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“ASINO VECTORE VIRGO REGIA FUGIENS CAPTIVITATEM”:
APULEIUS AND THE TRADITION OF THE PROTEVANGELIUM JACOBI

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**"Asino vectore virgo regia fugiens captivitatem":
Apuleius and the Tradition of the Protevangelium Jacobi¹**

The *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius abounds in exquisite allusions to and take-offs of various texts and genres. The tale of Aristomenes alone, for example, features a parody of a lover's suicide combined with discreet allusions to Plato's *Phaedrus*.² But Apuleius did not play exclusively with classical texts: allusions to Christianity have occasionally been detected in his novel. Daniel Massé's *L'Apocalypse et le royaume de Dieu* (Paris 1934), to take an extreme example, posited constant criticism of the text of the *Gospels* and of the *Apocalypse* by Apuleius.³ But virtually all of his interpretations are wild; even Herrmann denied their validity—with the exception of that of the wife of the *pistor* at *Met.* 9.14 p. 213.13, a woman justifiably numbered among the detested monotheists:⁴

nec enim vel unum vitium nequissimae illae feminae deerat, sed omnia prorsus ut in quandam caenosam latrinam in eius animum flagitia confluxerant: saeva scaeva virosa ebriosa pervicax pertinax, in rapinis turpibus avara, in sumptibus foedis profusa, inimica fidei, hostis pudicitiae, *tunc spretis atque calcatis divinis numinibus in vicem certae religionis mentita sacrilega praesumptione dei, quem praedicaret unicum, confictis observationibus fallens omnis homines* et miserum maritum decipiens matutino mero et continuo stupro corpus manciparat.

But this is not all. I would draw attention to the tale of the maiden Charite among the robbers, her first failed escape on the ass, and her subsequent liberation by her lover Tlepolemos, an important episode from the center of the *Metamorphoses*, and suggest that some of Apuleius's improvements are best explained by reference to Christian texts. The Virgin on an Ass may not only be another sign of Apuleius's dislike of Christians, but also evidence for the emergence and circulation of some of the NT *Apocrypha*.

One of the the sources of the *Metamorphoses* was a lost Greek novel (hereafter "Eselsroman") with a *terminus post quem* in the reign of Hadrian (117-38 A.D.),⁵ of which only an

¹ I would like to express my thanks to Albert Henrichs and to Ludwig Koenen for their criticism and bibliographical help.

² *Met.* 1.16 p. 14.19 ff. *iam iam grabattule* ... parodies the tragic heroine's address to her marriage-bed. Note the introduction of poorly clad Socrates (*Met.* 1.6 p. 5.12 ff. Helm) and the Pheadran plane-tree at *Met.* 1.18 p. 17.5 *iuxta platanum istam residamus*: Plato 229A 7-B2 προάγει δὴ καὶ σκόπει ὅπου καθιζήσομεθα. — ὄρᾳς οὖν ἐκείνην τὴν ὑψηλοτάτην πλάτανον; ... ἐκεῖ σκιά τ' ἐστὶν καὶ πνεῦμα μέτριον καὶ πόα καθίξεσθαι ἢ ἂν βουλώμεθα κατακλινῆσαι.

³ pp. 303-61; cf. 334 "C'est le doigt sur L'Apocalypse, qu' Apulée compose l'Ane d'or."

⁴ L. Herrmann, "L'Ane d'or et le christianisme," *Latomus* 12 (1953) 189-91; P.G. Walsh, "Lucius Madaurensis," *Phoenix* 22 (1968) 143-57; M. Simon, "Apulée et le christianisme," in *Mélanges ... H.-C. Puech* (Paris 1974) 299-305; T.D. Barnes, *Tertullian* (Oxford 1971) 60; for the most recent discussion of this text see B. Baldwin, "Apuleius, Tacitus, and Christians," *Emerita* 52 (1984) 1-3.

⁵ See H. van Thiel, *Der Eselsroman I*, *Zetemata* 54 (München 1971) 36. The second volume presents a synoptic edition of the "Ovoç and the corresponding passages of Apuleius. His reconstruction is conveniently

epitome, the pseudo-Lucianic Λούκιος ἢ Ὕοος (hereafter "Ὕοος"), is extant. When we consider possible allusions to Christianity we must compare the text of the Ὕοος in all cases. Were there traces of anti-Christian sentiment already present in the *Eselsroman*? Or were these episodes improvisations of Apuleius?

