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THE ASS WORSHIP CONTROVERSY

A Thesis Presented

by

ROBERT E. RAVENS-SEGER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 1991

Department of History

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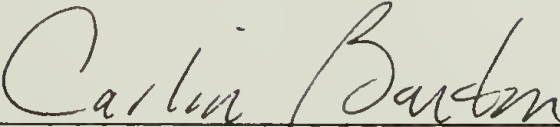
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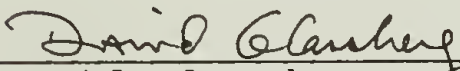
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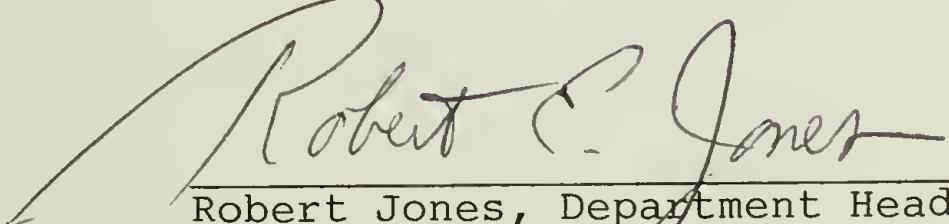
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This work is affectionately dedicated to the downtrodden donkey.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	<u>Page</u> v
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE EGYPTIANS VERSUS THE JEWS.	5
A. Introduction	5
B. The Ass of the Bible	7
C. The Ass Worship Calumny (1).	13
III. ENTER THE GREEKS	26
IV. THE ASS ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.	35
A. Introduction	35
B. Agriculture.	36
C. Literature	52
D. Conclusions.	60
V. THE PAGANS VERSUS THE CHRISTIANS	63
A. Introduction	63
B. Rivals of Christianity	64
C. The Ass Worship Calumny (2).	81
VI. CONCLUSIONS.	93
NOTES.	104
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.	119

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To study the fate of the ass in antiquity is to study the folly of the human race, the destructive error of our ways. To inquire into the nature of the degradation of the ass is to inquire into our subjugation of nature, and the disasters that follow therefrom. To discover humanity's treatment of the ass is to discover, disclose, and display the treatment of the world and our neighbors on this planet. To understand ass denigration is to understand institutions that enshrine monarchy, hierarchy, and slavery.

The cry is lifted against human bondage, but the same Bible that those in the American South used to enshrine their own peculiar institution, or the Afrikaners theirs, is the same that gives us dominion over the animals. We are all kings over nature by divine right. This attitude, this license, has been called humanism, but that word has many positive connotations, that of placing humans rather than gods at the center of our universe, the measure of all things. I propose the term "homocentric" in its place, alongside of ethnocentric or egocentric, in order to achieve a better understanding of the essence of our sense of alleged superiority. This term, homocentric, imparts the

largely negative connotations that the term is meant to convey.

The nascent environmental movement is an attempt, albeit somewhat tardy, to undo or even reverse some of the damage wrought by the rapacity of homocentrism over the past ten or twelve thousand years. Toward this end, at the very center of this study, I have placed the ass of antiquity, both wild (free) and domesticated (enslaved). Through the travails and vicissitudes of the ass we will catch more than a glimpse of our own folly, cruelty, and shortsightedness. As the attitudes in question prevail, the story will extend, where necessary, beyond the fuzzy delineations of historical epochs. The story that follows is unabashedly asinocentric.

However that may be, I must place the ass in the proper context. Therefore, I will begin with animal worship and categorization, which is bound up in the formation of religion, and both a result and a cause of the shift to agriculture and domestication of animals. The earth and its creatures became enslaved to the will of humanity. While the earth was enslaved, the dependence of humans on their subjects of survival led to the exaltation of some animals and plants, and the degradation of others. Different societies had a multitude of coping strategies.

From the totemism of the Aborigines of Australia, to the animal worship of the Egyptians, to the

anthropomorphism of the Greeks, the animism of the Romans, and the exclusiveness of Yahweh and the Jews, all these societies retained some reverence for nature and its denizens, to greater or lesser degrees. Some animals were sacred, others abominations. Some plants were wheat, others tares. Animals came to represent things other than they were, often based on an exaggeration of superficially perceived characteristics, or by analogy and allegory.

As a result of these human-imposed attributes, themselves a reflection of human hegemony, the animals were categorized and sacralized. Each culture, in its own way, tried to foist its ideas, along with its dominance, on others. Thus, I have chronologically arranged the great antique culture clashes of the Jews with the Egyptians, the Jews with the Greeks, and lastly, the pagans with the Christians. Midway through the discussion, embracing the turn of the millennium, I have detailed the status of the ass as it entered the last half of antiquity which saw the gradual triumph of monotheism over paganism.

The ass has an important role to play in this saga, for in its debased position (in the eyes of humans) it became, as it were, the center of the accusation thrown back and forth from one camp to the other. For those who were said to worship the ass were more lowly than the ass which they worshipped. This ass, the most abject of all creatures, became a most powerful weapon in the arsenal

of the respective combatant. In this paradigm, the ass became the cornerstone because the builders rejected it.

Of the three principal accusations leveled against the Christians by pagan writers, two have been extensively dealt with by apologists and historians alike. These two accusations were infanticidal cannibalism (related to the Eucharist) and the agape love feast, in which incestuous orgies were said to take place. The third charge against the Christians (and before them the Jews), ass worship, has been largely ignored by subsequent generations as being too laughable to seriously believe. However, the former two charges had been previously leveled by pagans against one another, so that the calumny of ass worship is in every sense unique to the conflict between paganism and monotheism in late antiquity.

Lastly, I will conclude how these attitudes and actions of antiquity have had influence up to our own time, and to what extent ass denigration (and the larger phenomenon of homocentrism it represents) has been modified. To do so, I will turn to the antique land in which ass denigration has held sway for centuries, since the time of antiquity. One will find that there is a correlation between the admirers of the ass and those who tread lightly upon the earth, and the denigrators of the ass and those who are contributing to the earth's destruction.

CHAPTER II

THE EGYPTIANS VERSUS THE JEWS

A. Introduction

At the beginning of the second century of the present era, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote that the Egyptians worshipped a number of gods who were either animals or half beast and half human.¹ Because animals in agricultural societies are generally enslaved and denigrated, their continued worship remains a relic, I maintain, of a pre-agricultural condition. In the latter case the animal is an equal, and, in totemic systems, a kin and ancestor. But with the subjugation of nature to the will of humanity, this feeling of respect and/or reverence would tend to disappear.

The continued worship of animals in the agricultural state of development can take, therefore, one of two forms: actual worship of animals and worship that which is merely imputed in order to libel a person or group. The animal worship of the ancient Egyptians is a reverence for the animals' symbolic value as an emblem of agricultural fertility, and as mothers or fathers of animals and humanity. The ancient Egyptians may be classified under this rubric. The latter is a form of denigration toward

those who would worship something inferior, implying that they are benighted, lower than that which they foolishly revere. Denigration is the intent of those who imputed the worship of the ass to rival religious groups.

The ancient phenomenon of ass denigration was a little of both types. That is to say, ass worship was couched in an aura plausible to those who were familiar with the worship of animals, but the charge of ass worship itself was fictitious, as no one was willing to worship the poorly-regarded beast. The ass's humble status was a detriment to its symbolic value, especially among the hierarchical Romans, while its substantial phallic endowment was detrimental to its symbolic value for the humble but otherworldly Christians. Therefore, when the Roman and Christian world views were combined under Constantine and his successors, the ass lost doubly.

And yet, the condemnation of the ass never quite becomes universal, for there were those from both the pagan and Christian traditions who saw in the ass a fitting metaphor for that which each society regarded most highly. Those who admired the ass, however, were always a tiny minority. Far more numerous were those who charged the donkey with being "the meanest of all beasts"² than being the "Marcus Aurelius of the meadows."³

What are the causes then of the reality of ass denigration and the fiction of ass worship? Perhaps it

is a humanistic world view, combined with a contempt for manual labor and sexuality that prevailed in late antique society.

The phenomena of ass worship and denigration first appear in the conflict between the Jews and the Egyptians. Therefore, the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures in establishing the earliest Hebrew position with relation to the ass is undeniable. To these Scriptures, then, one must turn in order to reconstruct the Jewish attitude toward the donkey in the age when the Torah, Prophets, and Writings were being redacted. Here we can glean the attitudes toward animals and the natural world, and contrast them to those of their principal spiritual and sometimes physical opponent, the Egyptians.

B. The Ass of the Bible

There are three references I can find in Genesis suggesting the status of the ass, handed down from the oral traditions to the redactors of the time of the Exile. The first is an indication of the economic status of the donkey.

Issacher is no better than a donkey
That lies stretched out between its saddlebags.
But he sees that the resting place is good
And that the land is delightful.
So he bends his back to carry the₄load
And is forced to work as a slave.

This second comes from the words of the dying Jacob in which he describes the character and expectations of his sons.

[Judah] ties his young donkey to a grapevine
To the very best of the vines."⁵

The donkey is used as transport, and for riding, even by the sons of the patriarch. As among the Egyptians, in whose country they were dwelling, the horse was unknown, or exceedingly rare in that early time (c. 1500 B.C.E.).

Joseph is like a wild donkey by a spring
A wild colt on a hillside.
His enemies attack him fiercely
And pursue him with their bows and arrows.⁶

The wild ass receives respect in the Bible, while its domestic cousin is treated neutrally or with contempt. Two of the twelve sons of Jacob are likened to donkeys; a third, Judah, is associated with a donkey, but receives no animal denigration--rather, Judah is a drunk, as the verse goes on to say.

There are several relevant passages in Exodus, which are legalistic in nature. "Every first-born male of your animals belongs to the lord, but you must buy back from him every first-born male donkey by offering a lamb in its place. If you do not want to buy back the donkey, break its neck."⁷ This passage is rather typical of the moral dubiousness of Yahweh's command, laws, and callous actions. "If a man takes the cover off a pit or if he digs one and does not cover it, and a bull or donkey falls

into it, he must pay for the animal."⁸ Here the donkey is dealt with as an economic unit. The offense is not to the animal, but to the owner of the animal. To paraphrase the passage, if a stolen animal, such as a cow, donkey, or a sheep is found in the possession of the one who stole it, that one must pay two back for the one stolen.⁹

Other passages in Exodus include other legal issues involving donkeys.¹⁰ The donkey is very common, and serves as an example that these Hebrew peasants could understand.

If you happen to see your enemy's cow or donkey running loose, take it back to him. If his donkey has fallen under its load help him get the donkey to its feet again, don't just walk off.¹¹

This passage could be interpreted two ways: God calls for either kindness to the donkey, or to the owner. A loose donkey is a free (as opposed to enslaved) donkey, and the exhortation to help the donkey to its feet doesn't relieve him of the load that forced him to collapse initially.

Balaam the prophet, son of Beor, had a donkey whom God gave the power of speech. In the story the donkey is used as the archetype of obedience, to Balaam, and to God, as well as a faithful companion for life (a testimony to the longevity of the donkey).¹²

As a result of the Syrian siege of Samaria, a donkey's head was worth fifty pieces of silver.¹³ The meaning of

this passage is uncertain, because donkeys neither part the hoof nor chew the cud. But it is not listed as an abomination either. Perhaps in extreme famine it could be eaten; or perhaps a donkey's head was a weight of measure.¹⁴

"A donkey is content when eating grass,"¹⁵ says Job, when lamenting his own discontent. But how gracious is a donkey under duress? To Job God retorts,

Who gave the wild donkeys their freedom?
Who turned them loose and let them roam?
I gave them the desert to be their home,
And let them live on the salt plain.
They keep far away from the noisy cities,
and no one can tame them and make them work.
The mountains are the pastures where they feed,
where they search for anything green to eat.¹⁶

The above is a poetic, moving appreciation of the wild ass, which was admired, it seems, by all the major cultural groups of antiquity. "Cattle know who owns them, and donkeys know where their master feeds them. But that is more than my people Israel know. They don't understand at all."¹⁷

In the above prologue of Isaiah, god is dressing down Israel for being less astute than these familiar farmyard denizens. Referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem, "even the palace will be abandoned and the capital city totally deserted. Homes and the forts that guarded them will be in ruins forever. Wild donkeys will roam there, sheep will find pasture there."¹⁸ As noted

earlier, wild donkeys stray far from the haunts of humans, for fear of slavery. Therefore, this allusion is used to create a mental picture of the coming emptiness awaiting Jerusalem.

Referring to the post-exilic restoration, Isaiah says: "how happy everyone will be with plenty of water for the crops and safe pasture everywhere for the donkeys and cattle."¹⁹ This is a Hebrew version of the Elysian Fields or the Isles of the Blessed, a future golden age to approximate the age that existed before the fall (to both pagans and Jews).

Below the wild ass is likened to the rebelliousness of Israel, impatient of restraint and anarchistic: "you are like a wild donkey used to the desert."²⁰

Regarding a judgment on the unrighteous king of Judah, Jehoiakim, when he comes to die:

No one will weep for him or cry 'My lord, My king'
With the funeral orders of a donkey,
he will be dragged away
and thrown outside Jerusalem's gates.²¹

Here we see ass denigration emerging as the writings move forward in time. But it also contrasts the humility of the ass with the exalted nature of kingship.

Regarding the worship of idols (the gold bull of Samaria) and general rebelliousness he says, "stubborn as wild donkeys, the people of Israel go their own way."²² Here we encounter the stereotypical stubbornness of the

donkey; even the onager is coming in for criticism here.

In the following endearing piece of wisdom, the donkey seems to fare better than the horse and the fool. "You have to whip a horse, you have to bridle a donkey, and you have to beat a fool."²³ But bridling is still a form of exerting control and compliance, as the others are.

Below is the famous passage that the Christians believe was fulfilled in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem by Jesus.

Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion
 Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem!
 Look, your king is coming to you!
 But humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal
 of a donkey.²⁴

It combines the elements of exaltation of the Davidic kingdom with the suffering servant, as quoted in Matthew and Luke (but not Mark and John).

The following apolyptic curse that Zechariah utters against the enemies of the Hebrews is very similar to the curse that Apollo puts upon the Achaians in Homer. "A terrible disease will also fall on the horses, the mules, the camels, and the donkeys-on all the animals in the camp of the enemy."²⁵ It also gives an indication of the animals required in the logistics of moving an army in the ancient Near East.

The overall message to be gleaned from the totality of these references is that the donkey's place in Hebrew literature is that of a common agricultural beast. The

attitude of the Hebrews toward the donkey is very similar to the attitude of the Gentiles toward the donkey.

C. The Ass Worship Calumny (1)

Flavius Josephus (37 - c. 100 C.E.) provides a voice that brings the Egypto-Jewish conflict into the era of Hellenistic cultural and Roman administrative and military hegemony. He deals with the ass as an animal. He also answers the charge of ass worship leveled against the Jews by the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans.

Josephus, in his autobiography, Vita, wrote, "I then loaded the camels and asses; which I had brought with me in large numbers, and dispatched the corn to Galilee."²⁶ Throughout his writings, Josephus consistently spoke of the ass as a beast of burden. Again, Josephus, in Contra Apionem, referred to various pagan philosophers and their writings that testify to the antiquity of the Jews. One, Hermippus of Smyrna, wrote of one Calliphon of Crotona, who was a disciple of Pythagoras. Hermippus, wrote Josephus, recorded that after Calliphon had died, he went with Pythagoras, "and admonished him not to pass a certain spot, on which an ass had collapsed"²⁷ Josephus quotes Hermippus as saying that he was thus following the precepts of the Jews and Thracians. Perhaps from a very early date, in the minds of pagan religious and intellectuals, there was felt to be a special reverence

for the ass in Judaism. This account of Hermippus, written as it was in the third century B.C.E., may be one of the earliest pagan references to the Hebrew cult of the ass.²⁸ Calliphon may have heard that the Jews worshipped the ass, and admonished Pythagoras to show respect for it as well. The Pythagoreans were unusually susceptible or predisposed to ideas from the East.

Eusebius, in the fourth century, quoted Aristobulus saying that Pythagoras incorporated many points of Jewish law into his doctrines, including perhaps the ass cult.²⁹ In Contra Apionem, Josephus related the story of Mosellamus the Jewish archer, to cite the characteristic Jewish contempt for pagan divination.³⁰ The proscription of magic in Judaism was the real reason for the disavowal of graven images in the Jewish law, according to Freud, and this interpretation makes good sense.³¹ The ancient cross, however, had much talismanic properties. The cross, of course, was on the back of every donkey. Thus the talisman was transferred from the one to the other. Two other donkey features, its humility and its phallus, magnified this talismanic power enormously. This power was referred to in antiquity. Take, for example, the calumnies of Manetho which included the origins of the ass worship controversy.³²

As indicated by the quotation "loading the camels and asses with corn,"³³ Josephus generally maintains a utilitarian approach to asses, and when the Jews are not

being maligned by the ass-worship calumny, he refrains from denigrating them. The above is a prosaic example of the usage and maintenance of a strict neutrality in regards to the donkey. Later, Josephus has the same thing to say about mules, refraining from the pagan comments that would, as a matter of course, hastily compare mules with asses, to the disparagement of the latter. The asses and mules are mentioned as part of a larger story.³⁴

When the ass-worship charge is directed against the Jews, however, Josephus is anxious to distance the Jews from the ass, in much the same manner of the Christian apologists of a somewhat later era. His story about Pythagoras, implying that the Jews had a special place for the ass in their religion, Josephus brushed aside. Hermippus of Smyrna (3rd century B.C.E.), the Greek historical author to whom Josephus refers, probably was, however, influenced by the belief, common among Greeks, of the Jewish cult of the ass. Hermippus was using the story not to explain the origin of Jewish beliefs, but their effects. It was similar to the attempts of others to explain the Jewish abstention from pork.³⁵ Josephus deftly turns the offhand remarks of the Greek historian into a compliment of the Jews. He concludes, "in fact, it is actually said that [Pythagoras] introduced many points of Jewish law into his philosophy."³⁶

In a later passage, Josephus quotes Hecataeus, a Greek historian, in defense of the fact that the temple contains "'not a single statue or votive offering, no trace of a plant, in the form of a sacred grove or the like.'"³⁷ But, as a Gentile, who of course could not proceed beyond the Court of the Gentiles, how could Hecataeus know what was in the Holy of Holies? All this passage proves was that in the areas the Gentiles had access to, the Jews had no image to worship, and did not worship trees, or the spirits they contained.

