**‘New’ Religions in Rome**

*The readings here, like those in the immigration section, do not do credit to the complexity of the religious groups in Rome, but they at least sketch out part of the picture: they need to be supplemented by readings from the source collection assigned for this class.*

*Rome had its own deities, who were worshipped within the pomerium, the religious boundary of the city, though they also had many important cult sites outside that boundery. Foreign deities had their cult sites outside the pomerium, but that did not mean many of them were not also incredibly important to Rome and Romans. To start us off here is Juvenal, in a satire directed against women, attacking a number of supposedly ‘unRoman’ religions and their female adherents. Despite what Juvenal says, however, both men and women worshipped these gods and attended their temples and compounds.*

And now, behold! In comes the chorus of the frantic Bellona and the Magna Mater, attended by a giant half-man, with an obscene form admired by youths who cut off his smooth balls long ago: a noisy cohort and the people’s castanets fall silent as appears, as he wears a Phrygian turban tied around his plebeian cheeks. With solemn utterance he bids the lady beware of the September winds unless she do not purifies herself with a hundred eggs, and present him with some old mulberry-coloured garments in order that any great and unforeseen calamity may pass into the clothes, and make expiation for the entire year. In winter she will go down to the river of a morning, break the ice, and plunge three times into the Tiber, dipping her trembling head in its whirling waters, and crawling out thence naked and shivering, she will creep with bleeding knees right across the field of Tarquin the Proud. If the white Io shall so order, she will journey to the confines of Egypt, and fetch water from hot Meroe with which to sprinkle the Temple of Isis which stands hard by the ancient sheepfold. For she believes that the command was given by the voice of the Goddess herself----a pretty kind of mind and spirit for the Gods to talk to st night! Hence the chief and highest place of honour is awarded to Anubis, who, with his linen-clad and shaven crew, mocks at the weeping of the people as he runs along. He it is that obtains pardon for wives who break the law of purity on days that should be kept holy, and exacts huge penalties when the coverlet has been profaned, or when the silver serpent has been seen to nod his head. His tears and carefully-studied mutterings make sure that Osiris will not refuse a pardon for the fault, bribed, no doubt, by a fat goose and a slice of sacrificial cake.

No sooner has that fellow departed than a palsied Jewess, leaving her basket and her truss of hay, comes begging to her secret ear; she is an interpreter of the laws of Jerusalem, a high priestess of the tree, a trusty go-between of highest heaven. She, too, fills her palm, but more sparingly, for a Jew will tell you dreams of any kind you please for the smallest fee. An Armenian or Commagenian sooth-sayer, after examining the lungs of a dove that is still warm, will promise a youthful lover, or a big bequest from some rich and childless man; he will probe the breast of a chicken, or the entrails of a dog, sometimes even of a boy; some things he will do with the intention of informing against them himself.

Still more trusted are the Chaldaeans; every word uttered by the astrologer they will believe has come from Hammon's fountain, for now that the Delphian oracles are dumb, man is condemned to darkness as to his future. Chief among these was one who was oft in exile, through whose friendship and venal prophecies the great citizen died whom Otho feared. For nowadays no astrologer has credit unless he have been imprisoned in some distant camp, with chains clanking on either arm; none believe in his powers unless he has been condemned and all but put to death, having just contrived to get deported to a Cyclad, or to escape at last from the diminutive Seriphos.

Your excellent Tanaquil[[1]](#footnote-1) consults as to the long-delayed death of her jaundiced mother----having previously enquired about your own; she will ask when she may expect to bury her sister, or her uncles; and whether her lover will outlive herself----what greater boon could the Gods bestow upon her? And yet your Tanaquil does not herself understand the gloomy threats of Saturn, or under what constellation Venus will show herself propitious, which months will be months of losses, which of gains; but beware of ever encountering one whom you see clutching a well-worn calendar in her hands as if it were a ball of clammy amber; one who inquires of none, but is now herself inquired of; one who, if her husband is going forth to camp, or returning home from abroad, will not bear him company if the numbers of Thrasyllus call her back. If she wants to drive as far as the first mile-stone, she finds the right hour from her book; if there is a sore place in the corner of her eye, she will not call for a salve until she has consulted her horoscope: and if she be ill in bed, deems no hour so suitable for taking food as that prescribed to her by Petosiris.

If the woman is of humble rank, she will promenade between the turning-posts of the Circus; she will have her fortune told, and will present her brow and her hand to the seer who asks for many an approving smack of the lips. Wealthy women will pay for answers from a Phrygian or Indian augur well skilled in the stars and the heavens, or one of the elders employed to expiate thunderbolts. Plebeian destinies are determined in the Circus or on the ramparts: the woman who displays a long gold chain on her bare neck inquires before the pillars and the clusters of dolphins whether she shall throw over the tavern-keeper and marry the old-clothes-man.

Juvenal, *Satire* 6.511-587

*However, goddesses like Isis had long had an attraction for many Romans. Tertullian reports how the Senate in 59 BCE decided to destroy the*

Many times have the censors destroyed (a god) without consulting the people. Bacchus, with all his ritual, was certainly by the consuls, on the senate's authority, cast not only out of the city, but out of all Italy; whilst Varro informs us that Serapis also, aIsis, Harpocrates, and Anubis, were excluded from the Capitol, and that their altars which the senate had thrown down were only restored by popular violence. The consul Gabinius, however, on the first day of the ensuing January, although he gave a tardy consent to some sacrifices, in deference to the crowd which assembled, because he had failed to decide about Serapis and Isis, yet held the judgment of the senate to be more potent than the clamour of the multitude, and forbade the altars to be built.

Tertullian, *To the Nations* 1.10.17

*If you are wondering what the comment about Bacchus in the passage above is referring to, it is the so-called Bacchanalian conspiracy, where in one of the earliest cases of the Romans coming down hard on a religion they violently suppressed the worship of Bacchus in Italy 186 BCE:*

8. The following year diverted Spurius Postumius Albinus and Quintus Marcius Philippus from the care of armies, wars, and provinces, to the punishing of an intestine conspiracy. The praetors cast lots for their provinces, Titus Maenius obtained the city jurisdiction; Marcus Licinius Lucullus, that between citizens and foreigners; Caius Aurelius Scaurus, Sardinia; Publius Cornelius Sulla, Sicily; Lucius Quintius Crispinus, Hither Spain; Caius Calpurnius Piso, Farther Spain. The making of inquisition concerning clandestine meetings was decreed to both the consuls. A Greek of low rank came, first, into Etruria, not with one of the many trades which his nation, of all others the most skillful in the cultivation of the mind and body, has introduced among us, but a low operator in sacrifices, and a fortune-teller; nor was he one who, by open religious rites, and by publicly professing his calling and teaching, imbued the minds of his followers with terror, but a priest of secret and nocturnal rites. These mysterious rites were, at first, imparted to a few, but afterwards communicated to great numbers, both men and women. To their religious performances were added the pleasures of wine and feasting, to allure a greater number of proselytes. When wine, lascivious discourse, night, and the intercourse of the sexes had extinguished every sentiment of modesty, then debaucheries of every kind began to be practiced, as every person found at hand that sort of enjoyment to which he was disposed by the passion predominant in his nature. Nor were they confined to one species of vice---the promiscuous intercourse of free-born men and women; but from this store-house of villainy proceeded false witnesses, counterfeit seals, false evidences, and pretended discoveries. From the same place, too, proceeded poison and secret murders, so that in some cases, not even the bodies could be found for burial. Many of their audacious deeds were brought about by treachery, but most of them by force; it served to conceal the violence, that, on account of the loud shouting, and the noise of drums and cymbals, none of the cries uttered by the persons suffering violence or murder could be heard abroad.

9. The infection of this mischief, like that from the contagion of disease, spread from Etruria to Rome; where, the size of the city affording greater room for such evils, and more means of concealment, cloaked it at first; but information of it was at length brought to the consul, Postumius, principally in the following manner: Publius Aebutius, whose father had held equestrian rank in the army, was left an orphan, and his guardians dying, he was educated under the eye of his mother Duronia, and his stepfather Titus Sempronius Rutilus. Duronia was entirely devoted to her husband; and Sempronius, having managed the guardianship in such a manner that he could not give an account of the property, wished that his ward should be either made away with, or bound to compliance with his will by some strong tie. The Bacchanalian rites were the only way to effect the ruin of the youth. His mother told him, that, "during his sickness, she had made a vow for him, that if he should recover, she would initiate him among the Bacchanalians; that being, through the kindness of the gods, bound by this vow, she wished now to fulfill it; that it was necessary he should preserve chastity for ten days, and on the tenth, after he should have supped and washed himself, she would conduct him into the place of worship." [I have cut the section about how the Romans became aware of this cult and its ‘dangers’, coming back to the story when Hispala, a prostitute with a heart of gold, tells all]

…Hispala then gave a full account of the origin of the mysteries. At first," she said, "those rites were performed by women. No man used to be admitted. They had three stated days in the year on which persons were initiated among the Bacchanalians, in the daytime. The matrons used to be appointed priestesses, in rotation. Paculla Minia, a Campanian, when priestess, made an alteration in every particular, as if by the direction of the gods. For she first introduced men, who were her own sons, Minucius and Herrenius, both surnamed Cerrinius; changed the time of celebration, from day to night; and, instead of three days in the year, appointed five days of initiation, in each month. From the time that the rites were thus made common, and men were intermixed with women, and the licentious freedom of the night was added, there was nothing wicked, nothing flagitious, that had not been practiced among them. There were more frequent pollution of men with each other than with women. If any were less patient in submitting to dishonor, or more averse to the commission of vice, they were sacrificed as victims. To think nothing unlawful was the grand maxim of their religion. The men, as if bereft of reason, uttered predictions, with frantic contortions of their bodies; the women, in the habit of Bacchantes, with their hair disheveled, and carrying blazing torches, ran down to the Tiber; where, dipping their torches in the water, they drew them up again with the flame unextinguished, being composed of native sulphur and charcoal. They said that those men were carried off by the gods, whom the machines laid hold of and dragged from their view into secret caves. These were such as refused to take the oath of the society, or to associate in their crimes, or to submit to defilement. This number was exceedingly great now, almost a second state in themselves, and among them were many men and women of noble families. During the last two years it had been a rule, that no person above the age of twenty should be initiated; for they sought for people of such age as made them more liable to suffer deception and personal abuse.