Charite, once she is free, approaches her home town : (*Met.* 7.13 p. 163.21-164.2)

Quam simul accessimus, tota civitas ad votivum conspectum effunditur. procurrunt parentes, affines, clientes, alumni, famuli, laeti faciem, gaudio delibuti *pompam* cerneret omnis sexus et omnis aetatis novumque et hercules *memorandum spectamen*, *virginem asino triumphantem*. denique ipse etiam hilarior pro virili parte, ne praesenti negotio ut alienus discreparem, porrectis auribus proflatisque naribus rudivi fortiter, immo tonanti clamore personui.

The Ὕοος has the following:

ἔτυχεν δὲ καὶ ὁ τὴν κόρην μεμνηστευόμενος σὺν αὐτοῖς ἐλθὼν · αὐτὸς γὰρ ἦν ὁ καὶ τὸ καταγώγιον τῶν ληστῶν μηνύσας. παραλαβὼν οὖν τὴν πάρθενον καὶ καθίσας ἐπ' ἐμὲ οὕτως ἤγεν οἴκαδε. οἱ δὲ κωμῆται, ὡς εἶδον ἡμᾶς ἔτι πόρρωθεν, ἔγνωσαν εὐτυχοῦντας, εὐαγγέλιον αὐτοῖς ἐμοῦ προογκησαμένου καὶ προσδραμόντες ἠσπάζοντο καὶ ἤγον ἔσω (26.12-17 Macleod).

Massé, according to Herrmann, suggested that *Met.* 7.13 p. 163.24-25 Helm *novumque et hercules memorandum spectamen, virginem asino triumphantem* alluded to the Flight into Egypt.⁶ If anything, however, it seems to me that the verb *triumphantem* suggests parody of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The ironic emphasis, almost a *paraprozdokian*, is on the word *virginem*. The entry into a *civitas* and the welcoming crowds also reinforce the comparison to the Mark 11.1-11 rather than to the secretive travels of Joseph and Mary.⁷ In the Ὕοος the ass brays the εὐαγγέλιον, a word that usually means victory-tidings, but, by this period, could conceivably hint at the Christian Gospel.⁸ The Ὕοος may have seated the girl

printed in a German translation: *Abenteuer eines Esels oder die Verwandlungen des Lukios*, Tusculum Schriften, München 1972.

⁶ Herrmann (p. 189) gives no page reference to Massé, and I have been unable to locate the passage to which he alludes. What I did find was an allegorisation of the Lucius's employment with the gardener, see Massé 347, "Donc, Lucius et le jardinier sont en route, l'un portant l'autre. Ainsi Jésus montait à Jérusalem, sur l' Ane"; also Massé 304 n. 1. Similarly on p. 189 Herrmann says that Massé discusses Apuleius, *Met.* 2.1 *et lapides quos offenderem de homine duratos* as an allusion to Lot's Wife; he again gives no page reference. Massé discusses the passage on p. 340, but says nothing about Lot's wife. He mentions (340 n. 1) instead Matthew 3.9 and Luke 3.8.

⁷ Matt. 21.1-11 and Luke 19.29-38 also report the incident, but the former, assimilating the incident to *Zach.* 9.9, mentions two beasts, an *asina* (Ὕοος) and a *pullus* (πῶλος). Haemus, also, described his escapade, a daring ride from town on an ass, *sumpta veste muliebri* (*Met.* 7.8 p. 159.26 ff.). Professor Henrichs drew my attention to K. Kerényi's discussion of this passage in *Die griechisch-orientalische Romanliteratur in religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Tübingen 1927) 197-98 n. 91. Kerényi assimilated both the *virginem asino triumphantem* and the *virgo regia* to scenes of triumphal entry, citing the NT as a Christian parallel.

⁸ Used by Cicero *Att.* 2.3.1 and 13.40.1 and *LXX* 2 Ki. 4 in the plural ; in Greek in the singular by Joseph. *BJ* 2.17.4 and Appian *BC* 3.93. In all of these instances it means "good tidings." The context is often military. The verb, however, seems to be common in Greek romance: see Char. 2.1.1; Hel.2.10.1; 2.23.2; 4.15.1; 5.22.3; 5.30.3; 6.6.3; 10.1.3; 10.2.1; The plural appears in Char. 6.5.2 and Hel. 10.3.1. The *TLG* was used for a word-search in the Greek novelists.

on the ass, the way Christ was seated on the ass, to parallel the Gospels, and may have hinted at the origin of the scene by the use of εὐαγγέλιον, but it is more than likely that εὐαγγέλιον merely suggests military good news, the defeat of the robbers, a suggestion that was expanded by Apuleius into a *virgo triumphans*, accompanied not by trumpets, but by a braying ass.⁹ Herrmann dismissed this allusion, perhaps because he did not examine another important passage.