In Contra Apionem, the avowed purpose of the author is to refute those calumnies of the Greeks and Egyptians (who perpetually smarted over their portrayal in the Exodus), which he found most antithetical to the essence and survival of Judaism. High upon the list of these calumnies is the charge of ass-worship. Why did he find it so believable to Gentiles, and so threatening to Jews? These are important questions, central to the nature of this inquiry. The origins of anti-Semitic calumny, he says, lie with the Egyptians, and here he is probably correct. Josephus begins with the discussion of the reasons behind the calumnies. For the reasons why a people cast aspersions on another are the most important, as those aspersions are, by their very nature, false. These are centered upon the circumstances of the Jews' arrival in, and departure from, Egypt.

The point of contention was, for Josephus, religion. In his own words it was that "the profound contrast between the two cults created bitter animosity, since our religion is as far removed than that which is in vogue among them as is the nature of god from that of irrational beasts."³⁸ This statement is a telling one. Not only is Josephus implicitly chiding the Egyptians for their worship of animals, he is doing so from a humanist perspective. That is to say, if god created humanity in his own image, then god is something like a human, rather than an animal. So, Josephus points to the animal denigration implicit in Judaism, and, through them, to Christianity. The Egyptians saw themselves being embedded within the world of nature, not separated from or above it, as the Jews saw themselves.

Josephus goes on in a similar vein, "for it is their national custom to regard animals as gods, although there are local differences in the honors paid to them."³⁹ (How different this is in tone from Plutarch!) Josephus goes on to state that the Egyptians, "these frivolous and utterly senseless specimens of humanity, accustomed from the first to erroneous ideas about the gods, were incapable of imitating the solemnity of our theology."⁴⁰ The lines are drawn. By denigrating the religiosity of the Egyptians, Josephus is by implication condemning all pagans, for the "folly" of animal worship. Among pagans, the Egyptians

were widely admired for being the most intensely religious, the most rigorously ascetic, people, with a religion sanctioned by great antiquity. Egyptian cults such as Isis and Serapis were widely exported during the time of the Empire, and the country proved a magnet for ascetics and eremitics, both pagans, Jews, and later Christians. It would seem that Josephus' central complaint is that the Egyptian religions are grounded in nature, and not respectful of the Jewish (and Christian) "chain of being." This is the essence of their dispute and mutual animosity.

The first writer he specifically refutes is Manetho, and the first issue he addresses is the charge of ass worship. There are many reasons why this controversy would hold such prominence in a work such as this. Manetho claims that "by his first law [Moses] ordained that [the lepers] should not worship the gods nor abstain from any of the animals held in special reverence in Egypt."⁴¹ This is important for two reasons. One, the customs of the Jews were, according to Manetho, chosen precisely because they were antithetical to the Egyptians--the Jews were, in effect, obstinate and immature, rejecting hallowed customs for spite; and two, one sign of respect for a god was to abstain from the flesh of animals with which it is identified, such as Apis the bull. This is one of the cardinal tenets of totemism. The passage quoted above helps to explain the passage in Petronius that refers to

the Jews worshipping a pig-god,⁴² because a people generally abstain from the flesh of an animal they worship, as in India. Another law Manetho ascribes to Moses is that the Hebrews "should have no connexion with any save members of their own confederacy."⁴³ He talks of how the sacred animals were held in reverence in the temples of the Egyptians, and how they were hidden or moved in times of national danger,⁴⁴ as at the time of the Exodus. Manetho calls the Jews of Jerusalem, as Homer did, the Solymites, which means "temple robbers." He accuses the Jews of various impieties in the thirteen years they ruled Egypt, asserting, "not only did [the Hebrews] pillage the temples and mutilate the images of the gods [as Christian iconoclasts would do after them], but, not content with that, they habitually used the very sanctuaries as kitchens for roasting the venerated sacred animals."⁴⁵

These stories, whether or not they have any basis in truth, are revealing of the yawning gulf that separated the Jews from their surrounding neighbors. The Jews exploited some animals, abominated others, and worshipped none. By contrast, the worship of animals particularly survived and thrived in Egypt. The Egyptians did not, however, worship all animals. In this case, there was some overlap among them and the Jews.

I will try to explain the Egyptian denigration of the ass. Josephus thanks Manetho for asserting that the

Jews were not of Egyptian origin, which is something both sides were eager to agree on, out of their mutual hatred.

Besides Manetho, Josephus attacks Chaeremon, Lysimachus, and Apion, who repeat in various forms the calumnies of Manetho using conflicting names and dates. While they all give differing accounts of and assign differing dates to the events described in Exodus, they all have in common their condemnation of the Jews on two points: one, their sacreligious rejection of the Egyptian religion, and hence paganism in general, and two, their refusal to have intercourse with other nations. The charge that the Jews hated humankind ensured the Jews of both their distinct identity and their bad relations with their neighbors, as evidenced by these hostile historical traditions.

The charge of ass-worship was precisely intended to ruin the credibility of the party, Jewish or Egyptian, that was attacked. Josephus claims that Apion got his information from Posidonius and Apollonius Molon, writers of the first century B.C.E. I will quote this passage at some length.

Within this sanctuary [i.e., the Holy of Holies] Apion has the effrontery to assert that the Jews kept an ass's head, worshipping that animal and deeming it worthy of the deepest reverence; the fact was disclosed, he maintains, on the occasion of the spoilation of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, when the head, made of gold and worth a high price, was discovered.⁴⁶

Tacitus and Diodorus make similar statements also, to which I will turn in due course. Josephus then throws the charge back at him, by saying that "even if we did possess any such object, an Egyptian should be the last person to reproach us; for an ass is not worse than the cats, he-goats, and other creatures which in this country rank as gods."⁴⁷ This is an important statement on several levels, for it goes to the center of the controversy.

While the Egyptians did worship animals, the ass was not one of them. Thus, to the Egyptians, the ass was worse than the cat, goat, and so on. The Mosaic Law forbade the making of images, and Yahweh was a spiritual concept, rather than an animal or a human. The charge of Manetho and the others is as grave as could be levelled against the Jews. The ass, to the Egyptians, was equated with Seth, an evil god, enemy of Osiris, Isis, Horus, as well as to the solar deities Ammon-Re, Aton, and Apis (the golden calf) the bull-god of high esteem. In a sense, Seth was driven out of Egypt along with the Jews--his chosen people and the god whom they, "in secret," revered. Hence, the result was the assignation of the golden ass to the Holy of Holies. Since the ass was one of the proscribed animals of the Mosaic (dieting) Laws, might it be worshipped for that reason?

We know from Manetho that the Egyptians felt that the Jews adopted practices that were antithetical to the

Egyptians. Perhaps the Jews worshipped Seth for the reason that the Egyptians despised him. This is a charge that Josephus is keen to refute, and he does so with an exposition of the essential characteristics of the Jewish religion. He portrays it as antithetical to the religion of the Egyptians. I quote at length:

throughout our history we have kept the same laws, to which we are eternally faithful. Yet, notwithstanding the various calamities that our city, like others, has undergone, when the temple was occupied by successive conquerors, . . . they found nothing there but the purest type of religion,⁴⁸ the secrets of which we may not reveal to aliens.

Here Judaism is revealed as a kind of national mystery religion.

The Jews have nothing to hide, nevertheless, and Josephus cites pagan historians of whom he approves to vindicate the fictitious nature of the charge of ass worship. Like the pagans, the Jews, he says, hold the ass in low esteem. Here the Jews join the ranks of the denigrators, eager to distance themselves from any special association with the ass. He was, after all, trying to instill among the pagans a respect for Jewish laws and customs. He continues, "there is the evidence which Apion should have considered, had not he himself been gifted with the mind of an ass and the impudence of a dog, which his countrymen are wont to worship."⁴⁹ Here he seems to be referring to Anubis, who figures strongly in the cult of Isis in the period of the Empire. He puts the

denigration of the ass into the wider concept of animal denigration, but he feels by far most strongly about the ass. "We Jews attribute no honor or virtue to asses With us, as with other sensible people, asses are beasts that carry loads on their backs, and if they invade our threshing floors and eat the corn, or stop short on the road, they are soundly beaten, as humble ministers for labour and agriculture."⁵⁰ So much for the Jewish worship of the ass. And yet the story doesn't die. It is repeated in Tacitus and will later be transferred to the Christians.

When Josephus turns to another story of Apion, again the story is that of the ass worship of the Jews, and the head of the golden ass of the temple and how it came to be stolen (this by way of explaining why it wasn't one of the treasures carried off to Jerusalem for the triumph of Titus in 71 C.E.). Here I quote Apion through Josephus as intermediary.

'In the course of a long war between the Jews and the Idumaeans, an inhabitant of an Idumaeian city called Dorii, who worshipped Apollo and bore (so we are told [by Mnaseas]) the name of Zabidus, came out to the Jews and promised to deliver into their hands Apollo, the god of his city, who would visit our temple if they all took their departure. The Jews all believed him; whereupon Zabidus constructed an apparatus of wood, inserted in it three rows of lamps and put it over his person. Thus arrayed he walked about, presenting the appearance to distant onlookers of stars preambulating the Earth.'⁵¹

So disguised, Josephus continues, Zabidus entered the temple sanctuary, and made off with the head of the

golden pack-ass and spirited it back to Dora, and so ends Apion's account.⁵² Characteristically, Josephus refutes the ass denigration of the Gentiles with some of his own. "May we not, on our side, suggest that Apion is overloading the pack-ass, that is to say himself, with a crushing pack of nonsense and lies."⁵³ This is a telling statement. To call someone an ass was clearly a strongly worded insult, reflecting badly on the ass. Similarly, people could relate to the mental image of a pack-ass, staggering, overloaded, under a crushing burden.

Philo (30 B.C.E - 45 C.E.), in his "On the Migration of Abraham," gives the following account of his attitude toward the ass, in his pursuit of allegory, which is similar to the attitude of Josephus.

For he who bears the same name as this place, namely Sichem, the son of Hamor, that is, of irrational nature; for the name Hamor means 'an ass,' giving himself up to folly and and being bred up with shamelessness and audacity, infamous man that he was, attempting to pollute and defile the judicial faculties of the mind; if the pupils and friends of wisdom, Sichem and Levi, had not speedily come up, having made the defences of their house safe, and destroyed those who were still involved in the labour devoted to pleasure and to the indulgence of the uncircumcised."⁵⁴

All these attributes mentioned above are those which could be readily associated by the reader to the ass. In his zeal for allegory, Philo knew he could rely on that association to make the work effective.

The preceding discussion gives an overall perspective of the ass from the Jewish point of view from earliest

times to the first century C.E., from Rome and Alexandria respectively. It is obvious from the evidence that the ass, taken as a whole, was not thought of very highly. In the earliest writings in the Torah, the ass is treated neutrally; the wild variety even receives mild praise. However, as time advances toward the Roman period, the stature of the ass declines precipitously. The ass-worship calumny arose and was vociferously enjoined by Josephus and set back upon the pagans. While Josephus regards the donkey as a useful beast of burden, he rejects it as an object of worship, as he sees it as a contemptible animal. More strongly, Philo employs the ass as an allegory for libidinous folly, rebelliousness, and evil.

CHAPTER III

ENTER THE GREEKS

To juxtapose the Greek attitudes toward the donkey with those already established of the Jews and Egyptians, we turn to Homer as an indication of how the donkey was perceived among the Ionian Greeks of the eighth century B.C.E. In the first book of the Iliad we find that the first animals to be attacked by Apollo during his plague of the Achaeans were the mules.¹ Either this was because the animal was considered the lowliest among them, or perhaps the most useful. It could be that it was a combination of both reasons that Apollo should single out the mule thusly.

In the second book, Homer tells of those mules of Asia who are able to reproduce, as testified by a number of other ancient writers.² These "mules" it would seem, were in reality wild asses of a subspecies with larger stature and shorter ears than the common domestic donkey. Perhaps they are Syrian wild asses (Equus Hemionius Onager) to which the poet is referring.

In the seventh book, the mule and the oxen are referred to as the most common draught animals of the day.³ Still later, the question of the best animal for the job is answered: "a plow yoke of mules since they are better

beasts than oxen for dragging the wrought plowshare through the depth of the harvest land."⁴

The stubbornness and resiliency of the donkey, as well as the inefficacy of beatings, is illustrated in the following passage.

As when a donkey, stubborn and hard to move, goes into a cornfield in despite of boys, and many sticks have been broken upon him, but he gets in and goes on eating the deep grain, and the children beat him with sticks, but their strength is infantile; yet at last by hard work they drive him out when he is gluttoned with eating.⁵

Why does it take the children so long? Because "asses chew their fodder very slowly."⁶

Despite these attributes, however, donkeys were considered very valuable. For example, at the funeral games of Patroclus, one was offered for the winner of the prize for boxing. Thus, Peleides "led out into the field and tethered there a hard-working six-year-old unbroken jenny [she-ass], the kind that is hardest to break; and for the loser set out a two handled goblet."⁷

This completes a survey of some--but not all--of the mule and donkey references to be found in the Iliad. From them one may gather the following conclusions. They were valuable, if common, work animals. In the case of the donkey, particularly, it also has a reputation for mischievous behavior, hardiness, and stubbornness. They do not seem to be as poorly regarded as among the Jews

or Egyptians, at least at this early stage of Greek history. Therefore, we must turn to later Greek writers.

Aesop, the sixth-century B.C.E. Ionian author of animal fables, tells the following story of an ass, which will indicate that denigration has already set in among the Greeks, two centuries after Homer.

There was once a man who loaded his ass with the statue of a god, in order to transport it to one of the city temples. Now everybody they encountered on the road uncovered [their heads] and did reverence to the god. The ass, however, imagined that this was in honour of himself. So he began to fancy himself at liberty to do as he pleased; and, as if in protest against being made to carry his burden, pulled up short and flatly refused to go on. Finding him so stubborn, his drivers smote him repeatedly and violently with his staff, crying: 'Triple idiot that you are, think you that it has come to such a pass that people pay their devotions to a donkey?'⁸

This quotation provides all the themes familiar to ass denigration. The accusations against the donkey are these: stupidity, self-importance, and stubbornness. His proper role is to carry burdens or he faces physical compulsion. The idea of anyone worshipping him is preposterous. Those who would are beneath contempt.

Aesop's portrayal of the ass was to become the most widely held in Greek culture. For example, by the third century B.C.E. the Greeks made use of the ass as the ludic figure par excellence, the ass as mimic fool, doubling as a figure with magical efficacy, with its combination of humility and phallic endowment, an ideal for warding off the evil eye. There is an Athenian terra cotta of

that time period which contains a mimic fool between two comic actors, and the figure has ass's ears. This terra cotta is an early indication of a phenomenon well suited to the proclivities of the Romano-Hellenistic civilization.⁹

The ass would become the archetype of the mimic fool (stupidus) and thus the epitome of the ludic world view, a kind of king of the Saturnalia in the psyche of antiquity. It is unsurprising, therefore, that he is a slave, for the "figure of the slave is thoroughly and distinctively mime-like."¹⁰ How much more so would this apply to the donkey, that slave of slaves?

Aristotle's work in natural history suggests itself as an important source for discovering some of the attitudes that will be important factors in the study of ass worship and denigration. In one instance, he writes that humans and mules are the only two animals that are invariably tame.¹¹ He classifies the equids as Lophuri, having a mane and long hair on their tails--the horse, ass, and mule. Aristotle also includes the hinnus and the ginnus.¹² The "breeding mules" of Syria, which Homer had referred to, are in reality the Equus Hemionus Onager, the Syrian wild ass. He calls them "mules" but cautions that they only look like mules, but are not.¹³

Another feature of the equids that provides categorization is that they have a solid rather than cloven hoof, and he mentions in this capacity, the horse, mule,

and Indian ass.¹⁴ Aristotle also classifies the ass among those animals that shed their teeth, mentioned right after humans;¹⁵ but he does not mention them in his discussion of the penis sizes of various animals, which is unusual among ancient writers. The ass is, instead, consigned to a list of those animals lacking a gall bladder.¹⁶ The ass is said to have the thickest and blackest blood of all animals,¹⁷ much as the Roman writers claimed it to have the thickest milk. Is this an explanation for the sluggishness of the ass? Aristotle disagrees, for according to him, the ass had the third thinnest milk of all animals!¹⁸ Combined with mare's milk it is used to make Phrygian cheese.¹⁹ All the animals of Epirus (in Illyria) are larger than those found elsewhere, except the ass, of course.²⁰

In terms of reproduction, Aristotle states that "the ass reaches puberty in both sexes at 30 months; they rarely, however, produce young till they are three years, or three years and six months old. But it has been known to be pregnant and bring up its young within a year."²¹ He also states that asses get neither ticks nor lice,²² but this is not true.²³

Aristotle devotes Chapters 23 and 24 of Book 6 to the mating of asses and mules (he means the Hemionus) respectively. As these are a mixture of truth and fable, I omit the discussion in order not to pass on misinformation

to the reader. (They are also rather lengthy.) Suffice to say that he takes a neutral stance on the mating habits of the domestic and wild ass, and views them in a clinical rather than moral sense. In Chapter 29 of Book 6, he takes up the subject of the Hemionus, which he and other writers sometimes call the "mule" or Oreus.