14. When she had completed her information, she again fell at the consul's knees, and repeated the same entreaties, that he might send her out of the country. The consul requested his mother-in-law to clear some part of the house, into which Hispala might remove; accordingly, an apartment was assigned her in the upper part of it, of which the stairs, opening into the street, were stopped up, and the entrance made from the inner court. All Fecenia's effects were immediately removed there and her slaves sent for. Aebutius, also, was ordered to remove to the house of one of the consul's clients. When both the informers were by these means in his power, Postumius represented the affair to the senate, laying before them the whole circumstance, in due order; the information given to him at first, and the discoveries gained by his inquiries afterwards. Great dismay seized on the senators; not only on the public account, lest such conspiracies and nightly meetings might be productive of secret treachery and mischief, but, likewise, on account of their own particular families, lest some of their relations might be involved in this infamous affair. The senate voted, however, that thanks should be given to the consul because he had investigated the matter with singular diligence, and without exciting any alarm. They then committed to the consuls the holding of an inquiry, out of the common course, concerning the Bacchanals and their nocturnal orgies. They ordered them to take care that the informers, Aebutius and Fecenia, might suffer no injury on that account; and to invite other informers in the matter, by offering rewards. They ordered that the officials in those rites, whether men or women, should be sought for, not only at Rome, but also throughout all the market towns and places of assembly, and be delivered over to the power of the consuls; and also that proclamation should be made in the city of Rome, and published through all Italy, that "no persons initiated in the Bacchanalian rites should presume to come together or assemble on account of those rites, or to perform any such kind of worship; and above all, that search should be made for those who had assembled or conspired for personal abuse, or for any other flagitious practices. The senate passed these decrees.

The consuls directed the curule aediles to make strict inquiry after all the priests of those mysteries, and to keep such as they could apprehend in custody until their trial; they at the same time charged the plebeian aediles to take care that no religious ceremonies should be performed in private. To the capital triumvirs the task was assigned to post watches in proper places of the city, and to use vigilance in preventing any meetings by night. In order likewise to guard against fires, five assistants were joined to the triumvirs, so that each might have the charge of the buildings in his own separate district, on this side the Tiber. 15. After despatching these officers to their different jobs, the consuls mounted the rostrum; and, having summoned an assembly of the people, one of the consuls, when he had finished the solemn form of prayer which the magistrates are accustomed to pronounce before they address the people, proceeded thus: “Romans, to no former assembly was this solemn supplication to the gods more suitable or even more necessary: as it serves to remind you, that these are the deities whom your forefathers pointed out as the objects of your worship, veneration, and prayers: and not those which infatuated men's minds with corrupt and foreign modes of religion, and drove them, as if goaded by the furies, to every lust and every vice. I am at a loss to know what I should conceal, or how far I ought to speak out; for I dread lest, if I leave you ignorant of any particular, I should give room for carelessness, or if I disclose the whole, that I should too much awaken your fears. That the Bacchanalian rites have subsisted for some time past in every country in Italy, and are at present performed in many parts of this city also, I am sure you must have been informed, not only by report, but by the nightly noises and horrid yells that resound through the whole city; but still you are ignorant of the nature of that business. Part of you think it is some kind of worship of the gods; others, some excusable sport and amusement, and that, whatever it may be, it concerns but a few. As regards the number, if I tell you that they are many thousands, that you would be immediately terrified to excess is a necessary consequence; unless I further acquaint you who and what sort of persons they are. First, then, a great part of them are women, and this was the source of the evil; the rest are males, but nearly resembling women; actors and pathics in the vilest lewdness; night revelers, driven frantic by wine, noises of instruments, and clamors. The conspiracy, as yet, has no strength; but it has abundant means of acquiring strength, for they are becoming more numerous every day. Your ancestors would not allow that you should ever assemble casually, without some good reason; that is, either when the standard was erected on the Janiculum, and the army led out on occasion of elections; or when the tribunes proclaimed a meeting of the plebeians, or some of the magistrates summoned you to it. And they judged it necessary, that whatever a multitude was, there should be a lawful governor of that multitude present. Of what kind do you suppose are the meetings of these people? In the first place, held in the night, and in the next, composed promiscuously of men and women. If you knew at what ages the males are initiated, you would feel not only pity but also shame for them. Romans, can you think youths initiated, under such oaths as theirs, are fit to be made soldiers? That arms should be intrusted with wretches brought out of that temple of obscenity? Shall these, contaminated with their own foul debaucheries and those of others, be champions for the chastity of your wives and children?

16. "But the mischief were less, if they were only made femine by their practices; of that the disgrace would chiefly affect themselves; if they kept their hands from outrage, and their thoughts from fraud. But never was there in the state an evil of so great a magnitude, or one that extended to so many persons or so many acts of wickedness. Whatever deeds of villainy have, during late years, been committed through lust; whatever, through fraud; whatever, through violence; they have all, be assured, proceeded from that association alone. They have not yet perpetrated all the crimes for which they combined. The impious assembly at present confines itself to outrages on private citizens; because it has not yet acquired force sufficient to crush the commonwealth; but the evil increases and spreads daily; it is already too great for the private ranks of life to contain it, and aims its views at the body of the state. Unless you take timely precautions, Romans, their nightly assembly may become as large as this, held in open day, and legally summoned by a consul. Now they one by one dread you collected together in the assembly; presently, when you shall have separated and retired to your several dwellings, in town and country, they will again come together, and will hold a consultation on the means of their own safety, and, at the same time, of your destruction. Thus united, they will cause terror to every one of you. Each of you, therefore, ought to pray that his kindred may have behaved with wisdom and prudence; and if lust, if madness, has dragged any of them into that abyss, to consider such a person as the relation of those with whom he has conspired for every disgraceful and reckless act, and not as one of your own. I am not secure, lest some, even of yourselves, may have erred through mistake; for nothing is more deceptive in appearance than false religion. When the authority of the gods is held out as a pretext to cover vice, fear enters our minds, lest, in punishing the crimes of men, we may violate some divine right connected therewith. Numberless decisions of the pontiffs, decrees of the senate, and even answers of the haruspices free you from religious scruples of this character. How often in the ages of our fathers was it given in charge to the magistrates, to prohibit the performance of any foreign religious rites; to banish strolling sacrificers and soothsayers from the forum, the circus, and the city; to search for, and burn, books of divination; and to abolish every mode of sacrificing that was not conformable to the Roman practice! For they, completely versed in every divine and human law, maintained that nothing tended so strongly to the subversion of religion as sacrifice, when we offered it not after the institutions of our forefathers, but after foreign customs. Thus much I thought necessary to mention to you beforehand, that no vain scruple might disturb your minds when you should see us demolishing the places resorted to by the Bacchanalians, and dispersing their impious assemblies. We shall do all these things with the favor and approbation of the gods; who, because they were indignant that their divinity was dishonored by those people's lusts and crimes, have drawn forth their proceedings from hidden darkness into the open light; and who have directed them to be exposed, not that they may escape with impunity, but in order that they may be punished and suppressed. The senate have committed to me and my colleague an inquisition extraordinary concerning that affair. What is requisite to be done by ourselves, in person, we will do with energy. The charge of posting watches through the city, during the night, we have committed to the inferior magistrates; and, for your parts, it is incumbent on you to execute vigorously whatever duties are assigned you, and in the several places where each will be placed, to perform whatever orders you shall receive, and to use your best endeavors that no danger or unrest may arise from the treachery of the party involved in the guilt.

17. They then ordered the decrees of the senate to be read, and published a reward for any discoverer who should bring any of the guilty before them, or give information against any of the absent, adding, that if any person accused should fly, they would limit a certain day upon which, if he did not answer when summoned, he would be condemned in his absence; and if any one should be charged who was out of Italy, they would allow him a longer time, if he should wish to come and make his defense. They then issued an edict, that "no person whatever should presume to buy or sell anything for the purpose of leaving the country; or to receive or conceal, or by any means aid the fugitives." On the assembly being dismissed, great terror spread throughout the city; nor was it confined merely within the walls, or to the Roman territory, for everywhere throughout the whole of Italy alarm began to be felt, when the letters from the guest-friends were received, concerning the decree of the senate, and what passed in the assembly, and the edict of the consuls. During the night, which succeeded the day in which the affair was made public, great numbers, attempting to fly, were seized, and brought back by the triumvirs, who had posted guards at all gates; and informations were lodged against many, some of whom, both men and women, put themselves to death. Above seven thousand men and women are said to have taken the oath of the association. But it appeared that the heads of the conspiracy were the two Catinii, Marcus and Caius, Roman plebeians; Lucius Opiturnius, a Faliscan; and Minius Cerrinius, a Campanian: that from these proceeded all their criminal practices, and that these were the chief priests and founders of the sect. Care was taken that they should be apprehended as soon as possible. They were brought before the consuls, and, confessing their guilt, caused no delay to the ends of justice.

