis celeritate deserite. Draco est qui colitur; latere non potest.*" Trans. by author, Fir., Mat., *De Err. Prof.*, XXVI. 2.

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greatest religious issues. It was to these very issues which the metamorphosis finally and profoundly responded. Christian views regarding blood entailed a synthesis of those two basic concepts regarding blood noted at the outset of this chapter—sacrifice and regeneration. Humans could be offered regeneration through sacrificed blood. The blood of Christ was only the most famous, and perhaps most eloquent, expression of that simple notion. The Lord's Supper provided a microcosm of these beliefs. In a new guise was found one of antiquity's most ancient religious notions: that the qualities of a god or human being could be captured or embodied in some sort of food and eaten.[131] It was an idea remarkably similar to the beliefs in blood represented in the old stories about Medea, Erictho, the **Lamiae**, or Apuleius' old hags. Nor are the ideas of the eucharist altogether different from those ideas of transference found in the other cults, like Asklepios, Sarapis, or the petty superstitions of popular culture. A great continuity can be seen here in an amorphous idea which was centuries ahead of science in its simple precept; a subtle concept comprising one of the truly lasting legacies handed down from ancient religion and popular culture: For the Blood is the Life. It was one of ancient religions' most compelling transformation metaphors. And its notions regarding regeneration and renewal alluded to even more profound metamorphosis beliefs. These included the great hope for god-like perfection and freedom from death.

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[131] Thomas discusses this phenomenon of "eating the god" in her discussion of the **Latinae Feriae**. Thomas, Ruth Edith, *The Sacred Meal in the Older Roman Religion*, (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Libraries, 1935), 3-4.

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CHAPTER 5

DEIFICATION AND THE RESURRECTION

Many manifestations of metamorphosis have already been noted. The shape of human beings could be changed, giving them the powers and attributes of animals. The consciousness could be ecstatically transformed into a more divinely inspired consciousness. The body's physical infirmities and the personality's foibles could be touched by divine healing, and added significant elements of divinity. Blood could offer rejuvenation and revivification. But the most developed form of metamorphosis combined elements from all these. The whole of the human being could take on divine attributes, becoming veritably god-like.

Early Greek religion had posited anthropomorphic (man-shaped) gods. Hellenistic religion offered 'theomorphic' (god-shaped) men. This was the final and most sophisticated evolution of the metamorphosis; the belief that men and women could become like gods or God. Forms of this new metamorphosis took on many shapes. Chief among them were the elevation of the Emperors to divine status, and Hellenistic beliefs in resurrection. Many different Hellenistic religions can serve as models, but two are especially informative: the Egyptian cults which entered the West through Ptolemaic Egypt, and Christianity.

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The new reality of cosmpolitan empire provided an especially favorable context for the new metamorphosis. Subtle but fundamental shifts in later antiquity's occidental culture had greatly challenged existing religious systems. The anthropomorphism of classical religions was seriously challenged by the new faiths of the Hellenistic world, and its accompanying syncretism. The petty, imperfect gods of the old panthea—larger than life though they may have been—were now confronted by a plethora of new divinities and beliefs which challenged the old order. In the Greece which emerged after the Peloponnesian War, this was the famous "Failure of Nerve" about which Gilbert Murray wrote. Rome too, experienced its "failure of nerve." As in the case of Greece, it was precipitated by a series of crises in public life, and by the challenge of cosmopolitanism.

But if the Hellenistic era was eclectic, the trend was only exacerbated by the Roman Empire's arrival into Mediterranean affairs. The Empire's dizzying conglomerate of ethnicities exerted pressure on indigeneous religious life which has seldom since been rivalled, until perhaps the present age. In Italy itself, the pressure had reached a boiling point during the first century B.C. The final decades of the Republic were marked by increased apathy toward the traditional faith. Franz Altheim rightly notes, "towards the close of the Republic, then, things had reached such a pitch that the attention of the age was diverted not only from the principal figures of the Greek world of gods, but also from the revered institutions of native Roman religion."[1] The great Capitoline temple was

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[1] Altheim, Franz, *A History of Roman Religion*, trans. by H. Mattingly, (London: 1938), 331.

burnt in 83 B.C., and was not fully restored for twenty-one years.[2] Cicero described the Roman mood at this time as indifferent. He noted that the old cults had become largely irrelevant in practical affairs. The auspices were mere pawns in political struggles, and the augural discipline was no longer favored with widespread respect.[3] Similarly, Livy frankly conceded that by the first century B.C., men no longer believed that gods could disclose future events.[4]

More abstract metamorphosis beliefs emerged during this period of flux. The spiritual crisis, confronting both Greece and, later, Rome, facilitated the introduction of new cults, many of which involved unique ideas, as well as different gods. This development was characterized by a plethora of inventive beliefs in transforming religious powers, not the least of which was the Christian Resurrection. But it also appeared in more subtle ways. One of these was the belief in Egyptian animism, which was introduced into the Hellenistic and Imperial religious world-view. The old dog and jackal headed Nile deities were largely mocked by the occidental world. Nonetheless, clear elements of the old Egyptian thinking emerged into the world of later antiquity.

The Syncretism which characterized later religions was an example of metamorphosis in-and-of itself. Part of this development emanated from the strain of cultural diversity. A culture's gods are archetypal figures personifying the values and beliefs of the society.

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[2] Nock, A.D., "Religious Development from the Close of the Republic to the Reign of Nero," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, 10, 496.

[3] Cic., *de Div.*, I. 16. 29; Taylor, Lily Ross, "Manipulating the State Religion" *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 76-97.

[4] Livy, XLIII. 13. 1.

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Cosmopolitan ages, then, tend to pressure change upon the simple old divine embodiments of the local and regional cults. Few eras in all history have been more cosmopolitan than the Hellenistic and Imperial ages. Consequently, few periods have offered more amorphous, less clearly defined divine persons.

Scores of deities—both new and old—were the beneficiaries of the new syncretism. The Egyptian gods Sarapis and Isis are among the best examples. Both were derived from ancient Egypt. But by the Hellenistic and then Imperial periods, their central ideas and iconographies were absorbed by the West, where they became centerpieces of one of later paganism's most popular religious sects. Indeed, part of their attraction—as was the case with so many of the ancient near eastern cults which found their way into Imperial religious life—was the flexibility which they offered to the Greeks and Romans.[5] Both had their origins in the ancient faiths of the Nile. Isis was an important goddess from the old Pharonic faith. She was given hellenized features by the Greeks, which made her more palatable to the new cultures of the era. The origins of Sarapis were more complex, and directly related to shape-shifting, animism and syncretism. The generally accepted theory asserts that Sarapis was a fusion of the god Osiris and the Apis

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[5] "Serapis offre à chacun l'aspect ou philosophique qu'il desire." Bonneau, Danielle, *La Crue du Nile: Divinité Egyptienne à travers mills ans d'historie (332 av. 641 a;*. J.C., (Paris: Librarie C. Klinck Seick, 1964), 321; cf. "It (the Isiac faith) was, or at least it became, a complex religion with a wealth of mythological, philosophical, and eschatological elements which, though never systematized and brought into agreement, yet offered to all classes of believers something which their religious aspirations craved." LaPiana, G., "Foreign Groups in Rome during the First Centuries of the Empire," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 20, (1927), 303.

Bull.[6] Upon the death of each Apis, the bull's spirit was believed to merge into the more generalized soul of Osiris. In conjunction with the dead bull's venerated status, elaborate funeral procedures were developed for the dead bulls, including the construction of tombs.[7] Eventually, workers building the tombs housing the mummified Apis bulls began worshipping the dead beasts proper. Consequently, a new collaboration between Osiris and Apis was created, called Osiris-Apis. When the Macedonians came to rule Egypt in the fourth century B.C., the term was bastardized to "Osarapis," and finally "Sarapis."[8] Hence, Sarapis, one of antiquity's greatest pagan deities, emanated partially from a bull. Given the fact of Egyptian religion's inherent beauty and usually sophisticated theology, this blending was one of the crudest and most elemental forms of metamorphosis which survived into later antiquity.

This is not to say the transference of beliefs from East to West was an entirely seamless or smooth process. Often traditional Egyptian religion was seen as strange and even repulsive by the Greco-Romans. Egyptian animism—the veneration of animals, or the placement of divinity into an animal shell—seemed to many in the Greco-Roman world suspiciously close to animal worship. The role of animals in Western religion was largely reserved for folklore. In a world where gods had evolved into human-like beings, oriental animism sometimes seemed crude and primitive. Western culture was steeped in

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[6] For more information on the Apis bull, see Diod. Sic., 84, 85, 88, 96,

[7] Diodorus also includes a rich account of the complex funeral rites which Egyptians followed upon the death of their venerated animals. *ibid.*, 1. 83. 5-9.

[8] Wilcken, *Urkenden der Ptolemäerzeit*, 1, (Berlin: 1927), 19; Bevan, E.R., *The House of Ptolemy: A History of Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, (Chicago: Argonaut Press, 1927), 40-41.

the glory and brilliance of Apollo, or the sensual and erotic heat of Aphrodite. To some Greco-Romans, the idea of worshipping dog-headed Anubis must have seemed little less than appalling. Still, ideas found in Egyptian religion figured heavily in Hellenistic Egyptian faith and in the most abstract beliefs in shape-shifting which emanated from it. Confronting Egyptian beliefs, the West could Hellenize the iconography surrounding Osiris or Isis, giving it the Greco-Roman exterior of plastic art, and translating the rich ancient myths into Greek and Latin. It could also Hellenize the animistic elements embedded in oriental shape-shifting accounts.

Egyptian views regarding animals present a curious twist in metamorphosis beliefs. In Hellenistic religions, men were sometimes turned into animals, and men were sometimes turned into gods. In Egyptian animism, animals were sometimes turned into gods. The Egyptians were very serious about the worship of animals. Diodorus Siculus notes that anyone unfortunate enough to kill a cat in Egypt would pay with his life.[9] The Egyptians were so pious in this regard that they apparently even refused to eat sacred animals during a particularly vicious famine (λιμῷ . . . πιεζομενων).[10] One of the best examples of this sacred animism concerned the ibis. The ibis figures heavily into Egyptin animism. Diodorus noted, "The Egyptians excessively venerate certain of the animals, not only living, but also dead—animals such as cats and fishes and dogs, and the birds which

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[9] Diod., Sic., I. 83.

[10] *ibid.*, 1. 84. 1.

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they call ibises."[11] Similarly, Herodotus asserted that anyone who killed an ibis or a falcon, even unintentionally, had to die.[12] Indeed, the ibis was a particularly important image in Egyptian religious symbolism. The sacred bird had been linked with other gods, including Isis and Osiris.[13] Moreover, ibises are depicted on two frescoes at Herculaneum, walking in the scene of a holy shrine.[14]

Egyptian veneration of animals clearly offended more pious and/or traditional Greeks and Romans, whose religion tended to glorify man. To them, this reverse metamorphosis which posited divine animals seemed bizarre. Even in the imperial period, when Egyptian religion had gained more widespread acceptance, sardonic Juvenal would still write:

> What won't those mad Egyptians use for Gods? One district worships the green crocodile, another ibises gorged full on snakes, and in another, apes are still the style. . . . Here cats, there riverfish are thought divine, dogs too! But our Diana gets no mention where eating leeks and onions are made sin. How shrewd to make a shrine of one's own garden.[15]

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[11] "σέβονται γὰρ ἔνια τῶν ζῴων αἰγύπτιοι καθ'ὑπερβολὴν οὐ ζώντα μονον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τελευτήσαντα, οἷον αἰλούρους καὶ τοὺς ἰχνεύμονας καὶ κύνας, ἔτι δ'ἱέρακας καὶ τὰς καλουμένας παρ'ἀυτοῖς ἴβεις." Diod. Sic., 1. 83. 1.

