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Corinth, Rome, and Africa: a Cultural Background for the Tale of the Ass

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The pseudo-Lucianic *Onos*, even though its geographical references are not particularly detailed, allows the reader to follow the main character's travels with a certain degree of precision. Lucius is from Patrae, in Achaia; he arrives in Hypata and then, by travelling northwards in Thessaly and Macedonia, proceeds up to Thessalonike. In that city he is restored to human shape, and from there he sails back to his homeland.

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, on the other hand, Lucius is from Corinth.¹ At the beginning of the novel, we find him on the road to Hypata but then, after his abduction by the robbers, the geographical setting becomes indefinite and it is clear only that he is wandering in Thessaly. We return to a recognisable, concrete world again only when the ass arrives in Corinth-Kenchreai (10,19,1)² where the final metamorphosis takes place. Here too, as in the *Onos*, this metamorphosis is followed by a sea voyage. But instead of travelling to his homeland the hero is taken to Rome (11,26,1) where, in the novel's final chapter, he undergoes his final initiation.

The uncertainty of Lucius' whereabouts after his initial metamorphosis is normally explained either as a folk-tale feature of the novel, and/or a concession to Apuleius' 'Romanocentric readership':³ his readers, the argument

goes, were probably not interested in details about the geography and landscape of central Greece, and presumably not really able to understand them.

I think that these are valid points, and I shall try to offer a more detailed analysis of the second of these in a later part of this paper; but I would also like to suggest that the novel's lack of geographical specificity results also from other literary choices made by Apuleius, especially his decision to have Lucius come from Corinth and to place there his restoration to human shape. After making these changes to the plot, Apuleius still had to carry through with the plot of his model, now in a different geographical setting. For the most part, then, he leaves Lucius' travels unmapped.

Now we could ask ourselves why, by placing Lucius' origins and his re-transformation in Corinth instead of Patrai and Thessalonike, Apuleius introduced such an important change to the original plot. Scholars of course have already debated this issue, the most important treatment being a contribution by Hugh Mason.⁴ Here are, briefly, the most important reasons which have been adduced so far for this change:

- Corinth was better known to the Latin audience than Thessalonike (again the idea of a 'Romanocentric readership').
- Corinth was also well known as a rich but corrupt and immoral city: therefore it was, by contrast, a good setting for the chastity and purity of Lucius, converted to the Isiac faith.
- Corinth was an important centre of the cult of Isis.

There is also the point made made by Stephen Harrison:⁵ Lucius makes an Odyssean *nostos* (homeward journey) by returning to Corinth at the end of his wanderings, and this is of course a point well worth considering to explain the high-level structure and the epic flavour of the novel. Anyway, if Lucius is a Roman citizen (this is clear in the *Onos*, though the point is not stressed in the *Metamorphoses*⁶), then maybe his real *nostos* is the travel to

¹ In 1,22,4 he claims to have a letter of presentation by a Corinthian named Demeas; more explicitly in 2,12,3 Lucius says *Corinthi... apud nos* ('at Corinth, where I live').

² Cf. Zimmerman 2000, 11 and n. 18; and Niall Slater's contribution to this volume, p. 173. The arrival of the ass in Corinth has been carefully prepared for in the first two books by the allusions to Lucius' Corinthian origins: cf. Zimmerman 2000 *ad* 10,19,1. Anyway, it should be noted that, when he arrives in Corinth, he gives no sign of recognizing the city as his fatherland.

³ Harrison 1998, 64 f.

⁴ Mason 1971, 160–165; see also Veyne 1965, 241–251 and Zimmerman 2000, 18.

⁵ Harrison, in this volume p. 43.

⁶ In *Onos* 55 Lucius has the *tria nomina* of a Roman citizen: 'my name is Lucius, and that of my brother Gaius, and the other two names we share with our father'. *Metamorphoses* 9,39,3 makes clear that Lucius can understand the Latin-speaking soldier, and the Latin language is necessary of course also in the forensic activity he will practice in Rome (11,28,6). Cf. also Bowersock 1965, 289; Mason 1983; Mason 1994, 1681 f.; Harrison 2000, 215 f.; a different view in Walsh 1968.