18. But so great were the numbers that fled from the city, that because the lawsuits and property of many persons were going to ruin, the praetors, Titus Maenius and Marcus Licinius, were obliged, under the direction of the senate, to adjourn their courts for thirty days, until the inquiries should be finished by the consuls. The same deserted state of the law-courts, since the persons, against whom charges were brought, did not appear to answer, nor could be found in Rome, necessitated the consuls to make a circuit of the country towns, and there to make their inquisitions and hold the trials. Those who, as it appeared, had been only initiated, and had made after the priest, and in the most solemn form, the prescribed imprecations, in which the accursed conspiracy for the perpetration of every crime and lust was contained, but who had not themselves committed, or compelled others to commit, any of those acts to which they were bound by the oath---all such they left in prison. But those who had forcibly committed personal defilements or murders, or were stained with the guilt of false evidence, counterfeit seals, forged wills, or other frauds, all these they punished with death. A greater number were executed than thrown into prison; indeed, the multitude of men and women who suffered in both ways, was very considerable. The consuls delivered the women, who were condemned, to their relations, or to those under whose guardianship they were, that they might inflict the punishment in private; if there did not appear any proper person of the kind to execute the sentence, the punishment was inflicted in public. A charge was then given to demolish all the places where the Bacchanalians had held their meetings; first in Rome, and then throughout all Italy; excepting those wherein should be found some ancient altar or consecrated statue. With regard to the future, the senate passed a decree, "that no Bacchanalian rites should be celebrated in Rome or in Italy;" and ordering that, "in case any person should believe some such kind of worship incumbent upon him, and necessary; and that he could not, without offence to religion, and incurring guilt, omit it, he should represent this to the city praetor, and the praetor should lay the business before the senate. If permission were granted by the senate, when not less than one hundred members were present, then he might perform those rites, provided that no more than five persons should be present at the sacrifice, and that they should have no common stock of money, nor any president of the ceremonies, nor priest."

*The senate then passed the following decree:*

Quintus Marcius, the son of Lucius, and Spurius Postumius, consulted the senate on the Nones of October [i.e., the 7th], at the temple of the Bellonae. Marcus Claudius, son of Marcus, Lucius Valerius, son of Publius, and Quintus Minucius, son of Gaius, were the committee for drawing up the report. Regarding the Bacchanalia, it was resolved to give the following directions to those who are in alliance with us: No one of them is to possess a place where the festivals of Bacchus are celebrated; if there are any who claim that it is necessary for them to have such a place, they are to come to Rome to the praetor urbanus, and the senate is to decide on those matters, when their claims have been heard, provided that not less than one hundred senators are present when the affair is discussed. No man is to be a Bacchantian, neither a Roman citizen, nor one of the Latin name, nor any of our allies unless they come to the praetor urbanus, and he in accordance with the opinion of the senate expressed when not less than one hundred senators are present at the discussion, shall have given leave. Carried.

No man is to be a priest; no one, either man or woman, is to be an officer (to manage the temporal affairs of the organization); nor is anyone of them to have charge of a common treasury; no one shall appoint either man or woman to be master or to act as master; henceforth they shall not form conspiracies among themselves, stir up any disorder, make mutual promises or agreements, or interchange pledges; no one shall observe the sacred rites either in public or private or outside the city, unless he comes to the praetor urbanus, and he, in accordance with the opinion of the senate, expressed when no less than one hundred senators are present at the discussion, shall have given leave. Carried.

No one in a company of more than five persons altogether, men and women, shall observe the sacred rites, nor in that company shall there be present more than two men or three women, unless in accordance with the opinion of the praetor urbanus and the senate as written above. See that you declare it in the assembly for not less than three market days; that you may know the opinion of the senate that this was their judgment: if there are any who have acted contrary to what was written above, they have decided that a proceeding for a capital offense should be instituted against them; the senate has justly decreed that you should inscribe this on a brazen tablet, and that you should order it to be placed where it can be easiest read; see to it that the revelries of Bacchus, if there be any, except in case there be concerned in the matter something sacred, as was written above, be disbanded within ten days after this letter shall be delivered to you. In the Teuranian field.

**The Magna Mater/Cybele and the Galli**

*The Galli were priests of the great goddess Cybele, a goddess with an important cult centre in Pessinus in Phrygia, but who was worshipped around the East. The Romans referred to her as the Magna Mater, the Great Mother. They invited her to Rome in an attempt to gain her favour during the Second Punic War; she came from Pessinus, in Anatolia in 204 BCE (in modern Turkey), and Romans after that had a bond of friendship with Pessinus. (It did not hurt that after she arrived the Romans went on to conclusively win the war.) The chief of the priests was called Attis, and the priest themselves wore saffron robes and clashed metal cymbals together as they walked the streets. They also were self-castrated, and Romans were not allowed to become priests there, with the exception of the chief priest. In 103 BCE a priest from the shrine in Pessinus addressed the Roman senate either to have restoration of some harms invlected on impieties committed at his shrine, or to predict yet another Roman military success. He would have cut a remarkable figure, with "colourful attire and headdress, like a crown, with regal associations unwelcome to the Romans". Yet the senate supported him; and when a plebeian tribune who had violently opposed his right to address the senate died of a fever (or, in the alternative scenario, when the prophesied Roman victory came) Magna Mater's power seemed proven. Some Greeks, however, like Dionysius of Halicarnassus, argued that the Romans tried to keep a boundary between themselves and this cult:*

3 And — the thing which I myself have marvelled at most — despite the influx into Rome of innumerable nations which are under every necessity of worshipping their ancestral gods according to the customs of their respective countries, the city has never officially adopted any of those foreign practices, as has been the experience of many cities in the past. But, even though she has, in pursuance of oracles, introduced certain rites from abroad, she celebrates them in accordance with her own traditions, after banishing all fabulous clap-trap. The rites of the Idaean goddess [Cybele] are a case in point; 4 for the praetors perform sacrifices and famous games in her honour every year according to the Roman customs, but the priest and priestess of the goddess are Phrygians, and it is they who carry her image in procession through the city, begging alms in her name according to their custom, and wearing figures upon their breasts and striking their tambourines while their followers play tunes upon their flutes in honour of the Mother of the Gods. 5 But by a law and decree of the senate no native Roman walks in procession through the city arrayed in a multi-coloured robe, begging for money or escorted by flute-players, or worships the god with the Phrygian ceremonies. That is how cautious are they about admitting any foreign religious customs and how great their aversion is to all pompous display that is wanting in decorum.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 29.3-5

*This is how Livy described the coming of the Magna Mater and her priests to Rome. As you can see, it was a great state occasion, and involved also a famous case of a woman proving her chastity publicly:*

In addition they deliberated on the reception of the Idaean Mother [Cybele/Magna Mater], in regard to whom not only had Marcus Valerius, one of the ambassadors, arriving in advance, reported that she would be in Italy very soon, but also there was recent news that she was already at Tarracina. 6 It was no unimportant decision that occupied the senate — the question who was the best man in the state. 7 At any rate every man would have preferred a real victory in that contest to any high commands or magistracies, whether conferred by vote of the senators or of the people. 8 Publius Scipio, son of the Gnaeus who had fallen in Spain, was the young man not yet of an age to be quaestor, whom they judged to be the best of good men among all the citizens. 9 If writers who lived nearest in time to men who remembered those days had handed down by what virtues the senate was led to make that judgment, I should indeed gladly hand it on to posterity. But I shall not interject my own opinions, reached by conjecture in a matter buried by the lapse of time. 10 Publius Cornelius was ordered to go to Ostia with all the matrons to meet the goddess, and himself to receive her from the ship, and carrying her to land to turn her over to the matrons to carry. 11 After the ship had reached the mouth of the river Tiber, in compliance with the order he sailed out into open water on a ship, received the goddess from her priests and carried her to land. 12. The foremost matrons in the state, among whom the name of one in particular, that of Claudia Quinta, is conspicuous, received her. Claudia's repute, previously not unquestioned, as tradition reports it, has made her purity the more celebrated among posterity by a service so devout. 13. The matrons passed the goddess from hand to hand in an unbroken succession to each other, while the entire city poured out to meet her. Censers had been placed before the doors along the route of the bearers, and kindling their incense, people prayed that gracious and benignant she might enter the city of Rome. It was to the Temple of Victory, which is on the Palatine, that they carried the goddess on the day before the Ides of April, and that was a holy day. 14.The people thronged to the Palatine bearing gifts for the goddess, and there was a banquet of the gods, and games also, called the Megalesia.

Livy, *From the Founding of the City* 29.145.14

*The poet Lucretius describes the procession of the Magna Mater in Rome:*

And so great mother of gods, and mother of beasts,

And parent of mankind she alone has been named.

Her the old and learned poets of Greece praised.

Seated in a chariot in the realms of air

To drive her team of lions, teaching thus

That the great earth hangs poised and cannot lie

Resting on other earth. To her chariot

They've yoked wild beasts, since offspring

However savage, must be tamed and guided

By care of parents. They have crowned

With turret-crown the peak of her head,

Since, fortressed in her divine, lofty strongholds,

She is who sustains the cities; now, adorned

With that same token, today is carried forth,

With solemn awe through many a mighty land,

The image of that mother, the divine.

Her the wide nations, after antique rituals

Name the Idaean Mother, giving her

Escort of Phrygians, since first, they say,

From out those regions it was that grain began

Through all the world. To her do they assign

The Galli, the emasculate, since thus

They wish to show that men who violate

The majesty of the mother and have proved

Ungrateful to parents are to be adjudged

Unfit to give unto the shores of light

A living progeny. The Galli come:

And hollow cymbals, tight-skinned tambourines

Resound around to bangings of their hands;

The fierce horns threaten with a raucous bray;

The tubed pipe excites their maddened minds

In Phrygian measures; they bear before them knives,

Wild emblems of their frenzy, which have power

The rabble's ungrateful heads and impious hearts

To panic with terror of the goddess' might.

And so, when through the mighty cities borne,

She blesses man with silent salutation,

They strew the highway of her passage

With coin of brass and silver, gifting her

With alms and generosity, and shower her and shade

With flowers of roses falling like the snow

Upon the Mother and her companion-bands.

Here is an armed troop, which by Greeks

Are called the Phrygian Curetes. Since

among themselves they use to play

In games of arms and leap in measure round

With bloody mirth and by their nodding shake

The terrorizing crests upon their heads,

This is the armed troop that represents

The arm'd Dictaean Curetes, who, in Crete,

As runs the story, whilom did out-drown

That infant cry of Zeus, what time their band,

Young boys, in a swift dance around the boy,

To measured step beat with the brass on brass,

That Saturn might not get him for his jaws,

And give its mother an eternal wound

Along her heart. And it is on this account

That armed they escort the mighty Mother,

Or else because they signify by this

That she, the goddess, teaches men to be

Eager with armed valour to defend

Their motherland, and ready to stand forth,

The guard and glory of their parents' years.