In the 6th Book of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* the reformed and now higher-minded ass had attempted to rescue Charite from the robbers. As they fled, she detailed the rewards due her saviour when she should be safe at home.

tuque praesidium meae libertatis meaeque salutis, si me domum pervexeris incolumem parentibus et formosopro reddideris, quas tibi gratias perhibebo, quos honores habebō, quos cibos exhibebo! iam primum iubam istam tuam probe peccinatam meis virginalibus monilibus adornabo ... sed nec inter cibos delicatos et otium profundum vitae totius beatitudinem deerit tibi dignitas gloriosa. nam memoriam praesentis fortunae meae divinaeque providentiae perpetua testatione signabo et depictam in tabula fugae praesentis imaginem meae domus atrio dedicabo. *visetur et in fabulis audietur doctorumque stilis rudis perpetuabitur historia "asino vectore virgo regia fugiens captivitatem."* accedes antiquis et ipse miraculis et iam credemus exemplo tuae veritatis et Frixum arieti supernatasse et Arionem delphinum gubernasse et Europam tauro supercubasse. quodsi vere Iupiter mugivit in bove potest in asino meo latere aliqui vel vultus hominis vel facies deorum (*Met.* 6.28-29 pp. 150.6-151.11 Helm).

Charite promises to commemorate her present fortune and divine providence with a permanent testimonium. A votive tablet with the image of her flight will adorn the atrium of her house. It will be seen, heard of in stories, and the lowly tale (*rudis historia*) will be perpetuated by the pens of the learned: "A royal virgin fleeing captivity on the back of an ass." The ass will be added to the annals of ancient animals, and, because of his example, the miraculous stories of Frixus, Arion, and Europa will be believed. In the Ὀvoς the girl prays to the gods to be saved and offers the ass his freedom (23.14-18).

Various details require explanation. Charite is called *regia*, which in normal Latin usage means "royal." At *Met.* 4.23 she is merely supposed to have very rich parents and to have come from a top local family.¹⁰ In Apuleius the word generally has its standard meaning.¹¹ One passage alone distinguishes *regius* from *rex*: Psyche's lack of suitors is described at 4.32.4: *non rex, non regius, nec de plebe saltem*, a passage where *regius* could either mean "of royal blood" or "noble." Otherwise Apuleius is happy to use *nobilis*.¹² Was Charite of

⁹ Apuleius happily translates metaphors. The sexual wrestling of Ὀvoς 8-11 becomes fighting at *Met.* 2.10 p. 33.22 and 2.17 p. 39.1 ff.

¹⁰ *Met.* 4.23. p. 92.24 Helm *parentes autem tui de tanto suarum divitiarum cumulo* ... Presumably of high social class, see 4.24 p. 93.12 *tali familia* and 4.23 p. 92.18 *summatem regionis*.

¹¹ See 4.2.7 *regius nitor* (of the purple); 5.1.6 *domus regia*; 6.7.1 *Iovis regias aures*.

¹² *Met.* 9.18 p. 216.8 *matronae nobilis* (of Arete); 10.22 p. 253.20 *nobili femina* (of the woman who commits bestiality); 2.13 p. 36.1 *nobilibus*; 2.18 p. 39.22 *vesana factio nobilissimorum iuvenum*; 3.11 p. 60.5 *vestrae familiae nobilitas* (of Lucius).

royal blood or is this a mock-dramatisation of her plight intended to put her in the same social class as the mythological Europa, a notable princess on an animal? Why is she specifically called a *virgo* in this passage when she had generally been a *puella* before?¹³ Ass rescues princess?¹⁴ Why the emphasis on the aretalogical depiction of the scene, the votive tablet, and finally its commemoration for eternity in the writings of learned men?

There have been three attempts to explain the virgin on the ass within an entirely pagan literary framework. O. Weinreich compared Phaedrus, fab. 119 with this passage, and came to the following conclusion. Both Phaedrus and Apuleius are derived from a lost Hellenistic "aretalogische Novelle" in which an ass and a thunderstorm, the miraculous agents of Venus, cause a poor bride to be brought to the house of a poor, but noble suitor, not to that of the rich and ugly one who had awaited her. Apuleius supposedly used the same source, but altered it to achieve a tragic ending in which the bridegroom is killed, and the bride kills herself after blinding the treacherous rival suitor. Weinreich compares the narrative elements in the tales, and attempts to reconstruct the lost common source of Apuleius and Phaedrus.¹⁵