Rome: a sea voyage, the direction from East to West, and Rome as the final destination also seem more in keeping with Odysseus and Aeneas. The idea of a *nostos* to Rome could also make more sense in a comparison with the *Onos* where the hero, as we have seen, sails back to his homeland *after* the end of his (mis)adventures.⁷

In my opinion, each of the other arguments considered above has its pros and cons. However, I think that the most important, the one which in a sense encapsulates all the others, is the first: Corinth was more familiar to the 'intended audience' of a novel written in Latin. Indeed, even if it was not so rich as Corinth, Patrae was also a very prosperous city;⁸ and the cult of Isis, Osiris and Sarapis is well attested for Thessalonike too.⁹ Rome itself was of course very rich, had temples and devotees of Isis, and in terms of its fame for moral corruption the city was probably second to none. Apuleius could have chosen Rome as the setting for the whole plot, or at least for the part from the retransformation onwards, and not only for the last chapters of the novel. On the contrary, we must note that the *Metamorphoses* also corresponds well enough with the lost Greek original in terms of topography, so much so that almost the whole plot is set in central Greece. The most remarkable exception, which is probably the main cause of the novel's geographical inspecificity, is the important role played by Corinth: for some reason, the Corinthian setting and the journey from Greece to Rome were tempting choices for Apuleius.¹⁰

Corinth was indeed well known for its wealth, moral corruption and the cult of Isis¹¹ but, as we have seen, these facts become meaningful only at the end of the *Metamorphoses*, when they contrast with the retransformation and conversion of Lucius; they have little point at the beginning, when Corinth is simply introduced as the birthplace of the main character. I also wonder if

⁷ See anyway Niall Slater's paper in this volume (p. 175), where Lucius' voyage to Rome is regarded as an exile.

⁸ Corinth, Athens and Patrae were 'the three centers of commercial and banking activities in Greece': Wiseman 1979, 507.

⁹ Sources in Griffiths 1975, 15 and n. 4; 330; 349 f.

¹⁰ As a minor suggestion, it is also worth mentioning the fact that Corinth was a centre of the cult of Pegasus and Bellerophon: see Engels 1990, 99 ff. The mythical couple is alluded to at 6,30,5; 7,26,3; 8,16,3; 11,8,4; the winged horse (a winged ass in the last passage) seems to be a paradoxical symbol for Lucius, who tried to become a bird and was turned into an ass.

¹¹ Wealth and corruption: Wiseman 1979, 508; cult of Isis: Engels 1990, 102 ff.

wealth, corruption, and the cult of Isis were actually the first ideas that a reference to Corinth evoked in the literate Latin reader. I would point rather to a fact which, while obvious perhaps, has always been neglected in this field of study: Corinth was one of the most prosperous Greek cities until it was razed to the ground by a Roman army led by Lucius Mummius in 146 BC; after that year, Corinth was on the whole deleted from Greek geography until it was rebuilt and repopulated as a Roman colony by Caesar.¹²

In order to evaluate the conjecture that this history of Corinth is somehow meaningful in the *Metamorphoses*, it is useful to consider briefly the immense resonance that it had in both Greek and Latin culture.

The destruction of Corinth, and that of Carthage which occurred a few months earlier, marked a turning point in the Mediterranean politics of Rome: by that time the City was confident in its dominant role and ready to defend its interests at any cost. So Corinth and Carthage, 'the two jewels of the sea-cost' (Cicero, *ND* 3,91), two cities that could 'bear the weight and the name of an empire', were destroyed 'so that they could never rise again' (Cicero, *Agr.* 2,87). This Ciceronian embarrassment sets out the reasons for a Roman policy which, however, was not entirely without remorse; the orator himself acknowledges that 'through a specious appearance of expediency wrong is very often committed in transactions between state and state, as by our own country in the destruction of Corinth'¹³ (*Off.* 3,46). Even more telling is Florus, *Epit.* 1,32,1: 'as though that age could only run its course by the destruction of cities, the ruin of Carthage was immediately followed by that of Corinth, the capital of Achaëa, the glory of Greece... this city, by an act unworthy of the Romans, was overwhelmed before it could be accounted in the number of their declared enemies'.¹⁴

If the Romans cried crocodile tears, we can easily imagine the universal mourning that the destruction of Corinth, 'the bright star of Greece' (Diodorus Siculus 32,27,1), aroused in the Hellenistic world. As far as I know, its first literary echo is in an epigram by the Egyptian Polystratus (*AG* 7,297):

¹² On the history and archaeology of Corinth, besides Wiseman 1979 and Engels 1990, see Gilman Romano 2000. On Kenchreai: Hohlfelder 1976.

¹³ Trans. Miller 1975.

¹⁴ Trans. Forster 1984.