[12] Herod., 2. 65,

[13] In Egypt, probably more than four million of these birds were mummified and interred in the Necropolis north of Saqqarah. They were embalmed at the rate of about 10,000 annually. Smelik, K.A.D., "The Cult of Ibis," in *Studies in Hellenistic Religion*, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 225-243.

[14] Tinh, Tran Tam, *Le Culte des Divinities Orientales à Herculaneum*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), cat. # 58, 59 (fig. 40,47).

[15] Mazzaro's translation seems to convey the biting wit and sarcasm of Juvenal with special subtlety; Juv., *Sat.*, XV, trans. by Jerome Mazzaro, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965); Cumont notes that "Parmi les vegetaux, l'oignon est particulierement sacré. La raison supposé en est qu'il provoque le 'flatus ventris,' c'est

The foreign nature of some Egyptian reliigion figured heavily in the struggle between Antony and Octavian—a struggle which, in one aspect, can be described as a battle pitting Roman xenophobia against the emerging Empire's nascent cosmopolitanism. Indeed, Antony's reputed love affair with Hellenistic/Oriental culture was depicted by Octavian as an almost Homeric struggle between gods and men. The deities of the East were pitted against the deities of the West. On the eve of Actium, Octavian's speech to the army denounced Antony for having embraced Egypt's customs and religions.[16] Later, in Virgil, Actium is depicted in almost apocalyptic proportions. Describing the buckle of Aeneas, Virgil offers what is really a portrayal from Actium. In a corner of the scene, the Nile awaits the return of conquered Antony. On one side are seen Augustus and the traditional gods of the Roman hearth. On the other is Antony, followed by a swarm of oriental deities. At his side is the dog-headed Anubis and various other alien beings.[17]

Sometimes the metamorphosis of animals into gods produced tawdry episodes. Dog-god Anubis figures heavily in a salacious scandal which occured in Rome in A.D. 19. This was the year of the persecution which Tiberius launched against both Egyptian and Judaic religions.[18] A military draft was used as a pretext for the ethnic cleansing

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à dire l'expulsion des demons malfaisanta avales avec la nourriture." Cumont, *Les Religions Orientales*, 74.

[16] Cass. Dio, 50. 24-30.

[17] Verg., *Aen.*, VIII. 675-713.

[18] Smallwood, E. Mary, "Some Notes on the Jews under Tiberius," in *Latomus*, 15, (1956), 314-315; Heidel, W.A., "Why were the Jews Banished from Italy in A.D. 19," in *American Journal of Philology*, 41, (1920), 28-47; Tac., *Ann.*, II. 85. 5; Suet., Tib., 36; Cass., Dio, LVII. 18. 5a; Joseph., *Ant Iud.*, XVIII. 65. 81-5; Philo, *In flaccum*, 1, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 23-24.

policies. Many Jews and Egyptians were exiled to Sardinina. The others were ordered to leave Italy unless they renounced their faiths within a fixed period of time. Suetonius asserted that Egyptians and Jews were banished from Rome and forced to burn their religious garments. And while he specifically cited only Jews as being subject to the draft, Suetonius did say that those of the same race or similar beliefs were expelled from the city.[19] It is not entirely clear whether or not Suetonius distinguished clearly between Jews and Egyptians.

Unfortunately, neither Suetonius or Tacitus offered any kind of specific explanation as to why these persecutions occured. Scholars have had to consider a set of intriguing, though rather dubious accounts offered by Josephus.[20] While the stories told by Josephus are almost certainly apocryphal, they reveal the revulsion which most Western society reserved for odd divine beings who were half-man and half-god. In one of these narratives, the beauty of a Roman noblewoman named Paulina greatly fascinated the knight Decius Mundus. Decius failed to seduce Paulina, despite offering her 200,000 Attic drachmas. Subsequently, he bribed a certain freedwoman named Ida with 50,000 drachma who, in turn, offered 25,000 drachmas to a temple priest. The priest went to tell Paulina that the Egyptian god, Anubis, desired her company for an evening at the temple. Paulina's husband, Saturnis, granted permission. Decius, disguised as Anubis, met Paulina at the Iseum and obtained as a god that which eluded him as a mortal. Afterwards, his pride inflated by the experience, Decius revealed his true idenitity to Paulina, who told

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[19] Suet., *Tib.*, 36.

[20] Joseph., *Ant. Jud.*, XVIII. 65-80.

her husband Saturnia. When word of the scandal reached Tiberius, the temple was demolished, the cult statue thrown into the Tiber, and the priests involved were crucified.[21] Curiously, Decius was merely banished.[22] It has also been argued that Tiberius was trying to prevent oriental style prostitution from coming into Rome.[23]

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[21] ". . . ce fait rapporté par Flavius Josephus est partiellement confirmé par la decouverte dans le Tibre de six sistres, quatre pres du Ponte sisto et deux pres du Pont unberto, c'est à dire sur la frange orientale du Champ de Mars." Malaise, Michel, *Les Conditions de Pénétration et de Diffusion des Cultes Égyptiens en Italie*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 393; Bissing, F. von, "Sul tipo dei sistri trovati nel Tevere," in *Bulletin de la Societe d'Archeologie d'Alexandrie*, 31 (1937), 211-224.

[22] The story of Paulina and "Anubis" is placed alongside a similar anecdote, this one involving the Jews. A Roman woman named Fulvia was swindled into offering gold and purple to four Jewish men, believing her gifts would adorn the great temple in Jerusalem. Instead the men kept the valuables. Fulvia told her husband—coincidentally named Saturnis, as was Paulina's husband in the accounts of the Egyptian cults. Again, news of the misdeed reached Tiberius, who punished the entire Jewish community in Rome. The reasons why Josephus took pains to distinguish between an incident involving Jews, and an incident involving Egyptians, are enigmatic. Neither Tacitus or Suetonius does. Unnik asserts that Josephus "was not after the telling of a juicy story, as is often thought, but he wanted his readers to see the true reasons for what had happened and the differences between the two cases." Sharon Kelley Heybob also concurs with this more plausible explanation. Many Jews from the period were not the culturally and theologically distinct individuals popular Christian images often portray. Jews and Egyptians were often fully hellenized and blurred into the syncretistic blend of Hellenistic and Imperial religion. More, Judaism had met with earlier Roman opposition, as had the other incoming oriental religions. Valerius Maximus reports, for example, that the Jews were banished from Rome in 139 B.C. for proselytizing their cult of Jupiter Sabazius. So it is possible that Josephus wanted to distinguish between his own religion and the other incoming oriental cults. Val. Max., 1.3.3.; Unnik, W.C., "Flavius Josephus and the Mysteries," in *Studies in Hellenistic Religions*, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 258; Heybob, Sharon Kelley, *The Cult of Isis Among Women in the Graeco-Roman World*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 118; Fellman, Rudolf, "Der Sabazios Kult," in *Die orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich*, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 316-340.

[23] Heidel noted the similarities in the accounts of both Paulina and Fulvia as evidencing this encroaching temple prostitution. He notes that Tacitus equates the Jews and Egyptians so closely that they almost seem to be identical. Moreover, strict measures were taken by the Senate to eliminate the apparent presence of prostitution among

Regardless, the stories serve to display the level at which Rome was being confronted with the emerging cosmopolitanism of her Empire. Anubis, the dog-headed god, was a part of this tension.

But despite such tensions, there was a kind of inevitability in the new syncretism, which ultimately facilitated the evolution of metamorphosis beliefs. Traditional Roman culture was doomed to fail in the struggle to avert dilution with the Hellenistic faiths. In the same year that Tiberius launched his persecutions, Germanicus visited the ancient lands of the Nile.[24] Here, he sought out the sacred Apis bull and observed a fast in honor of the occasion.[25] Given Germanicus' rank, the visit may well have had political implications.[26] Still, the oriental cults were now attracting the top levels of Roman

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Equestrian women. Heidel says that Fulvia's gifts to the four men were gold and purple. In some oriental societies, gold and purple were woven into temple hangings by prostitutes, e.g. in II Kings, where, among the reforms of King Josiah, was numbered that "He broke down the tents of the sodomities, that were in the house of Jehovah, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah." Smallwood more plausibly noted that by the New Testament period, there was virtually no prostitution left in oriental religions—especially in biblical societies. She argues that the fundamental reason for the expulsion of A.D. 19 was that the Jews were converting many Romans to Judaism, basing her claims on a single reference from Cassius Dio, and a reference by Seneca to general suspicion of foreign beliefs around this time. Still, general Roman xenophobia seems the most realistic explanation for the persecutions of A.D. 19. II Kings, 23: 7; Tac., *Ann.*, II. 85; Cass. Dio, 57. 18. 5a; Sen., *Epist.*, 108. 22; Heidel, W.A., "Why were the Jews banished from Italy in A.D. 19," in *American Journal of Philology*, 41 (1920), 38-47; Smallwood, "Some Notes on the Jews under Tiberius," 318.

[24] Ootgeheim, J., "Germanicus en Égypte," in *Les Études Classiques*, 27, (1975), 241-57.

[25] Pliny, *NH.*, VII. 185; Solin., XXXII. 19; Amm. Marc., XXII. 14.8.

[26] "On ne peut s'empêcher de songer que Germanicus par son voyage en Égypte cherchait la sympathie des Égyptiens, laquelle aurait pu lui être d'un grand secours dans un lutte éventuelle contre Drusus, le fils de Tibère." Malaise, Michel, *Les Conditions de Pénétration et de Diffusion des Cultes Égyptiens en Italie*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 394.

leadership. Indeed, the son of Germanicus was to finally bring Egypt's gods and notions of Hellenistic monarchy into the Eternal City.

But the animism imported from Egypt was only the crudest example of metamorphosis in Hellenistic and Imperial religion. The ancient idea that men could become gods gained further credence, and features heavily in many of the new hybrid sects. Ancient mythic heroes such as Hercules, Cadmus, Romulus, Aeneas had all received forms of deification. The Hellenistic and Roman eras saw this old notion spread and diffused into the new cults. Ultimately this took the form of belief in resurrection—an idea which culminated in Christianity, but which found echoes in other faiths as well.

The other men that became gods had been, generally, mythic heroes from the hoary ages of pre-history and folklore. For society to worship or venerate a near contemporary was something quite new which Greece and Rome inherited from the East. In fact, this accounts for the deification of two fundamentally different contemporaries: Caesar and Christ. They were light-years apart, both metaphorically and philosophically. Caesar represented the culmination of everything for which the public man could strive; power, fame and glory. Christ embodied pure human spirituality—the rejection of secular careerism, and the baubles of human institutions. These men left powerful biographies for the ages. Yet both were to transcend their niches as mere historical figures. They became immense cultural icons—archetypal literary figures symbolizing two antithetical religions: worldly glory, and simple human decency—the *civitas hominis* and the *civitas dei*. They were, in effect, two sides of the same coin. Both became gods.