There are difficulties with this theory. To take one example: Weinreich assumes that even the Phaedrus fable has reached us in mangled form, confused by Phaedrus himself (pp. 10-11). He makes a number of assumptions in reconstructing the lost aretalogical novel. The ass, he says on the basis of Apuleius, should have been thanked for rescuing the girl, but is not (p. 11). The ass likewise should have been interested in the girl (*ibid.*). But Weinreich did not mention the passage of the ὄνοϋς, where the girl promises the ass a μέδιμνος κριθῶν (23).¹⁶ So rather than assume that Phaedrus misunderstood his source and omitted both the thanks to the ass and his love of the girl, we should more economically conclude that, since Apuleius and the ὄνοϋς share a parent, the thanks to the ass and his dumb affection come from the *Eselsroman*. The more one compares parallels from the ὄνοϋς, the less likely it seems that Apuleius and Phaedrus share a common parent in a lost aretalogical novel.¹⁷ The narrative weight of the Phaedrus fable is not on the *ass*, but on the miraculous storm (119 vv. 15-10).

For the convenience of the reader, I offer a diagram of significant elements in the three authors (p. 225). The only elements common to all three tales are the bride, the ass, his braying, and one of the suitors. It is clear that Apuleius took his central plan from the *Eselsroman* (as attested by the ὄνοϋς): the presence of the robbers is decisive. But he developed his tragic

¹³ p. 92.18; p. 93.5; p. 93.9; p. 94.16; p. 150.1; p. 151.12; p. 151.18 *infelix puella*; p. 152.1 *probissima puella*; p. 152.22; p. 153.8; p. 153.15 *corpus puellae*; p. 149.16 *illa virgo captiva*; p. 149. 23 *liberandae virginis studio*; p. 153.11 *virginis fugae*; p. 153.14 *nudam virginem*;

¹⁴ Is this the meaning of the Budé editors *ad loc.* p. 98? "La mention de la 'jeune princesse' doit être une allusion à un thème consacré," see *Apulée. Les Métamorphoses*, t. 2, ed. D.S. Robertson, trans. P. Vallette (Paris 1946).

¹⁵ O. Weinreich, "Fabel, Aretalogie, Novelle," in *Sb. Heidelberg*, phil.-hist. Kl. 1930/31 Abh. 7, 5-75.

¹⁶ Weinreich clearly states that shared features in Apuleius and the ὄνοϋς enable us to reconstruct the *Eselsroman*, but he does not clarify his conception of the relationship between the *Eselsroman* and Phaedrus (15-16). It would appear, according to him, that they both share a common ancestor.

¹⁷ Weinreich (23-24) does not note that *procurrunt* in Apuleius 7.13 almost certainly reflects προσδραμόντες in the ὄνοϋς (and hence in the *Eselsroman*) and does not have to come from Phaedrus 119.22 *procurrunt pueri*.

Schema of narrative elements in Phaedrus, Apuleius, and Onos¹⁸

Phaedrus	Apuleius	᾽Οvoς
bride poor because parents rent ass	bride noble and rich (<i>regia, erilis</i>)	bride *
ass	ass	ass
suitor 1 noble (<i>genus</i>)	Tlepolemus <i>inter suos principalis</i> ¹⁹	fiancé *
poor (<i>pauper</i>)	— ²⁰	*
handsome (<i>forma</i>)	<i>speciosus</i>	*
suitor 2	Thrasyllus	*
<i>locuples</i>	<i>pecuniae fructu locuples</i>	*
?low-born and ugly? ²¹	—	*
—	<i>praenobilis</i>	*
—	robbers	robbers
no thanks to the ass	ass loves girl	ass loves girl
no aretalogy of ass	thanks to ass	thanks to ass
ass brays	aretalogy of ass	no aretalogy of ass
happy ending	ass brays	ass brays
	tragic ending	accidental tragedy

ending differently. Presumably he intended to create a story in which Charite's mourning for Tlepolemus resembles Isis/Venus's grief for Osiris Adonis, treacherously slain while hunting by Thrasyllus/Seth.²² The secondary tragedy of Charite does not occur in the ᾽Οvoς, except for the fact of her and her husband's death. In the ᾽Οvoς, and presumably in the *Eselsroman*, the pair drowns. The only element that links Apuleius and Phaedrus is the second suitor theme. Yet since this second suitor theme is so tragically (and self-consciously tragically developed),²³ and so different from what is in Phaedrus as to be unrecognisable, Phaedrus is unlikely to be the source of contamination. Above all, the aretalogy of the ass himself is missing in Phaedrus. Since rival suitors adorn many tales, Apuleius and Phaedrus do not have to come from an aretalogical novel. Apuleius worked from the *Eselsroman*, and, as often, embroidered upon it.²⁴

Herrmann, rejecting the Christian allusion, and looking at *Met.* 7.13 p. 163.24-25 Helm, derived the episode in Apuleius directly from Phaedrus: "une vierge portée triomphalement par un âne chez un prétendant noble et pauvre," (*Latomus* 12 [1953] 189). But because he missed

¹⁸ "—" means absent, "*" no basis for judgement since the text is an epitome of a lost work.