In Syria, there are animals called hemioni which are different from those derived from a mixture of the horse and the ass, though they resemble them in appearance. As the wild ass is named for its resemblance to the domestic kind, the wild asses and the hemioni differ from the domestic race in speed.²⁴ These hemioni are derived from their own congeners.

In the discussion of natural enemies among animals, Aristotle claims that:

enmity also exists between the aegithus and the ass; for the ass frequents thorny places, that it may scratch its sores, and by this means and when it brays it overturns the eggs and young of the aegithus, for they fall out of the nest from fear of this noise, and the bird, to revenge²⁵ this injury, flies upon the ass and inflicts wounds.

He also states that the wolf is the enemy of the ass, and the raven also, which strikes at the ass's eyes. The ass also competes with the acanthis for thorns, and this brings them into conflict. This completes the information about the ass in the areas under Aristotle's purview.²⁶

This does not complete our partial survey of Greek writers, for Homer, Aesop, and Aristotle, taken collectively, could not be considered representative of the period of this study, that is to say, the time period centered around the mid-second century. Athenaeus, in

his Deipnosophistae, reports that, in a triumphal pageant given by Ptolemy II in Alexandria, among the participants in the procession were:

five troops of asses on which were mounted Sileni and Satyrs wearing crowns. Some of the asses had frontlets [star-shaped ornaments mounted on their foreheads to ward off the evil eye] and harness of gold, others of silver There were also four chariots drawn by wild²⁷ asses, and there were also carts drawn by mules.

All this in a country that despised asses. It seems a very impolitic gesture, but the position of the early Ptolemies was strong indeed.

Athenaeus' contemporary, Claudius Aelianus, wrote a compendium on animals, compiling the knowledge of natural history from earlier authors in a way that was characteristic of that era. Among the comments he makes upon the mule is interesting in its self-conscious avowal of humanity as genetic engineer and tamperer with nature. He is paraphrasing Democritus when he writes that mules

'do not give birth, for they have not got wombs like other animals [this is not true] but of a different formation and quite incapable of receiving seed; for the mule is not the product of nature but a surreptitious contrivance of the ingenuity and, so to say, adulterous daring of man. And I fancy,' said Democritus, 'that a mare became pregnant from being by chance violated by an ass, and that men were its pupils in this deed of violence, and presently²⁸ accustomed themselves to the use of its offspring.'

Aelian goes on to denigrate the ass, in the manner of late antiquity, which suggests that these opinions of the ass are his own. For, "it is especially the asses

of Libya which, being very big, mount mares that have no manes, having been clipped [to encourage in that way the production of mules]. For those who know about the coupling of horses say that a mare in possession of the glory of her mane would never tolerate such a mate."²⁹

Sometimes the ass is both exalted and denigrated in the same culture. For example, in contrast to the Greeks, "the Saracori keep asses, not to carry burdens or grind corn but to ride in war, and mounted on them they brave the dangers of battle, just as the Greeks do on horseback."³⁰ Characteristically, there are limits to the respect accorded them, for, "any ass of theirs that appears to be more given to braying than others they offer as a sacrifice to the God of War."³¹

In contrast to the endurance of the wild asses mentioned in Xenophon's Anabasis,³² Aelian says that

the [wild] asses of Mauretania gallop at a very great speed, at least at the start they are extremely swift But they quickly tire And so the men leap from their horses and throw halters around the asses' necks, and each one securing an ass to his horse, leads the one he has caught like a prisoner of war.³³

However, it is difficult to believe in the veracity of this story because it also describes the asses as weeping copious tears, not from fear of death or capture but on account of the weakness of their feet!³⁴ It is unlikely that wild asses would be slower or less enduring than a half-millennium earlier, or horses any faster or

longer-winded. It seems to be a fable of one ill-disposed to the ass.

In India there are herds of wild horses and wild asses. Now they say that when the asses mount the mares, the latter remain passive and take pleasure in the act and produce mules of a red colour and extremely swift of foot, but that these mules are impatient of the yoke and generally skittish. The people there are said to take them with foottraps if they are caught as two-year-olds they do not refuse to be broken in, but when older they₃₅ are just as savage as fanged and carnivorous beasts.

Aelian also reports that in the region of the Psylli in India, the asses and mules are very small, as well as that in India, wild asses are hunted by domesticated lions.³⁶

The above selection rounds out this sampling of Greek writers, purposefully bringing the story of the ass up to the end of the second century C.E. The second century of our era was a time which saw the height of the ass-worship controversy that raged between pagan and Christian writers of the Latin tongue. It becomes necessary, therefore, to trace the development of Roman views of the ass from the beginnings of Latin literature to the time when the Christians were making themselves an object of concern to the Roman authorities. In this way the views of all the major participants in the drama of the ass-worship controversy will become clear.

CHAPTER IV

THE ASS ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA

A. Introduction

The perception that our contemporaries have of the ass in ancient literature and society is largely negative. Perhaps this is due in part to the cruel treatment endured by Lucius in Apuleius' picaresque novel, Metamorphoses. Another example that readily comes to mind is the charge leveled by Tacitus in the fifth book of his Historia that the Jews worshipped the head of an ass, for which they were reviled by pagans. Also, we recall the famous graffito discovered in 1904 under the Palatine in Rome of a crucified ass, presumably scratched to denigrate the Christians.¹

However, on careful examination of the majority of ass references found in the ancient literature of the Roman period, I found the perception of the ass to be largely neutral. In many cases, particularly in works on agriculture and natural history, I found a deep appreciation for the qualities of the ass in two areas. Specifically, the ass was a patient and reliable beast of burden and its services as a sire for a mules was indispensable. Along with the mule, the ass was employed chiefly as a pack animal, a draught animal, and the primary power source

for turning the corn mills of the Empire. The work was so arduous that the mill was used as a punishment for slaves.²

In my research I found that although the ass was treated brutally and was tyrannized over by the common people, the animal was gratefully acknowledged by elite writers, especially in the field of agriculture. My findings indicate that a further distinction must be made between the treatment accorded to the domestic donkey (asinus) and the wild ass (onager) upon its capture, for both food and domestication. In this chapter I will examine the role the ass played in the ancient mind and economy, as well as its treatment in high-brow literature and popular culture, both in the domestic sphere and in the wild.

B. Agriculture

The perception that the ancients had of the ass can be gleaned from a multiplicity of sources. Due to their agricultural orientation, the Romans wrote voluminously in the fields of animal husbandry and natural history. In these areas, as in most others, the Romans followed Greek models. There are references to the ass to be found as early as the sayings of Pythagoras, the drama of Aeschylus, Aristotle's Historiae Animalium, and Xenophon's Anabasis. But it is due to the Romans' self-conscious-

preoccupation with agricultural matters that this material blossoms into a distinct body of work.

In Republican times Cato the Censor (234-149 B.C.E.) wrote the earliest existing treatise on Roman agriculture. Written in the mid-second century, it is a product of his later years. In De Agri Cultura Cato wrote about the essential characteristics and equipment of a model farm in which both asses and mules figure prominently. The reference for an olive yard is as follows: "three pack-asses to carry manure, 1 ass for the mill"³ and later, "three pads for the asses . . . one donkeymill."⁴ For a vineyard one would need "one muleteer . . . two draft donkeys, one for the mill . . . one donkey yoke . . . three of donkey-harness . . . three donkey-mills."⁵ Thus, it is apparent from the need for asses, ass hardware, and ass tenders that the animal was indispensable to the normal operation of olive production and viniculture. The principal occupations of asses were those of draught, plow, and mill animals; these themes will occur repeatedly in the works to follow.

The next agricultural writer on the subject of asses is that of the Mennipean satirist Varro (116-27 B.C.E.). In his later years he also took up the subject of agriculture in a treatise called Res Rusticae. Of the ass and its utility to farmers, he recorded many and varied aspects of its value. In addition, Varro discussed his

views concerning the rearing and breeding of the ass.

For example, in the following passage Varro explains the probable derivation of six Roman cognomina, each representing a major domestic animal. "Many of our family names are derived from both classes, the larger and the smaller, and such as Porcius, Ovinus, Caprilius from the smaller, and Equitius, Taurus, Asinius from the larger."⁶ These names may represent the suggestive remnants of a Roman or Latin totemism lost in prehistory.

In the matter of which breed of asses is best, Varro naturally favors those of his home town of Reate among them. The prospective buyer, in order to make an intelligent choice, must consider the quality of the breed; "it is for this reason that in Greece the asses of Arcadia are noted, and in Italy those of Reate--so much so that within my recollection an ass fetched 60,000 sesterces, and one team of four at Rome sold for 400,000."⁷ These are exorbitant prices indeed.

On the controversial subject of the foaling of mules, writers were of differing opinion. Varro is one who claims it can happen, but strictly as a portentous event. He writes of a conversation with his contemporary, Vaccius, on the nine points of animal husbandry.

'So, if you wish, subtract two of the topics, coition and foaling, when you speak of mules.' 'Foaling?' asked Vaccius; 'why, don't you know that it has several times been asserted that a mule has borne a colt at Rome?' To back up his statement, I add that both Mago and

Dionysius remark that the mule and the mare bring forth in the twelfth month after conception. Hence we must not expect all lands to agree, even if it is considered a portent when a mule bears young here in Italy.⁸

Therefore, Varro is admitting that his views on the subject were not universally accepted. By holding this view, Varro contradicts Aristotle.⁹ Still later, Columella will contradict Varro.¹⁰ However, Livy ('who does not err') lists two such occurrences in Varro's home district of Reate.¹¹

Varro, like other authors in and out of the field of agriculture, is careful to distinguish between the wild ass (onager) and its domestic counterpart (asinus). Here he introduces the onager: "there are two species of these animals: the wild ass, called onagrus, of which there are many herds, as, for instance, in Phrygia and Lycaonia; and the domesticated, such as are all those in Italy."¹² With regard to their propagation he adds, "the wild ass is well suited for breeding, because he is easily changed from wild to tame and never changes back from tame to wild."¹³ Nevertheless, with regard to the suitability of the offspring of the wild ass and the mare, Varro, as before, will be contradicted by Columella.

Varro discusses the merits of hinnies (the offspring of a stallion and a she-ass) as opposed to mules, and compares the milk of the jenny (she-ass) unfavorably to that of the mare. Later, the merits and alternate uses

of the milk of the jenny will be discussed. Varro's contemporary, Murrius, explains,

'for mules and hinnies are hybrids and grafts, not from roots after their own kind; for the mule is an offspring of a mare and an ass, while the hinny is the offspring of a horse and a jenny; each is useful for work, but neither brings any return from young. When an ass colt is newly born it is placed under a mare and becomes fatter on her milk, as they claim that such nourishment is more nutritious than the ass's milk.'¹⁴

In addition, Varro writes about the relationship between nurture and reproduction. "Special care is also taken of the foster-mother, so that the mare may furnish the colt with an abundant supply of milk. A jack so reared may be used for breeding after three years, and because it is accustomed to horses it will not refuse to mate."¹⁵ Varro then repeats his earlier statement of the superiority of Arcadian and Reatine asses, and the prices they command. On the whole, the treatment the ass receives in Varro is the same that is accorded to the horse.

The agriculturalists agree that the purchase, breeding and care of asses is every bit as important as the corresponding treatment of horses. Consider the following:

in purchasing we observe the same rules as in the case of horses, and make the same stipulations in the matter of purchase and acceptance as were named in the case of horses. We feed these chiefly on hay and barley and increase the amount before breeding, so that we may furnish strength from the food breeding, so that we may furnish strength from the food for begetting; and we mate them at the same season in which we mate horses, and we are careful also to have them cover the mares with the help of a groom. When a mare drops a horse-mule or a mare-mule we rear it at the teat.¹⁶

From this testimony it is clear that the treatment of asses and horses was, to gentlemen farmers, the same.

Among the hybrids of horse and ass, there were differing roles accorded to the mule and the hinny. The mule was indispensable as a draught animal, while the hinny was more pleasing to the eye. In the words of Varro, "In assembling a herd of mules both age and build must be watched--the former of hauling, and the latter that they may please the eyes with their appearance; for it is by pairs of these animals that all vehicles are drawn on the roads."¹⁷

It seems plausible that Varro is taking pains to stress the equal utility of asses with horses. That alone is grounds for according to them the respect and dignity commonly reserved for horses. Among the leisured aristocrats, there was little of the stigma attached to the ass that was abundant in the lower classes. There was a reason for this discrepancy of opinion, which will be addressed in the conclusion.

It is not overstating the case to note that there were some eccentric landowners that who were not as interested in what was economically viable as they were in indulging in curious activities. Varro notes such a one in Res Rusticae, Quintus Hortensius:

And it was not enough for him to feed from his ponds--nay, he must feed his fish with his own hands; and he actually took more pains to keep his mullets

from getting hungry than I do to keep my mules at Rosea from getting hungry, and indeed he furnished them nourishment in the way of both food and drink much more generously than I do in caring for my donkeys. For I keep my very valuable asses with the help of a single stable-boy, a bit of barley, and water from the place."¹⁸

This illustrates the case that it was thought to be eccentric to put impractical matters such as these before the proper treatment and value of asses relative to their economic importance in practical husbandry. This attitude is found to continue with Columella.

Columella, a Spaniard, in an era of prominent Spanish writers, wrote his De Re Rustica in the century following Varro. He drew on the writings of Aristotle, Cato and Varro. Columella's treatise is more logically arranged than that of his predecessor because his work was not in the dialogue form that Varro had employed. Furthermore, Columella is in direct or indirect contradiction with Varro more than once on the subject of asses. For example, he does not concur with Varro on the ease with which asses and horses are brought together for the purposes of reproduction, and introduces a tone of disparagement in the quality of the jackass with respect to the mare. By the first century, in contrast to Republican times, ass denigration has thus infected the upper classes, even among natural scientists.

For not only are the seeds, which are injected into the genital parts, with difficulty quickened into life but also after conception they take longer to mature

into the creature which is to be born, and it is only after the completion of a year that in the thirteenth month the offspring is brought forth with difficulty, and more of the sluggishness of the father is inherent in the offspring than the vigour of the mother.¹⁹

In the following section several disputed topics are discussed, including whether reproduction in mules is impossible or only rare, and the breeding of mules from various combinations of progenitors. In addition, Columella refutes the notion advanced by Varro that there is any suitable domesticity in the first generation offspring of an onager as opposed to a domestic ass. The superiority of the former's offspring must await the second generation. This view is shared by Pliny the Elder, whose opinions will be discussed later. Columella states that Varro, Dionysius and Mago "have related that in some regions of Africa the production of offspring by mules is so far from being considered a prodigy that their offspring is as familiar to the inhabitants as those born from mares are to us."²⁰ In reference to mule breeding, Columella asserts "a mule can be bred not only from a mare and a donkey, but also from an ass and a horse, and further from a wild ass and a mare."²¹ The results of the aforementioned methods of breeding mules produces an exceptionally reliable and hard working farm animal.

Columella goes on to unfavorably contrast the attributes of the hinny as opposed to the mule. In his opinion, this is because the hinny retains more of the

characteristics of the she-ass, and is only superficially like the stallion. "It is, therefore, most advantageous to choose a donkey as sire for a race of mules whose appearance, as I have said, is proved by experience to be handsomer."²²

It is clear that there is a subtle aversion to the ass in Columella, as evidenced here, that was absent in Varro and Aristotle. However, he is not always at variance with the opinions of his predecessors. Here, in regards to this passage on the raising of ass-foals, he is in concurrence with Varro. "As soon as the foal of an ass, such as I have described, is brought to birth, it should be taken away from its mother and put under a mare who has no knowledge of it."²³ The favorable result of this deception will be that "the future stallion, fed in this manner learns to have an affection for mares."²⁴ On the other hand, "sometimes also, although it has been reared on its own mother's milk, if it has lived familiarly amongst mares from its tender years, it may well seek their company."²⁵

In whichever way these animals were bred and raised, they were excellent pack and draught animals, perhaps their most crucial role in the ancient economy. Without them, all routine transportation came to a grinding halt. Suetonius illustrates an incident of Caligula's madness, in which "[Gaius] sent to Rome, where his agents

commandeered public conveyances, and even draught animals from the bakeries, . . . which led to a bread shortage in the city, and to the loss of many law-suits, because litigants who lived at a distance were unable to appear in court and meet their bail."²⁶

Columella commences his seventh book by again demonstrating his ambivalent attitude toward the ass, referring to it as a lesser farm animal, "the cheap and common ass."²⁷ Nevertheless, he is compelled to praise its many qualities and put aside his prejudice. Here he refers to the hardness of the Arcadian ass, as Varro and other writers had done; in this evaluation Columella and his predecessors concur.