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Deification for Caesar and Christ was not an easy transformation. Worshipping men as gods represented the greatest assertion of metamorphosis beliefs. The shift in views regarding the fundamental humanity of all men and women did not come naturally to the West. Indeed, the struggle between old and new thinking in this regard was seldom more visibly marked than in the struggle over Emperor worship. Emperor worship was an ancient and engrained custom in the East, with its millenia long history of pharaohs and priest-kings. The *kulturkampf* in the West was manifested early in the struggle over Emperor worship. Rome's ostensibly republican institutions wrestled with the idea of the Hellenistic monarchy, which proved to be pre-cursor to the Emperor, as well as the Emperor's cult. Consideration of the first major rulers of Rome to claim divinity reveals much in this regard.

The worship of kings and pharaohs, an ancient and established custom among many eastern societies, had been adopted by Alexander the Great, and became customary among many Hellenistic rulers. This was particularly true in Egypt, where millennia of worshipping the monarch had readied the indigeneous population to bow low before the Ptolemies. Caesar, who campaigned triumphantly in Egypt, was the first Roman ruler to toy with assuming godhood. In settling Egypt, he flirted with the notion of creating an eastern style monarchy, perhaps one modeled after the Ptolemies. In the West, he was clearly offered hints of divinity by the Senate. These honors came in response to Caesar's great triumphs at Thapsus and Munda.[27]

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[27] Nock, *Conversion*, 56.

After Thapsus, a chariot was set on the Capitol facing Jupiter. Alongside it was a bronze statue of Caesar which seems to have had one foot resting on a glove.[28] While the significance of such symbolism is not certain, the implications of world rule and even divinity seem evident. After Munda, Hellenistic influences were even more visible. Receiving news of Caesar's triumph, the Senate decreed that the morrow's Parilia should be celebrated simultaneously with the victory.[29] In the processional launching the Parilian games, an ivory figure of Caesar was to be carried, accompanied by other gods.[30] In later years, Caesar placed a gold image of the divine Cleopatra beside the statue of Venus, his ancestoress, in a temple.[31] And after the Ides, the people originally desired to bring Caesar's corpse into the temple of Jupiter for burial.[32]

In the struggle between Antony and Octavian, the political implications of the different religious systems became even more marked. For political propaganda, the struggle between Rome's two leading strongmen took on grandiose theological and cultural aspects. Cleopatra's influence upon Antony was crucial in this regard.[33] Plutarch

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[28] Cass. Dio, 43. 14. 6.

[29] The Parilia celebrated the gods and goddesses Pales, patrons of the flocks and fields. A prayer to Pales is found in Ovid. By Cicero's day the games were celebrated as representing the foundation of Rome. Ovid, *Fasti*, 4. 721; Cic., *De Div.*, 2. 98; Varro, *Rust.*, III. 2.1.9.

[30] Cass. Dio, 43.45. 2; Suet., *Iuv.*, 76.1.

[31] App., *BCiv.*, 2. 148.

[32] *ibid.*, 2. 148; Suet., *Iuv.*, 88. Suetonius reports that after Caesar's death, a comet shot through the sky.

[33] Huzar, E. G., *Mark Antony: A Biography*, (London: Croom-Helm, 1978), 189-90.

tells that Cleopatra, as the divine ruler, was associated with both Isis and Aphrodite.[34] As her alliance with Antony developed, Cleopatra posed with him for various paintings and statues. In Egypt, in 38 B.C., Antony declared himself Dionysus. Dio Cassius stated that Antony was depicted as Dionysus or Osiris, and she as Isis or Selene.[35] In 34 B.C., after defeating the Armenians, Antony presented his spoils to Cleopatra, who sat on her throne dressed as Isis.[36] By traditional custom, he should have offered the fruits of his conquest to the Capitoline Jupiter.[37]

The allure of transforming oneself into divine stature was great. Even Augustus, who claimed to champion traditional Roman virtues, showed Hellenistic notions of a semi-deistic monarchy. Immediate and overt creation of an imperial cult would have been both politically unwise and incompatible with his conservative Roman posturing. Nonetheless, Rome's first emperor attempted to associate his position with the gods, however cautiously. Here is found the basis for the deification of Rome's Emperors which would characterize later periods. In particular, Augustus honored Apollo. His great triumph at Actium was achieved near the temple of Apollo. In commemoration of his victory, he enlarged Apollo's old sanctuary. He also founded the new city of Nicopolis

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[34] Plut., *Ant.*, 54. 6.

[35] Cass. Dio, 50. 5. 2-3; 25. 2-4.

[36] *ibid.*, 49.40.3; cf. Plut., *Ant.*, 50; cf. also, Huzar, E.G., "The Literary Efforts of Mark Antony," in *Aufsteig und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II. 30. 1., 1982, 654-57.

[37] "There is ample evidence in all this that fundamental aspects of the Hellenistic god-king were now being assumed by the Romans; in a sense Antony is the last of the Hellenistic monarchs." Fishwick, Duncan, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 48.

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and began the quinquennial games.[38] The Temple of Apollo was consecreated and erected next door to Augustus' own home.[39] Even earlier steps had aligned the Principate with the immortals. After the Peace of Brundisium, he arrived at a banquet dressed like Apollo.[40]

But despite the flirtations of Caesar, Antony and Augustus with deification, it was only with the reign of Caligula that the practice was introduced de juré. The Emperor was born in A.D.12. Much of his youth was spent with his grandmother Antonia, the daughter of Antony. Only at the age of nineteen did he go to live with his adoptive father, Tiberius.[41] Thus, the young Caligula was reared in an environment acquainted with the Orient.[42] Perhaps this led him to introduce many overtly eastern practices into Rome. Uncertainty continues as to the extent Caligula was influenced by Egyptian beliefs. It seems clear, however, that he was far more susceptible to eastern ideas than his two predecessors. These more eastern flavored ideas included the ascent of men and women, particularly royal ones, to the level of deities.

Caligula may have lost his sanity after a bout with illness in 37.[43] Insanity may have made Caligula eager for the heightened glory heaped upon oriental rulers. He

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[38] Suet., *Aug.*, 18; Strabo, 7. 7. 6.

[39] Cass. Dio, 53. 1. 3.

[40] Suet., *Aug.*, 70; cf. also, Huzar, "The Literary Efforts of Antony," 656.

[41] Suet., *Cal.*, 10.

[42] Plut., *Ant.*, 87.

[43] Philo *Legatio ad Gaium*, 14. 22.

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quickly displayed inclinations toward Hellenistic monarchy. He began by declaring Tiberius a god, but the Senate discouraged this initial act.[44] He next introduced the oriental practice of prostration.[45] Later, a band of Alexandrian Jews visiting Rome were denounced by the Emperor for their people's general reluctance to admit his divinity.[46]

After Caligula, Emperor worship became an increasingly accepted addition to Roman religion. Caligula's successor Claudius largely strove to revive the muted conservatism of Augustus and Tiberius in regards to Emperor worship.[47] He displayed reluctance to accept divine status, although he did receive such accolades in Britain.[48]

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[44] Sen., *Apocol.*, 2.

[45] Cass. Dio, 59. 27.

[46] Philo, *Leg.*; 353; One wonders to what extent these significant breaks with Augustus and Tiberius were the results of specifically Egyptian sentiments. The evidence seems to indicate that Caligula harboured a special fondness for the refined and exotic Nile culture. Philo reports that he surrounded himself with many Egyptian servants. Pliny notes that Gaius brought a beautiful obelisk from Egypt. Both Plutarch and the C.I.L. state that it was Caligula who established the Isiac festival in Egypt. Suetonius and Dio report that one of Caligula's first acts was to build a temple on the Palatine, probably the Isiac Temple. For more complete studies of Caligula's orientalism, Philo, *Leg.*, 166; Pliny, *NH.*, 36. 64; C.I.L., I. 2., 333, and Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 13; Suet., *Cal.*, 22 and Cass. Dio, 59. 28. 2; Wissowa, G., *Religion und Kultus der Romer*, 2ed. ed., (Munich: 1912), 353; cf. especially, Koberlein, *Caligula und ägyptiscen Kulte* (previously noted); Cumont, Franz, "La Salle Isiaque de Caligual au Palatin," in *Revue de l'Historie des Religions*, 114 1936), 127-129.

[47] "Augustus and Tiberius had used religion to enlarge their control of the state. Caligula had misused it for self-glorification. Claudius could readily return to the Augustan model. The temper of the times called both for conservative traditionalism in Roman cults and oecumenical tolerance in accepting the foreign gods of the Empire. The result was a blend in which conservatism was tempered by innovation." Huzar, Eleanor G., "Claudius," 649.

[48] Joseph., *Bell. Jud.*, 7; Tac., *Ann.*, 14. 31; Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult*, vol. 1., pt. 2, 195.

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Yet when he died, he was declared a god in Egypt.[49] With Nero, religious practice was more muted than it had been under Caligula, or than it would be under the Empire's later rulers. Still, oriental despotism, and the deification of leaders which accompanied it, re-emerged more prevalently than it had during the reign of Claudius. Nero himself exhibited a healthy dose of skepticism regarding religious faith.[50] Nonetheless, he largely resurrected the purple trappings of oriental despotism which Caligula had so emulated, and which had found relatively little echo during the reign of Claudius.[51] The Emperor was fairly charmed by the hymns offered him by a band of Alexandrians, and he sent to Egypt for more singers.[52] More important are images found in the *Einsiedeln Eclogues*. Published in 1879 from a tenth century manuscript, a passage from these rare documents repeats Vergil's phrase while describing Nero: "*Tuus iam regnat Apollo*. (Your Apollo

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[49] *Poxy*., 1021, as quoted in Lewis, Naphatalie, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 89.

[50] Suetonius emphasizes Nero's doubt regarding virtually all religions. Nero did favour the Syrian Atargatis. Still, he was capable of urinating on her statue, lest anyone think him a zealot. Suet., *Nero*, 56; For Atargatis, cf. Luc., *Syr D*; Apul., *Met*., 8-9.

[51] Much of oriental despotism which leaked into the Empire's early decades seems to have been derived from Egypt. Nero's close circle of friends and family included individuals well-acquainted with Egyptian ways. One of Nero's teachers was Chaeremon of Naucratis. Chaeremon's work is no longer extant, but he is mentioned in Porphyry as having been director of the library at Alexandria. More, Nero's wife, Poppaea Sabina, had family who worshipped Isis. In Pompean excavations, the home of her cousin Poppaea Habitus was discovered.Tram Tan Tinh reports that in its garden were beautiful Egyptian religious symbols. Tacitus reports that when Sabina died, Nero did not burn her body in traditional Roman fashion, but had her corpse spiced as was done in the Orient. Porph., *Abst*., 4. 6, in Eus., *Praep. Evang*., III. 4; Tac., *Ann*., XVI. 6. 2; Tinh, Tram Tan, *Essai sur le culte d'Isis à Pompéi*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964), 48-49; Colin, Jean, "Les Consuls du César-Pharon Caligula et l'Héritage de Germanicus," in *Latomus*, 13 (1954), 410.