¹⁹ *Met.* 4.26 p. 94.21 *speciosus adolescens inter suos principalis*.

²⁰ Weinreich assumes he must be poor, but he is forcing the parallel to Phaedrus (24).

²¹ As reconstructed by Weinreich (10).

²² R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike* (München 1962) 76-77.

²³ See, for example, the framing use of *scaena* at *Met.* 4.26 p. 94.20 and 8.11 p. 185.23.

²⁴ See Van Thiel, *Eselsroman* (above n. 5) p. 123

the second allusion to virgin on ass, he does not note that the *virgo* in the Phaedrus-fable is not *regia*.²⁵ The ass might be explained by Phaedrus, but not the epithet applied to the girl or the robbers based on the ὄνος.²⁶

In the scenes that deal with the plight of maiden and ass Apuleius plays various literary games. J. Winkler ingeniously drew attention to the phrase *rudis historia*, which may well involve a pun on *rudere*, a "braying story."²⁷ Apuleius mocks the evident desire of the ass for the maiden whom he cannot possess because he is no longer a man.²⁸ The ass even tries to kiss Charite's feet as they escape.²⁹ Apuleius also exploits the mythological precedents in the very speech of Charite. Jupiter had disguised himself as a bull to seduce Europa. The irony is dramatic: Charite is unaware how close to the truth she is—atop a man disguised as an ass, in fact. The discussion among the robbers about the punishment meet for the renegade maiden and ass touches upon a philosophical theme, the imprisonment of the living within the dead, the soul within the body: *mortuae bestiae ipsa vivens ventrem habitabit*.³⁰ This torture must already already have occurred in the *Eselsroman* (ὄνος 25.23ff.). The particular disgrace concerns the binding of a virginal body to that of the physically over-endowed ass.³¹ That the ὄνος perceived the sexual possibilities in the punishment is clear from the use of συνοικεῖν.³² But it is noteworthy that Apuleius significantly improves on this theme later on. No longer does the ass worry about receiving (ἐπιδεχόμενος) the girl and becoming her tomb (θήκη in ὄνος 26.7-8 Macleod),³³ but about *being pregnant* with the her (*Met.* 7.4): *Talis cogitationibus fluctuantem subit me illa cura potior qua statuto consilio latronum manibus virginis decretam me victimam recordabar. ventremque crebro suspiciens meum iam missellam puellam parturibam.*

²⁵ Unless such information was lost in a lacuna after line 1. There is no lacuna indicated in B.E. Perry, *Aesopica* (Urbana 1952) 599. In any case, I find it unlikely that a daughter of a noble house would have to have a poor man's ass *rented* for her to ride to her wedding: fab. 119.13 *Illum puellae casu conducunt sui*. ed. A. Brenot, *Phèdre Fables* (Paris 1924)

²⁶ J. G. Griffith proposes an interpretation similar to that by Herrmann. He derives the passage in Apuleius, because it seems to show traces of iambic rhythms, back to yet another lost metrical fable in which the ass was properly thanked.

²⁷ J.J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: a Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1985) 197-98. Winkler rightly perceives that the phrase *doctorum stilis* must be self-referential. And that there is an ironic connection with the *rudis locutor* of the prologue. See Winkler for a generalised interpretation of 6.29 as a "fleeting image of textual glory" (156).

²⁸ *Met.* 4.22 p. 92.18-19 *puellam mehercules et asino tali concupiscendam.*

²⁹ *Met.* 6.28 p. 149.27 *pedes decoros puellae basiabam.*

³⁰ *Aen.* 8.845 *mortua quin etiam iungebat corpora vivis | componens manibusque manus atque oribus ora | tormenti genus, et sanie taboque fluentis | complexu in misero longa sic morte necabat.* The torture is attested in Cicero's *Hortensius* frag. 95 Müller (Augustine, *Contra Iulian. Pelag.* 4.15.78) *verumque sit illud quod est apud Aristotelem, simili nos affectos esse supplicio atque eos, qui quondam cum in praedonum Etruscorum manus incidissent, crudelitate excogitata necabatur; quorum corpora viva cum mortuis adversa adversis accommodata quam aptissime colligabantur; sic nostros animos cum corporibus copulatos ut vivos cum mortuis esse coniunctos.* It was probably also cited of the relationship of soul and body in the lost *Protrepticus* of Aristotle. For the ass as symbol of the body see I. Opelt, *RAC* 6.586.

