

Even Worse than Jesus!: The Juxtaposition of Peregrinus and Jesus in Lucian's *De Morte Peregrini*

When Lucian evaluates the merits of two religious leaders who died violent deaths, Peregrinus and Jesus, it is the pagan Peregrinus who comes up worse. Despite Lucian's antipathy towards Christians, Peregrinus' pagan identity was insufficient for preference over Jesus. Lucian deploys similar details and religious titles to describe both Peregrinus and Jesus, indicating that he understood them to be working on similar projects and that they should be judged by similar standards (Pernot 2002, Eshleman 2012).

This paper posits that the cumulative effect of allusions to Jesus in the description of Peregrinus' death imply that Peregrinus fails to fulfill the religious roles by which Lucian judges both of them. Despite their different backgrounds, for Lucian both Jesus and Peregrinus are sophists and *nomothetes*, they both preach rejection of worldly wealth and they both die in order to obtain immortality. However, in the satire it is clear that Peregrinus pursues religious authority merely as a way to obtain fame and that his search for immortality is caused more by cowardice than piety. So when Peregrinus performs his suicide *cum* apotheosis, Lucian evokes the earlier description of Jesus and the crucifixion to highlight the similarities of their deaths and also to denigrate Peregrinus. As a consequence of this besmirching of Peregrinus' character, Jesus appears more moral than the pagan.

While Lucian does not express overt preference for Jesus over Peregrinus, Peregrinus' denigration indicates that even though the *De Morte Peregrini* is written with full command of the style and knowledge of Greco-Roman literature, Lucian also places

value on ideas and practices outside of Greco-Roman culture. Additionally, when Lucian satirizes the Christians, his attacks engage the Christians on their own terms, rather than by the values of Greco-Roman culture (Edwards 1989). This reluctance to evaluate people by the standards of Greco-Roman culture has resonances in other Lucianic works, in which he criticizes the assumption that Greek and Roman knowledge have inherent superiority (Nasrallah 2005, Andrade 2013).

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