[52] Suet., *Nero*, 20.

reigns at last)."[53] Similarly, a skit on the death of Caligula depicts Phoebus comparing Nero to the great Sun.[54]

The role of Emperor worship in introducing the idea that men could metamorphose into gods, however significant, had severe limitations. In theological terms, Emperor worship was hardly egalitarian. The Roman Empire numbered roughly 100 million people. If only the Emperor had access to divine status, that was hardly evidence of a democratic trend in religion. Compared to most people, the Emperor was already a virtual god. The same ideas, however—that a human being could become god—also figured at the center of several major Hellenistic faiths. Through them, the benefits of divine status were soon to be offered to popular culture. This provided the most sophisticated extension of the idea of metamorphosis and the most powerful, accounting for the immense transformation in religion which comprises Hellenistic and/or Graeco-Roman religions. The notion that commen men and women could enter into the realm of the spirit and eternity—that a kind of deification was open to all who sought it—transformed the nature of ancient religion. This was a profound innovation in religion, and one which was a central characteristic of

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[53] The Einsiedeln Eclogues are sometimes attributed to Calpurnicus Siculus, though this cannot be proven. The text is found in *Poeti Latini Minores*, ed. by E. Baehrens, 5 vols., 1879-83, iii; *Eclogues*, 4. 5. 87; Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, 46.

[54] Sen., *Apol.*, 4. 1. 5. 25; recall that in much Hellenistic philosophy, the sun was the "sun king (βασιλεύς ἥλιος)"—the "heart of the world" (καρδια τοῦ κοσμου) which bestowed all life. The little religious affinity which Nero displayed seems to have derived from solar worship. Tacitus reports that when a conspiracy against Nero was discovered, Sol was considered to have saved the Emperor. Tac., *Ann.*, XV. 74; cf. Halsberghe, Gaston, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 35; Cumont, *Mithras*, 27.

the Hellenistic age. Its most important and elemental manifestation was a liberation from that most basic nemesis of human aspiration, death.

The shifting from death to life was the greatest metamorphosis possible for a human being to undergo. Resurrection from death was an important component in many of the Hellenistic "mystery" religions. Death was a dominant sub-theme in many of the new cults. Again, the religions emanating from Egypt are particularly instructive. Sarapis himself had been born in an ancient Memphis tomb and was frequently associated with death, the greatest mystery of all. This was a logical extension of his connections with Osiris.[55] Diodorus Siculus notes that Sarapis was equated with both Osiris and Pluto, the Greek god of the underworld.[56] Plutarch's important *De Iside et Osiride* refers to the death aspect of Sarapis, and links the god with Pluto/Hades.[57] Similarly, there were those

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[55] There was apparently some attempt to make Osiris the son of Zeus and an Egyptian girl from Thebes. Cf. Diod. Sic., *On Egypt*, 25; "Serapis et Osiris furent ou identique des l'origine ou identifes immediatement." Cumont, *Les Religions Orientales*, 70.

[56] Apart from well-known myths regarding Hades, popular conceptions of the Greek afterlife remain somewhat enigmatic. Cynical Lucian says that "the general herd (ὁ πολὺς ὄμιλος)" took the old stories from such venerable sources as Homer and Hesiod quite literally, including belief in the afterlife—so belief in the traditional Greek afterlife must have had at least some popularity in the Hellenistic world. Plutarch's *Sayings of Spartan Woman* seems to imply a kind of Valhalla for Spartan soldiers, and that deserters went to hell. Too, there seems to have been the belief that soldiers dying in battle went immediatly to the afterlife. At least, this is what Plutarch seems to indicate. He depicts Leonidas addressing his troops just before Thermopylae, telling them to eat breakfast in the expectation that they would be having dinner in paradise. This bears some contrast to Christian eschatology, which often seems to depict a kind of waiting period, wherein believers must await the final apocalypse described in Revelation before they receive their "final rewards." Nonetheless, Christ did say to the thief on the cross, "this day (σήμερον) thou shalt be with me in paradise." Diod. Sic., *On Egypt*, 25; Lucian, *On Funerals*, 2; cf. Plutarch, *Sayings of Spartan Women*, 1,13, 22; Xenephon, *Spartan Society*, 1; Luke, 39-43.

[57] Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 28.

in Plutarch's day who believed the word Sarapis literally meant "coffin of Apis."[58] A worshipper of Sarapis was considered an omen of Alexander the Great's death.[59] His Greek adherents often depicted Sarapis with wheatstalks and Cerebus (the afterlife and fertility).[60]

The transformation entailed by death comprised a central feature in much Egyptian religious ceremony. Apuleius, for example, describes rituals overtly centering on death.[61] These were strange cermemonies of which we know but little. Such secret mysteries undoubtedly added greatly to the shadowy, exotic allure of the eastern cults.[62] After Isis

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[58] *ibid.*, XXIX; Diodorus tells of an ancient link between Osiris and the Apis bull. This focuses on the famous tale of Osiris' dismemberment. According to this account, Isis gathered up all the various pieces save her husband's reproductive organ. She then delivered one to each Egyptian district for burial. Individual priests were instructed to choose a local animal to represent Osiris, and the Apis bull was selected as a more universal embodiment of the god. Diod. Sic., *On Egypt*, 21-22; cf. Augustine, *De civ.* D, XVIII. 5.

[59] Plut., *Alex*, LXXVIII; Arr. *Anab.*, VII. 26. Sarapis is now believed to have made his appearance during the early years of Ptolemaic reign in Egypt. Hence, his appearance in Persia during the campaigns of Alexander seems anachronistic. This account has led some to believe that Sarapis was really the Babylonian deity "Shar-Apsi." More plausible is the theory that the deity referred to in the narratives was some now unknown god whom men of Plutarch's or Arrian's time would have equated with Sarapis. Stambaugh, John, *Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 9-11; Cumont, *Les Religions Orientales*, 70; Brenk, Frederick, *In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives*, (Leiden: Lugdini Batavorum, 1977), 198.

[60] Hani, Jean, "Sarapis Dieu Solaire," in *Revue des Études Grecques*, I, 83 (1970), 52.

[61] Apul., *Met.*, XI. 23.

[62] These mystery rites were quite secretive and exclusive. Lucian reports that while the emblems of Dionysus were being paraded in the streets, one of the revelers walked through the town, ordering the uninitiated to shut their doors so they could not see the religious ceremony. In Petronius' *Satyricon*, the protagonist Encolpius and his companion are greeted at an inn by the maid of the innkeeper Quartilla. The servant girl tells the young men that Quartilla was in her "secret chapel (*cryptam*)," where she was practicing

restored human form to Lucius, he became a fervent devotee, undergoing some rite of symbolic death. Lucius tells us that he entered the threshold beyond death, where he encountered and worshipped many gods.[63] The next day he emerged and was presented to onlookers in brightly colored, exotic garb, decorated with flowers and various animals. In his right hand was a "torch brimming with flames."[64] Most important, on his head he wore an impressive headdress, implying the radiant sun.[65] Like much Christian theology, this death and resurrection was understood in terms of a re-birth, not unlike the language employed by Christ in John 3. Indeed, Lucius at one point says that "I celebrated most festively the 'sacred birth' (*natalem sacrorum*)."[66]

This ritual symbolized some kind of death and resurrection—the final, culminating act of metamorphosis. Apuleius had referred to an initiation ceremony "like a voluntary

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her religious devotions. Apuleius, as usual, provides extremely pertinent information. After Lucius was restored human shape, he underwent initiation into the mysteries of Isis. Just before he took part in the secret ceremony in which he later claimed to have seen the gods, Lucius/Apuleius reports that "Then, all the 'uninitiated' were dismissed. *Tunc semotis procul profanis omnibus.*" The choice of words used by Apuleius to distinguish between "initiates" and "uninitiates" is intriguing: "sacrati," and "profani." Another especially important primary source for the mysteries is Plato's *Phaedrus*. Cf. Lucian, *de Sacr.*, 14; cf. also, Petronius, *Satyricon*, 1. 16; cf. Apul., *Met.*, XI. 23, 24.

[63] "During midnight, I saw the sun flashing with bright light . . . *nocte media vidi solem candido coruscantem lumine.*" Continuing, Lucius/Apuleius notes, "I approached the lower gods and the upper gods face to face and I adored them at close range . . . *deos inferos et deos superos accessi coram et adoravi de proximo.*" Apul., *Met.*, XI. 23.

[64] "*At manu dextra, gerebam flammis adultam facem.*" *ibid.*, XI. 24.

[65] *ibid.*, XI. 24.

[66] "*Exhinc festissimum celebravi natalem sacrorum.*" Birth imagery was a common theme in death and resurrection theology. The most well-known manifestation of this truth was in Christian theology, with its emphasis on being "re-born," and dying to self. All these abstract concepts were embodied in the ceremony of Baptism. *ibid.*, XI. 24.

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death (*ad instar voluntariae mortis*)."[67] The ceremony itself is, in theory, not entirely unlike the coffin rituals involved in modern masonic liturgy. The ritual described in *Metamorphoses* draws on an Egyptian myth concerning the death and resurrection of Osiris, related by Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*.[68] As a mortal Pharaoh, Osiris was tricked by enemies into lying down in a coffin, whereupon the lid was suddenly sealed, and the entire box thrown into the Nile. Isis ultimately retrieved her brother/husband, and Osiris became a major god of both fertility and the afterlife. Plutarch asserts that one of Osiris' first acts was to bring cultivation to the barren land.[69] Hence, one notes the mythological links between funerary rites, fertility and resuscitation.[70] Like a seed being planted into the ground, the dead Osiris/Apis yielded life, in a new and glorified form.[71]

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[67] *ibid.*, XI. 21.

[68] Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 11-15.

[69] *ibid.*, 13.

[70] Also from Plutarch we learn that a holy ceremony marked the flooding of the Nile. In the holy rites, a jar of Nile water headed a procession honoring Osiris and fertility. Moreover, at the "Pamylia" festival, a statue wielding a greatly exaggerated phallus was carried. This iconography seems to have been related to the Osiris myth. Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 36; Peuckert, Will-Erich, *Geheimkulte*, (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1984), 497.

[71] This point is especially pertinent given the funeral culture of much of antiquity, and especially Egypt. Many ancient Egyptian reliefs depict the ritual purification of a dead person. Here, the minister never washes the person's head nor feet, but pours water in streams over the head of the corpse instead. Similarly, Lucian reports that the Egyptians salted corpses and set them at the table for dinner, noting as well that the common classes were known to bathe corpses before a funeral. Cf. Wild, Robert, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 145, ftn. 69; Lucian, *On Funerals*, 21, 12.