³¹ *Met.* 10.22 p. 253.19-20 *tam vastum genitale.*

³² ὄνος 25.30 Macleod πρῶτον μὲν τῷ νεκρῷ ὄνῳ συνοικεῖν.

³³ For *living* animals as tombs for humans see C. Bailey *ad* Lucretius 5.993 (*Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*, III [Oxford 1947]).

When we isolate what is not in Phaedrus or in the Ὕοϋς, two other important innovations emerge. (1) In both places where Apuleius mentions the virgin on the ass, he treats the image of the girl on the ass itself as a notable and recordable item: *memorandum spectamen virginem asino trimphantem and visetur et in fabulis audietur doctorumque stilis rudis perpetuabitur historia "asino vectore virgo regia fugiens captivitatem."* In both cases the aretalogy is for the escape on an ass. (2) Apuleius deliberately makes his *virgo "regia."* The girl in the Ὕοϋς is not described as rich or royal (her wealth and lineage are unimportant) and the girl in Phaedrus is poor. Even if we assume that Charite becomes *regia* to reinforce her narrative identity with Psyche and Isis,³⁴ we are still left with her virginity: the combination of *virgo* and *regia* is significant. Although Psyche, the daughter of a king, is *virgo* at the beginning of the story (4.29 p. 97.20 and 4.32 p. 100.11), she soon loses her virginity to young Amor to whom she is sacrificed. Therefore we turn to Christian sources, where we may find a reason for Apuleius's innovations.

Charite's escape may be compared to the travels of the Virgin Mary, the most famous *virgo regia* to travel on an ass. According to apocryphal sources, her lineage was of the house of David, hence royal.³⁵ The Flight into Egypt is attested in Matthew 2.14, but the scene is not given any of the visual colouring familiar from art. It does not appear in any of the other Gospels. Apuleius could not have drawn his allusion from Matthew alone, for there is no indication of how the Holy Family travelled when it was on the road.

Depiction of the scene may be traced, instead, to the apocryphal NT Gospels. Pseudo-Matthew in particular illustrates the Flight.³⁶ At 17.2 *Tolle Mariam et infantem et per viam eremi perge in Aegyptum.* At 18.1 *descendit Maria de iumento.* 19.2 *ambulabant autem leones cum eis simul, et cum bobus et asinis et sumariis qui eis necessaria portabant ... erant autem duo boves et plaustrum, in quo necessaria portabant, quos leones dirigebant in itinere eorum.* Finally 20.1 shows Mary again dismounting from her beast of burden: *descendere eam fecit de iumento.* But what was the beast of burden? *Iumentum* is a vague term. For this we have to go to the description of another journey, to the *Protoevangelium Jacobi* 17.3, a description of Mary's approach to Bethlehem: καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Μαριάμ· κατάγαγέ με ἀπὸ τῆς ὄνου, ὅτι τὸ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐπείγει με προσελθεῖν. καὶ κατήγαγεν αὐτὴν ἀπὸ τῆς ὄνου, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· ποῦ σε ἀπάξω καὶ σκεπάσω σου τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην; ὅτι ὁ τόπος ἔρημός ἐστι.

The ass featured prominently in anti-Christian polemic. A famous grafitto from Rome showed a crucified ass (H. Leclercq in *DACL* 1.2.2044 fig. 585 s.v. "âne"): the Christians

³⁴ See Merkelbach, *op. cit.* (above, n. 22) 75 "Charite ist eine Doppelgängerin der Psyche. Daß sie auch eine Doppelgängerin der Isis ist, wird sich gleich zeigen."

³⁵ *Protevangelium Iacobi* 10.1 καὶ ἐμνήσθη ὁ ἱερεὺς τῆς παιδὸς Μαριάμ, ὅτι ἦν ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Δαυίδ; see also *Ps.-Matthew* 1.2 of Anna, Mary's mother: *filiam Ysachar uxorem ex tribu sua, id est, ex genere David.* M. Nicolas, *Études sur les évangiles apocryphes* (Paris 1866) 339 dates the emphasis on Christ's matrilinear descent from the house of David late, to the 5th C. A.D, despite an allusion to it in Tertullian's *De carne Christi* 21, PL 2, 788B. If I am right about the allusion in *regia*, this genealogy was generally current much earlier.