And they are quite right, for it can be kept even in a country which lacks pasturage, since it is content with very little fodder of any sort of quality, feeding on leaves and the thorns of brier-bushes, or a bundle of twigs which is offered to it; indeed it actually thrives₂₈ on chaff, which is abundant in almost every region.

Because the ass can be treated so poorly and perform so well, as he says, it is possible that it became an object of contempt to those who saw in these very qualities an indication of a servile disposition. When the donkey rebelled, conversely, it was treated as a sign of stubbornness and stupidity. While the fidelity of the dog is unanimously praised by ancient writers, there are none who claim that canines would be particularly loyal to abusive masters. Moreover, the ass was a difficult

animal to break, which implies an independence of character, as in cats, but not stupidity.

Furthermore, under domestication, the ass became, like the oxen, the paragon of patient endurance. So Columella concludes, "it endures most bravely the neglect of a careless master and tolerates blows and want most patiently; for which reasons it is slower in breaking down than any other animal used for ploughing, for, since it shows the utmost endurance of toil and hunger, it is rarely affected by disease."²⁹ This latter assertion is contested by the findings of modern research.³⁰ Why did these researchers claim that the donkeys were practically invulnerable to these diseases? Perhaps it was to bear out their portrayal of the hardness of the ass through exaggeration, a favorite practice of many ancient writers. Perhaps the hardness of the donkey, thus portrayed, tended to exonerate mankind for their cruel treatment. It was acceptable to treat the donkey shabbily, because it could withstand the treatment. In addition to all aforementioned attributes, the ass's ability to plow lighter soil more profitably than oxen and the facility with which it handles heavy packs certainly made it an excellent investment;³¹ even the poor could afford to own and thus profit by the labor of the ass, as Apuleius abundantly demonstrates throughout the Metamorphoses.

There is combined in the ass the loyalty of the dog with the fortitude of the ox. And yet, why was this animal so reviled? There may be some clues to this paradox in the Naturalis Historia of the elder Pliny. Familiarity breeds contempt, it is said, and the ass was as familiar a sight as one would find in the ancient world. The very commonness of the ass to the ancients made it invaluable as a point of reference. Therefore, it could be used as an index of comparison when describing, say, uncommon fauna. It is not surprising that Pliny does this twice in the same sentence, when he describes "tailed monkeys with black heads, ass's hair and a voice unlike that of any other species of ape; Indian oxen with one and with three horns; the leurocota, swiftest of wild beasts, about the size of an ass."³²

As to the onager, Pliny asserts that it was numerous in Africa. About them he says that:

in that species each male is lord of a separate herd of females. They are afraid of rivals in their affections, and consequently they keep a watch on their females when in foal, and geld their male offspring with a bite; to guard against this the females when in foal seek hiding-places and are anxious to give birth by stealth. Also they are fond of a great deal of sexual indulgence.³³

Here, I think, a contributing factor to the problem of ass denigration may be found. Attributed to the African onager are forms of behavior one doesn't find in animals untouched by the corruption of human contact. Extreme

jealousy, gelding one's rivals, maiming one's offspring, and sexual licentiousness are characteristics considered to be strictly human perversion, not usually found in the "ideal" state of nature. In fact, much of the moralizing of the first century was directed against deviations such as these, found among asses, in human society.

There may also be a connection, however unconscious, with the breeding of asses with horses. Was it as unnatural to promote sexual relations between races of animals as it was to accept sexual deviance among humans? This too, became a topic of moralizing. One has only to consider Plutarch, who, in his Moralia claims that "even men themselves acknowledge that beasts have a better claim to temperance and the non-violation of nature in their pleasures For men have in fact, attempted to consort with goats and sows and mares, and women have gone mad with lust for male beasts."³⁴ Plutarch goes on to claim that "no beast has ever attempted a human body for lustful reasons. But the beast I have mentioned and many others any other unlawful pleasures."³⁵ There are other examples of unnatural couplings to be found in Apuleius, Lucian, and in Juvenal's Satire VI, the last of which will be examined in the context of this paper at a later point.

Whatever the moral issue of interspecific mating, it remains a fact that one of the chief values of asses were as breeders, and Pliny makes that point in several

ways. He claims that the price quoted by Varro for a single ass, that of 400,000 sesterces paid by one Quintus Axius, was the highest price ever commanded for any animal. Why were they so valuable? Pliny says that "the services of the ass kind are undoubtedly bountiful in ploughing as well, but especially in breeding mules."³⁶ He agrees with Varro and Columella as to which breed of asses were most sought after. Perhaps, here too, he takes his information from Varro.

Pliny supplies the additional information that, in terms of profit margin, she-asses are more valuable to the owner than the outcome of a successful war. He states that foals of the best she-asses were collectively valued at as much as 400,000 sesterces.³⁷

On the specific subject of breeding mules, Pliny agrees with Columella in that "a mare coupled with an ass after twelve months bears a mule, an animal of exceptional strength for agricultural operations"³⁸ but that "a mule is also got by a horse out of an ass, though it is unmanageable, slow and obstinate"³⁹ In this case both authors disagree with Varro. However, on the question of fertility in mules, Pliny reports several opinions but does not take sides. He notes that "a number of cases of reproduction by mules are recorded in our Annals, but these were considered portentous. Theophrastus states. that mules breed commonly in Cappadocia, but that the

Cappadocian mule is a peculiar species."⁴⁰ This follows the testimony of Aristotle as well, which was summarized in the previous chapter.

Pliny reports that there are several other options when breeding; it is stated in many Greek sources that "a foal has been got from a mare coupled with a mule, called a ginnus."⁴¹ On the suitability of onagers as breeders he states that "she-mules bred from a mare and tamed wild-asses are swift in pace and have extremely hard hooves, but a lean body and indomitable spirit. But as a sire the foal of a wild-ass and a domestic she-ass excels all others. The wild asses in Phrygia and Lycaonia are pre-eminent."⁴²

Almost as an afterthought, Pliny appends another unrelated use for the ass to the end of his discussion on breeding. In this case it is not a use normally associated with the ass: that is, as food. Pliny writes that "Maecenas set the fashion of eating donkey foals at banquets, and they were much preferred to wild asses at that period; but after his time the ass lost favour as a delicacy."⁴³ Lastly, Pliny adds the additional evidence that the milkfoal of an onager continued to be a delicacy in his day, although it had fallen out of favor in Rome. He states that "Africa boasts of their foals as an outstanding table delicacy; the vernacular word for them is lalisio."⁴⁴ This last contention is supported by the

evidence of Martial. Pliny also reports the story found in the records of Athens of the famous mule that lived at Athens, and assisted with the construction of the Parthenon. This animal, which lived to be eighty years old, was protected by decree and fed at public expense."⁴⁵

The properties of lactation in asses had many unique characteristics. Pliny says that once they are in foal, jennies can give milk immediately. In addition, ass's milk is the thickest of all milks. It was thought also to have cosmetic properties such as promoting whiteness in women's skin and eliminating wrinkles. This is evident when Pliny writes that "at all events Domitius Nero's wife Poppaea used to drag five hundred she-asses with foals about with her everywhere and actually soaked her whole body in a bath-tub with ass's milk, believing that is also smoothed out wrinkles."⁴⁶ The empress was not alone in this belief. In the testimony of Juvenal, a fashionable first century woman was described. She "laves herself with milk for which sake she'll lead out a retinue of asses."⁴⁷ This passage of Juvenal provides an important link between the consideration of asses in terms of agriculture and natural history, and the more common view of asses provided by other branches of literature such as drama, satire, and verse.

C. Literature

In the literature that spans the period of the later Republic through the late Empire, there is found a more varied treatment of the ass than that of the scientific writers. To make sense of the dizzying variety of material, it must be divided into literary genres. Therefore, it will be broken into the treatment of comedy/satire and poetry/history. The composite of asses drawn from satirical works sheds light on the more common conception in which the ass is ridiculed or made the butt of sexual innuendo (this is in reference to its alleged promiscuity). However, writers of poetry and history tend to be more sympathetic in their treatment of the ass and have much more in common with the orientation of the writers on agriculture and natural history.

The first Roman comedic writer relevant to this survey is Plautus (c. 254 - 184 B.C.E.). One of his plays, the Asinaria, or "the ass dealer," sheds little light on asses, but does record their cost, 20 minae for four Arcadian asses, which was evidently a great deal of money in Plautus' time.⁴⁸ If one needed to raise money in a hurry, selling asses would be a sure way to do so. There are two other references to asses that should be noted, dealing with the cruelty to which asses were subjected. In the Poenulus of Plautus, for example, "indeed, in the manner of an ass

who is dealt beatings"⁴⁹ is used as the type of a miserable countenance, and in the Pseudolus, "men more like asses I never did see--ribs cudgelled callous!"⁵⁰ It seems likely from this evidence and that of other authors that constant floggings were what an ass could expect.

Horace (65 - 8 B.C.E.), in his very first epistle (1.13), ostensibly addresses Vinnius Asina. There is a lightly jesting pun on the addressee's cognomen which, it may be recalled, is mentioned as a basic cognomen in Cato's De Agri Cultura. In lines 6-9, Horace describes plodding along in stubborn pursuit of a goal as ass-like behavior, and warns Asina to be careful lest his surname makes him the butt of "asinine" jokes.⁵¹ Thus, it appears that being compared to an ass was very unflattering. While Vinnius Asina is obscure, surely Asinius Pollio, Gallus, and Celer are not.⁵² Horace doesn't always speak of asses in a jesting tone, however, and seems to have sympathy for the sufferings of real asses and their travail. A case in point for the unfortunate beast is to be found in the first satire. It seemed to the ass that a heavily laden pack was a special torment: "with drooping ears and lowered head, the little donkey submits his back to the heavy load."⁵³

Ovid (43 B.C.E. - 18 C.E.) was another Augustan poet who revealed his sympathy for the suffering of the ass. In a couplet from the Amores he laments, "don't forget

how the wretched long-eared ass, when too heavily beaten, gets stubborn, goes slow."⁵⁴ Like most animals, the ass was not exempt from the threat of ritual sacrifice. Thus, in the Fasti, Ovid writes that "a young ass, too, is slain in honour of the stiff guardian of the country-side: the cause is shameful, but beseems the god."⁵⁵ In Fasti VI, however, the ass is given an honored place in a festival to Vesta, of which Ovid writes, "lo, loaves are hung on asses decked with wreaths, and flowery garlands veil the rough millstones."⁵⁶ Later in the passage, during this five day festival in which the ass did not work the flour mills, "hence the baker honours the hearth and the mistress of hearths and the she-ass that turns the millstones of pumice."⁵⁷ This is the only respite the mill ass had in the yearly cycle.

In the Metamorphoses, there are several more references to the ass. For example, at a festival of Bacchus, "there the gray-haired tippler reels along supported by his staff; or else bestrides his crook-backed ass, and insecurely rides."⁵⁸ This is one among many references of the ass being the conveyance of the humble and lowly. The crooked-back, also, could only be the result of overwork and abuse. Further on, Apollo, to punish Midas, turns his ears into an ass's ears, so that "grotesquely long they grew, with coarse gray hair, and hinged at base,

with power of movement there. One part incurs a sentence: he appears still man, but with plodding ass's ears."⁵⁹

What was the significance of turning a man's ears to ass's ears? Why was this a particularly onerous fate? Did the man-as-ass hold any special significance in ancient times that we can glean from the literary evidence? There are many indicative asides, in the form of off-hand remarks, but no definitive statement of what is meant, say, to called "an ass." This is paralleled in the more modern tale of Pinocchio in which the children, as punishment, are turned into asses, and Pinocchio himself sprouts asses' ears for the same reason.

To conclude a survey of Augustan poets, one must not neglect to turn to Virgil, whose Georgics was a tribute in verse to rural Italy. (Much of his technical knowledge seems to have been obtained from Varro.) The following passage was later quoted by Columella, while the theme of the overburdened ass is repeatedly echoed by Apuleius.

The tardy donkey's driver loads its sides
With cheap fruits and returning brings from town
A hammered millstone or black lump of pitch.⁶⁰

In the third book, while in the midst of his tribute to the dog, Virgil writes of hunting wild asses with hounds in Italy.⁶¹ It seems odd that dogs could run down onagers, if, as Xenophon testifies, horses could not.⁶² Still odder is the fact that this is the only mention of onagers in Italy, as it is clear from the evidence of the other authors

that their range consisted of North Africa to Asia. It can be safely asserted that Virgil here is using poetic license.

This inquiry now shifts to focus on the Neronian period, nearly half a century following Ovid's demise. In the Satyricon of Petronius (d. 66 C.E.) there are several interesting references to the ass. Here, representing functional art, "the dishes for the first course included an ass of Corinthian bronze"⁶³ Later in the same book, a testament to the notion, asserted by the agriculturalists, of the onager as a superior sire can be found. One guest, referring to Trimalchio, says in admiration that "he hasn't a single mule that wasn't sired by a wild ass."⁶⁴ Still later, one overhears what may have been a common saying, referring to cruelty or vengeance by proxy: "If you can't beat the ass, you beat the saddle."⁶⁵ There was another saying current as well, describing a story that was difficult to believe as being "a real donkey on the roof."⁶⁶ This was a common expression for the sudden appearance of any grotesque apparition. In addition to these references there are several comments indicative of the lowly position of muleteers, bearing in mind the essential services of the ass and mule as draft animals. Referring to an inadequate singer/mimic, Habinnas says, "he's no one to equal him if he wants to imitate mule-drivers or hawkers."⁶⁷ Later the singer "dressed up in a great coat

and whip and did the Life of a Muleteer."⁶⁸ Further on, Chrysis comments on the unchaste character of contemporary women and their passion for low-born types. "The arena sets some of them on heat, or a mule-driver covered with dust."⁶⁹ There can be little doubt that the low status of muleteers is derived at least partly from their association with the sterile hybrid of the lowly ass, and partly also to the stigma attached to all manual labor. This, too, reflected on the status and treatment of the ass.

In the first satire of Persius (34 - 62 C.E.), a reference to men with asses' ears recalls the Metamorphoses. Persius' denigration refers to those who do not appreciate his verse, who are incapable of understanding. "I've seen this, seen it. There's not one of them who doesn't have ass's ears!"⁷⁰ Thus, the unwillingness of the ass to perform on command made it the stereotype of stupidity, and a convenient reference point to describe doltish unsophisticates. This topic, too, seems to merit its own line of study.

At this point, two Flavian satirists will be considered: Martial (d. 102 C.E.) and Juvenal (c. 60 - c. 140 C.E.). While their writings generally involved social denigration, the references involving the ass are by no means consistent in this respect. In fact, there is a great deal of incidental information to be gathered

from these sources. For example, Martial, in his thirteenth book of epigrams, refers to the lalisio in the same context that Pliny reports in his Naturalis Historia--that is, as a table delicacy. Thus, he writes "while he is a young wild ass, and is fed by his mother alone, the lalisio has, as a nursling, this name, but one short-lived."⁷¹ Later in the same book, he reports that the hunt for the wild ass sometimes replaced that of ivory: "a beautiful wild ass comes; the hunt of the Indian tusk must be sent away; now shake your togas no longer."⁷² These two quotes indicate that the wild ass was highly appreciated, both at the table and as sport, in comparison to its domestic cousin. For the onager was no slave, freer in fact than these Roman writers. Therefore, they were accorded respect on that basis and that of their physical attributes.

Juvenal returns to the ground covered by the Satyricon--the breakdown of moral standards. In his sixth satire, which he directed against women, Juvenal refers to the sexual incontinence of noble women. Here he is not writing about a dust-covered mule-driver, but an ass: "will madam submit her bottom to be served by a donkey."⁷³ In the eighth satire, Juvenal refers to the consul Laternus (who served under Nero) as a "mulio" or muleteer as a term of reproach,⁷⁴ and says that he swears by no higher deity than Epona, putting him on par with equines, who, like Laternus, have Epona as their divine patroness. "Numa

ordained, before Jove's altar he swears by none save Epona and the icons daubed on his stinking stables."⁷⁵

The last work to be considered in this field of inquiry is Noctes Atticae of Aulus Gellius (c. 123 - c. 165 C.E.), a writer representative of the second century. This compendium of a variety of topics naturally takes up the subject of the ass a number of times. In Book XIX, he takes a negative perspective with regards to the ass, the opposite of Plutarch, when he writes "who, then, having any human modesty, would take pleasure in those two delights of venery and gluttony, which are common to man with the hog and the ass?"⁷⁶ It is reasonable to assume that the vice here associated with the hog is gluttony, while that of venery is connected with the ass. In the increasingly ascetic climate of later antiquity, the assignations are particularly damning.

In contrast, in Book XV Gellius relates the remarkable story of Ventidius Bassus. As an infant, Bassus was led in triumph by Pompeius Strabo in the Social War (91 - 88 B.C.E.) and later became a tender of mules--widely regarded as the epitome of a lowly occupation. He had an amazing reversal of fortune. During the Civil Wars, he became a partisan of the Caesarians and subsequently attained the consulship in 43 B.C.E.