*Catullus in poem 63 imagined Attis, the original castrated priest of Cybele/Magna Mater in a rather dramatic fashion:*

Over the vast main borne by swift-sailing ship, Attis, as with hasty hurried foot he reached the Phrygian wood and gained the tree-girt gloomy sanctuary of the Goddess, there roused by rabid rage and mind astray, with sharp-edged flint downwards dashed his burden of virility. Then as he felt his limbs were left without their manhood, and the fresh-spilt blood staining the soil, with bloodless hand she hastily took a tambour light to hold, your taborine, Cybele, your initiate rite, and with feeble fingers beating the hollowed bullock's back, she rose up quivering thus to chant to her companions.

“Haste you together, she-priests, to Cybele's dense woods, together haste, you vagrant herd of the dame Dindymene, you who inclining towards strange places as exiles, following in my footsteps, led by me, comrades, you who have faced the ravening sea and truculent ocean, and have castrated your bodies in your utmost hate of Venus, make glad our mistress speedily with your minds' mad wanderings. Let dull delay depart from your thoughts, together haste you, follow to the Phrygian home of Cybele, to the Phrygian woods of the Goddess, where sounds the cymbal's voice, where the tambourine resounds, where the Phrygian flutist pipes deep notes on the curved reed, where the ivy-clad Maenads furiously toss their heads, where they enact their sacred orgies with shrill-sounding ululations, where that wandering band of the Goddess flits about: there we should run with hurried mystic dance.”

When Attis, spurious woman, had thus chanted to her group, the chorus straightway shrieks with trembling tongues, the rapid tambourine booms, the concave cymbals clang, and the troop swiftly rushes with rapid feet to green Ida. Then raging wildly, breathless, wandering, with brain distraught, hurries Attis with her tambourine, their leader through dense woods, like an untamed heifer shunning the burden of the yoke: and the swift Gallae press behind their speedy-footed leader. So when the home of Cybele they reach, wearied out with excess of toil and lack of food they fall in slumber. Sluggish sleep shrouds their eyes drooping with faintness, and raging fury leaves their minds to quiet ease.

But when the sun with radiant eyes from face of gold glanced over the white heavens, the firm soil, and the savage sea, and drove away the glooms of night with his brisk and clamorous team, then sleep fast-flying quickly sped away from wakening Attis, and goddess Pasithea received Somnus in her panting bosom. Then when from quiet rest torn, her delirium over, Attis at once recalled to mind her deed, and with lucid thought saw what she had lost, and where she stood, with heaving heart she backwards traced her steps to the landing-place. There, gazing over the vast main with tear-filled eyes, with saddened voice in tristful soliloquy thus did she lament her land:

“Mother-land, my creatress, mother-land, my begetter, which full sadly I'm forsaking, as runaway slaves do from their masters, to the woods of Ida I have rushed on foot, to stay amid snow and icy dens of beasts, and to wander through their hidden lurking-places full of fury. Where, or in what part, mother-land, may I imagine that you are? My very eyeball craves to fix its glance towards you, while for a brief space my mind is freed from wild ravings. And must I wander over these woods far from my home? From country, goods, friends, and parents, must I be parted? Leave the forum, the palaestra, the race-course, and gymnasium? Wretched, wretched soul, it is yours to grieve for ever and ever. For what shape is there, whose kind I have not worn? I (now a woman), I a man, a stripling, and a lad; I was the gymnasium's flower, I was the pride of the oiled wrestlers: my gates, my friendly threshold, were crowded, my home was decked with floral garlands, when I used to leave my couch at sunrise. Now will I live a priest of gods and slave to Cybele? I a Maenad, I a part of me, I a sterile trunk! Must I range over the snow-clad spots of verdurous Ida, and wear out my life beneath lofty Phrygian peaks, where stay the sylvan-seeking stag and woodland-wandering boar? Now, now, I grieve the deed I've done; now, now, do I repent!”

As the swift sound left those rosy lips, borne by new messenger to gods' twinned ears, Cybele, unloosing her lions from their joined yoke, and goading, the left-hand foe of the herd, thus speaks: “Come,” she says, “to work, you fierce one, cause a madness urge him on, let a fury prick him onwards till he returns through our woods, he who over-rashly seeks to fly from my empire. On! thrash your flanks with your tail, endure your strokes; make the whole place re-echo with roar of your bellowings; wildly toss your tawny mane about your nervous neck.” Thus angry Cybele spoke and loosed the yoke with her hand. The monster, self-exciting, to rapid wrath spurs his heart, he rushes, he roars, he bursts through the brush with heedless feet. But when he gained the humid verge of the foam-flecked shore, and spied the womanish Attis near the opal sea, he made a bound: the witless wretch fled into the wild wood: there throughout the space of her whole life a bondsmaid did she stay. Great Goddess, Goddess Cybele, Goddess Dame of Dindymus, far from my home may all your anger be, 0 mistress: urge others to such actions, to madness others hound.

*The Christian author Prudentius described the Taurobolion, the sacrifice of a bull, for the Magna Mater. It should be said that this description is part of anti-pagan poem, so it is surely somewhat embellished:*

The high priestess who is to be consecrated is brought down under ground in a pit dug deep, marvellously adorned with a fillet, binding her festive temples with chaplets, her hair combed back under a golden crown, and wearing a silken toga caught up with Gabine girding. Over this they make a wooden floor with wide spaces, woven of planks with an open mesh; they then divide or bore the area and repeatedly pierce the wood with a pointed tool that it may appear full of small holes. Here a huge bull, fierce and shaggy in appearance, is led, bound with flowery garlands about its flanks, and with its horns sheathed---its forehead sparkles with gold, and the flash of metal plates colors its hair. Here, as is ordained, they pierce its breast with a sacred spear; the gaping wound emits a wave of hot blood, and the smoking river flows into the woven structure beneath it and surges wide. Then by the many paths of the thousand openings in the lattice the falling shower rains down a foul dew, which the priestess buried within catches, putting her head under all the drops. She throws back her face, she puts her cheeks in the way of the blood, she puts under it her ears and lips, she interposes her nostrils, she washes her very eyes with the fluid, nor does she even spare her throat but moistens her tongue, until she actually drinks the dark gore. Afterwards, the corpse, stiffening now that the blood has gone forth, is hauled off the lattice, and the priestess, horrible in appearance, comes forth, and shows her wet head, her hair heavy with blood, and her garments sodden with it. This woman, all hail and worship at a distance, because the ox's blood has washed her, and she is born again for eternity.

Prudentius, *Peristephanon*

*On the whole we are often left with Roman perceptions of Eastern religions – with the exception of Judaism and Christianity, and those are not very helpful for understanding the appeal and impact of the various mother goddesses. Hence I have included the following by the Roman-Syrian author Lucian. It describes the religious cult for the ‘Syrian Goddess’ at the temple of Hierapolis Bambyce in Syria, where she too was served by eunuch priests. In his retelling of the cult’s foundation story, the Assyrian queen Stratonice dreamt she must build a temple at Hieropolis to the goddess and so the king sent her there with a young man named Combabus to ensure it was done. Just in case of any trouble with the queen, Combabus castrated himself and left his genitals sealed in a box with the king. When the queen fell in love with Combabus and tried to seduce him, he revealed his condition, but this didn't prevent her from wanting him around all the time. After they god back home, she turned on Combabus and accused him of attacking her; Combabus was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. Then – and only then for some reason – did he ask for the sealed box to prove his innocence, where upon the king relented and rewarded Combabus.*

Combabus had stood up to this point in silence, but as he was being led to his fate, he spoke out, and demanded the restoration of his pledge, affirming that he was to be killed not for rebellious conduct against his king, nor for any violation of the king's married life, but solely because of the king's eagerness to possess what he had deposited at the royal court at his departure. The king then summoned his treasurer and bade him bring fout what he had committed to his custody. On its production, Combabus removed the seal and displayed the contents of the vessel, and showed how he himself had suffered thereby; adding, "This is just what I feared, O King, when you sent me on that errand: I left with a heavy heart, and I did my duty, constrained by sheer necessity. I obeyed my lord and master to mine own undoing. Such as I am, I stand accused of a crime which none but a man in every sense could have committed. The king cried out in amazement at these words, embraced Combabus and said with tears, "What great ruin, Combabus, have you brought upon yourself? What monstrous deed of ill have you, alone of men, wrought to your sorrow? I cannot praise you, rash spirit, for enduring to suffer this outrage; would that you had never borne it; would that I had never seen its proofs! I needed not this your defence. But since the deity has willed it thus, I will grant you, first and foremost, as your revenge, the death of the informers: and next there shall follow a mighty gift, a store of silver and countless gold, and raiment of Assyria, and steeds from the royal stud. You shalt enter freely to us unannounced and none shall withstand you: none shall keep you from my sight, even were I by my wife's side." Thus he spook, and thus he acted; the informers were led off straightway to their execution; Combabus was laden with gifts, and the king's attachment to him was increased. No one of the Assyrians was deemed equal in wisdom and in fortune to Combabus.

26. On his request that he might complete what was unfinished in the construction of the temple—for he had left it unfinished—he was despatched anew; and he completed the temple, and there he lived. To mark his awareness of the bravery and good deeds of his architect, the king granted him a bronze statue of himself to stand in the temple of his construction. And even to the present day this bronze statue is seen standing in the temple, the work of Hermocles of Rhodes. Its form is that of a woman, but the garments are those of a man. It is said, too, that his most intimate friends, as a proof of their sympathy, castrated themselves like him, and chose the same manner of life. Others there are who bring gods into the story and affirm that Combabus was beloved by Hera; and that it was she who inspired many with the idea of castrating themselves, so that her lover should not be the only one to lament the loss of his virility. 27. Meantime the custom once adopted is still in practice, and many persons every year castrate themselves and lose their virile powers there, either out of sympathy with Combabus, or to find favour with Hera. They certainly castrate themselves, and then cease to wear man's clothing; they put on women's dress and perform women's tasks. I have heard the origin of this ascribed to Combabus as well, for the following event occurred to him. A certain foreign woman who had joined a sacred assembly, beholding a human form of extreme beauty and dressed in man's attire, became violently enamoured of him: after discovering that he was a eunuch she killed herself. Combabus accordingly in despair at his incapacity for love, put on women’s clothing, that no woman in future might be deceived in the same way. This is the reason of the female attire of the Galli. Enough of Combabus and his story: in the course of my story I shall make mention the Galli, and of their castration, and of the methods employed to effect it, and of the burial rites wherewith they are buried, and the reasons why they have no ingress to the temple; but before this I am inclined to speak of the site of the temple and of its size: and so I will even speak.