The growth of a seed into a mature plant was an image of metamorphosis which was readily absorbed by ancient religions. Sarapis was linked to fertility in even more explicit fashion. In fact, he was associated with the biblical Joseph, for both Joseph and Osiris were mythic givers of agriculture to Egypt, in ancient Egyptian and Hebrew myth.[72] This points to the common bond of fertility which the two figures shared.[73] Moreover, the Jewish tribe of Joseph was associated with the bull, recalling both Apis and the Biblical golden calf.[74] Referring to this link, Tertullian, in A.D. 197, wrote that "For this Serapis was formerly called Joseph from the family of the Saints."[75] Rufinus of Aquileai (c. 345-401) linked Joseph and Sarapis, citing their common association with grain.[76] So too did Firmicus Maternus in his *De Errore Profanarum Religionum*, which urged the eradication of paganism.[77] Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* describes the origins

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[72] Mussies, Gerard, "The Interpretation Judaica of Sarapis," in *Studies in Hellensitic Religions*, ed. by M.J. Vermaseren, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1979), 189-214.

[73] Consider Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture whose altar appears in *Metamorphoses* during the Cupid and Psyche myth. After being scorned by Cupid, and victimized by Venus, Psyche wandered the countryside. She finally saw a couch there, with sheaves of corn, blades twisted into garlands, barley reeds, hooks, scythes, sickels, and other havesting instruments strewn about the scene. The goddess Ceres appeared to Psyche. Although moved by the maiden's plight, she had made an ancient treaty of friendship with Venus, and was unable to help Psyche. As well as revealing the collegiality of the gods, the scene as described by Apuleius is a quaint and special depicition of the lesser fertility religions which figured heavily in rural popular culture. Apul., *Met.*, VI. 2-3.

[74] Deuteronomy, 33:17.

[75] Tert., *Apol.*, II. 8.

[76] Ruf., Aquil., *Hist. Ecc.*, XI. 23.

[77] Firm., Mat., *De Errore Profanarum Religionum*, 13.

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of Sarapis just subsequent to an account regarding Joseph.[78] This may have been Augustine's attempt to differentiate between the commonly linked Sarapis and Joseph.[79]

The metamorphosis from death to resurrection was frequently understood in the ancient guise of solar religion. This was especially true with Egyptian faith. Indeed, the bonding of the Hellenistic/Egyptian religion with death was closely paralleled with its link to the sun, the earth's most visible life-giving force. The sun was a traditional part of the Egyptian afterlife. The Egyptians believed that the sun traveled through the underworld at night.[80] This corroborates the blinding and brilliant image of the spirit realm which Lucius narrates. Sarapis was frequently linked with the sun. Weber has asserted that

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[78] August., *De civ. D.*, XVIII. 4. 5.

[79] Mussies, "The Interpretation Judaica of Sarapis," 194-200.

[80] The blending of underworld theology with the metaphor of darkness and light, or night and day, also figures heavily in Apuleius' version of the Cupid and Psyche myth. Readers see some evidence of ancient beliefs regarding hell (*Orcus*) and/or *Domus Ditis*, the House of Pluto. In this version of the myth, a jealous Venus is giving Psyche impossible tasks—reminiscent of the twelve labours of Hercules. After Psyche passes the particularly difficult second task, getting some golden fleece from a magical flock of sheep, Venus declares her belief that the girl is a witch (*Malefica*=evil doing). She commands the girl to "take herself straightaway to hell, to the feral haunts of Orcus himself. *Protinusque ad inferos et ipsius Orci ferales penates te derige.*" There, she is to fill a box with a day's worth of beauty. Hell is clearly depicted as being "under the ground," an ancient understanding of the world which still exists in some religious circles. With the help of a magic tower, Psyche is instructed to locate the area known as Taenarus, a ruined and remote region. Here she will find the "breathhole of Hell (*spiraculum Ditis*). The Hell depicted in Apuleius does indeed seem to have been linked with darkness and/or night, for as Psyche departs from Hell *à la* Orpheus, she is said to "worship the bright light of day (*adorata candida ista luce*)." Psyche's descent into hell, from which she successfully emerges, is a metaphor for religious salvation. It serves as a kind of parable for the sort of religious salvation which is the moral centerpiece of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Apul., *Met.*, VI. 13, 16, 19, 20.

Sarapis was initially considered a son of the god Helios, then a manifestation of Helios himself.[81] Indeed, there was an entire sub-sect of Sarapis centering around the sun.[82] A crucial account of the solar cult comes from Rufin's *Ecclesiastical History* (XI. 23). Each year, on a certain day following the Nile's annual flood and the New Year, a festival was held at Alexandria. The temple was structured so that at a precise moment in this festival, a single ray of sunshine would strike the god's image, which normally was nestled in shadows and darkness. Hani argues that this ceremony symbolically united

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[81] Weber, W., *Drei Untersuchungen zur ägyptisch greichischer Religion*, (Berlin, 1911),

[82] Just as Sarapis was frequently associated with Helios, the sun, his consort Isis was commonly linked with the moon. Indeed, virtually all the major goddesses of later antiquity had the moon as one of their central symbols. In Ovid, Isis (in her Italian guise as Io) appears to a certain Ligdus, who was encouraging his pregnant wife to commit infanticide if the child should prove to be female. This story not only indicates the significance of Isis as the divine protector of unborn women, but it also shows the goddess'nocturnal qualities. Her forehead is ornamanted with moon shapes (*lunaria coruna*). This correlates to Apuleius' description of her in his *Metamorphoses*, wherein she also has moon shapes on her forehead, as well as the wheat stalks symbolizing fertility. Later, Apuleius reports that her garment also was adorned with the moon and stars. Ovid, *Met.*, IX. 660; Apul., *Met.*, XI. 3, 4.

Sarapis with the life-giving sun.[83] In terms of Egyptian theology, the deities of Osiris and Re had been merged.[84]

But the great cults of the Hellenistic and Roman eras were not the only ones to propound the metamorphosis from death to life. The ancient world's religiously heterodox twilight centuries were host to a variety of new and often obscure cults embodying profound notions about death, life, and resurrection. Lucian preserves one such example in his *The Passing of Peregrinus*, which mockingly describes Peregrinus, who had converted to Christianity for a time, but ultimately returned to cynic philosophy. According to Lucian, he had become so enamoured of Indic ideas that he finally cremated

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[83] This Egyptian solar ceremony honoring Sarapis corresponds somewhat to early Roman festivals honoring Luna, the moon goddess, whom later antiquity associated with Sarapis' consort Isis. She was one of the oldest and most elemental of ancient Latin deities, preceding the Syrian Atargatis and the Greek Artemis, whom Romans worshipped as Diana. The comparison between Egyptian and Italian tendencies to worship the sun and moon reveals the tenacious ancient propensity to venerate the heavens. Lucretius claimed that the first men were compelled to religion by the many activities of the sky—night, day, storm, show, winds, thunder, etc. The soft and enigmatic visage of the moon was no exception. In early Rome, Luna was sometimes associated with Hecate and the lunar cycle which had provided the most accessible unit of measuring time. Ovid notes that the "moon rules the months. *Luna regit menses.*" Therefore, according to Ovid, the end of each March ended with the worship of the moon on the Aventine hill. Varro echoes these same assertions. The passage by Varro notes that the temples built by Titus Tatius included Temples both to the moon and Diana. If Varro is using some ancient source, this would probably indicate some distinction between the two during the Sabine period. Tacitus reports the construction of another temple honoring the moon on the Aventine, and near the Circus Maximus. Vitruvius mentions this temple as well. Ovid, *Fasti*, 109-110, *Met.*, III. 883; Varro, *Lingua Latina*, V. 68, 74; cf. Tacitus, *Ann*, XV. 41. 1; Vit., V. 5. 8; Lucretius, V. 1188-1193; Lunais, Sophie, *Recherches sur la Lune: 1., Les Auteurs Latins de la fin Guerres Puniques à la fin du regne des Antonins*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 98.

[84] "Le sens d'un tel rite est clair. Il s'agissait, en somme, d'une reanimation de la statue, d'une 'unio mystica de Sarapis avec son père, c'est à dire, en terms de theologie égyptienne, d'Osiris avec Rê. Hani, "Sarapis Dieu Solaire," 53.

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himself at Olympia in A.D. 165. Despite Lucian's derisive tone, many telling qualities of Peregrinus' beliefs emerge from the account. These indicate fairly sophisticated beliefs in death and resurrection theology, and the diffusion of this sort of metamorphosis into more popular culture.

Peregrinus feigned himself Homer's Proteus, the "old man of the sea" found in the *Odyssey*.[85] The being had a range of magical powers, including shape-shifting. He could take on so many forms that it was virtually impossible for Menelaus to apprehend the old man. Menelaus was able to corner him only at the instruction of his daughter Eidothea, who told him to disguise himself in seal skins.

Peregrinus combined these beliefs in shape-shifting metamorphosis with more abstract notions regarding resurrection. He apparently borrowed liberally from Indic religion and Greek philosophy. Indeed, Lucian at one point calls him "Peregrinus Proteus," and again, Proteus the "cynic."[86] He notes that "Peregrinus no longer deigned to be called Proteus, but had changed his name to Phoenix, because the Phoenix, the Indian bird, was said to mount a pyre when it is very far advanced in age.[87] Lucian also accused the "Peregrinus" of repeating certain oracles which conveniently appeared to support his claims to special and even divine status. It was plain, too, that he already

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[85] Homer, *Od.*, IV.

[86] Lucian, *Demonax*, 21; *adv. Idoct.*, 14.

[87] Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus*, 27.

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desired divine status, and fully expected that image would be re-cast in gold.[88] Lucian reports that Peregrinus believed he was cremating himself "in order to teach them to scorn death and conquer their fears," and to overcome the body's physical limitations.[89] He went to his cremation in a downright filthy shirt, somewhat resembling popular images of John the Baptist and hinting at the ascetisicm which would come to characterize religious fervor in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.[90] Indeed, he sees cremation as a form of despising death, burning, and other such terrors.[91] As he approached his cremation fire, Peregrinus talked about all the trials he had faced, and the labors he had endured.[92] Reserving as much cynicism for the sophistry and pseudo-intellectualism of

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[88] The word here is ἀναστήσεσθαι, to be risen up again. In other words, he expects a kind of cultural resurrection, in which his spirit and legacy will be both literally and figuratively resurrected in the form of golden statuary. This demonstrates the subtle tension between abstract and practical meaning which Hellenistic Greek accorded to the word ἀναστασις. This word became of monumental significance in Christian theology and textual criticism.

[89] "ὡς διδάξειν αὐτοὺς θανάτου κάταφρονεῖν καὶ ἐγκαρτερεῖν τοῖς δεινοῖς." *ibid.*, 23.

[90] *ibid.*, 36.

[91] In Mark, believers are promised that they will be able to handle serpents, drink poisons, and undergo other like activities. The passage's origin is disputed, and it does not appear in the earlier copies of Mark. These controversial verses have given rise to some of Christendom's more bizarre religious sects, including the snake-handlers and fire-eaters of American Appalachia. Mark 16: 17-18.