³⁶ A. de Santos, *Los Evangelios Apocrifos* (Madrid 1956) p. 189 dates this text to the 6th C. O. Cullmann in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, eds. *The New Testament Apocrypha I* (trans. R. McL. Wilson, Philadelphia 1963) 406 places it in the 8th or 9th C. (4th German edition, Tübingen 1968, 303).

are supposed to have worshipped an ass-God.³⁷ Apuleius may reflect a more learned form of a popular invective tradition.³⁸ In the *Gospel of Ps.-Matthew* the desert and its inhabitants were miraculously tamed at the coming of the Virgin. Here instead Apuleius shows an amusing variant in which an ass serves the maiden because he loves her. The contrast between the *rudis historia* and the *doctorum stili* draws attention to Apuleius's own arch and self-conscious treatment, and not entirely, I think, because the story was told by an ass (Winkler, op. cit. [above n. 27]). The style of Christian Scripture was not considered crude and embarrassing by Jerome and Augustine alone. A polished sophist already make fun of it in the 2nd. C. The Virgin Mary had miraculously given birth in the presence of ox and ass to a God who would be ridiculed as an ass.³⁹ Here instead the ass, a creature of labile mythological identity, who had earlier fancied himself as Dirce's bull,⁴⁰ lives in terror of a torture that will make him pregnant with a virgin (see above, p. 226). Both tales feature a virgin in a cave with another somewhat hostile woman to take care of her.⁴¹ There may be an additional twist to the vignette. The later MSS of the *Protoevangelium* (above p. 227) specified a respectable she-ass, Apuleius a randy male. The earliest manuscript of the *Protevangelium*, but one featuring a slightly different redaction from the standard text, has a male ass.⁴² This papyrus dates from the 3rd C., hence is 600 years older than the witnesses that specify the she-ass (Testuz [see n. 42] p. 24). There are two possibilities: either Apuleius's text simply reflects the earlier version of the story, or, for obvious reasons, he chose the variant intentionally when confronted with both traditions.⁴³ Likewise when Haemus/ Tlepolemus discusses possible punishments for Charite, he suggests that she be sent to a *leno*: *Met.* 7.9. p. 161.10 ff. *Helm quin et ego censeo deducendam eam ad quampiam civitatem ibique venundandam ... nam et ipse quosdam lenones pridem cognitos habeo.*⁴⁴ It is worth remembering that one fate that might attend a Christian maiden in 2nd. C. Africa was *condemnatio ad lupanar.*⁴⁵

The date of composition of the *Protoevangelium* of James is disputed. The Greek evidence is early, and consists of apparent allusions in Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and Ori-

³⁷ Tert. *Apol.* 16 *somniastis caput asinum esse deum nostrum.*

³⁸ See P.G. Walsh (*art. cit.* [above n. 4] 151-57 and also *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge 1970) 186-88.

³⁹ See *Ps.- Matt.* 14 *et posuit puerum in praesepio, et bos et asinus adoraverunt eum. Tunc adimpletum est quod dictum est per Isaiaam prophetam dicentem: "Cognovit bos possessorem suum et asinus praesepe domini sui" ...* For the Christian ass-god see n. 37, above.

⁴⁰ See *Met.* 6.27 p. 149.18 *non tauro, sed asino dependentem Dircen aniculum.*

⁴¹ *Met.* 4.6 p. 78.18 *Res ac tempus ipsum locorum speluncae illius <quam> latrones inhabita<ba>nt, descriptionem exponere flagitat; ibid., p. 79.4 insurgit speluncae ... turris ardua caulae firmae solidis cratibus, ovili stabulationi commodae; Met.* 4.23 p. 92.20 *eam simul intra speluncam ducunt.* See *Prot.* 18.1 for Mary in the cave and the search for a midwife.

⁴² See M. Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer V, Nativité de Marie* (Cologny-Genève 1958) 98 (*Prot.* 17.2) καὶ ἔστρωσεν τὸν ὄνον καὶ ἐκάθισεν αὐτήν and 100 (*Prot.* 17.3) κατάγαγέ με ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄνου.

⁴³ É. de Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 33 (Bruxelles 1961) 142 prints ἔστρωσεν τὸν ὄνον on p. 142 with τὸν being the reading of ZARSyrb^{ab}Aeth and τὴν the reading of Sc^P and Tischendorf and τοῦ ὄνου on p. 144, where τοῦ is the reading of ZSyr^{ab} and τῆς the reading of c^o ti [VP]. The masculine form is likely to be the original, given its early attestation.

⁴⁴ See Winkler (above, n. 27) 47-48 for the allegorical ambiguity in the threat.