Lucian, *On the Syrian Goddess* 51

**Jews**

*Of all the immigrant groups in Rome, the Jewish people seem to have had the strongest group identity. They were always also under constant threat because of their monotheism and how that conflicted with emperor worship. In the following the Jewish author Philo addresses the Emperor Caligula, reminding him of how Augustus had treated his people:*

155 How then did he [Augustus] look upon the great division of Rome which is on the other side of the river Tiber, which he was well aware was occupied and inhabited by the Jews? And they were mostly Roman citizens, having been emancipated; for, having been brought as captives into Italy, they were manumitted by those who had bought them for slaves, without ever having been compelled to alter any of their hereditary or national observances. 156 Therefore, he knew that they had synagogues, and that they were in the habit of visiting them, and most especially on the sacred sabbath days, when they publicly cultivate their national philosophy. He knew also that they were in the habit of contributing sacred sums of money from their first fruits and sending them to Jerusalem by the hands of those who were to conduct the sacrifices. 157 But he never removed them from Rome, nor did he ever deprive them of their rights as Roman citizens, because he had a regard for Judaea, nor did he never meditate any new steps of innovation or rigour with respect to their synagogues, nor did he forbid their assembling for the interpretation of the law, nor did he make any opposition to their offerings of first fruits; but he behaved with such piety towards our countrymen, and with respect to all our customs, that he, I may almost say, with all his house, adorned our temple with many costly and magnificent offerings, commanding that continued sacrifices of whole burnt offerings should be offered up for ever and ever every day from his own revenues, as a first fruit of his own to the most high God, which sacrifices are performed to this very day, and will be performed for ever, as a proof and specimen of a truly imperial disposition. 158 Moreover, in the monthly divisions of the country, when the whole people receives money or corn in turn, he never allowed the Jews to fall short in their reception of this favour, but even if it happened that this distribution fell on the day of their sacred sabbath, on which day it is not lawful for them to receive any thing, or to give any thing, or in short to perform any of the ordinary duties of life, he charged the dispenser of these gifts, and gave him the most careful and special injunctions to make the distribution to the Jews on the day following, that they might not lose the effects of his common kindness.

Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 155-8

*We are told that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in Suetonius’ life:*

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ] he expelled them from Rome.

*Life of Claudius* 25.4

*As there were also disturbances involving Jews in Alexandria, he issued a number of edicts about the Jews including this one:*

Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power, proclaims: . . .Therefore it is right that also the Jews, who are in all the world under us, shall maintain their ancestral customs without hindrance and to them I now also command to use this my kindness rather reasonably and not to despise the religious rites of the other nations, but to observe their own laws.

*However, according to Cassius Dio, Claudius did not expel the Jews, because there were too many:*

As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without starting a riot to bar them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings.

Cassius Dio 60.6

*When discussing the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE by the (later) Emperor Claudius Tacitus offers what is an incredibly biased view, which, however, gives you a sense of what the average Roman might believe about the Jews:*

2 1 However, as I am about to describe the last days of a famous city, it seems proper for me to give some account of its origin. It is said that the Jews were originally exiles from the island of Crete who settled in the farthest parts of Libya at the time when Saturn had been deposed and expelled by Jove. An argument in favour of this is derived from the name: there is a famous mountain in Crete called Ida, and hence the inhabitants were called the Idaei, which was later lengthened into the barbarous form Iudaei. Some hold that in the reign of Isis the superfluous population of Egypt, under the leadership of Hierosolymus and Iuda, discharged itself on the neighbouring lands; many others think that they were an Egyptian stock, which in the reign of Cepheus was forced to migrate by fear and hatred. Still others report that they were Assyrian refugees, a landless people, who first got control of a part of Egypt, then later they had their own cities and lived in the Hebrew territory and the nearer parts of Syria. Still others say that the Jews are of illustrious origin, being the Solymi, a people celebrated in Homer's poems, who founded a city and gave it the name Hierosolyma, formed from their own.

3 1 Most authors agree that once during a plague in Egypt which caused bodily disfigurement, King Bocchoris approached the oracle of Ammon7 and asked for a remedy, whereupon he was told to purge his kingdom and to transport this race into other lands, since it was hateful to the gods. So the Hebrews were searched out and gathered together; then, being abandoned in the desert, while all others lay idle and weeping, one only of the exiles, Moses by name, warned them not to hope for help from gods or men, for they were deserted by both, but to trust to themselves, regarding as a guide sent from heaven the one whose assistance should first give them escape from their present distress. They agreed, and then set out on their journey in utter ignorance, but trusting to chance. Nothing caused them so much distress as scarcity of water, and in fact they had already fallen exhausted over the plain nigh unto death, when a herd of wild asses moved from their pasturage to a rock that was shaded by a grove of trees. Moses followed them, and, conjecturing the truth from the grassy ground, discovered abundant streams of water. This relieved them, and they then marched six days continuously, and on the seventh seized a country, expelling the former inhabitants; there they founded a city and dedicated a temple.

4 1 To establish his influence over this people for all time, Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions. The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor. They dedicated, in a shrine, a statue of that creature whose guidance enabled them to put an end to their wandering and thirst, sacrificing a ram, apparently in derision of Ammon. They likewise offer the ox, because the Egyptians worship Apis. They abstain from pork, in recollection of a plague, for the scab to which this animal is subject once afflicted them. By frequent fasts even now they bear witness to the long hunger with which they were once distressed, and the unleavened Jewish bread is still employed in memory of the haste with which they seized the grain. They say that they first chose to rest on the seventh day because that day ended their toils; but after a time they were led by the charms of indolence to give over the seventh year as well to inactivity. Others say that this is done in honour of Saturn, whether it be that the primitive elements of their religion were given by the Idaeans, who, according to tradition, were expelled with Saturn and became the founders of the Jewish race, or is due to the fact that, of the seven planets that rule the fortunes of mankind, Saturn moves in the highest orbit and has the greatest potency; and that many of the heavenly bodies traverse their paths and courses in multiples of seven.

5 1 Whatever their origin, these rites are maintained by their antiquity: the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity. For the worst rascals among other peoples, renouncing their ancestral religions, always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews; again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity. They sit apart at meals, and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful. They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference. Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice, and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account. However, they take thought to increase their numbers; for they regard it as a crime to kill any late-born child,16 and they believe that the souls of those who are killed in battle or by the executioner are immortal: hence comes their passion for begetting children, and their scorn of death. They bury the body rather than burn it, thus following the Egyptians' custom; they likewise bestow the same care on the dead, and hold the same belief about the world below; but their ideas of heavenly things are quite the opposite. The Egyptians worship many animals and monstrous images; the Jews conceive of one god only, and that with the mind alone: they regard as impious those who make from perishable materials representations of gods in man's image; that supreme and eternal being is to them incapable of representation and without end. Therefore they set up no statues in their cities, still less in their temples; this flattery is not paid their kings, nor this honour given to the Caesars. But since their priests used to chant to the accompaniment of pipes and cymbals and to wear garlands of ivy, and because a golden vine was found in their temple, some have thought that they were devotees of Father Liber, the conqueror of the East, in spite of the incongruity of their customs. For Liber established festive rites of a joyous nature, while the ways of the Jews are preposterous and mean.

Tacitus, *Histories* Book 5

*Juvenal attacked the Jews in his Fourteenth Satire for their worship of a god of whom they did not make images, not eating pork, and other such things:*

Some who have had a father who reveres the Sabbath, worship nothing but the clouds, and the divinity of the heavens, and see no difference between eating pork, from which their father abstained, and that of man; and in time they take to circumcision. Having been accustomed to flout the laws of Rome, they learn and practise and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses committed to his secret book, forbidding to point out the way to any not worshipping the same rites, and conducting none but the circumcised to the desired fountain. For all which the father was to blame, who gave up every seventh day to idleness, keeping it apart from all the concerns of life.

Juvenal *Satires* 14.96-106

**Christians**

*Celsus was a second century CE philosopher who wrote a diatribe against the Christians. That work does not survive intact, but we had substantial portions of the text from a work called Against Celsus written by the Christian bishop Origen of Alexandria in 248 CE.* *It gives you a sense for the various ways that the Romans attacked Christianity, even if one may doubt Origen’s honesty:*

BOOK 128 ...[Celsus] accuses [Jesus] of having "invented his birth from a virgin," and insults Him with being "born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt because of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly delighted with himself, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God."...

BOOK 3 44 After these points Celsus quotes some objections against the doctrine of Jesus, made by a very few individuals who are considered Christians, not of the more intelligent, as he supposes, but of the more ignorant class, and asserts that "the following are the rules laid down by them. Let no one come to us who has been instructed, or who is wise or prudent (for we think such qualifications evil by us); but if there be any ignorant, or unintelligent, or uninstructed, or foolish person, let them come with confidence. By which words, acknowledging that such individuals are worthy of their God, they manifestly show that they desire and are able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children."...