[92] Again, comparison with Christian thinking is in order. Consider Paul's boasting in his epistle to the church at Corinth. "We are fools on account of Christ, you are strong. You are in glory, we are in dishonour. Until this hour, we hunger and thirst, we are naked, burdened and stateless. ἡμεις μωροὶ διὰ Χριστόν, ὑμεῖς δὲ φρόνιμοι ἐν Χριστῷ, ἡμεῖς ἀσθενεῖς, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰσχυροί. ὑμεῖς ἔνδοξοι, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄτιμοι. ἄρχι τῆς ὥρας καὶ πεινῶμεν καὶ διψῶμεν καὶ γυμνιτεύμεν καὶ κολαφιζόμεθα καὶ ἀστατοῦμεν." I Cor. 4:

his day as he did for religious fanaticism, Lucian also notes that the various cynic philosophers at the scene were pushing Peregrinus into the flames—the ancient equivalent of yelling "Jump!" to a suicidal man perched on the ledge of a skyscraper.[93] He sensed the quality of religious extremism which led to such phenomena as Peregrinus. Subsequently, Lucian declares that he would not at all be surprised someday to see some who claim themselves to be healed of fevers by him, or claim that they had encountered his spirit in the dark.[94] However jaded and acerbic his insights may have been, Lucian's understanding of the kinds of social and psychological conditions which give rise to new religious cults are extremely striking—especially given their context with regards to the age which not only spawned minor figures like Peregrinus, but major faiths like Christianity. What is most important to note here are the striking similarities between metamorphosis beliefs preached by the obscure Peregrinus and the more powerful religions of the day, including nascent Christianity.

It was in Christianity where the most profound, tangible and unequivocal manifestation belief in death and re-birth materialized. Ancient belief in a metamorphosis was manifested most profoundly in the resurrection, and subsequent beliefs regarding the liberation of the body and/or spirit from the corrupt realm of the physical world which had been handed down since the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. The Christian

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[93] Indeed, Lucian notes that if Peregrinus should somehow have been able to pull some of these fraudulent and parasitic intellectuals into the flames with him, the cremation ceremony would have been a good thing after all. Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus*, 26.

[94] *ibid.*, 28.

resurrection of the dead was the last great act of metamorphosis of ancient religion. When the new religion claimed to have raised men from the dead, it was making a claim which rivaled the fascination which folklore stories like those of Erictho wielded for popular classes.

The primary word for the resurrection which occurs in the New Testament is ἀνάστασις, a word from which the name Anastasia was derived. The word is derived from the verb ἵστημι, to stand, and the preposition ἀνά, which means "up." Hence, the ἀνάστασις meant, literally, a standing up, or a rising. And indeed, it is in this very mundane, literal sense that the word is often used in the Bible. Only a few of the many examples need be noted here. Peter, in Luke's resurrection story, for example, is described as "rising up" (ἀναστας) and running to the tomb.[95] Sometimes the word is used in ostensibly simple contexts, but ones which could well have larger, more profound meaning as well. The calling of Matthew, for example, uses ἀνίστημι in a seemingly simple context—but one which could well have larger meaning, especially given the senstive context of the story, and the larger significance of the Christian "calling, κλῆσις." Here, Christ saw Matthew sitting at the customs house (ἐπι τὸ τελώνιον) and says to him, "Follow me ('Ακολούθει μοι)." Subsequently, Matthew, "rising up (ἀναστας)" follows Jesus.[96] The understated Hellenistic Greek is even more succinct

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[95] Luke, 24:12.

[96] Matt. 9:9.

in Luke. Telling the same story, Luke noted: ". . . rising up," and "leaving everything behind," he followed Christ.[97]

Other uses of ἀνίστημι in the New Testament narratives are more specific to the death and resurrection themes. Peter "rose up" to go to raise Dorcas from the dead.[98] This same story also featured Peter's use of the imperative ἀνάστηθι. Use of the word in this context is perhaps closer to the theological meaning which ἀνάστασις utlimately entailed. Christ, in referring to the dead Lazarus, tells Martha, "Your brother shall rise."[99] Martha makes a rather telling comment to Christ's assertion,aying, "I know that he shall arise in the resurrection in the last day."[100] 'Ανάστασις is also the word used by the Sadducees in trying to trick Christ by asking him to whom a wife would belong who had been married to seven successive deceased brothers: "In the Resurrection, the woman becomes the woman of which of them, ('Η γυνὴ οὖν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τίνος αὐτῶν γίνεται γυνή."), to which Christ gave the famous response that God is not the God "of the dead (νεκρῶν) but of the living (ἀλλά ζωντων)."[101]

The other important Greek word which was routinely used in the New Testment to refer to resurrection was ἐγείρω, a verb which literally means to "rouse up" or to

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[97] "καὶ καταλιπων πάντα. . . ." Luke 5:28; cf. also, Mark 2:13-17.

[98] Acts, 9:38.

[99] "'Αναστήσεται ὁ ἀδελφός σου." John 11:23.

[100] ". . . Οἶδα ὅτι ἀναστήσεται ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει ἐν ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ." *ibid.*, 11: 24; Consider also Christ's famous and telling response: "I am the resurrection and the life . . . 'Εγω εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καί ἡ ζωή." *ibid.*, 11: 25.

[101] Luke 20:32, 38; The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, an idea which had found favor with many Jews during the period.

"awaken." And as was the case with ἀνάστασις, ἐγείρω serviced a wide range of linguistic usages, spanning from the most rigidly practical to the most abstract and theological. Again, consideration of only some of the most telling examples is warranted. Despite the differences between the two words, they are sometimes used all but interchangeably. The imperative Ἔγειρε is used by Christ in healing the man at the Bethseda pool.[102] Christ used the word similarly in another healing. Jesus had forgiven the sins (ἁμαρτία) of a paralytic, an act which incurred the rebuke of the ubiquitous Pharisees. Subsequently, he said to the crippled man, "Rising up, take your bed and return unto your home."[103] The word refers to healing again in the story of Christ's healing of the ruler's daughter. Here, after his miraculous services were sought by the ruler, Matthew reports that Christ, "rising up," went to follow the distraught man.[104] Later in the same account, ἐγειρω more specifically connotes being raised from the dead. Here, the girl, whom the ruler had believed dead, "was raised up (ἠγερθη)." Other accounts use the word in similarly interesting fashion. Ἐγείρω figures in John, when the writer referred to Lazarus as he "whom him (Jesus) raised from the dead—ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν."[105] When Christ is sleeping in the boat, and the storm comes which he

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[102] John 5: 8.

[103] "Ἐγερθεὶς ἆρόν σου τὴν κλίνην καὶ ὕπαγε εἰς τον οἶκον." Matt. 9:7. Note also the close synoptic similarity which all the synoptic accounts of this story display. All three use virtually the same wording, including the imperative of ἐγείρω. Cf. Mark 2: 9; cf. also Luke 5: 24.

[104] "...ἐγειρθεις, ο Ἰησοῦς ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ." Matt. 9:19. cf. Mark 5:21; cf. also Luke 8:40.

[105] John 12: 1; cf. 12:9.

ultimately quells, the word is used when the disciples awaken Jesus.[106] The word is used in the account in which Christ, and even Simon Peter, are both said to have walked on the water. Here, John asserts, "the sea was roused up by a mighty wind, ἡ τε θαλασσα ἀνεμου μεγάλου πνεοντας διεγείρετο."[107]

The words also figure heavily in accounts of the Transfiguration. Here, the disciples fall to their faces at seeing the unencumbered glory of Christ, at which point Jesus tells them to "rise up and fear not."[108] After the Transfiguration, Jesus tells Peter, John and James not to tell anyone the thing which they saw until the son of man "should rise (ἀναστῇ)" from the dead.[109] This hints at the more theological and abstract connotations of ἀνίστημι. Matthew reports the same admonishment, using ἐγείρω.

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[106] Matt. 8:25; cf. also Mark 4:58.

[107] John 6:18; One interesting point emerges concerning the "Ascension," an event which certainly could have warranted the use of either ἀναστασις or ἐγειρω. It was, after all, a "rising up" in both a literal and theological sense. Still, the sources describing the story of Christ's ascension back into heaven do not use this word. Mark uses the verb ἀναλαμβάνω, saying that Christ was "taken up into heaven (ἀνελήμφη εἰς τον οὐρανον)." Luke uses ἀναφερω, saying that he was "borne up, ἀνεφερετο." Acts, generally assumed to also have been written by Luke, uses αἰρεω: "And saying these things, he was snatched up which they were wtaching, and a cloud took him from their eyes." "καὶ ταῦτα εἰπων βλεπόντων αὐτῶν ἐπήρθη καὶ νεφέλη ὑπελαβεν αὐτον ἀπο τῶν οφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν." Acts 1: 9; cf. Mark 16: 19; cf. also Luke 24: 51; Consider also the sublte differences of the word ἀναβαίνω, or going up. This is the word Matthew used to describe Christ's baptism, where Jesus "goes up, ἀνέβη," from the water. Mark used the same word, in nominative partiple form, ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος. cf. Matt. 3:16; Mark, 1:10.

[108] "'εγέρθητε καὶ μὴ φοβεῖσθε." Matt. 17:7.

[109] Mark 9:9.

"Speak the dream (δραμα) to no one until the time at which the son of man should rise up from the dead."[110]

Both ἀνίστημι and ἐγείρω served mundane and practical usages, but were also directly linked to the theology which informed no less a staple of the Christian message than the resurrection of the dead. This powerful story and myth was the final and greatest example of ancient metamorphosis; the transformation of both the body and the soul into a final and perfected (τέλειος) state. In the gospel accounts of Christ's resurrection from the dead, the words are used all but interchangeably.

But before discussing the resurrection metamorphosis at greater length, consideration must also be given to another metamorphosis metaphor which frequently occurs in New Testament thinking; the use of seed imagery. Seed imagery is extremely common in early Christian writings—especially the New Testament gospels, which tended to reflect the thinking and idioms of rural Palestinian Judaism. Christ notes that one knows it is summer by the fig tree's blossom.[111] More, seed and growth cycle imagery figure heavily into Christ's great parables. There is the parable of the vineyard workers, for example.[112] Similarly, there is the famous passage of the sower going forth to sow.[113] Someti,mes too, the "kingdom of heaven (βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) was likened

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[110] "Μηδενι εἴπητε το δραμα ἕως οὗ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρωπου ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγερθῇ. Matt. 17: 9. Note the use of δραμα, the word for a vision, or a thing being seen. The word highlights the esoteric and mystical connotations of the transfiguration experience.

[111] Matt. 24:32-35; cf. Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21: 29-33.

[112] Matt. 20: 1-16.

[113] Matt. 13: 1-9; cf. Mark 4: 1-9; Luke 8: 4-8.

to a mustard seed, which is smaller than other seeds, but grows (αὐξηθη) and becomes greater than other herbs. Finally, it becomes a tree.[114] In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the "kingdom of heaven" is likened to a man sowing good seed in his field, but the enemy comes and sows tares in the midst of the grain and departs.[115] Too, there is always that tried and true axiom of Christian education, "by their fruits ye shall know them."[116] Elsewhere the spiritual life is likened to a tree. "If the tree is good, the fruit is good."[117] Mark tells readers that the earth bears forth fruit of its own accord (αὐτομάτη).[118]

These are not mere illustrations taken from nature. The transformation evidenced in the growing cycle comprised one of religion's most powerful metaphors. Some of this was, no doubt, that old equation of fecundity with health and wealth, a not unfounded assumption for a much harsher age than today's.[119] In Christian theology, the believer's

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[114] Matt. 13: 31; cf. Mark 4: 30-32; Luke 13: 18-21.