At this the Roman people, who remembered that Ventidius Bassus had made a living by taking care of mules, were so indignant that these verses were posted everywhere

about the streets of the city:

Assemble, soothsayers and augurs all!
A portent strange has taken place of late;
For he who curried mules is consul now.⁷⁷

It was as a lieutenant of Antony in the Parthian War (39 - 38 B.C.E.) that Bassus became the first Roman citizen to celebrate a triumph over this eastern empire. Thus, in the inverted atmosphere of the Civil Wars, Bassus went from being led in triumph to celebrating one.

Lastly, Gellius reports that "asellus," the diminutive of "asinus," was commonly used as a term of affection. This was surely because of the attractiveness of the foal. Even Augustus addressed his ill-fated grandson Gaius in this manner. "Greeting, my dear Gaius, my dearest little donkey, whom, so help me! I constantly miss whenever you are away from me."⁷⁸ This last quotation illustrates the Roman propensity to exalt and denigrate the same things by turns.

D. Conclusions

I have found that the ass, in the small sampling of ancient literature featured here, has run the gamut of the highest admiration to the lowest of denigration, and several suggestions have been put forward to account for this discrepancy. In the first place, it must be noted that the obvious merits of the ass in terms of agriculture and economic matters led to its being lauded in this

capacity. The mystifying aspect of the issue is why the ass was denigrated and came to signify what it did for the ancients and our contemporaries. It must be that the ass appeared to be stupid, foolish or stubborn to those who had to work with it most closely, namely peasants and teamsters.

The lot of these people was harsh, and continued to worsen throughout the period of this study. What else to take out their anger and frustration on but the braying donkey? What better to ridicule than that animal which could most bear abuse without deleterious effect? In other words, the ass was the only animal one could abuse and not substantially decrease its economic potential. If one abuses a dog, it will turn on its tormentor. The ass can be pushed much further, as these and other writers can attest. Thus, the ass became the oppressee of the oppressed masses of the ancient world.

The importance of the ass to ancient culture was pervasive on many levels of perceived reality. The practical aspects are so obvious that they tend to be overlooked. However, what they meant to people on the various levels of psyche is neither obvious nor obtuse. The denigration of the ass was a catharsis of the teeming Greco-Roman masses. Increasingly in late antiquity, there grew an admiration of the lowly and the mundane as symbolic of an exalted and spectacular reality that existed, both

beside and beyond the readily apparent essence of day to day existence. For people of disparate origins, the essential and the humble, found an empathic and recognizable locus in "the meanest of all beasts."⁷⁹

CHAPTER V

THE PAGANS VERSUS THE CHRISTIANS

A. Introduction

It is with compassion toward the animals and rancor towards the law that Jesus makes the statement: "any one of you would untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath."¹ In this manner Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their stifling religious legal formalism. At the time this saying was recorded in koine, Judaism was seen as the major threat to nascent Christianity. Conversely, there were numerous points of contact between the pagan and Christian cultural systems. Most obviously, they both have made the transition to an agricultural system of food production, and thus have had to alter their world view, to take into account this most basic of all changes.

The basis of maintenance and continuance of life, the mental coping strategies were at least as profound in Christianity as they had been in paganism. This agricultural tradition did not necessitate the abandonment of animal categories, such as those represented by totemism. As the relationship of humanity to the earth manifested itself as a form of slavery of earth to man, so the nature

of animals went from god to slave. The change was by no means complete, and varied from culture to culture.

The Egyptians, an agricultural people, still revered some animals as gods, but their religion became tied to the agricultural cycle. Animals came to represent things other than themselves. Their characteristics became, in the minds of men, homogenized and typecast, even as the actual animals became "domesticated," that is to say, manipulated and enslaved. There are distinctions made between different species, related species, and wild (free) and domestic (slave) forms of the same species. Animal categorization had replaced totemism as a way to order the natural world.

In late antiquity and beyond, religious systems such as Christianity and its competitors felt that they had left such animality far behind. In many ways, however, Christianity was the least esoteric and most earthy of the major systems that existed contemporaneously with it (consider Neoplatonism, Manicheanism, and Talmudic Judaism, for example). This was because its reach was so broad.

B. Rivals of Christianity

Epona, the patroness of equines, who was of Celtic origin (yet another guise of the mother-goddess imported to Rome from without), covered under her protection and sometimes appeared in the guise of, or was associated with,

a dog, and was often portrayed with the cornucopia as "bestower of well-being and fertility both in this world and in the world beyond the grave."² It is likely that she was a mother-goddess, first, and then only later, with the introduction of horses, that she became associated with them as bringers of bounty, wealth, status and ease. With the relatively late arrival of donkeys and mules into the Celtic world, her maternal protection was extended yet again to these relatives of the horse. How did she fare in the Mediterranean milieu? We have evidence to show that she was worshipped in Italy; for example when Juvenal describes Lateranus, who rose to consul under Nero, a horse enthusiast, who propitiated only her, and who had her images painted in his stables. There is also evidence from Greece, in which Apuleius tells of "a small shrine of the goddess, with her image carefully decked with garlands of fresh roses, on the central pillar of a stable in Thessaly"³ in the latter second century C.E. Being sacred to the donkey, she may have been anathema to Apuleius' patroness, Isis, and he was only able to obtain deliverance from his metamorphosis through the auspices of Isis and not Epona.

As a rival to Christ in late antiquity, Epona earned the approbation of the nascent movement, and the charges of Minucius Felix and Tertullian, accusing the pagans of ass worship as a result of their recognition of their

patroness, Epona. But the accusations of these two apologists for Christianity will be dealt with in their proper context. For the avenue of attack they chose, that is, of undermining the goddess and her worshippers through their association with the donkey, constitutes two classic examples of Christian ass denigration. Apologists would tend to attack the most threatening opponents of their system.

Because the major centers of Celtic culture within the Empire in the Imperial period were Gaul and Britain, the most numerous finds related to the worship of Epona are located in the western provinces. There exists an image of her situated in the niche of a house in Pompeii; she is seated on a donkey and holds a human baby, which "might be just a symbol of her generally maternal character."⁴ These monuments are of several varieties, among them dedicatory inscriptions and portraits, the most numerous in stone, but also in bronze, terra cotta, and even wood.⁵ One from Gaul contains a yoked mule, but Epona is more characteristically seated side-saddle on a horse, or between two or more equines. These come from France, Luxembourg, and Austria; the latter is also a Celtic population center. Epona is generally shown in her maternal aspect, with mares, foals, or both. One bronze from England, for example, portrays her as enthroned between two foals.⁶ Others from Germany show her between two horses

that she is embracing, another from Bulgaria (Thrace) displays the goddess with nine of her charges--six horses and three mules.⁷

The Tacitus material concerning the Christians and the Jews is amazing in several respects. The first quality that strikes the reader is the lack of penetration and fairmindedness that characterizes the passages. But, Tacitus has an agenda and as such cannot be expected to dispense with the malice and innuendo with which he disparaged the Imperial system. He is concerned with making the strongest possible impression on his readership, so he portrayed his chosen opponents in the worst possible light.

Here he refers to the proceedings of the Senate in 19 C.E.

Another discussion concerned the expulsion of Egyptian and Jewish rites. The Senate decreed that four thousand ex-slaves tainted with those superstitions should be transported to Sardinia to suppress banditry there. If the unhealthy climate killed them, the loss would be small. The rest, unless they repudiated their unholy practices by a given date, must leave Italy.⁸

One possible explanation for the expulsion was the resistance the Romans habitually showed toward Jewish proselytization. Of which Egyptian rites were being circumscribed, I know nothing. The grouping together of Egyptian and Jewish rites by the Senate is suggestive of the similarity of impression these Eastern cults made on

the Romans. Perhaps the Egyptians and the Jews were not so different after all.

The next report in Tacitus of materials relevant to this inquiry is the burning of Rome, and this is important for several reasons. For one, it is chronologically the first instance, barring the execution of Jesus himself, of the Christians specifically running afoul of the the Roman authorities. All the instances previous to this time were done, according to both Christian and Jewish sources, at the instigation of the Jews, and by the Jews. The Neronian persecution opened a new chapter in Romano-Christian relations which would lead down the familiar road of the ass-worship controversy.

The charges leveled by the emperor against the Christians as a result of the great fire of Rome in 64 C.E. were those of incendiarism. The relevant passage states, "nobody dared fight the flames. Attempts to do so were prevented by menacing gangs. Torches, too, were openly thrown in, by men crying that they acted under orders. Perhaps they had received orders."⁹ The questions remain. If there were these gangs as described, who were they? Under whose orders were they acting to prevent the fighting of the fire, and assisting its spread? Were they the same people who started the fire, if indeed it was started?

Assuming that the fire was started, who were the likely incendiaries? There are two groups that obviously come to mind: Christian gangs acting under orders of their leadership, or soldiers or gangs acting under the orders of Nero. I will examine each in turn because of the bearing these precedent setting events had on the attitudes of the three contending factions, and on the reactions of the Imperial government to disturbances arising from religious fanaticism and separatism. Here I will return to the account of Tacitus, which seems to side with those who believed that Nero started or abetted the fire and which acquits the Christians, whom he did not admire.

But neither human resources, nor imperial munificence, nor appeasement of the gods, eliminated sinister suspicions that the fire had been instigated. To suppress this rumour, Nero fabricated scapegoats--and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilatus. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital."¹⁰

From reading this account several things become clear. First of all, the Roman people believed that it had been Nero who lit the fire. The second point is that Tacitus explicitly states that Nero fabricated the scapegoats, implicitly stating thereby that the Christians did not merit the charge of incendiarism. Therefore there was another reason for singling out the Christians--other people

didn't like them, and fourth, they were by this time, in the eyes of the government, distinct from Jews.

Suetonius states that in the previous reign, disorders had so shook the Jewish community at Rome, because of one "Chrestus",¹¹ that Claudius had had them expelled. At that time, perhaps fifteen years before, Christianity was considered a movement within the community, it appears from this evidence. Now they were considered distinct, it appears, for the first time. In the Acts of the Apostles, Seneca's brother Gallio, Roman governor of Achaia, still considered Christianity a dispute within Judaism.¹² And when James the Just and some other Judaizing Christians were executed in the interstices between Roman procurators, the Jews themselves seemed to be extirpating heresy in their midst. Nevertheless, only two years later, in Rome, it seems that the government, at least, had changed their minds.

To return to Tacitus, it would have been interesting to know why Jesus was punished back in Tiberius' reign, for the Romans were especially keen on precedence in matters of procedural jurisprudence. There can be no doubt of the attitude of the authorities, but, at this early point can it be safely asserted that the religion was already banned? Tacitus leaves some clues. "First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned--not so much for

incendiarism as for their anti-social tendencies."¹³ This is an instructive passage, for we see the beginnings of a pattern developing. It was as Christians they were arrested, and as Christians they were punished. The act of simply admitting one was a Christian was sufficient, in the first place, for punishment, for it was also an admission of guilt. There may have been precedents and procedures from the previous reign, in connection with the illegalization of Druidism under Claudius. The second point is that the Christians were condemned for "odio humani generis,"¹⁴ which can be taken to read, because of "their hatred of the human race," or because "the human race detested them." In other words, was the Christians' apocalyptic hatred of worldliness taken by pagans as anti-social (in the Stoic sense of the world community), or were the Christians given over to the agitation of the mob because they were hated, perhaps for the reasons stated above? The issue is unresolvable. Perhaps it was a combination of both reasons.

After detailing the exquisite nature of their executions, Tacitus states another observation indicative of the future. "Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest."¹⁵ It seems from this statement that the

Christians were indeed punished as Christians--that it was already religio illicita, and that the martyrdoms elicited sympathy. Later, they would elicit admiration, emulation, and conversion. It was by nature a sort of devotio and aristeia, to which the Greeks and Romans were previously culturally conditioned. There had as yet been no transference from the Jews of the charge of ass-worship, which would not have incited pity but rather malevolence and contempt.

Incidentally, in Suetonius' biography of Nero, he accuses the emperor of having lit the fire, but does not mention the subsequent repression of the Christians as being specifically related to the fire, although he does write that "punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief."¹⁶

Tacitus' other work of relevance here is his Historia. In Book 5 he discusses the Jews with references to the revolt of 66-73 C.E. These passages are crucial to the charges of ass-worship and therefore must be quoted at some length.

First, he talks about the origins of the Jews. He relates a number of theories, interestingly including a possible Cretan origin, perhaps confusing them with the Philistines who also arrived in the same area contemporaneously. He also reports the various opinions

current that they may have migrated from Egypt, Ethiopia, or Assyria, or be the Solymi of Homer, who fought with the Trojans. Tacitus himself follows in the tradition of Manetho and Apion, with the hostile Greco-Egyptian version of their origins. He seems to have not considered Jewish accounts of their own origins. In this Tacitus was however, not alone. The Egyptian tradition was at least considered history, while the Hebrew tradition was considered by the Romans to be more religious than secular in spirit, which may have put off non-Jews to their value as historical documents. That Tacitus made the distinction between Egyptian and Jewish sources in terms of their respective value as historical documents, is evidenced by the fact that Tacitus made use of the Egyptian tradition to the exclusion of the Jewish tradition.

Most writers, however, agree in stating that once a disease, which horribly disfigured the body, broke over Egypt; that king Bocchoris, seeking a remedy, consulted the oracle of Hammon, and was bidden to cleanse his realm, and to convey into some foreign land this race detested by the gods. The people, who had been collected after a diligent search, finding themselves left in a desert, sat for the most part in a stupor of grief, till one of the exiles, Moyses by name, warned them not to look for any relief from gods or man, forsaken as they were by both, but to trust themselves, taking for their heaven-sent leader that man who should first help them be quit of their present misery."¹⁷

It seems that Tacitus is taking his information from Lysimachus.¹⁸ There are many points here of importance. First is that the Hebrews were associated with leprosy

and disfigurements--as unclean prodigies. They were rejected by the gods, particularly by Hammon, that is to say, Ammon-Re, the Egyptian solar deity, sometimes associated with Osiris. They were driven off, much in the same way Horus had expelled Seth. In the Cretan version, the Idaei (Iudae--the Jews) were driven out by Zeus and the gods, sharing the exile of Saturn, whom they honored on Saturn's day--the Sabbath. These are important parallels. The Jews were rejected by, and in turn rejected, the gods of the Greco-Egypto-Roman pantheons. Who were they to worship? Which god would be their deliverance? Tacitus supplies the answer from the most numerous sources.

[The Jews] agreed, and in utter ignorance began to advance at random. Nothing, however, distressed them so much as the scarcity of water, and they had sunk ready to perish in all directions over the plain, when a herd of wild asses was seen to retire from their pasture to a rock shaded by trees. Moyses followed them, and, guided by the appearance of a grassy spot, discovered an abundant spring of water. This furnished relief. After a continuous journey for six days, on the seventh day they possessed themselves of a country, from which they expelled the inhabitants, and in which they founded a city and a temple.¹⁹

There are numerous details provided here that are of intense interest to the formulation of the ass-worship calumny. First of all, having agreed in their extremity to worship their deliverer, they found deliverers in Moses and the wild ass. The parallel of Moses striking the rock is clear,²⁰ his staff, a phallic symbol, substituted for the donkeys' role in the deliverance. The six-day journey

and the arrival on the seventh are paralleled in the Genesis story of creation. Tacitus also is clear to say that they came into possession of the land by force, as indeed was the case. Tacitus then takes up the theme of the Mosaic legislation, from a different point of view than either Philo or Josephus. The explanations are succinct, and from the pagan point of view, plausible. Tacitus continues:

Moyses, wishing to secure for the future his authority over the nation, gave them a novel form of worship, opposed to all that is practiced by other men. Things sacred to us, with them have no sanctity, while they allow what with us is forbidden. In their holy place they have consecrated an image of the animal by whose guidance they found deliverance from their long and thirsty wanderings [i.e., the ass]."²¹

This is a specific charge of ass worship. Being of Egyptian residence for several centuries, the Jews would certainly know that the ass was identified with Seth. The Jews would also be aware that Seth was vilified as the evil god of the Egyptians; contrary to the Egyptians, the Jews elevated to divinity that which the Egyptians rejected. They certainly also were aware of which animals the Egyptians worshipped. He continues, "they slay the ram, seemingly in derision of Hammon, and they sacrifice the ox, because the Egyptians worship it as Apis. They abstain from swine's flesh, in consideration of what they suffered when they were infected by the leprosy to which this animal is liable."²² Here is an early example of the medical school of explaining Hebrew dietary regulations.

Whatever the reason for their regulations, the Jews have animals they esteem, those they despise, and those they avoid.

Tacitus offers the reason why the Jews, unlike the Christians he previously mentions, are not persecuted as a religion. "This worship, however introduced, is upheld by its antiquity."²³ This is the sum of the difference between the two cults, in Roman eyes. The very conservatism of the Romans made them unwilling to persecute the Jews, despite the belief that "all their other customs, which are at once perverse and disgusting, owe their strength to their very badness."²⁴ This language he otherwise reserves for the Christians and the emperors. But, they are an ancient race with a national cult, and as such they are to be tolerated. Proselytization, however, is a danger.