Chap. 55 But as Celsus delights to pile up lies about us, and, in addition to those which he has already uttered, has added others, let us examine these also, and see whether it be the Christians or Celsus who have reason to be ashamed of what is said. He asserts, "We see, indeed, in private houses workers in wool and leather, and fullers, and the most unlearned and peasant people, not daring to utter a word in the presence of their elders and wiser masters; but when they get hold of the children privately, and certain women as ignorant as themselves, they pour forth wonderful statements, to the effect that they ought not to give heed to their father and to their teachers, but should obey them [that is the Christians]; that the former are foolish and stupid, and neither know nor can do anything that is really good, being obsessed with empty trifles; that they alone know how men ought to live, and that, if the children obey them, they will both be happy themselves, and will make their home happy also. And while speaking like this if they see a teacher approaching, or one of the more intelligent class, or even the father himself, the more timid among them become afraid. However, the more forward push the children to throw off the yoke, whispering that in the presence of father and teachers they neither will nor can explain to them any good thing, seeing they turn away with aversion from the silliness and stupidity of such persons, because they are completely corrupt, and so wicked, and would punish them. [They add] that if they wish to avail themselves of their aid, they must leave their father and their instructors, and go with the women and their playmates to the women's quarters, or to the leather shop, or to the fuller's shop, that they may become perfect, and by words like these they seduce them."

### Chap. 59 This statement also is untrue, that it is "only foolish and low class individuals, and persons devoid of perception, slaves, women, and children, of whom the teachers of the divine word wish to make converts."... After this it is unnecessary for us to wish to offer a reply to such statements of Celsus as the following: "For why is it an evil to have been educated, and to have studied the best opinions, and to have both the reality and appearance of wisdom? What barrier does this offer to the knowledge of God? Why should it not rather be an assistance, and a means by which one might be better able to arrive at the truth?"

### BOOK 6 78 Celsus next makes certain observations of the following nature: "Again, if God, like Jupiter in the comedy, should, on awaking from a long slumber, desire to rescue the human race from evil, why did He send this Spirit of which you speak into one corner [of the earth]? He ought to have breathed it alike into many bodies, and have sent them out into all the world. Now the comic poet, to cause laughter in the theatre, wrote that Jupiter, after awakening, despatched Mercury to the Athenians and Spartans; but do not you think that you have made the Son of God more ridiculous in sending Him to the Jews?"...

### BOOK 8 28 We shall now proceed to the next statement of Celsus, and examine it with care: "If in obedience to the traditions of their fathers they abstain from such victims, they must also abstain from all animal food, in accordance with the opinions of Pythagoras, who thus showed his respect for the soul and its bodily organs. But if, as they say, they abstain that they may not eat along with demons, I admire their wisdom, in having at length discovered, that whenever they eat they eat with demons, although they only refuse to do so when they are looking upon a slain victim; for when they eat bread, or drink wine, or taste fruits, do they not receive these things, as well as the water they drink and the air they breathe, from certain demons, to whom have been assigned these different provinces of nature?"...

### 55 Celsus goes on to say: "They must make their choice between two alternatives. If they refuse to render proper honour to the gods and to respect their priests, let them not come to manhood, or marry wives, or have children, or indeed take any share in the affairs of life; but let them depart hence with all speed, and leave no posterity behind them, that such a race may become extinct from the face of the earth. Or, on the other hand, if they will take wives and bring up children, and taste of the fruits of the earth, and partake of all the blessings of life, and bear its appointed sorrows (for nature herself has given sorrows to all men; for sorrows must exist, and earth is the only place for them), then must they discharge the duties of life until they are released from its bonds, and render due honour to those beings who control the affairs of this life, if they would not show themselves ungrateful to them. For it would be unjust in them, after receiving the good things which they dispense, to pay them no tribute in return."...

*One reason why the Romans were so uncomfortable with Christianity was that Early Christianity had a truly radical message: you do not necessarily have to obey your family, your parents or society, even as a young woman. The Acts of Thecla and Paul tell the story of Thecla, a young aristocratic woman, who encounters Saint Paul in the city of Iconium and then goes on a rather radical life transformation. I pick up after the opening section of the Acts, which recounts how he arrived in the city:*

…And while Paul was thus speaking in the midst of the church in the house of Onesiphorus, a certain virgin Thecla, the daughter of Theocleia, betrothed to a man named Thamyris, sitting at the window close by, listened night and day to the discourse of virginity and prayer, and did not look away from the window, but paid earnest heed to the faith, rejoicing exceedingly. And when she still saw many women going in beside Paul, she also had an eager desire to be deemed worthy to stand in the presence of Paul, and to hear the word of Christ; for never had she seen his figure, but heard his word only.

And as she did not stand away from the window, her mother sent for Thamyris; and he comes gladly, as if already receiving her in marriage. And Theocleia said: I have a strange story to tell you, Thamyris; for assuredly for three days and three nights Thecla does not rise from the window, neither to eat nor to drink; but looking earnestly as if upon some pleasant sight, she is so devoted to a foreigner teaching deceitful and artful discourses, that I wonder how a virgin of such modesty is so painfully put about. Thamyris, this man will overturn the city of the Iconians, and your Thecla too besides; for all the women and the young men go in beside him, being taught to fear God and to live in chastity. Moreover also my daughter, tied to the window like a spider, lays hold of what is said by Paul with a strange eagerness and awful emotion; for the virgin looks eagerly at what is said by him, and has been captivated. But go near and speak to her, for she has been betrothed to you. And Thamyris going near, and kissing her, but at the same time also being afraid of her overpowering emotion, said: Thecla, my betrothed, why do you sit thus? And what sort of feeling holds you overpowered? Turn round to your Thamyris, and be ashamed. Moreover also her mother said the same things: Why do you sit thus looking down, my child, and answering nothing, but like a mad woman? And they wept fearfully, Thamyris indeed for the loss of a wife, and Theocleia of a child, and the maidservants of a mistress: there was accordingly much confusion in the house of mourning. And while these things were thus going on, Thecla did not turn round, but kept attending earnestly to the word of Paul.

And Thamyris starting up, went forth into the street, and kept watching those going in to him and coming out. And he saw two men bitterly contending with each other; and he said: Men, tell me who this is among you, leading astray the souls of young men, and deceiving virgins, so that they do not marry, but remain as they are. I promise, therefore, to give you money enough if you tell me about him; for I am the first man of the city. And Demas and Ermogenes[[2]](#footnote-2) said to him: Who this is, indeed, we do not know; but he deprives young men of wives, and maidens of husbands, saying, There is for you a resurrection in no other way, unless you remain chaste, and pollute not the flesh, but keep it chaste. And Thamyris said to them: Come into my house, and rest yourselves. And they went to a sumptuous dinner, and much wine, and great wealth, and a splendid table; and Thamyris made them drink, from his love to Thecla, and his wish to get her as his wife. And Thamyris said during the dinner: You men, what is his teaching, tell me, that I also may know; for I am no little distressed about Thecla, because she thus loves the stranger, and I am prevented from marrying.

Demas and Ermogenes said: Bring him before the governor Castelios on the charge of persuading the multitudes to embrace the new teaching of the Christians, and he will speedily destroy him, and you shall have Thecla as your wife. And we shall teach you that the resurrection of which this man speaks has taken place, because it has already taken place in the children which we have; and we rose again when we came to the knowledge of the true God.

And Thamyris, hearing these things, being filled with anger and rage, rising up early, went to the house of Onesiphorus with archons and public officers, and a great crowd with batons, saying: You have corrupted the city of the Iconians, and her that was betrothed to me, so that she will not have me: let us go to the governor Castelios. And all the multitude said: Away with the magician; for he has corrupted all our wives, and the multitudes have been persuaded to change their opinions.

And Thamyris, standing before the tribunal, said with a great shout: O proconsul, this man, who he is we know not, who makes virgins averse to marriage; let him say before you on what account he teaches these things. And Demas and Ermogenes said to Thamyris: Say that he is a Christian, and thus you will do away with him. But the proconsul stayed his intention, and called Paul, saying: Who are you, and what do you teach? For they bring no small charges against you. And Paul lifted up his voice, saying: Since I am this day examined as to what I teach, listen, O proconsul: A living God, a God of retributions, a jealous God, a God in need of nothing, consulting for the salvation of men, has sent me that I may reclaim them from corruption and uncleanness, and from all pleasure, and from death, that they may not sin. Wherefore God sent His own Son, whom I preach, and in whom I teach men to rest their hope, who alone has had compassion upon a world led astray, that they may be no longer under judgment, O proconsul, but may have faith, and the fear of God, and the knowledge of holiness, and the love of truth. If, therefore, I teach what has been revealed to me by God, wherein do I do wrong? And the proconsul having heard, ordered Paul to be bound, and sent to prison, until, said he, I, being at leisure, shall hear him more attentively.

And Thecla by night having taken off her bracelets, gave them to the gatekeeper; and the door having been opened to her, she went into the prison; and having given the jailor a silver mirror, she went in beside Paul, and, sitting at his feet, she heard the great things of God. And Paul was afraid of nothing, but ordered his life in the confidence of God. And her faith also was increased, and she kissed his bonds. And when Thecla was sought for by her friends, and Thamyris, as if she had been lost, was running up and down the streets, one of the gatekeeper's fellow-slaves informed him that she had gone out by night. And having gone out, they examined the gatekeeper; and he said to them: She has gone to the foreigner into the prison. And having gone, they found her, as it were, enchained by affection. And having gone forth thence, they drew the multitudes together, and informed the governor of the circumstance. And he ordered Paul to be brought to the tribunal; but Thecla was wallowing on the ground in the place where he sat and taught her in the prison; and he ordered her too to be brought to the tribunal. And she came, exulting with joy. And the crowd, when Paul had been brought, vehemently cried out: He is a magician! Away with him! But the proconsul gladly heard Paul upon the holy works of Christ. And having called a council, he summoned Thecla, and said to her: Why do you not obey Thamyris, according to the law of the Iconians? But she stood looking earnestly at Paul. And when she gave no answer, her mother cried out, saying: Burn the wicked wretch; burn in the midst of the theatre her that will not marry, in order that all the women that have been taught by this man may be afraid.