[115] Matt. 13: 25.

[116] "...άπο τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιγώσεσθε αὐτούς." Matt. 7: 16.

[117] *ibid.*, 12: 33.

[118] Mark 4: 28.

[119] Such notions were part of Jewish thinking in the first century, as well as "pagan" and Christian thinking. Philo equated the infamous "self-love (φίλαυτια)" of Onan with selfishness. This refers to the Old Testament story in which Onan is ordered by Judah to impregnate his brother's wife. Knowing the child would not be his however, Onan went into the tent and "spilled his seed on the ground" rather than sire his brother's heir. In the Hebrew thinking of the day, Onan had thought of his own well-being rather than the group. Though long used by clergy to scare adolescent males from the horrors of auto-eroticism, the passage almost certainly refers to coitus interruptus. Nonetheless, its significance was not lost on the ancients, who saw Onan's selfish refusal to share his potency in the most moral of terms. Cf. Philo, *Quod Deus Immutablis Sit*, IV. 16; cf. also

spiritual life was a process which closely mirrored the physical maturation which was a characteristic of the natural world.[120] The 'fertile seed' was a manifestation of the divine spark emanating from all life, and especially human life.[121] Unlike older counterparts which had always been found in the many ancient fertility cults—with their almost intuitive understanding that life often emanates from death—Christianity added new spiritual and ethical dimensions to the ancient metaphor. This was, in essence, the powerful message which the Christian ἀνστασις conveyed to the ancients: to live, you must die. Subsequently, you will be resuscitated in a new, perfect body and spirit. Like the seed which must first go forth into the ground before becoming a plant, to gain the kingdom of heaven, your old self must die, to be replaced with a new and improved

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Genesis 38: 8-10.

[120] Consider Lucian's comparison of youthful male maturation with the sowing of seeds. He notes that young plants are frail, and growers must enclose the young seedlings in protective shelters so that they will not be injured by the breeze. When the stalk begins to thicken however, the grower can take away the protection, which will ultimately make them even more fruitful (καρπιμώτερα). Lucian, *Athletics*, 21.

[121] Philo, who never mentions the *dramatis personae* of the New Testament but shares much of its theology, wrote that Hanna, the mother of Samuel, received the divine seed (θεῖας γονας). In this same treatise, Philo discussed how God had set up the agricultural cycle. God, he says, assigned (απενιμε) growth to the plants. Here there is at least some similarity to Christ's famous parable of the seeds. A plant which is not watered decays and withers. When watered however, its growth is fully manifest for all to see. So too, in winter, plants die, to rise again in summer. Nature (φὐσις) then rises with the springtime warmth (εκ βαθεος ὑπνου περιαναστασα) and nourishes the young plants to life. Nature provides this nourishment (τροφεῖα) to the seedling just as a mother provides milk to an infant. More, the mystified means of this (δία τίνῶ ἀφάνῶν πορῶν) were analogous to women's life-giving breasts. cf. Philo, *Quod Deus Immutablis Sit*, II. 5; VII. 37-40.

model. This is what Christ meant when he said that "the grain of wheat bears forth much fruit if, falling to the ground, it dies."[122]

The seed image comprised a profound metaphor for Christian metamorphosis. It was found in myriads of early Christianity's most famous stories and beliefs. As was demonstrated in an earlier chapter on blood, early Christianity associated the physical body with death and corruption. This basic idea informed the great doctrine of orignal sin. In fact, the body was used as a metaphor both for the Church as a whole, and for Christian maturation. Consider, for example, Paul's famous line, "When I was a child, I thought like a child . . . but when I became a man, I put away childish things."[123] Too, the physical body and mortal consciousness were utterly unable to understand the truth of God, an eerily Platonic idea. Recall, for example, Paul's statement, "We see though a mirror into an enigma, but then face to face."[124] Hence, the growth of the human body was symbolically equated with the growth of the Christian initiate in knowledge and spiritual development. This again is demonstrated when Paul equates spirituality with physical maturation, using the word φρενος. "Brethren, be ye not children in your thinking (ταῖς φρεσίν), but be ye children in regards to evil. Be ye mature (τελειοι) in your thoughts."[125]

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[122] John 12: 24.

[123] 1 Cor. 13: 11; consider also Ephesians, which discusses the Christian life, distinguishing between infants (new believers) and adults (mature Christians). Ephesians 4: 14-15.

[124] Βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον." 1 Cor. 13: 12.

[125] *ibid.* 14: 20.

But this preoccupation with the body was manifested in more ways than just symbolism regarding human growth cycles. In many primitive Christian doctrines, sin, the natural body and death were one and the same thing. "Sin reigned in death."[126] Sin was believed to have been handed down by Adam. Indeed, the entire essence of the Christian message lay in this belief in the utter depravity of the self, as characterized by the physical body. In this perverse egalitarianism, all men and women were equally corrupt—equally doomed. Hence, the epistle to the infant church in Rome notes that the wages (τὰ ὀψεωνια) of sin were death.[127] More, all had sinned (πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον) and "fell short of God's glory (ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δοξης τοῦ θεοῦ)."[128] Paul wrote that "flesh and blood (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα)" would not inherit the kingdom of god, neither would corruption inherit incorruption.[129] This dichotomy between the spiritual body and the physical body was also apparent in the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus. Here, the religious leader comes to Christ by night to seek answers. Christ tells the old man that "except someone be born from above, he cannot see the kingom of heaven." Continuing, he asserts, "that being born from flesh is flesh, and that being born from spirit is spirit."[130]

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[126] "...ἐβασίλευσεν ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θανάτω." Romans 5: 21; Paul also wrote that Christian are "dead" (νεκροὺς) in their sins. Cf. Ephesians 2: 1,5; Colossians, 2: 13.

[127] Romans 6: 23.

[128] *ibid.*, 3: 23.

[129] 1 Cor. 15: 50.

[130] The Latin word Uterus embodied many of the same connotations which Hellenistic Greek did, with regards to the physical body. The "*Uterus Terrae*" was said to have been the hole in the earth from which all living creation had been born. Birth and the body

Given the equating of the old and/or physical body with death, the resurrection was a crucial linch-pin in the Christian message of metamorphosis. Hence, when there was apparently a group at Corinth who were denying the significance and historicity of Christ's resurrection, Paul was adamant: "If Christ be not raised, our message is in vain, and our faith is in vain—we shall be found false witnesses (ψευδομάρτυρες) of God."[131] He alleges that the risen Jesus was seen by over five hundred people, many of whom were still living at the time he wrote the first epistle to the church at Corinth.[132] Pitting the first Adam against the second Adam (Christ), he notes that in Adam, all die. Conversely, in Christ, all shall be made alive (ζῳοποιηθήσονται).[133] Ironically, ζῳοποιεω occurs far less frequently in the New Testament than does ἀνιστημι and ἐγείρω, but its meaning is no less significant in terms of Christian resurrection theology. Elsewhere, it is used in conjunction with the seed metaphor. For example, Paul writes that "what you sow is not made alive, except that it dies."[134] This is hinting at many of the same ideas which are found in a range of ancient fertility beliefs, including the Eleusinian rites centering around Demeter and Persephone, Adonis, and the elusive Isis rites described in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Death is not the end, but a metamorphosis. In the New Testment, this is never clearer than in Paul's quote that "all

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were seen as part of a natural physical order, which could be readily distinguished from the spiritual realm. John 3: 3, 6.

[131] 1 Cor. 15: 14-19.

[132] *ibid.*, 15: 5-6.

[133] *ibid.*, 15: 22.

[134] ". . . καὶ ὃ σπείρεις, οὐ ζῳοποιεῖται ἐὰν μὴ ἀποθάνῃ." *ibid.*, 15: 36.

flesh is not the same flesh." Instead, the apostle distinguishes between "heavenly (ἐπουράνια) flesh, and earthy (ἐπίγεις), or carnal flesh.[135]

Hence, the Christian conversion was a fundemantal transformation. It echoed many of the most basic ancient religious ideas of the era. But it also added a moral dimension, and the risen, metamorphosed Christian being had been "sown in corruption, risen in incorruption; sown in dishonor, risen in glory; sown in infirmity, risen in power." Continuing, Paul wrote, "the body is sown natural, it is risen as spiritual. If the body is natural, it is also physical."[136] Again, the comparsion is made between the two Adams. The first man, Adam, was fashioned unto natural life. The second Adam was fashioned unto spiritual life. Similarly, the first "man" was of the earth (ἐκ γῆς χοϊκος), while the "second man (δευτερος ἄνθρωπος) was "of heaven (ἐξ οὐραανοῦ)."[137] It was the second man, Jesus, who, Paul believed, had saved Christians from death, the last enemy (ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς).[138] The Christian defeat of death was the only thing which had saved

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[135] *ibid.* 15: 40.

[136] "σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ, ἐγείρται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ. σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ, ἐγείρεται ἐν δοξῃ. σπείρεται ἐν ἀσθενεία, ἐγείρεται ἐν δυνάμει. σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικον, ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν. ἐι ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν." *ibid.* 15: 43.

[137] *ibid.*, 15: 47.

[138] *ibid.*, 15: 26.

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believers from the vacuousness of existentialism. Paul wrote, "If the dead be not raised, let us eat and let us drink, for tomorrow we die."[139]

The sacrament of Christian baptism was perceived as symbolizing death and subsequent rebirth in microcosm. Paul, in Romans 6 writes: "Or know ye not that as many of us as were baptized unto Christ Jesus were baptized unto his death? We were buried with him through baptism unto his death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, thus also might we walk in newness of life."[140] Hence, one notes that baptism, too, mimicked the death and resurrection of Christ. The baptized believer had, in effect, undergone a metamorphosis from the old self to the new self. According to Paul, the believers reason themselves to be on the one hand dead in sin, but, on the other hand, living in God by Christ Jesus.[141]

The resurrection came to be seen as much more than just the gift of eternal life. It involved a fundamental transformation of the body and spirit into a perfected form. The resurrection figured heavily into traditional Jewish apocalyptic thinking. In New Testament Christianity, this same notion lived on in an eclectic mixture of ideas spanning the old "dry bones" rising up à la Ezekiel, and the judgement day eschatology which

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[139] "ἐι νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, 'Φάγωμεν καὶ πίωμεν, αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνῃσκομεν." *ibid.*, 15:32; This verse is quoted from the book of Isaiah 22:13. Christ, or the gospel writer, alludes to it as well, in the parable of the "rich fool." Cf. Luke 12: 19-20; Is. 56:12.

[140] "ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν 'Ιησοῦν εἰσ τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτισθημεν; συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τον θάνατον, ἵνα ὥσπερ ἠγερθη Χριστος ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δοξης τοῦ πατρος, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατάσωμεν." *ibid* 6:3-4.