The most degraded out of other races, scorning their national beliefs, brought to them their contributions and presents. This augmented the wealth of the Jews, as also did the fact, that among themselves they are inflexibly honest and ever ready to shew compassion, though they regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies. They sit apart at meals, they sleep apart, and though, as a nation, they are singularly prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; among themselves nothing is unlawful. Circumcision was²⁵ adopted by them as a mark of difference from other men.

To the Roman mind, the excessively separate are the licentious, just as extremes of asceticism become license. This is why the extremes of Egyptian eremitic monasticism

of the third and fourth centuries C.E. were frowned upon in the West.

The remarks of Tacitus indicate the chief causes of cosmopolitan pagans' resentment and bafflement of the Jews. The Jews are attacked for their supposed wealth, that they love each other but that the rest of the human race, their licentiousness among themselves, but most of all it is their separateness that is found most disturbing to the outsider. But "holy" means "separate", etymologically. Circumcision was to the pagan a kind of castration, or at least a mutilation, which was to the ancients considered far graver than it is to the modern mind. The Jews shared these ideas. The indictment is similar to the attack on the Christians in the later Annales and among pagans generally in the decades to come, almost point for point. The Christians inherited all the disadvantages of the Jews, in terms of the pagan viewpoint, but none of the advantages of the older faith.

Tacitus continues his indictment wavering between hostility and neutrality:

Those who come over to their religion adopt the practice [of circumcision], and have this lesson first instilled into them, to despise all gods, to disown their country, and set at nought parents, children, brethren. Still they provide for the increase of their numbers. It is a crime among them to kill any newly-born infant. They hold that the souls of all who perish in battle or by the hands of the executioner are immortal. Hence a passion for propagating their race and a contempt for death. They are wont to bury rather than burn their dead, following in this the Egyptian custom;

they bestow the same care on the dead,²⁶ and they hold the same belief about the lower world.

Perhaps they didn't reject everything about Egyptian religiosity after all! On the other hand, Tacitus is probably correct in attributing an Egyptian origin to many beliefs and practices of the Jews, although he failed to mention circumcision among them. In addition, the rite was also common among the Phoenicians. Beyond the aforementioned similarities, though, the Egyptians and the Jews part company. Tacitus refers to the worship of animals:

But their conception of heavenly things is quite different. The Egyptians worship a variety of animals and half-human half-bestial forms, whereas the Jewish religion is a purely spiritual monotheism. They hold it to be impious to make idols of perishable materials in the likeness of man; for them the most high and eternal cannot be²⁷ portrayed by human hands and will never pass away.

This last, of course, contradicts Tacitus' statement of the ass in the temple. But, then again, that god was not in the likeness of man. The beliefs and practices cited by Tacitus above were likely to have been the consequence of Zoroastrian influence in the post-exilic era. At that time, older Jewish beliefs were augmented by the introduction of Satan and of Apocalypticism of Persian origin. He writes as if he doesn't wholly disapprove of these aspects of Judaism listed above. However, he cannot resist a parting salvo. After explaining about the failure to honor the emperors, he writes:

From the fact, however, that their priests used to chant to the music of flutes and cymbals, and to wear garlands of ivy, and that a golden vine was found in the temple, some have thought that they worshipped Father Liber [Dionysus], the conqueror of the East, though their institutions do not by any means harmonize with the theory; for Liber established a festive and cheerful worship, while the Jewish religion is tasteless and mean.²⁸

Written a half-century previous to Tacitus, Petronius' comment about the Jews worshipping a pig-god is a telling one, and it falls in line with the attitude of Tacitus.

The full quotation is this:

The Jew may worship his pig god and clamour in the ears of high heaven, but unless he also cuts back with a knife the region of his groin, and unloosens by art the knotted head, he shall go forth from the holy city cast forth from the people, and transgress the Sabbath by breaking the law of fasting.²⁹

He attacks the Jews, but not with gravity, but behind his aspersions lie some of the major pagan objections to the Jews. For, in addition to the moral superiority claimed by them, lie the Mosaic restrictions. While they may be "holy" (i.e. separate), they could not seem to be ethical commands, but purely arbitrary or churlish. First, regarding the abstention from pork, far from being an abomination, it had the look of a totemic deity to the outsider, much as the Egyptians did. In addition, what had the mutilation of the male genitalia to do with moral rectitude? It must have seemed to pagans as did the excesses of the priests of the Syrian goddess appeared to Lucius. And yet the Egyptians and Phoenecians do not

come in for similar censuring over this rite. Lastly, the Sabbath was simply incomprehensible to the pagans--an obvious concession to the racial indolence of the Jews. Both systems had a logic to their respective adherents, but notwithstanding the work of a Philo or a Josephus, they might have been mutually exclusive. It took a new synthesis that could draw freely from both world views without having to "betray" either.

Yet, conversely, after the debacle of the Second Jewish War (132 - 135 C.E.), there was rapprochement between the pagans and the Jews. With the philhellenist Hadrian safely out of the way, his anti-Jewish legislation went into abeyance under the benign rule of Antoninus Pius. The Jews achieved an intellectual, religious, and economic flowering in the late antique period that was almost unique among the denizens of the Empire. They were accorded full citizenship in 212 C.E. yet retained their priveleges and exemptions as Jews.

This was not the case with the Christians, whose position declined legally, under Domitian and Trajan, and met with hostility under the Antonines and early Severan periods, when the Jews were flourishing. Why was the pagan hostility to he Jews transferred to the Christians in this period, with whom the pagans would seem to have, ostensibly, more in common?

C. The Ass Worship Calumny (2)

The substance of the pagan attack can be found in the work of the Christian apologist Minucius Felix, writing at the very end of the second century C.E., in the reign of Septimius Severus. It is set in the form of a debate between one Octavius Januarius, a deceased Christian for whom this work was intended as a tribute, and C. Caecilius Natalis, a magistrate from Cirta in the Roman province of Africa, the spokesman for paganism. The setting is Ostia, the port of Rome. Caecilius is an Academician, a Sceptic "agnostic in outlook, acquiescing in the superstitions of the illiterate multitude, while professing polite but skeptical interest in the speculations and contradictions of rival philosophies."³⁰ In this way he is similar to the kind of sampling that went on among such luminaries as Justin and Augustine.

The passage of particular relevance to the subject of the ass-worship calumny is to be found in Octavius.³¹ Not only is the passage itself of interest for that charge alone, but with the related accusations we can get a glimpse of the psychology driving the ass controversy. The speaker is Caecilius:

I am told that under some idiotic impulse they consecrate and worship the head of an ass, the meanest of all beasts, a religion worthy of the morals that gave it birth. Others say that they actually reverence the private parts of their director and high priest,

and adore his organs as parent of their being. This may be false, but such suspicions naturally attach to their secret and nocturnal rites. To say that a malefactor put to death for his crimes, and the wood of the death-dealing cross, are objects of their veneration is to assign fitting altars to abandoned wretches and the kind of worship they deserve.³²

Several congruities of this passage will be noted at once. First of all, there is the charge of worshipping the ass. Connected with this is the worship of the genitalia of the priest or officiant. The ass is a phallic animal; it is also thought to be lowly and stupid, with these qualities reflecting on those who revere it, as Lateranus in Juvenal's satire. The ass is also libidinous, hence the stories of nocturnal incestual orgies. There is also reason to believe that the pagans identified the ass head worshipped with Christ, and assumed that the Christians did, too. This explains the figure of the crucified man with the ass-head, incised graffito found on the Palatine. The man seen to adore it, "Alexamenos," has, significantly, a Greek name³³. Caecilius then paraphrases a speech of Fronto's against the Christians in asserting, along similar lines as those above, that:

on the day appointed they gather at a banquet with all their children, sisters, mothers, people of either sex and every age. There, after full feasting, when the blood is heated and drink has inflamed the passions of incestuous lust, a dog which has been tied to a lamp is tempted by a morsel thrown beyond the range of his tether to bound forward with a rush. The tale-telling light is upset and extinguished, and in the shameless dark lustful embraces are indiscriminately exchanged; and all alike, if not in act, yet by complicity, are involved in incest, as anything that

occurs by the acts³⁴ of individuals results from the common intention.

The ass is the common link between the object of worship, the priest, the rites, and Christ himself (the ass-headed man on the Palatine cross). The above passage is simply a projection of the attributes of the ass and the fertility cult mentioned in the former Caecilius passage. The suspicions attached to the Christians were made to realize the full implications of the worship hitherto described. The scene described above is made to seem even more revolting than the ritual prostitution of pagan earth-mother fertility rites, elsewhere mentioned, for the passage adds the charge of incest to that of mere profligacy. All of this Octavius refutes by asserting that these ideas "that the Christians worshipped monsters, devoured infants [the cannibalistic Eucharist calumny], and joined in incestuous feasts"³⁵ were fabricated. Demons spread these false stories. He continues, taking up the charges one at a time:

hence the gossip which you say you hear about our treating the head of an ass as divine. Who would be foolish enough to worship that? Who more foolish still, to believe in such worship? except perhaps those of you who keep whole asses in your stalls consecrated to your or their Epona, and decorate them ceremonially in company with Isis, or who sacrifice and worship heads of oxen and of wethers [gelded male sheep] and dedicate gods half-goat, half-man, and lion-headed or dog-headed deities. Do not you join the Egyptians in adoring and feeding the bull Apis?"³⁶

Thus he disposes of the charge of ass-worship, by one, denigrating the ass, as Josephus did, and two, accusing the pagans of ass-worship or being asses themselves, as both they and the asses alike worship Epona. Epona becomes the handle by which the Christians return the charge of ass-worship to the pagans. The only thing the two faiths have in common is their mutual contempt for the ass. Octavius continues, "the man who fakes up stories of our adoring the privates of a priest is only trying to foist his own abominations upon us. Indecencies of that kind may be countenanced, when modesty in any kind of sexual relation is unknown."³⁷ Thus is the substance of Octavius' refutation of the ass-worship calumny, and his return of the charge back on its source.

This discussion is paralleled by Tertullian's Apologeticus, which was written during the Severan persecution, in 197 C.E. This makes it the near contemporary of Minucius Felix's Octavius. He is defending against the charge of ass-worship.

For, in fact, with other people, you have dreamed that our god is an ass's head. This sort of notion Cornelius Tacitus introduced. For in the fifth book of his Histories he begins his account of the Jewish War; and about that origin as about the name and religion of the race he discoursed as he pleased. He tells how the Jews, liberated from Egypt, or, as he thought, exiled, were in the wilderness of Arabia utterly barren of water; and how, dying of thirst, they saw wild asses, which chanced to be returning from their pasture (it was thought) to slake their thirst; how they used them as guides to a fountain, and out of gratitude consecrated the likeness of a beast of the kind. Thence

came, I think, the assumption that we too, standing so near Jewish religion, are devoted to worship of the same image.³⁸

While Tertullian does not attempt to clear the Jews of the charge of ass worship, he cautions pagans not to confuse Judaism with Christianity, which does not worship the ass.

Tertullian goes on to discuss how Tacitus reported that Pompey, when he visited the Holy of Holies, found nothing there.³⁹ There is, of course, the explanation offered by Apion, of the image having been stolen.⁴⁰ But Tacitus also states that the Jewish religion was an imageless worship.⁴¹ Tertullian then goes on the offensive, addressing the pagans, reversing the charge of donkey worship from the Jews (and Christians) to the pagans in this way.

You, however, will not deny that every kind of baggage cattle and whole donkeys [as opposed to merely the head] with their goddess Epona are objects of your worship. Perhaps this is the real source of our bad name, that, among worshippers of every kind of beast and quadruped, we confine ourselves to the ass!"⁴²

Tertullian still later recounts another instance of the ass-worship calumny directed against the Christians, in this way.

But quite recently in this city a new representation of our god has been displayed, since a certain person, a criminal hired to dodge wild beasts in the arena, exhibited a picture with this inscription: 'The god of the Christians, ass-begotten.' It had ass's ears; one foot was a hoof, it carried a book and wore a toga. We laughed at both the name and the shape. But they at least ought at once to have adored a biform divinity, who have accepted gods with a dog's head or a lion's, gods with a goat's horns or a ram's, gods goat from

the loins down, gods with serpents for⁴³ legs, gods with wings on their feet or on their backs.

The Christians, therefore, did not, according to Tertullian, worship the ass. The pagans, through Epona, did, and a good deal of other animals besides.

The heresiologist Norman Cohn gives us some important insights into the causes of ass denigration, and the ass-worship calumny.

In the great city of Alexandria, Greek and Jewish communities lived side by side in a state of perpetual tension; and some time in the first century B.C. [this date seems too late] the Alexandrian Greeks started a rumour that the god of the Jews had the form of a donkey. The idea may have been inspired by the fact that the name Yahweh somewhat resembled the Egyptian word for 'donkey'; in any case it became the stock theme for anti-Jewish satire; [it was, Apion, and others said,] the central object of Jewish worship.⁴⁴

Other reasons why the Egyptians might have found it compelling to make the accusation, was that the donkey was, to their minds, the most denigrated animal, which was why it was associated with Seth, and vice-versa. The heiroglyphic symbols representing the donkey consist of a silhouette of a donkey, a phallus, and an arrow, a play in part on the donkey's endowment.⁴⁵ Cohn goes on to say:

in the ancient world it was of course not uncommon for a god to be symbolized by a sculptured animal. Even apart from the Egyptian gods, there was the Graeco-Roman Pan. But few animals were as poorly regarded as the donkey . . . and a cult centered on a donkey-god could only be ridiculous and shameful. That is why Apion told his stories, for Apion was an Alexandrian Greek and the leading anti-Jewish publicist of his day. And for generations after Apion's time. similar tales concerning the Jews [and the Christians] continued to circulate in Alexandria. As late as the

fourth century Epiphanius knew of a book possessed by Alexandrian Gnostics which treated the theme in a particularly colourful way. It told of how Zachariah [son of Baruch] saw in the temple a being which was both man and donkey. When he described what he had seen to the Jews, they killed him [in 67 C.E.]. Those Gnostics maintained that because of this incident it had been decreed that the high priest should wear bells, so that when he entered the temple to do priestly service, the being who was worshipped there would be warned in time to hide himself and the secret of his donkey shape would be preserved.⁴⁶

In the history of Egypt, the donkey was enslaved early on, while the horse was unknown. One usually does not worship as a god what one enslaves. Their utility, their commonness, and their generous endowment combined to make them seem the lowliest of animals. The most commonly depicted animal on Egyptian friezes, the donkey is also the most harshly treated; it is almost always being beaten or in other ways handled roughly.

The fantasy of the donkey-cult was easily extended from the Jews to the Christians But whereas, so far as we know, the Jews were accused of worshipping a donkey-god only in and around Alexandria [this is not true, consider Tacitus' account], when the same charge was brought against the Christians it spread far and wide through the Empire.⁴⁷

But Christians did not worship the ass, for as their pagan counterparts, they had contempt for it. Consider this discussion, in Justin's dialogue with Trypho, the Jew. While Justin concedes that donkeys have souls, he denies that they can perceive god, let alone be god.⁴⁸ In his Apologia I, he talks of the pervasiveness of the cross-form in nature and in the works of humans; he stresses

that it is the erect or vertical cross he is referring to, rather than the horizontal. Thereby he implicitly excludes the use of the donkey's dorsal stripe from Christian symbolism.⁴⁹ Presumably the ass-worship charge had already been leveled by the mid-second century, but not at the time of the writing of the Gospels.

However, Christ had a long and varied relationship with donkeys, according to our sources. Before birth he was carried to Bethlehem in his mother's womb, astride a donkey. He "was cradled in the feed box of a donkey"⁵⁰ after being born in a stable. He rode to Egypt and back on one, and rode in triumph on one's back in fulfillment of Zechariah.⁵¹

Almost all donkeys have a rather prominent cross on their backs. The dorsal stripe running from the mane to the tail forms the main axis, while the transverse stripe across its withers forms the latitudinal axis. The two symbols are united. The donkey, as an object of derision, deflected jealousy, while an ambiguous figure, is a highly effective talisman in its own right. But, with the addition of the cross, its potency as a talisman of good luck and protection was exponentially increased. Hence, worn around the neck, it is a charm which is both in the positive and negative sense of tremendous value to the possessor. It is far more effective than the evil eye or the phallus .

or the cross alone or combined, because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In an age when analogy meant everything, the donkey was a common and living symbol of the principal axes operant in the universe. People were intensely aware of its significance in a daemonic world of magic. However, like their Hebrew forebears, the Christians ostensibly rejected magic, or at least certain types. Because of its cross and phallus and lowly status, the ass was a high-charged magical symbol. (Why else would a Thessalian witch have in her kit a salve which could turn someone into an ass?)⁵² And so the ass as a symbol of the cult of Christ had to be rejected.

The trick was to separate the image of the cross and the ass in the minds of the ancients, and this was no easy task. In turn, this was a connection the pagans exploited because they did not want it severed. Hence the Vatican graffito and the works of the pagan apologists hammering home the magical and analogic connection between the Christian god and the ass. The donkey's biggest liability as a symbol in a highly ascetic age was, of course, the phallus.

Michael Grant, referring to the Christians of the Circumcision, talks about the locations and names of the various sects. The following quotation is particularly germane. "Other breakaway groups have left behind them

strange and varied reliefs which symbolize the life-giving power of the cross by the depiction of phalli."⁵³ The significance of these finds is simply unparalleled, for they point up precisely the kind of connection between religion and the ass. For the cross and the phallus are united in the donkey, making it a perfect symbol for Judeo-Christianity. Perhaps this is the branch that the Gnostics and Alexandrian Jews attacked as being ass-worshippers.

