

Artagatis, Cybele, Isis and Lucius at Rome.

Having made money with bogus oracles, the priests of the Syrian goddess drive Lucius, bearing their goddess's statue, out of town through a particularly rough (and symbolic; Zimmerman 2002) route (9.10). Soon a posse of townspeople seize them for stealing a cup from the sanctuary: the Galli respond that it was gift from the mother of the Gods to her sister (10.10), suggesting connections between the two. Isis was prominent at Rome (Bradley 2012) but Cybele even more so. In the *Aeneid*, a vital intertext for the *Metamorphoses* (Harrison 1997), Cybele plays a central role (Beard 1994, Wilhelm 1988). The Galli and the rites of Artagatis closely resemble Cybele's, criticism of whose cult was prominent in Apuleius' era (Latham 2012). A consideration of how episodes with the priests of Artagatis recall those of Cybele, and how the problematic status of Cybele, a foundational goddess for Rome, connects with the status of Roman Isis as another Eastern supporter of Rome, should condition our views on Lucius' participation in the Roman Isis cult.

Platonic dialogues furnish ironic intertexts (e.g. 'Socrates' in book I), and the eunuch head-priest (balding; recall the conclusion's shaven headed Lucius (Graverini 2007: 67); 'Philebus' recalls the Platonic dialogue about the ethics of pleasure; note Philebus, introducing Lucius to the other Galli, suggest Lucius will serve the priests sexually (8.26); his language evokes Anchises greeting Aeneas come to him in the underworld. (6.687). There are further subversions. Artagatis is not Cybele, yet her priests and rituals shared many similar shocking features, such as castrated, effeminate priests who beg for gifts, bloody ritual self-abuse, wild music and dancing, and threatening prophecies which compel donations. Greed is thought to motivate the Isis priests at Rome to demand additional initiations from Lucius (Harrison 1997).

Lucius' negative comments about these priests (8.27) echoed (and would apply to) savage contemporary criticisms of the priests of Cybele at Rome and elsewhere as well as to the worshippers and supporters of such cults. Other parallels connect the Artagatis episodes with the Isis-episodes. Lucius, suspected of being a rabid ass and locked up overnight, in the morning not only drinks the water offered to him (calling it the 'water of salvation') but even dips his head in it (9.3), as he will dip his head in the seawater at Cenchreae (11.1). Lucius emphasizes he was able to enjoy the softness of the human bed (9.2), as he is later able to enjoy the soft beach sand at Cenchreae (10.35) both rests having come after Lucius has cleverly avoided being killed and eaten. Earlier, after a dog stole his meat, the cook planned to kill and substitute Lucius; later, the pastry cooks, angered because Lucius stole their leftovers, discover his thefts and their laughter attracts their master. Earlier Lucius is threatened with being eaten by the cook's master; at Corinth Lucius is threatened by being eaten by the beasts in the arena for the enjoyment of his masters. Earlier, Lucius seems a rabid, mad ass, and is proved sane the next morning; at Corinth, he partially shares the desire induced madness of the Corinthian crowd; of course, the next morning Lucius displays true sanity in devotion to Isis. While the corrupt priests of Artagatis contrast with those of the good Isis, these parallelisms suggest more universal tendencies toward religious duplicity and delusion, conditioning our analysis of Lucius' service to Isis at Rome. Lucius has ass-like qualities even before his transformation; I argue that, after his reformation, as he bore the statue of Atragatis, Lucius now is the obedient ass of Isis, with Asinus his handler, whose problematical non-Roman cult and priesthood has served Rome since Sulla, alongside the Cybele whose nymphs guided Aeneas back to Latium (10.215-259) as Isis guided Lucius to Rome.

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