Lucius has smitten sore the great Achaean Acrocorinth, the star of Hel- las... and the sons of Aeneas left unwept and unhallowed by funeral rites the Achaeans who burnt the house of Priam.¹⁵

The general's identity is here partially concealed, since only his *praenomen* Lucius is quoted (whereas the Greek version of his *nomen*, Mommios, would also have fitted the meter); the result is a generic mention of a Roman destroyer. In Polystratus' view, the destruction of Corinth is more the nemesis of history than a consequence of the acts of a single general: it is vengeance taken by the descendants of Aeneas on the Greeks for the destruction of Troy. It was an epic deed and Virgil, who alludes to Mummius also in the show of heroes (*A.* 6,836 f. 'he... triumphant over Corinth, shall drive a victor's chariot to the lofty Capitol, famed for Achaeans he has slain'¹⁶) seems to share this view in *Aen.* 1,284 'there shall come a day... when the house of Assaracus shall bring into bondage Phthia and famed Mycenae, and hold lordship over vanquished Argos'.¹⁷ Servius clears up the mythological reference: 'house of Assaracus: that is the Trojan family... Assaracus begot Capys, Capys begot Anchises, and he gave birth to Aeneas progenitor of the Romans; from them came Mummius, who defeated the Achaeans'.¹⁸

In other texts, a paternalistic attitude replaces the idea of vengeance for Troy: a trend started by Titus Flamininus, who in an inscription in Delphi calls himself the *Aineadas Titos* vouching for the freedom of the Greeks (Plutarch, *Flam.* 12,11). Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 9,2,737A) describes to us a Mummius moved to tears at the sight of a young Corinthian slave, who compares his fate with that of the Greeks who died before Troy writing a verse of Homer (*Od.* 5,306).

Mourning for the loss of such an important city and for the countless great works of art that adorned it¹⁹ naturally recurs in Greek historians and geogra-

¹⁵ Trans. Paton 1960.

¹⁶ Trans. Fairclough 1999.

¹⁷ Trans. Fairclough 1999.

¹⁸ These verses of Virgil, and their interpretation by Servius, are influenced for Nenci 1978, 1016 by a propagandistic tradition started by the same L. Mummius. Anyway, this seems to be impossible, since the idea is already in the epigram by Polystratus quoted above in the text; for a confutation of Nenci's point see Graverini 2001, 143 ff.

¹⁹ Alcock 1993, 179 rightly emphasizes also the religious and political implications of the plunderings suffered by Corinth and other Greek cities: 'depriving one's enemy of sacred

phers like Polybius, Pausanias and Diodorus Siculus. However, after the end of the war between Greece and Rome, it became common (and safer) to add to this grief a sense of relief for the generosity of Julius Caesar, who made the city come back to life.²⁰

Even though it was the thoughtlessness of the leaders of the Achaean League that saddled them with full responsibility for the conflict, the severity of the Roman response was hard for the Greeks to accept, even for those most loyal to Rome (like Polybius, who seems to consider the doom of Corinth a just price to pay for a higher purpose). When Pausanias describes the monuments of Corinth, he also thinks back to the history of the city; and, although there is no explicit anti-Roman criticism, nevertheless 'his detailed narrative reflects his own often expressed concern for Greece's freedom and dignity'.²¹ Crinagoras, in *Greek Anthology* 9,284, regrets in no uncertain terms the quality of the new population of Corinth:

What inhabitants, O luckless city, hast thou received, and in place of whom? Alas for the great calamity of Greece!²²

As part of the Corinthian war booty, enormous wealth and a massive quantity of works of art arrived in Rome and this was not without effect on Roman society. Pliny the Elder disapproves of the laxity of morals induced by the great Mediterranean victories in the 2nd century BC and specifies that 'the victory over the Achaean League, from which statues and paintings came to Rome, had a great importance in the decline of morality' (*NH* 33,149; cf. also Livy 34,4,4). Eutropius 4,14,2 describes for us the three great triumphs celebrated in Rome in that year 145 BC: Africanus Minor and Metellus had, respectively, Hasdrubal and Andriscus marching before their chariots; but before the chariot of Mummius, who had no captured enemy generals to show, 'bronze statues and paintings and other ornaments of that most celebrated city were carried'. Here we have no space to discuss the link between the Corinthian booty and the unbridled enthusiasm of the Romans for Greek and Oriental art; nor can we speak about their distinctive eclectic

objects and possessing them yourself served two related purposes: defeating them in perpetuity and adding the power of their gods to your own symbolic arsenal'.