It would seem from this description that this sect was little more than worshippers of the agricultural cycle, exemplified in this case by the cross and the phallus, which, incidentally, double as charms and amulets for protection against the evil eye. This in itself is comprehensible but not unique. These are Judiac aspects--worldly and magical. With the rise of the Pharisaic monopoly, however, it was bound to be marginalized and eliminated, as were the Essenes, Sadducees, and the "fourth philosophy." However, there are other aspects of the sects that were confusing and overtly esoteric in a Gnostic-like sense. The only people who could absorb such minutiae would be a hyper-educated people like the Jews, but, without access to Pharisaic learning, these Jews, condemned as heretics and liturgically cursed, would tend to become less learned and more obtuse, steeped in angelology and its like, incomprehensible to outsiders.

They partook of some of the trends of late antiquity, but they were particularist in areas in which their Gentile compatriots strove for universality, and vice-versa.

This conflict between particularism and universality was the locus of the pagan attacks on the Christians and vice versa. This is the source of the calumnies of the agape love feast and of the Christian god or priest presiding in donkey form, whom the faithful worshipped by venerating the genitals. This would be followed by a cannibalistic feast and secret and indiscriminant and perhaps incestuous nocturnal orgies. On the other hand, the Christians united the symbol of the cross, deftly, with the pascal lamb, in the form of the monogram of Christ (XP) and ultimately avoided the charge. And yet, the cross still contains its potent, virile, and aggressive properties.

The power of the cross is apparent with its efficacy in the process of exorcism. The driving out of daemons is, if anything ever was, a magical act. The wood from the true cross unites pagan philosophic martyrdom and Hebrew pascal sacrifice. However syncretistic the "logic" behind the constructions, the nascent church opened itself up to some serious and annoyingly persistent charges. And, however wide the appeal and however well-suited to its environment, there was bound to be dissent from those who

found the totality of the edifice too serious, too lax,
or too ridiculous.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The very existence of the ass-worship controversy is a sad commentary on our species. It manifests a callous disregard for truth in our dealings with our fellows as well as for the other object of derision in question, that of the donkey. Implicitly criticized is the "natural world" that produced them both. The disrespect and intolerance at the heart of the controversy is one of the greatest indictments of humankind, from their own pens.

The hapless donkey, who performed the most grueling tasks of that regressive and technologically backward society, received only abuse and beatings for its pains. It was the archetype of the humiliated, of the contemptible. This should not be surprising in a society based on slavery, both among humans and other animals. Manual labor was held in contempt, as were those who were forced to it by the tyranny of circumstance or physical compulsion. None of the religious systems mentioned in this survey were opposed to slavery as such, with the exception, possibly, of the Cynics. In such a situation the donkey was bound to have few, if any, allies.

The donkey was condemned for its slavery, but it was one of many animals enslaved. Was it because of its

stubbornness, that is to say, its resistance to its condition? Certainly, the philosophers preached non-resistance, or cheerful acquiescence in adversity. The Christians, because of their humble origins, should have been receptive, at least, to the claims of the ass. Initially, it would appear, they were. They freely associated Jesus with donkeys in the Gospels. But so, too, did they have him rub shoulders with publicans and sinners!

The ass, however, suffered from a crucial liability in that increasingly ascetic age, his penis and his libidinous nature. When the Christians became associated with the ass in the minds and pens of their enemies, they denied they even knew the ass! They even foisted the charge back upon their pagan tormentors as had the Jews before them.

For these reasons I have chosen two works that bring the story closer to our own time, to see how the ass has fared in more modern times, yet still staying within the confines of the Empire. The first that I have selected is from the Eastern Empire, and the setting is the island of Prinkipo on the Bosphorus and the time is the 1880s. Author Samuel Cox is writing his impressions of the ass in that part of Asia Minor. The observations are timeless.

When talking about the animal sounds to be heard on the island he naturally comes upon the donkey. He writes

of "the unmelodious bray of the festive jackass."¹ The sound is everywhere, for they are numerous, and the island is small. "Is it the distant rolling thunder from Olympus?" No, "it is the jackass Diapason!"² Cox knows his name. What follows is an eloquent panegyric of the donkey.

"Be it known that nearly all the locomotion of these isles is done by these meek children of misery. I am prepared to defend them for their patience, industry and docility. I am ready to die believing in their good sense, despite the libels upon their long ears, as significant of obtuseness."³ They are subject to the same afflictions as before--unending toil and derision, but there is a sensitivity in the mind of the author that is lacking in the ancients. This feeling is betrayed by his statements such as, "they are not imperceptible to kindnesses," and "I have become their confidant and familiar."⁴

The white jackass that Cox knows on Prinkipo is "arrayed in gold cloth, with blue beads on its noble forehead and around its milky neck--to keep off the evil eye."⁵ How little some things have changed, despite the passage of fifteen hundred years since the "conversion" of the Empire. While Cox complains about the amount of braying he hears on the island, he admits that "after all, it is their affectionate nature that must speak out in these harmonious numbers."⁶ However, it is this braying that gets them into trouble so often with their human

masters. When the donkey starts to bray "he beats and kicks him. He jerks his head up, down, and awry. But still undaunted, the animal roars again and again."⁷

Cox repeats the old calumnies--stubbornness, self-importance, stupidity--and debunks them. He says, instead, "I am not prepared to join in the general objurgation. He has excellent qualities."⁸ He does not condemn their obstinacy. "On the contrary, it is a virtue. Does not this duality of nature give strength of character and courage?"⁹ Indeed it does. As to the donkey's pride, he says, in contradiction to Aesop, "it has never been applied except in derision of the donkey. This is unjust."¹⁰ As to the third charge, "the ass is by no means a stupid beast; he is contemplative. He belongs to the tropical climate."¹¹

Cox goes on to talk about the history and pedigree of the ass, bringing into the discussion the Caliphs, the Bible, and the donkey, as it was known to him in the 1880s. Their status (according to Cox) had much improved since antiquity. He related a story to demonstrate the ingenuity of the ass "Sardanapalus" whom he rode across the desert in Egypt in the winter of 1886. After arriving at the temple of Abydos, they rested in the becolumned shade. "Under the very eye of a painted Rameses, he hung up his head by his upper teeth to the ledge of the structure, and thus rested."¹²

Cox asks, "why as it that the ass never figured among the gargoyles and other strange carvings in the architecture of the middle ages? There must have been a prejudice at that time against all sedate and reverent objects."¹³

He refers to the Mass of the Ass in these same middle ages. It was "not unusual to see the ass led in grand procession in the solemn ceremonies of the Church. Chants were sung in his honor. Even imitations of his braying . . . were heard in the response of the assistants who took up the melodious noises and gave harmony to the mediaeval mind."¹⁴

How do I conclude this discussion of Cox? It is simple. "Let us not be iconoclasts. Let us believe in the dignity of the ass."¹⁵

At this point it would be instructive to cite the evidence of the Spanish poet Juan Ramone Jimenez (1881-1958), who was living in the tiny Spanish village of Moguer at the turn of the century. While a manifestly sympathetic observer of donkeys, he had occasion to remark on the wretchedness, misery, cruelty, and exploitation that were the common lot of donkeys in Latin countries. In his account, written in Spanish and published in 1916, he recounts experiences that occurred some years previously. Yet, in spite of the horrid lot of donkeys, he finds that they were, perversely, honored on occasion, especially during feasts.

There is the story of the old donkey which has been left to die, too old to be of use, and so, simply abandoned.¹⁶ Then there is the story of the white mare, in this case a horse, who is also old, stoned to death in the street.¹⁷ The same is true of a stray dog and of an ownerless donkey.¹⁸ There are other forms of cruelty to animals displayed such as a description of a cockfight and bullfighting, and the tormenting of turtles by children.¹⁹ But Jimenez reserves his greatest outrage for the treatment of, and attitudes toward, donkeys by people.

Jimenez's references to donkey denigration fall into three categories. These are one, instances of cruelty toward and exploitation of donkeys, two, passages of praise and honor of the donkey, and three, references that cut both ways. For the usefulness of the donkey goes some way towards mitigating the rigor of their oppression, so long as they remain so. Together, they present a picture of the status and place of the donkey in Latin society, frozen in time since antiquity. In this way we will augment our picture of the donkey during the period of the late antique world. In order to do so, we must take the donkey in context by relating it to other animals.

I now relate the incident of the castrated colt. Jimenez tells the story of the castration, contrasting the sprightly freedom and buoyant happiness of the colt

with its subsequent sadness and docility, a being transformed through routine violence.

In his young eyes there flashed at times a living fire How light, how nervous, how sharp he was, with his small head and slender legs.

In his noble fashion, with free and prideful gait, he passed through the low door of the old barn . . . he filled the green barnyard with gladness Four men awaited him there They led him under the pepper tree. After a brief, rough struggle, first affectionate, then blind, they threw him down on the barnyard dung, and, while they sat on him, Darbon, the veterinarian, performed his surgery, putting an end to the colt's mournful and magical beauty

The colt . . . was now like an unbounded book. It was as though he was no longer of the earth, as though between his shoes and the stones a new element isolated him, leaving him without awareness, like an uprooted tree, like a memory²⁰ in the violent, whole, round morning of Spring.

What Jimenez seems to be saying here is that by taking away his life drive, we are taking the spirit of life itself. The contrast between the spirited, independent colt and his predicament after the rape in the barnyard, clearly shows the tragic consequences of our attitude toward animals, and this takes its greatest focus in the donkey. For, as Lucius Apuleius states, when confronted with the prospect of being gelded, he would rather throw himself off a cliff first, and so die as a whole donkey.

The central cause of environmental degradation in antiquity, and the attitude that resulted from the new outlook toward animals and other phenomena of the natural world was "humanism." Perhaps a better term would be

homocentrism. The humanistic view of the universe is that man is the crown of creation, the image of god, the end for which all else is the means. This view is, I maintain, the result of the switch to agriculture, which manifests itself in, for example, the anthropomorphism of deity, which replaces stones, groves, and brooks of animism. Animals, too, go from being worshipped and propitiated, regarded as kin and ancestor, to being exploited, denigrated, and enslaved and exterminated. More symbolically, they are made the butt of jokes and the archetypes of the lowly and degenerative states of human proclivities and weaknesses. Whence came this fall from grace? The alternative paradigm of man being a ward of nature to being the (perceived) master of it. The deities now become the grains, the crops, over which man has, seemingly, more control, however tenuous (as they are a prey to the elements). The animals, however, become slaves, as mere units of production.

The change can be approached from three perspectives. First, chronologically, with the progression to agriculture, anthropologically, with cross-cultural studies, and three, a combination of the two--cross cultural analysis in the historical progression, across ethnic groups and up and down the social scale. The most denigrative of all animals--"the meanest of all beasts"²¹--will be found to be the slave of slaves. For example, among contemporaneous

peoples, the nature of animal denigration would tend to vary between various cultural and ethnic groups depending on their background and common predilections. For example, cultures that valued the horse, particularly warrior cultures, would tend, as a group, to denigrate the donkey, an animal that was key to civil pursuits, such as agriculture and transport. The domestic varieties would in turn be more reviled than their wild cousins.

This phenomenon was more marked in the case of the ass than in any other species, unsurprisingly. References to both the domestic and wild branches of the species contain disparagement toward the former and (generally) praise for the latter. Most of these references occur among the scientists and national historians, less among philosophers and the apologists. This kind of split categorization was too complex for the purveyors of popular, which tended to lump all elements of a species, or group of species, say asses, mules, and wild asses (onagers) and assign them a common trait or group of traits. This also occurred both in popular and "serious" religions, particularly among the Egyptians and the Celts, where this propensity was to be found widely among exalted circles. The question to ask is, why should this be so? What was it in the background of the Celts and the Egyptians--and even the Greeks--which allowed this to continue and flourish? In the case of the Egyptians and the Greeks,

it could be argued that those influences came from the East. But what of the Celts? What are the traditions of their neighbors the Germans? They were indeed merely proto-agricultural, and in that sense were "backward" compared to the Celts. (But it seems no more likely, and perhaps is considerably less, that it must have come from the past.) Among the Romans, where animal categorization is rampant in popular entertainment, the treatment and conceptions of animals were both bizarre and pathological in their extremes of deference and meanness, not to say sheer callousness. But if the stories of fishpond funerals and Androclus are shocking, perhaps one should reflect, in the midst of these extreme examples, on the distinctions made between the extremes of pets, performers, slavery, experimentation, butchery, and wastefulness of the contemporary treatment of animals.²²

Related to these topics is true charge and countercharge leveled by Judeo-Christian apologists and their respective religious systems. This fascinating debate and the vehement denials of the apologists betray real sensitivity regarding the issue. I have studied the writings of Josephus, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, and others who refute the charge that the Jews worshipped the head of an ass. This revealed a widening circle of writers who addressed the issue. On the Graeco-Roman side, the extant works of Tacitus, Apuleius, Suetonius and others

have been scrutinized. Nor were the Jews and Christians solely on the defensive on the matter of ass worship, as they charged that devotees of Epona and Isis were engaged in the same type of activity. In fact, the ass's role in pagan ritual was fairly extensive, as I have attempted to demonstrate.

The ass played a role in the religions of the Principate and in the cults of later antiquity. The role of the ass in the psyche of the ancient Mediterranean, however, existed long before the age of Roman hegemony. The references to the ass in Hellenistic literature and among the Hellenistic writers of natural and cultural history cannot be overlooked. It was in the complex cultural milieu of the Hellenized eastern half of the Empire that much of the drama of the controversies involving the ass was to be played out.

NOTES

CHAPTER II: THE EGYPTIANS VERSUS THE JEWS

1. Tacitus Histories 5.5.
2. Minucius Felix Octavius 9.3.
3. Juan Ramon Jimenez, Platero and I, trans. Eloise Roach (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), 92.
4. Genesis 49.14-15 TEV (Today's English Version)
5. Ibid., 49.11 TEV.
6. Ibid., 49.22 TEV.
7. Exodus 13.12-13 TEV.
8. Ibid., 21.33-34 TEV.
9. Ibid., 22.2-4 TEV.
10. Ibid., 22.9-10 TEV.
11. Ibid., 23.4-5 TEV.
12. Numbers 22.21-35 TEV.
13. 2 Kings 6.25 TEV.
14. For the merits of both views see John Kitto, ed., The Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature (New York: American Book Exchange, 1880), s.v. "ass", p. 242; 2 Kings 6.25 TEV.
15. Job 6.5 TEV.
16. Ibid., 39.5-8 TEV.
17. Isaiah 1.3 TEV.
18. Ibid., 32.14 TEV.
19. Ibid., 32.20 TEV.
20. Jeremiah 2.23 TEV.

21. Ibid., 22.18-19 TEV.
22. Hosea 8.9 TEV.
23. Proverbs 26.3 TEV.
24. Zechariah 9.9 TEV.
25. Ibid., 14.15 TEV.
26. Josephus Vita 117-22.
27. Josephus Contra Apionem 1.162-65.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 229n (Eusebius P.E. 13.12.664a.)
30. Ibid., 1.200-05.
31. Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Vintage Books, 1946), 104n. "The Biblical prohibition against making an image of anything living hardly sprang from any fundamental rejection of plastic art, but was probably meant to deprive magic, which the Hebraic religion proscribed, of one of its instruments." (Frazer, l.c. p. 87, note)
32. Josephus Contra Apionem 1.227.
33. Josephus Vita 117-22.
34. Ibid., 127-31.
35. Josephus Contra Apionem p. 229n (Exodus 22.28, Leviticus 19.16); Contra Apionem 2.137.
36. Josephus Contra Apionem 1.165.
37. Ibid., 1.199.
38. Ibid., 1.224-25.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 1.238-39.
42. "Iudaeus licet et porcinum numen adoret

et caeli summas advocet auriculas,
 ni tamen et ferro succiderit inguinis oram
 et nisi nodatum solverit arte caput,
 exemptus populo sacra migrabit ab urbe
 et non ieiuna sabbata lege premet.

Petronius Poetae Latini Minores 4:97.B.47.

43. Josephus Contra Apionem 1.238-39.

44. Ibid., 1.243-44.

45. Ibid., 1.249-50.

46. Ibid., 2.80-81; Posidonius, teacher of Cicero and supporter of Pompey had a variant of the story of Antiochus IV. This story he got from Diodorus Siculus 34.1.3, who said that Antiochus IV had seen the statue of Moses riding a donkey and holding a book in the Holy of Holies. Michael Grant, The Jews in the Roman World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 55-56.

47. Josephus Contra Apionem 2.81-82.

48. Ibid., 2.82-83.

49. Ibid., 2.85-86.

50. Ibid., 2.86-88.

51. Ibid., 2.112-14.

52. Ibid., 2.114.

53. Ibid., 2.115.

54. Philo, On the Migration of Abraham. In The Essential Philo, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 189.