⁴⁵ Tertullian *Apol.* 50.12 *nam et proxime ad lenonem damnando Christianam potius quam ad leonem confessi estis labem pudicitiae apud nos atrociorum omni poena et omni morte reputari.* Van Thiel sees the threat of the bordello as a *palliata* motif, introduced by Apuleius (115).

gen.⁴⁶ The earliest papyrus dates to the 3rd C. A.D (above, n. 43). The first attestation of this work in the Latin world used to be seen in the late 4th and early 5th C. A.D. (Amann, *op. cit.* [see n.46], 138-144). Jerome commented irascibly about its content,⁴⁷ and Prudentius took it into account in his Hymn about the Nativity of Christ.⁴⁸ Now the happy publication of the *Barcelona Hymn to the Virgin Mary* puts its first Latin attestation somewhat earlier in Egypt at least.⁴⁹ The *Hymn* draws extensively on the *Protoevangelium*.

But I suggest that the *Protoevangelium*, which was composed during the 2nd C. A.D., may have already been known to a Latin writer of the latter half of the 2nd C.⁵⁰ There is no need for a Latin version: Apuleius read Greek. The Christian Virgin on an ass is an image that has been transmitted to us in writing by the NT Apocrypha alone, but there may have been other ways the story travelled in the 2nd C.A.D.⁵¹ The scene might have been depicted: a votive tablet would have shown the miraculous flight.⁵² But representations of the Flight into Egypt are apparently first attested in the 5th to 6th C. A.D.⁵³ Although the absence of archaeological data may be an accident of preservation, it is nonetheless safest to assume that Apuleius met the legend in written or oral form. The pagan author who was not an apologist rarely read Christian scripture,⁵⁴ but there is little here that Apuleius could not have known, if not from the *Protoevangelium* itself, from the oral folktale substrate of which the *Protoevangelium* was concocted: the escape on a lowly ass of a royal Virgin who had been pregnant with God. This allusion may be evidence of popular filtering of Christian legend into the pagan community.

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⁴⁶ See E. Amann, *Le Protoévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins* (Paris 1910) 81-82; de Santos ([above, n. 36] 137) does not accept Justin's (*Tryph.* 78, PG 6.660) mention of a σπήλαιον of the Nativity as evidence that he knew the *Prot.* Amann expresses some doubts (81).

⁴⁷ Jerome, *Adv. Helvidium* 8, PL 23.192 cited by de Santos (189).

⁴⁸ *Cath.* 11. 97 *hunc quem latebra et obstetrix | et virgo feta ...* mentions an *obstetrix*, obviously an apocryphal detail. *Latebra* also suggests a *spelunca* rather than a manger in an inn.

⁴⁹ R. Roca-Puig, *Himne a la Verge Maria-Psalms Responsorius, Papir llati del segle IV*, segona edició (Barcelona 1965); W. Speyer, "Der bisher älteste lateinische Psalmus Abecedarius," *JbAC* 19 (1967) pp. 211-216; E.A. Lowe, *CLA Suppl.* (Oxford 1971) no. 1782. The papyrus itself is varyingly dated from the beginning to the end of the 4th C. A.D.

⁵⁰ The *terminus post quem* of Apuleius's *Apologia* is 158/9 A.D. See R. Syme, "Proconsuls d'Afrique sous Antonin le Pieux," *RÉA* 61 (1959) 310-19; H.E. Butler and A.S. Owen, *Apulei Apologia* (Oxford 1914) put the *Golden Ass* after the *Apologia* (p. viii), Massé before ([above, p.1] 325-26); J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Apuleius of Madauros: The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*, *EPRO* 39 (Leiden 1975) 7-14, argues for ca. 170 A.D.; P.G. Walsh (*art. cit.* [above n. 4]) pp. 149-50 is prepared to go as late as 190.

⁵¹ M. Nicolas, *op. cit.* [above, 35] 327, thinks that an oral transmission was likely in the earlier period.

⁵² Isis-Epona on an ass (Weinreich, *op. cit.* [see n. 15] 20-21) from a Pompeian stable is not necessarily an ex-voto.

⁵³ I. Opelt, *RAC* 6.591; also H. Leclercq in *DACL* 1.2.2060 s.v. "âne" indicates that the evidence is minimal and very late. An 8th C. fragment of Coptic tapestry from the Malcove Collection, now in the Brooklyn Museum (no. 59.54) depicts the Virgin on an ass.

⁵⁴ I note Baldwin's blanket statement on pagan reluctance to read the NT (*op. cit.* [above n. 4] 1-2). Information may have been passed by word of mouth.