²⁰ Polybius 39,2 (from Strabo 8,6,28); Pausanias 7,17,17; Diodorus Siculus 32,27,1.

²¹ Swain 1996, 338; see also Bowie 1996, 216 ff.

²² Trans. Paton 1960.

tastes induced by the continuous stream of works of art flowing from every nation into public and private collections in Rome. Instead it will suffice simply to mention the celebrated ‘Corinthian bronze’: the ancients believed that this alloy had been created in the destruction of Corinth, when the immense heat of the fire melted and mixed bronze and noble metals. Modern scholars debate not only the composition but the very existence of such an alloy. And yet, the metal unquestionably had a long and glorious literary life and this is attested, for example, by a brilliant Petronian parody.²³

It was almost inevitable that Corinth should become a perennial symbol of the relationship between Greece and Rome: it was here that Flaminius and later the emperor Nero announced the freedom and independence of Greece;²⁴ between these two announcements there was, in sharp contrast, the armed intervention by Mummius. In the characterization of the city, history seems to echo and/or foreshadow the same ideological patterns we can trace in the literary sources.

The Romans, thanks also to the Corinthian booty, intensified their Hellenization and developed a passion for Greek art; the Greeks, however, were always reluctant to lay down the crown of their cultural excellence. It is precisely in Corinth that Favorinus of Arles (an author whose spiritual proximity with Apuleius is stressed by Paul Vallette and Gerald Sandy²⁵) played upon this feeling of superiority, itself deeply rooted in the genetic code of the Greeks, but also powerfully felt among the Romanized Greeks, citizens of a Corinth that was by then a Roman colony:

If some one who is... a Roman, not one of the masses but of the equestrian order, one who has affected, not merely the language, but also the thought and manners and dress of the Greeks... – for while the best of the Greeks over there [i. e. in Rome] may be seen inclining toward Roman ways, he inclines toward the Greek,... not only to seem Greek but to be Greek too – taking all this into consideration, ought he not to have a

²³ Petronius 50,5. On the infusion of Greek art into Rome as war booty see Pape 1975; on Corinthian bronze, Jacobson-Weitzman 1995.

²⁴ The cutting of the Isthmus by Nero also gave the opportunity for a dispute concerning Roman and Greek identities: cf. Whitmarsh 1999. On the tight connection of Corinth to Rome, and the ‘informal and symbolic threads’ that bound the Greek city to the capital of the empire, see Alcock 1993, 168 f.

²⁵ Vallette 1908, 187 ff.; Sandy 1997, 93 ff.

bronze statue here in Corinth? Yes,... because, though Roman, he has become thoroughly hellenized, even as your own city has...²⁶

Favorinus praises Corinth as a Roman colony that by that time was thoroughly Hellenized: and it is clear that, for the orator as well as for his audience, this was a remarkable improvement. Favorinus was himself a Roman who became Hellenized, but many others remained true specimens of ignorance. Thus, beyond chastising Mummius as the destroyer of Corinth, Favorinus criticizes him as a typically ‘ignorant’ Roman who wrote the name of Nestor and Priam (two heroes always described in ripe old age) under the statues of two young Arcadian men. The whole population of Rome fell into the same error:

the Roman mob, *as might have been expected*, imagined they were beholding those very heroes, and not mere Arcadians from Pheneus.²⁷

With this brief survey I hope to have enriched the picture of the ideas and emotions that Corinth could awaken in a literate reader of Apuleius’ age, Greek or Roman. Not only was it a rich city, and immoral, and a centre of the cult of Isis; it was, even more, a powerful symbol of cultural identity. Its expressive potential was always ambivalent: a Roman could use the symbol of Corinth to celebrate the greatness of his people and the vengeance of Aeneas’ descendants over the destroyers of Troy. A Greek could use it to lament his loss of freedom, and to give vent to his bitterness for the injustices he had suffered, or even to make of it the emblem of his cultural superiority.

In this context, it is not difficult to see the close relationship between the city of Corinth and the *Metamorphoses*. Corinth is not only the native town of the main character and the place where he regains human shape: it is also mentioned in the prologue – together with Athens and Sparta, the two other symbols of Greek civilization – as the fatherland of the novel itself (of course, I am accepting here Harrison’s hypothesis of the book itself as the speaker of the prologue²⁸). It is at once an ideal and a literary connection:

²⁶ [Dio Chrysostom] 37, 25–26; trans. Crosby 1986. On the construction of Greek identity in Favorinus’ *Corinthian oration* see Whitmarsh 2001, 295 ff.