CHAPTER III: ENTER THE GREEKS

1. Homer Iliad 1.50.

2. Ibid., 2.825.

3. Ibid., 7.333-34.

4. Ibid., 10.351-53.

5. Ibid., 11.556-61 (emphasis mine).

6. Pliny the Elder Naturalis Historia 5:17.6.54.
7. Homer Iliad 23.653-55.
8. Elisabeth D. Svendsen, A Passion for Donkeys (London: David & Charles, 1988), 102.
9. Romano-Hellenistic civilization is used here as the type of cultural system that held sway in the eastern Mediterranean from the death of Alexander until the third century (323 B.C.E.-c. 250 C.E.).
10. Allardyce Nicoll, Mimes Masks and Miracles (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963), 47.
11. Aristotle Historiae Animalium 1.1.12.
12. Ibid., 1.6.3.; Ginnus is the offspring of a "mule" and a mare. 6.24.1., p. 11n.
13. Ibid., 1.6.3.
14. Ibid., 2.2.3,6,8.
15. Ibid., 2.2.11.
16. Ibid., 2.9.5.
17. Ibid., 3.14.3.
18. Ibid., 3.16.2.
19. Ibid., 3.16.5.
20. Ibid., 3.16.7.
21. Ibid., 5.12.7.
22. Ibid., 5.25.2.
23. Betsy and Paul Hutchins, The Definitive Donkey (Gainesville, TX: Hee Haw Books, 1981), 52-66; Angela Barrows, Donkey Keeping and Breeding (Claverdon, Nr. Warwick, Great Britain: Old Barn Publications, 1977), 54-64.
24. Aristotle Historiae Animalium 6.29.4.
25. Ibid., 9.1.5.
26. Ibid.

27. Athenaeus Deipnosophists 2:5.200.
28. Aelian De Natura Animalium 3:12.17.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 3:12.34.
31. Ibid.
32. Xenophon Anabasis 5.1.
33. Aelian De Natura Animalium 3:14.10.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 3:16.9.
36. Ibid., 3:16.37; 3:17.26; in 6.51 Aelian relates why the Egyptians hate asses.

CHAPTER IV: THE ASS ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA

1. Hermann Reich, "Der Mann mit dem Eselskopf," Shakespeare - Jahrbuch 40 (1904): 110.
2. Plautus Pseudolus 1.5.499-500.
3. "asinos ornatos clitellarios qui stercus vectent tris, asinum molarium I" Cato De Agri Cultura 10.1.
4. "instrata asinis III . . . molas asinarias unas" Ibid., 10.3-4.
5. "asinarium I . . . asinos plostrarios II, asinum molarium I . . . iugum asinarium I . . . ornamenta asinis instrata III . . . molas asinarias III" Ibid., 11.1-4.
6. "nomina multa habemus ab utroque pecore, a maiore et a minore--a minore Porcius, Ovinus, Caprilus; sic a maiore Equitius, Taurus, Asinus" Varro Res Rusticae 2.1.10.
7. "hoc nomine enim asini Arcadici in Graecia nobilitati, in Italia Reatini, usque eo ut mea memoria asinus venierit sestertiis milibus sexaginta et unae quadrigae Romae constiterint quadringentis milibus." Ibid., 2.1.14-15.
8. "quare deme, si vis, duas res de mulis,

admissuram et parturam. Vaccius, Parturam? inquit, proinde ut non aliquotiens dicatur Romae peperisse mulam. cui ego ut succinerem, subicio Magonem et Dionysium scribere, mula et equa cum conceperint, duodecimo mense parere. quare non, si hic in Italia cum peperit mula sit portentum, adsentiri omnes terras." Ibid., 2.1.26-27.

9. Aristotle Historia Animalium 6.24.1.

10. Columella De Re Rustica 2:6.37.3-4.

11. Livy 26.23; 37.3.

12. "horum genera duo: unum ferum, quos vocant onagros, ut in Phrygia et Lycaonia sunt greges multi; alterum mansuetum, ut sunt in Italia omnes." Varro Res Rusticae 2.6.2-3.

13. "ad seminationem onagrus idoneus, quod et e fero fit mansuetus facile et e mansueto ferus numquam." Ibid., 2.6.3.

14. "brevis oratio de istis, inquit Murrius. nam muli et item hinni bigeneri atque insiticii, non suoapte genere ab radicibus. ex equa enim et asino fit mulus, contra ex equo et asina hinnus. uterque eorum ad usum utilis, partu fructus neuter. pullum asininum a partu recentem subiciunt equae, cuius lacte ampliores fiunt, quod id lacte quam asininum ad alimonia dicunt esse melius." Ibid., 2.8.1-2.

15. "matri suppositiciae quoque inserviunt, quo equa ministerium lactis cibum pullo praebere possit. hic ita eductus a trimo potest admitti; neque enim aspernatur propter consuetudinem equinam." Ibid., 2.8.2-3.

16. "quos emimus item ut equos stipulamurque in emendo ac facimus in accipiendo idem, quod dictum est in equis. hos pascimus praecipue faeno atque hordeo, et id ante admissuram et largius facimus, ut cibo suffundamus vires ad feturam, eodem tempore quo equos adducentes, itemque ut ineat equas per origas curamus. cum peperit equa mulum aut mulam, nutricantes educamus." Ibid., 2.8.3-5.

17. "in grege mulorum parando spectanda aetas et forma, alterum, ut in vecturis sufferre labores possint; alterum, ut oculos aspectu delectare queant. hisce enim binis coniunctis omnia vehicula in viis ducuntur." Ibid., 2.8.5-6.

18. "neque satis erat eum non pasci e piscinis,

nisi etiam ipse eos pasceret ultro ac maiorem curam sibi haberet, ne eius esurirent nulli, quam ego habeo, ne mei in Rosea esuriant asini, et quidem utraque re, et cibo et potione, cum non paulo sumtuosius, quam ego, ministraret victum. ego enim uno servulo, hordeo non multo, aqua domestica meos multinummos alo asinos" Ibid., 3.17.6.

19. "nam cum difficulter iniecta genitalibus locis animentur semina, tum etiam concepta diutius in partum adollescunt, atque peracto anno mense tertio decimo vix eduntur, natisque inhaeret plus socordiae paternae quam vigoris materni." Columella De Re Rustica 2:6.36.2-3.

20. "prodiderunt mularum fetus regionibus Africae adeo non prodigiosos haberi, ut tam familiares sint incolis partus earum, quam sunt nobis equarum." Ibid., 2:6.37.3-4.

21. "mula autem non solum ex equa et asino, sed ex asina et equo, itemque onagro et equa generatur." Ibid., 2:6.37.3.

22. "itaque commodissimum est asinum destinare mularum generi seminando, cuius, ut dixi, species experimento est speciosior." Ibid., 2:6.37.5-6.

23. "igitur qualem descripsi asellum, cum est protinus genitus, oportet matri statim subtrahi, et ignoranti equae subici." Ibid., 2:6.37.8.

24. "sic nutritus admissarius equas diligere condiscit." Ibid., 2:6.37.8.

25. "interdum etiam, quamvis materno lacte sit educatus, potest a tenero conversatus equis familiariter earum consuetudinem appetere." Ibid., 2:6.37.8.

26. Suetonius Gaius 39.

27. "vilis hic vulgarisque asellus" Columella De Re Rustica 2:7.1.1.

28. "nam etiam eo rure, quod pascuo caret, contineri potest, exiguo et qualicunque pabulo contentus. quippe vel foliis spinisque vepraticis alitur, vel obiecto fasce sarmentorum. paleis vero, quae paene omnibus regionibus, abundant, etiam gliscit." Ibid., 2:7.1.1.

29. "imprudentis custodis negligentiam fortissime sustinet: plagarum et penuriae tolerantissimus: propter quae tardius deficit, quam ullum aliud armentum. nam laboris et famis maxime patiens raro morbis afficitur."

Ibid., 2:7.1.2

30. Barrows, 54-64; Hutchins, 66-67.

31. Columella De Re Rustica 2:7.1.2-3.

32. "cercopithecus nigris capitibus, pilo asini et dissimiles ceteris voce, Indicos boves unicornes tricornesque, leucrocotam perniciosissimam feram asini fere magnitudine" Pliny the Elder Naturalis Historia 3:8.30.72. The leucrocota is type of hyena. (The elder Pliny lived from 23-79 C.E.)

33. "mares in eo genere singuli feminarum gregibus imperitant. timent libidinis aemulos et ideo gravidas custodiunt morsuque natos mares castrant; contra gravidae latebras petunt et parere furto cupiunt. gaudentque copia libidinis." Ibid., 3:8.46.108.

34. Plutarch Moralia "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti" 7.990.F.

35. Ibid., 7.991.A.

36. "opera sine dubio generi munifica arando quoque, sed mularum maxime progeneratione." Pliny the Elder Naturalis Historia 3:8.68.167.

37. Ibid., 3:8.68.170.

38. "ex asino et equa mula gignitur mense XIII, animal viribus in labores eximium." Ibid., 3:8.69.171.

39. "gignitur autem mula et ex equo et asina, sed effrenis et tarditatis indomitae." Ibid., 3:8.69.171.

40. "est in annalibus nostris peperisse saepe, verum prodigii loco habitum. Theophrastus vulgo parere in Cappadocia tradit, sed esse id animal ibi sui generis." Ibid., 3:8.69.173.

41. "cum equa muli coitu natum quod vocaverint ginnum" Ibid., 3:8.69.174.

42. "generantur ex equa et onagris mansuefactis mularae veloces in cursu, duritia eximia pedum, verum strigoso corpore, indomito animo. sed generator onagro et asina genitus omnes antecellit. onagri in Phrygia et Lycaonia praecipui." Ibid., 3:8.69.174.

43. "pullos earum epulari Maecenas instituit multum

eo tempore praelatos onagris; post eum interiit auctoritas saporis asino." Ibid., 3:8.68.170.

44. "pullis eorum ceu praestantibus sapore Africa gloriatur, quos lalisiones appellat." Ibid., 3:8.69.174.

45. Ibid., 3:8.69.175.

46. "Poppaea certe Domiti Neronis coniunx quingentas per omnia secum fetas trahens balnearum etiam solio totum corpus illo lacte macerabat, extendi quoque cutem credens." Ibid., 3:11.96.238.

47. "atque illo lacte fovetur propter quod secum comites educit asellas" Juvenal Satirae 6.467-69.

48. Plautus Asinaria 1:2.2.345.

49. "Illud quidem quorsum asinus caedit calcibus." Plautus Poenelus 4:3.3.684.

50. "neque ego homines magis asinos numquam vidi, ita plagis costae callent" Plautus Pseudolus 4:1.1.136.

51. Horace Epistulae 1.13, 6-9.

52. On the origin of the cognomen Asina: "[Eusebius,] tell us, please, the origin of these cognomen, for they belong to men of no ordinary worth; and yet the names would seem to suggest an insult rather than a compliment. These names, replied Praetextatus, are neither complimentary nor insulting in their origin; they are the result of chance circumstances. The Cornelii were given the cognomen 'Asina' because a head of the Cornelian clan--buying some land or marrying a daughter--being required to produce the usual guarantors, brought a she-ass (asina) with a load of money to the Forum as a tangible security in their place." Macrobius Saturnalia 1.6.28-9.

53. "demitto auriculas, ut iniquae mentis asellus, cum gravius dorso subiit onus." Horace Satirae 1.9.20-21.

54. "adspice, ut auritus miserandae sortis asellus adsidue domitus verbere lentus eat!" Ovid Amores 2.7.14-16.

55. "caeditur et rigido custodi ruris asellus; causa pudenda quidem, sed tamen apta deo." Ovid Fasti 1.391-92.

56. "ecce coronatis panis dependet asellis, et velant scabras florida sarta molas." Ibid., 6.311-12.

57. "inde focum observat pistor dominamque focorum,
et quae pumiceas versat asella molas." Ibid., 6.317-18.
58. Ovid Metamorphoses 4.35-37.
59. Ibid., 11.207-10; also Persius Satirae 1.120-21.
60. "...tardi costas agitator aselli
Vilibus aut onerat pomis, lapidemque revertens
Incusum aut atrae massam picis urbe reportat."
Columella De Re Rustica 2:7.1.3 (Virgil Georgica 1.273-75.)
61. Virgil Georgica 3.409-10.
62. Xenophon Anabasis 5.1.
63. Petronius Satyricon 15.31.
64. Ibid., 15.38.
65. Ibid., 15.45. A Roman slave might well say,
"If you can't beat your master, beat his ass."
66. Ibid., 15.63.
67. Ibid., 15.68.
68. Ibid., 15.69.
69. Ibid., 15.126.
70. "vidi, vidi ipse, libelle: auriculas asini
quis non habet?" Persius Satirae 1.120-21.
71. "dum tener est onager solaque lalisio matre
pascitur, hoc infans sed breve nomen habet." Martial
2:13.97.
72. "pulcher adest onager: mitti venatio debet
dentis Erythraei: iam removete sinus." Ibid., 2:13.100.
73. "quo minus imposito clunem summittat asello."
Juvenal Satirae 6.334.
74. Ibid., 8.147-48.
75. "interea, dum lanatas robumque iuvenum more
Numae caedit, Iovis ante altaria iurat solam Eponam et
facies olida ad praesepia pictas." Ibid., 8.155-57.
76. "quis igitur habens aliquid humani pudoris

voluptatibus istis duabus coeundi atque comedendi, quae sunt homini cum sue atque asino communes, gaudeat?" Aulus Gellius Noctes Atticae 3:19.2.6-7.

77. "eamque rem tam intoleranter tulisse populum Romanum, qui Ventidium Bassum meminerat curandis mulis victitasse, ut vulgo per vias urbis versiculi proscriberentur:

Concurrere omnes augures, haruspices!

Portentum inusitatum conflatum est recens;

Nam mulas qui fricabat, consul factus est."

Ibid., 3:15.4.3.

78. "'ave, mi Gai, meus asellus iucundissimus, quem semper medius fidius desidero, cum a me abes.'" Ibid., 3:15.7.3.

79. Minucius Felix Octavius 9.3.

CHAPTER V: THE PAGANS VERSUS THE CHRISTIANS

1. Luke 13.15 TEV; similarly, the author of 2 Peter refers to the story of Balaam, praising the role of the donkey. (2 Peter 2.15-16 TEV)

2. J. M. C. Toynbee, Animals in Roman Life and Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 197.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 198.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 199.

8. "actum et de sacris Aegyptiis Iudaicisque pellendis factumque patrum consultum ut quattuor milia libertini generis ea superstitione infecta quis idonea aetas in insulam Sardiniam veherentur, coercendis illic latrociniis et, se ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum; ceteri cederent Italia nisi certam ante diem profanos ritus exuissent." Tacitus Annales 2.85.

9. "nec quisquam defendere audebat, crebris multorum minis restinguere prohibentium, et quia alii palam faces iaciebant atque esse sibi auctorem vociferabantur" Ibid., 15.38.

10. "sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia quin iussum incendium crederetur. ergo abolendo rumor Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat. auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat; repressaque in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursum erumpebat, non modo per Iudaeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam quo cuncta undique atrocitas aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque." Ibid., 15.44

11. Suetonius Claudius 25; Acts of the Apostles 18.2 TEV.

12. Acts of the Apostles 18.12-17 TEV.

13. "igitur primum correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens haec proinde in crimine incendii quam odio humani generis convicti sunt." Tacitus Annales 15.44.

14. Ibid.

15. "unde quamquam adversus sontis et novissima exempla meritos miseratio oriebatur, tamquam non utilitate publica sed in saevitiam unius absumerentur." Ibid.

16. Suetonius Nero 16.2.

17. Tacitus Historia 5.3.

18. Josephus Contra Apionem 1.305; 2.16.

19. Tacitus Historia 5.3.

20. Exodus 17.1-7 TEV.

21. Tacitus Historia 5.4.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 5.5.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.
29. Petronius Poetae Latini Minores 4:97.B.47.
30. Minucius Felix, introduction by Gerald H. Rendall in Octavius (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 307.
31. Minucius Felix Octavius 9.3-9.
32. Ibid., 9.3-4.
33. Hermann Reich, "Der Konig mit der Dornenkrone," Neue Jahrbucher fur das Klassische Altertum 13 (1904): 707-08; also Minucius Felix Octavius, p. 336n.
34. Minucius Felix Octavius 9.6-7.
35. Ibid., 28.2.
36. Ibid., 28.7-8.
37. Ibid., 28.10.
38. Tertullian Apologeticus 16.1-3.
39. Tacitus Historia 5.9.
40. Josephus Contra Apionem 2.112-20.
41. Tacitus Historia 5.5.
42. Tertullian Apologeticus 16.5.
43. Ibid., 16.12-13.
44. Norman Cohn, Europe's Inner Demons (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 5.
45. Alan Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar (Oxford: University Press, 1982), 459.
46. Cohn, 5 (Epiphanius, Panarion 26.12).
47. Cohn, 5-6.
48. Justin, "Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo," 154.
49. Ibid., 285.

50. Roland H. Bainton, Christianity (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 33.

51. Ibid., 41; Zechariah 9.9 TEV.

52. Apuleius Metamorphoses 3.22-25.

53. Grant, 259.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS

1. Samuel S. Cox, The Isles of the Princes (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 82.

2. Ibid., 83.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 84.

7. Ibid., 85.

8. Ibid., 86.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 87.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 89.

13. Ibid., 92.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Juan Ramon Jimenez, Platero and I, trans. Eloise Roach (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), 172-73.

17. Ibid., 166.

18. Ibid., 101, 49-51.

19. Ibid., 135.

20. Ibid., 23-24.

21. Minucius Felix Octavius 9.3.

22. Macrobius Saturnalia 3.154; Aulus Gellius Noctes Atticae 1:5.14.5-30.

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