[141] 1 Cor. 6: 11.

figured significantly in much Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity. The great final resurrection day was now combined with a new twist: the idea of being "snatched up" in the twinkling of an eye. This final theme seems to have had less ancient precedent in Judaism, though one could certainly point to the cases of Enoch and Elijah, both of whom God snatched up suddenly into heaven.[142]

Even the apocryphal stories surrounding the first resurrection—that of Christ on Easter morning—indicate a belief in a resurrected body which was vastly different from normal physical bodies. There is a kind of schizophrenia in the gospels, and Christian tradition generally. On the one hand, Jesus' raising is seen as a literal event. He arose on Easter morning and spent approximately forty additional days on earth. Then came the ascension. But there is another more subtle yet pervasive understanding of the resurrection. Here, Christ makes only occasional appearances as a resurrected being. In this manifestation, the resurrected Christ was not always clearly recognized, and seemed to have different powers. It was probably this traditional understanding of the ἀναστασις which informed Saul of Tarsus' Damascus Road conversion.[143] The appearance of the resurrected Christ was seen, from this perspective, as part of the ongoing resurrection of Christ. Hence, Paul, who was not among the *dramatis personae* of the four gospels, was

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[142] In Genesis, one reads that Enoch walked with God, and Enoch "was not," for God took him. Second Kings reports that Elijah, after picking Elisha as his successor, was caught up by the Chariots of God near the Jordan Riber and Jericho. For Enoch, cf. Gen. 5:21-24; for Elijah's ascension into heaven, cf. 2 Kings 2:1-12.

[143] Acts 9: 1-19.

still able to number himself among the apostles.[144] This amorphous dichotomy between two seemingly conflicting views of the resurrected body reveal much about the belief which many early Christians had in a spiritual and physical metamorphosis.

In New Testament tradition, the resurrection experience had metamorphosed Jesus. Reports of Christ's resurrected body and its apparently altered state of physicality are well-known. Matthew does not mention it much, and the resurrection account takes up only the last, twenty-eighth chapter of the book. Mark, however, asserts that he appeared in "another form" ("ἐν ἑτέρᾳ μορφῇ") to two disciples who were going into a field.[145] Luke's gospel includes the story of Christ's appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus wherein Christ appears to two of the disciples, but they did not recognize him. This hints at the "metaphysical" resurrection in which Christ can walk through doors, and cannot be touched. There is some similar tone to the story at the tomb wherein Christ seems a confusing, angelic being—not altogether clearly distinguished from the angels guarding the site. The disciples did not recognize Christ, as "their eyes were sealed in order that they not recognize him."[146] Only when Christ went with them to where they were staying and broke the bread did the group finally grasp his identity.[147] Still, some

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[144] 1 Cor. 15: 9; cf. the word ἀποστολος, apostle, comes from the Greek ἀποστελλω, a verb which means to "send forth." The apostles are traditionally thought to be those disciples whom Christ had personally "sent forth." Since Paul was not a part of the Palestinian Judaiac milieus which had spawned Christianity, his claim to apostleship rested on his encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road.

[145] Mark 16:12.

[146] "οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μὴ ἐπιγνῶναι αὐτόν." Luke 24: 16.

[147] *ibid.* 24:30.

Lukian accounts also seem designed to display the "real" nature of the resurrected Jesus. After Christ was recognized during the bread-breaking, he proceeded to demonstrate the reality of his 'corpus.'[148] First he commanded them to look upon his hands and feet, which may hint at the "doubting Thomas" story preserved in John. Similarly, he requested food, then ate while they are watching.[149] Like the story of Thomas discussed below, the account is obviously included to note the literally physical nature of Christ's resurrection.[150]

The writer of John includes descriptions of the resurrected Christ which are even more enigmatic. Mary went to the tomb, this time apparently unaccompanied by the other Mary. There, she met Simon Peter and "the other disciple whom Jesus loved (. . . τὸ ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει Ἰησοῦς . . .)." Mary looked into the tomb and saw angelic beings—this time two, one seated at the foot of the place where Christ had lain, the other at the head. Again, Mary did not recognize the resurrected Christ, the text stating that "she saw Jesus standing, and she knew not that it was Christ."[151] After she finally recognized him, he said something very interesting to her: "Do not touch me (Μή μου ἅπτου), for I have not yet gone up to the Father."[152] Similarly, in the very next

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[148] Recall as well that when his disciples first recognized him, "they thought to see a ghost (ἐδόκουν πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν). *ibid.*, 24:37.

[149] *ibid.*, 24:37-40; cf. John 20:24-29.

[150] For further reference and later debates on the Easter story, read Tertullian's literalist interpretation of the resurrection. Tertullian, *De Resurectione Carnis*, 2.

[151] *ibid.*, 20: 14-15.

[152] *ibid.*, 20: 17.

Johannine account, the disciples were meeting behind locked doors "because of fear of the Jews (διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων).[153] Christ appeared in their midst, although the doors are locked.[154] This implies a non-corporeal Jesus. Nonetheless, he showed them his hands and his rib, as if to prove his physicality.[155]

Christ appeared again to his disciples while they were fishing.[156] After an uneventful night of fishing, Christ appeared to the men while they were in the boat. And as in so many of the other Easter story accounts, they again did not recognize him. Jesus bade them cast their nets onto the right side of the boat. Upon doing so, the disciples caught a great wealth of fish. After this miraculous event, not one of the disciples dared to ask him his identity. This, according to John, was the third time that the resurrected Christ had appeared to his disciples.[157] There was one other important strand of resurrection theology in primitive Christianity. A large-scale type of resurrection became known as the "rapture." Its central feature was a sudden "snatching up" and the acquisition of the final, perfect body and soul. In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives what is perhaps the definitive New Testament description of this important futuristic belief. Here, hinting at some of the greatest "judgement day" themes which were to become so prevalent in Christian tradition, Paul writes, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be

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[153] *ibid.*, 20:19.

[154] Recall that the witches of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* were also able to go through locked doors, or enter rooms. Apul., *Met.*, 1. 7.

[155] John 20: 20.

[156] It was, apparently, back to business as usual for the disciples.

[157] John 21: 1-14.

changed in an instant—in the twinkling of an eye, in the final trumpet."[158] Hence, one recalls the famous line the the day of the Lord would come as a "thief in the night (ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ).[159] Here, in this futuristic event, "the dead shall be raised—οἱ νεκροὶ ἐγερθήσονται."[160] And when Paul says that "we shall all be changed," he seems to be referring to the metamorphosis of the body and spirit into the perfected, final Christian ideal. More, this final victory over corruption (φθαρτὸν) was synonomous with the final victory over mortality. "Death is swallowed up in victory," he writes, quoting from Isaiah. "Oh Death, where is thy victory. Oh death, where is thy sting."[161]

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[158] "πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα ἐν ἀτόμῳ, ἐν ῥυπῇ ὀφθαλμου, ἐν τῇ ἐσχατῃ σάλπιγγι." 1 Cor. 15: 51.

[159] I Thess. 5: 2.

[160] 1 Cor. 15:52.

[161] "Κατεπεόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νῖκος. ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ νῖκος; ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ κεντρον;" ibid., 15:55; cf. Isaiah 25: 8.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Metamorphosis in Greco-Roman religious thought provided a common-theme in much contemporary religious thinking, and gave an attractive power to many of the day's most pervasive and noted religions. That was its role. Ideas about metamorphosis, then, helped to facilitate the diffusion of the various "Hellenistic" cults and, ultimately, Christianity. It also furnished an important link among many of the "popular" religions and folklores which were floating about, and the more formal and "traditional" religions of later paganism. Metamorphosis provided an important bond with earlier Greek, Roman and Near Eastern Religions. Many of the same ideas of transformation which had appeared in religion prior to 323 B.C. found a new voice in the syncretism which followed in the wake of Alexander's armies. This offered religious men and women a continuity between early and late paganism, and lent the credence of antiquity to new forms of religious expression. Euripides lived centuries before the writers of either the Hellenistic or the Roman eras. Yet his description of religious ecstasy, and its transforming powers, was remarkably similar to that of Paul or Philo. In their descriptions of Arcadian lycanthropy, Strabo and Pausanias were reporting on lore which, they themselves noted, was prehistorically old. Yet their descriptions of men turning into

beasts bear obvious similarities to tales set in the A.D. period, like those of Petronius or Apuleius.

More important, I think, consideration of metamorphosis helps to resolve one of the great interpretative questions of ancient history: how did the various "Hellenistic" cults spread throughout the cosmopolitan ancient world? Certainly more than one reason exists, and historians must resist the impulse to emphasize one factor for the new diffusions at the expense of all the others. There are many reasons that new or transformed religions grow, spread, and flourish. Political, social, and economic forces play a major role. But one must not too casually dismiss the role of powerful sacred ideas, human emotional needs, and personal experience. That spiritual and emotional dimension is what earlier twentieth century historians like Franz Cumont, A.D. Nock, and Gilbert Murray tried to stress in their work—and it is what I have tried to stress in mine. The role of metamorphosis in Greco-Roman religious thought was that it directly appealed to individual people on a deeply personal level, offering them hope for meaningful transformation of their lives.

In many ways, Christian thought represented a culmination of metamorphosis belief as it had evolved over a period of centuries and millennia. No qualitative difference between Christian transformation and that of other religions, or, indeed, folklores, necessarily existed. But a case can be made that in chronological terms, at least, Christianity embodied a hybrid blend of new and old thinking regarding metamorphosis—one which not only borrowed heavily from earlier ancient religions and Palestinian Judaism, but one which spawned its own rather unique promise of change, as

well. This new belief in transformation promised not only personal conversion, but a radically altered concept of body, and resurrection from death. These same notions had been present in other contemporary religions, too, most notably that of Isis and Sarapis. When Christianity ultimately gained ascendancy in the religious struggle which characterized later Roman history, it featured many of those same powerful notions about metamorphosis which had characterized other ancient beliefs.

The idea of resurrection, and the metamorphosis from death to life, gradually took hold in the ancient world. It was a tremendously attractive idea—one promising society's most lowly elements the gift of divinity. A commonality in many of the more abstract metamorphosis beliefs posited that men and women could become gods or God. The idea appeared in a variety of guises, ranging from the deification of Roman Emperors, based on Ptolemaic Egyptian and other Hellenistic models, to the resurrection theology which figured so heavily in many of the "Hellenistic mystery-cults." Ultimately, it was a belief in a spiritual and physical metamorphosis—a religious leitmotif which helped inspire a wide range of the Greco-Roman faiths, including those from Egypt and, ultimately, Christianity.

Metamorphosis entailed one basic, central religious idea, often understood both metaphorically and literally. Such thinking envisioned a dramatic changing of physical shape or nature which accompanied a fundamental spiritual transformation. Ultimately, human beings could be changed into godlike creatures. This abstract metamorphosis comprised one of the greatest acts of religious salvation. And although fundamentally simple, it emanated from a profoundly diverse belief system. It ranged from the

restoration of Lucius' human shape, and his spiritual redemption at the hands of the goddess Isis, to the beliefs in rapturous resurrection which fill the gospels and Pauline epistles. It was a sacred link between the spirit and the body. Renewal or revivification in one involved renewal or revivification in the other. It was a symbolic idea of great religious and philosophical power. Metamorphosis promised that the sometimes dreary realities of people's everyday lives could be meaningfully transformed, and that there was a haven from the unforgiving indifference of the natural order.

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