And the governor was greatly moved; and having scourged Paul, he cast him out of the city, and condemned Thecla to be burned. And immediately the governor went away to the theatre, and all the crowd went forth to the spectacle of Thecla. But as a lamb in the wilderness looks round for the shepherd, so she kept searching for Paul. And having looked upon the crowd, she saw the Lord sitting in the likeness of Paul, and said: As I am unable to endure my lot, Paul has come to see me. And she gazed upon him with great earnestness, and he went up into heaven. But the maid-servants and virgins brought the kindling, in order that Thecla might be burned. And when she came in naked, the governor wept, and wondered at the power that was in her. And the public executioners arranged the wood for her to go up on the pile. And she, having made the sign of the cross, went up on the kindling; and they lighted ot. And though a great fire was blazing, it did not touch her; for God, having compassion upon her, made an underground rumbling, and a cloud overshadowed them from above, full of water and hail; and all that was in the cavity of it was poured out, so that many were in danger of death. And the fire was put out, and Thecla saved.

And Paul was fasting with Onesiphorus and his wife, and his children, in a new tomb, as they were going from Iconium to Daphne. And when many days were past, the fasting children said to Paul: We are hungry, and we cannot buy loaves; for Onesiphorus had left the things of the world, and followed Paul, with all his house. And Paul, having taken off his cloak, said: Go, my child, buy more loaves, and bring them. And when the child was buying, he saw Thecla their neighbour, and was astonished, and said: Thecla, whither are you going? And she said: I have been saved from the fire, and am following Paul. And the boy said: Come, I shall take you to him; for he is distressed about you, and is praying six days. And she stood beside the tomb where Paul was with bended knees, and praying, and saying: O Saviour Christ, let not the fire touch Thecla, but stand by her, for she is Yours. And she, standing behind him, cried out: O Father, who hast made the heaven and the earth, the Father of Your holy Son, I bless You that You have saved me that I may see Paul. And Paul, rising up, saw her, and said: O God, that know the heart, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I bless You that You, having heard me, have done quickly what I wished.

And they had five loaves, and herbs, and water; and they rejoiced in the holy works of Christ. And Thecla said to Paul: I shall cut my hair, and follow you wherever you may go. And he said: It is a shameless age, and you are beautiful. I am afraid lest another temptation come upon you worse than the first, and that you withstand it not, but be cowardly. And Thecla said: Only give me the seal in Christ, and temptation shall not touch me. And Paul said: Thecla, wait with patience, and you shall receive the water.

And Paul sent away Onesiphorus and all his house to Iconium; and thus, having taken Thecla, he went into Antioch. And as they were going in, a certain Syriarch, Alexander by name, seeing Thecla, became enamoured of her, and tried to gain over Paul by gifts and presents. But Paul said: I know not the woman whom you speak of, nor is she mine. But he, being of great power, himself embraced her in the street. But she would not endure it, but looked about for Paul. And she cried out bitterly, saying: Do not force the stranger; do not force the servant of God. I am one of the chief persons of the Iconians; and because I would not have Thamyris, I have been cast out of the city. And taking hold of Alexander, she tore his cloak, and pulled off his crown, and made him a laughing-stock. And he, at the same time loving her, and at the same time ashamed of what had happened, led her before the governor; and when she had confessed that she had done these things, he condemned her to the wild beasts. And the women were struck with astonishment, and cried out beside the tribunal: Evil judgment! Impious judgment! And she asked the governor, that, said she, I may remain pure until I shall fight with the wild beasts. And a certain Tryphæna, whose daughter was dead, took her into keeping, and had her for a consolation.

And when the beasts were exhibited, they bound her to a fierce lioness; and Tryphæna accompanied her. But the lioness, with Thecla sitting upon her, licked her feet; and all the multitude was astonished. And the charge on her inscription was: Sacrilegious. And the women cried out from above: An impious sentence has been passed in this city! And after the exhibition, Tryphæna again receives her. For her daughter Falconilla had died, and said to her in a dream: Mother, you shall have this stranger Thecla in my place, in order that she may pray concerning me, and that I may be transferred to the place of the just.

And when, after the exhibition, Tryphæna received her, at the same time indeed she grieved that she had to fight with the wild beasts on the day following; and at the same time, loving her as much as her daughter Falconilla, she said: My second child Thecla, come and pray for my child, that she may live for ever; for this I saw in my sleep. And she, nothing hesitating, lifted up her voice, and said: God most high, grant to this woman according to her wish, that her daughter Falconilla may live forever. And when Thecla had thus spoken, Tryphæna lamented, considering so much beauty thrown to the wild beasts.

And when it was dawn, Alexander came to take her, for it was he that gave the hunt, saying: The governor is sitting, and the crowd is in uproar against us. Allow me to take away her that is to fight with the wild beasts. And Tryphæna cried aloud, so that he even fled, saying: A second mourning for my Falconilla has come upon my house and there is no one to help; neither child, for she is dead, nor kinsman, for I am a widow. God of Thecla, help her!

And immediately the governor sends an order that Thecla should be brought. And Tryphæna, taking her by the hand, said: My daughter Falconilla, indeed, I took away to the tomb; and you, Thecla, I am taking to the wild-beast fight. And Thecla wept bitterly, saying: O Lord, the God in whom I believe, to whom I have fled for refuge, who delivered me from the fire, grant a recompense to Tryphæna, who has had compassion on Your servant, and because she has kept me pure. Then a tumult arose, and a cry of the people, and the women sitting together, the one saying: Away with the sacrilegious person! The others saying: Let the city be raised against this wickedness. Take off all of us, O proconsul! Cruel sight! evil sentence!

And Thecla, having been taken out of the hand of Tryphæna, was stripped, and received a girdle, and was thrown into the arena, and lions and bears and a fierce lioness were let loose upon her; and the lioness having run up to her feet, lay down; and the multitude of the women cried aloud. And a bear ran upon her; but the lioness, meeting the bear, tore her to pieces. And again a lion that had been trained against men, which belonged to Alexander, ran upon her; and she, the lioness, encountering the lion, was killed along with him. And the women made great lamentation, since also the lioness, her protector, was dead.

Then they send in many wild beasts, she standing and stretching forth her hands, and praying. And when she had finished her prayer, she turned and saw a ditch full of water, and said: Now it is time to wash myself. And she threw herself in, saying: In the name of Jesus Christ I am baptized on my last day. And the women seeing, and the multitude, wept, saying: Do not throw yourself into the water; so that also the governor shed tears, because the seals were going to devour such beauty. She then threw herself in in the name of Jesus Christ; but the seals having seen the glare of the fire of lightning, floated about dead. And there was round her, as she was naked, a cloud of fire; so that neither could the wild beasts touch her, nor could she be seen naked.

And the women, when other wild beasts were being thrown in, wailed. And some threw sweet-smelling herbs, others nard, others cassia, others amomum, so that there was abundance of perfumes. And all the wild beasts that had been thrown in, as if they had been withheld by sleep, did not touch her; so that Alexander said to the governor: I have bulls exceedingly terrible; let us bind to them her that is to fight with the beasts. And the governor, looking gloomy, turned, and said: Do what you will. And they bound her by the feet between them, and put red-hot irons under the privy parts of the bulls, so that they, being rendered more furious, might kill her. They rushed about, therefore; but the burning flame consumed the ropes, and she was as if she had not been bound. But Tryphæna fainted standing beside the arena, so that the crowd said: Queen Tryphæna is dead. And the governor put a stop to the games, and the city was in dismay. And Alexander entreated the governor, saying: Have mercy both on me and the city, and release this woman. For if Cæsar hear of these things, he will speedily destroy the city also along with us, because his kinswoman Queen Tryphæna has died beside the Abaci .

And the governor summoned Thecla out of the midst of the wild beasts, and said to her: Who are you? And what is there about you, that not one of the wild beasts touches you? And she said: I indeed am a servant of the living God; and as to what there is about me, I have believed in the Son of God, in whom He is well pleased; wherefore not one of the beasts has touched me. For He alone is the end of salvation, and the basis of immortal life; for He is a refuge to the tempest-tossed, a solace to the afflicted, a shelter to the despairing; and, once for all, whoever shall not believe in Him, shall not live forever.

And the governor having heard this, ordered her garments to be brought, and to be put on. And Thecla said: He that clothed me naked among the wild beasts, will in the day of judgment clothe you with salvation. And taking the garments, she put them on. The governor therefore immediately issued an edict, saying: I release to you the God-fearing Thecla, the servant of God. And the women shouted aloud, and with one mouth returned thanks to God, saying: There is one God, the God of Thecla; so that the foundations of the theatre were shaken by their voice. And Tryphæna having received the good news, went to meet the holy Thecla, and said: Now I believe that the dead are raised: now I believe that my child lives. Come within, and I shall assign to you all that is mine. She therefore went in along with her, and rested eight days, having instructed her in the word of God, so that most even of the maid-servants believed. And there was great joy in the house.

And Thecla kept seeking Paul; and it was told her that he was in Myra of Lycia. And taking young men and maidens, she girded herself; and having sewed the tunic so as to make a man's cloak, she came to Myra, and found Paul speaking the word of God. And Paul was astonished at seeing her, and the crowd with her, thinking that some new trial was coming upon her. And when she saw him, she said: I have received the baptism, Paul; for He that wrought along with you for the Gospel has wrought in me also for baptism. And Paul, taking her, led her to the house of Hermæus, and hears everything from her, so that those that heard greatly wondered, and were comforted, and prayed over Tryphæna. And she rose up, and said: I am going to Iconium. And Paul said: Go, and teach the word of God. And Tryphæna sent her much clothing and gold, so that she left to Paul many things for the service of the poor.

And she went to Iconium. And she goes into the house of Onesiphorus, and fell upon the pavement where Paul used to sit and teach her, and wept, saying: God of myself and of this house, where you made the light to shine upon me, O Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God, my help in the fire, my help among the wild beasts, You are glorified forever. Amen. And she found Thamyris dead, but her mother alive. And having sent for her mother, she said: Theocleia, my mother, can you believe that the Lord lives in the heavens? For whether you desire wealth, God gives it to you through me; or your child, I am standing beside you. And having thus testified, she departed to Seleucia, and dwelt in a cave seventy-two years, living upon herbs and water. And she enlightened many by the word of God.

And certain men of the city, being Greeks by religion, and physicians by profession, sent to her insolent young men to destroy her. For they said: She is a virgin, and serves Artemis, and from this she has virtue in healing. And by the providence of God she entered into the rock alive, and went under ground. And she departed to Rome to see Paul, and found that he had fallen asleep. And after staying there no long time, she rested in a glorious sleep; and she is buried about two or three stadia from the tomb of her master Paul.

She was cast, then, into the fire when seventeen years old, and among the wild beasts when eighteen. And she was an ascetic in the cave, as has been said, seventy-two years, so that all the years of her life were ninety. And having accomplished many cures, she rests in the place of the saints, having fallen asleep on the twenty-fourth of the month of September in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and strength for ever and ever. Amen.

Instead of the last two sections, the ms. which Dr. Grabe used has the following:—

And a cloud of light guided her. And having come into Seleucia, she went forth outside of the city one stadium. And she was afraid of them also, for they worshipped idols. And it guided her to the mountain called Calamon or Rhodeon; and having there found a cave, she went into it. And she was there many years, and underwent many and grievous trials by the devil, and bore them nobly, being assisted by Christ. And some of the well-born women, having learned about the virgin Thecla, went to her, and learned the oracles of God. And many of them bade adieu to the world, and lived an ascetic life with her. And a good report was spread everywhere concerning her, and cures were done by her. All the city, therefore, and country round, having known this, brought their sick to the mountain; and before they came near the door they were speedily released from whatever disease they were afflicted by; and the unclean spirits went out shrieking, and all received their own in health, glorifying God, who had given such grace to the virgin Thecla. The physicians, therefore, of the city of the Seleucians were thought nothing of, having lost their trade, and no one any longer had regard to them; and being filled with envy and hatred, they plotted against the servant of Christ, what they should do to her. The devil then suggests to them a wicked device; and one day, being assembled, and having taken counsel, they consult with each other, saying: This virgin is a priestess of the great goddess Artemis; and if she ask anything of her, she hears her as being a virgin, and all the gods love her. Come, then, let us take men of disorderly lives, and make them drunk with much wine, and let us give them much gold, and say to them, If you can corrupt and defile her, we shall give you even more money. The physicians therefore said to themselves, that if they should be able to defile her, neither the gods nor Artemis would listen to her in the case of the sick. They therefore did so. And the wicked men, having gone to the mountain, and rushed upon the cave like lions, knocked at the door. And the holy martyr Thecla opened, emboldened by the God in whom she believed; for she knew of their plot beforehand. And she says to them: What do you want, my children? And they said: Is there one here called Thecla? And she said: What do you want with her? They say to her: We want to sleep with her. The blessed Thecla says to them: I am a humble old woman, but the servant of my Lord Jesus Christ; and even though you want to do something to me out of place, you cannot. They say to her: It is impossible for us not to do to you what we want. And having said this, they laid fast hold of her, and wished to insult her. And she says to them with mildness: Wait, my children, that you may see the glory of the Lord. And being laid hold of by them, she looked up into heaven, and said: God, terrible and incomparable, and glorious to Your adversaries, who delivered me out of the fire, who did not give me up to Thamyris, who did not give me up to Alexander, who delivered me from the wild beasts, who saved me in the abyss, who hast everywhere worked with me, and glorified Your name in me, now also deliver me from these lawless men, and let me not insult my virginity, which through Your name I have preserved till now, because I love You, and desire You, and adore You, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost forever. Amen. And there came a voice out of the heaven, saying: Fear not, Thecla, my true servant, for I am with you. Look and see swhere an opening has been made before you, for there shall be for you an everlasting house, and there you shall obtain shelter. And the blessed Thecla regarding it, saw the rock opened as far as to allow a man to enter, and did according to what had been said to her: and nobly fleeing from the lawless ones entered into the rock; and the rock was straightway shut together, so that not even a joining appeared. And they, beholding the extraordinary wonder, became as it were distracted; and they were not able to detain the servant of God, but only caught hold of her veil, and were able to tear off a certain part; and that by the permission of God for the faith of those seeing the venerable place, and for a blessing in the generations afterwards to those that believe in our Lord Jesus Christ out of a pure heart.

Thus, then, suffered the first martyr of God, and apostle, and virgin, Thecla, who came from Iconium at eighteen years old; and with the journeying, and the going round, and the retirement in the mountain, she lived other seventy-two years. And when the Lord took her, she was ninety years old. And thus is her consummation. And her holy commemoration is on the twenty-fourth of the month of September, to the glory of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to ages of ages. Amen.

*Christians might not help themselves in the eyes of Romans by attacking cultural institutions like the games. In the passage below Tertullian (c.160-c 240), a Christian author, fumes about the origins of the gladiatorial games in an extract from his work* On Spectacles*. Tertullian came from Carthage and was vehement in his disgust at what he called idolatry; how reliable he is, given his agenda, is a moot point.*

We still have to examine the most famed and popular spectacle: it is called *munus* from being an *officium*, for *munus* and *officium* are synonyms.[[3]](#footnote-3) People in the past thought they were performing a duty to the dead with this form of spectacle after they moderated its nature with a more refined form of cruelty. Long ago, since they believed that the souls of the dead are appeased by human blood, they purchased captives or slaves of poor quality and sacrificed them at funerals. Afterwards, they preferred to disguise this unholy practice by making it something to enjoy. Thus, after they trained the people they had obtained these ways to wield the weapons they had as best they could (training them to learn how to die!), they then exposed them to death at the tombs on the day appointed for sacrifices in honor of the dead. And so it was that they consoled themselves with murder. *That* is the origin of the gladiatorial *munus*. But gradually their refinement developed along with their cruelty; these inhuman people could not rest satisfied or gain pleasure unless wild animals tore humans to pieces. What was then a sacrifice offered for the appeasement of the dead was no doubt considered a rite in honor of the dead. This sort of thing is, therefore, idolatry, because idolatry, too, is a kind of rite in honor of the dead: both are services rendered to the dead.

Additionally, demons live in the images of the dead. And now consider the titles also: although this type of exhibition has moved from being an act to honor the dead to one which honours the living (for example, those who hold quaestorships, magistracies, flaminates,[[4]](#footnote-4) and priesthoods) still, since the guilt of idolatry taints the dignity of the title, whatever is carried out in the name of this dignity shares necessarily in the taint of its origin. We must also consider the paraphernalia which are considered as belonging to the ceremonies of the actual offices as also being idolatrous. For the purple robes, the fasces,[[5]](#footnote-5) the fillets,[[6]](#footnote-6) and crowns--finally, also, the announcements made in meetings and on advertisements[[7]](#footnote-7) and the final dinners[[8]](#footnote-8) given the evening before games—have the Devil’s pageantry and the invocation of demons. In conclusion, what shall I say about that horrible place which not even perjurers can bear? For the amphitheatre is consecrated to more numerous and more terrible names than the Capitol, although the Capitol is the temple of all demons.[[9]](#footnote-9) There as many unclean spirits live as there are seats. And to say a final word about the arts concerned, we know that Mars and Diana are the patrons of both types of *ludi*.

Tertullian, *On Spectacles* 12

*The Christian author Tertullian, in fine pagan loathing form, attacks it for this:*

The Circus is primarily consecrated to the Sun. His temple stands in the middle of it, and his image shines forth from the pediment of the temple. For they did not think it proper to worship beneath a roof a god whom they see above them in the open sky. Those who argue that the first circus show was given by Circe in honor of the Sun, her father, as they will have it, conclude also that its name is derived from her. Plainly, the sorceress undoubtedly transacted the business in behalf of those whose priestess she was, namely, the demons and evil spirits. How many evidences of idol worship do you recognize accordingly in the decoration of the place? Every ornament of the circus is a temple by itself. The eggs are regarded as sacred to Castor and Pollux by people who do not feel ashamed to believe the story of their origin from the egg made fertile by the swan, Jupiter.[[10]](#footnote-10) The dolphins spout water in honor of Neptune; the columns bear aloft images of Seia, so called from "sementatio" ('sowing'); of Messia, so called as deity of "messis" ('reaping'); and of Tutulina, so called as 'tutelary spirit' of the crops.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In front of these are seen three altars for the triple gods: the Great, the Potent, the Prevailing. They think these deities are Samothracean. The huge obelisk, as Hermateles says, is set up in honor of the Sun.[[12]](#footnote-12) Its inscription which, like its origin, is Egyptian, contains a superstition. The gathering of the demons would be dull without their Great Mother, so she presides there over the ditch.

Consus,[[13]](#footnote-13) as we have mentioned, keeps in hiding underground at the Murcian Goals. The latter are also the work of an idol. For Murcia, as they will have it, is a goddess of love to whom they have dedicated a temple in that part (of the valley).[[14]](#footnote-14) Take note, Christian, how many unclean deities have taken possession of the circus. You should have nothing to do with a place which so many diabolic spirits have made their own.

1. The name of a queen of Rome, chosen because it evoked the type of aristocratic families that claimed descent from those times, and used their names to remind people of that. She was also a seer and rather devious, according Roman legend. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Companions of Paul, who have been pretending to be his friend. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. No, they’re not. Both mean duty, but *munus* also means gift, especially a gift given to the dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A type of priesthood. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Certain Roman magistrates (consuls, praetors, curule aediles, quaestors) were entitled to be accompanied by lictors who carried fasces, a bundle of rods with an axe sticking out. These symbolized their power to punish as part of their duties. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The bands of wool priests and priestesses wore on their heads when performing ceremonies. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. We actually have some advertisements for these shows from Pompeii; see the section on advertising and marketing gladiators. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The *cena libera,* a public feast given the night before *ludi* to gladiators and those who were due to be executed in the arena. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Capitoline Hill held many temples for various deities and in particular the temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Jupiter raped Leda in the form of a swan and she laid eggs from which Helen and Pollux were born. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. These three goddesses are rather obscure, but were native Italic goddesses connected with grain production and protection. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This obelisk was set up by Augustus. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. His altar was buried in the Circus Maximus and uncovered during his feast day. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A native goddess, she was identified with Venus, the goddess of love. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)