²⁷ [Dio Chrysostom] 37, 42; trans. Crosby 1986.

²⁸ Harrison 1990; cf. also Harrison 2000, 227 f. and Nicolai 1999, who adopts Harrison’s point to some extent. Kahane-Laird 2001 appeared too late to be considered in this paper.

Athens, Corinth, and Sparta are called 'fruitful lands preserved for ever in even more fruitful books'.²⁹ The book is thus deeply rooted in a literary tradition which is connected with Greece as a whole. The prologue describes also a book that travels. After an 'early youth' spent in Greece, it moves very soon (*mox*) to Rome, where with hard work (*aerumnabilis labor*) it improves its language. We can see in this passage a clear allusion to the Greek origins of the ass's story which Apuleius imported to Rome, translated into Latin and elaborated with hard work to gain higher literary glory.

By placing Lucius in Corinth, the novel alludes from its very beginning to the relationship between Greece and Rome, which is indeed an important idea in the *Metamorphoses*, a Latin adaptation of a Greek original. The main character of the novel follows this pattern, since his adventures begin in Greece and conclude in Rome. Rome itself was full of artworks, marbles, bronzes and paintings which either came from Corinth and Greece as a result of war booty or were imported by art dealers; we can integrate the *Metamorphoses*, defined as a *fabula graecanica* by the prologue, into this same trend. The constant exploitation of preceding literature, and the frequent practice of literary *furtum*, are characteristic of its style and composition: just like the Romans of the 2nd century BC, Apuleius could be defined, with a bit of exaggeration and fancy, as a plunderer of works of art.

Of course, when speaking about the idea of Corinth as a literary symbol well suited to the genesis, contents and style of the *Metamorphoses* I have tackled only a part of the problem. We have seen that Corinth and its history could also be used to define a Greek cultural identity *in contraposition* to Rome. Is it possible that this side, too, of the 'Corinthian myth' is meaningful in Apuleius? Although his use of Corinth seems to be absolutely neutral, I think that the *Metamorphoses* lends itself to being read, in some measure, as a study in the problem of the relationship between Greece and Rome (or, better, the relationship between the empire's periphery and its centre).

Let us come back for a moment to the *Onos*, and, through it, to the lost Greek original. Even though the *Onos* makes no mention of Corinth, it nevertheless offers some opportunities to discuss our problem. In particular, I find it difficult to imagine that a Greek author could describe the transformation of a character named Lucius into an ass, a character clearly identified as a Roman citizen (quite an exceptional case for the ancient novel), without

²⁹ Trans. Hanson 1989.

some small thrill of satisfaction.³⁰ We could ask ourselves if the lost Greek original had a similar attitude,³¹ and if Apuleius somehow inherited it – or developed it independently.

The problem of Apuleius' cultural identity has been at the forefront, more or less explicitly, of much recent scholarship on the *Metamorphoses*. Particularly notable here is the useful survey of Apuleius' Greek culture produced by Gerald Sandy.³² For reasons explained below, I think that Apuleius' Hellenic underpinnings are only part of his bilingual culture, and probably not the most important.³³ The subtitle of Harrison's book (*A Latin Sophist*) presents a welcome counterbalance to, or completion of, this view.

On the contrary Ken Dowden, in attempting to demonstrate that the *Metamorphoses* were written during Apuleius' Roman period (perhaps around A.D. 155), has maintained that the novel was specifically written for an audience of readers living in Rome.³⁴ I will try to reproduce briefly his arguments, at least those which are relevant to my subject (though my selection is of course arbitrary, I will be using Dowden's words almost *verbatim*):

- there is little evidence for the existence of literature beyond that which was produced for the élite of Rome and for the imperial circle; Latin authors usually wrote and published at Rome; if Apuleius had been primarily addressing provincial audiences and the North African market, he would be practically unique. The *Florida* and *Apologia* themselves were written for the Roman market: the Carthaginian audience is painted in Roman colours.
- Apuleius' works survived into the modern era only because they were sent, read and copied in Rome, as is shown by Sallustius' *subscriptio* preserved in the manuscript F.

³⁰ Cf. Perry 1967, 220 ff.; *contra*, Walsh 1968.

³¹ This could seem unlikely, since Photius states that the *Onos* has a satirical tone, while the lost *Metamorphoseis* has not. Anyway, Photius' judgements do not always prove reliable, and the whole problem of the relations between the *Onos*, the lost Greek *Metamorphoseis*, and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, is a *vexata quaestio*.

³² Sandy 1997.

³³ An overestimation of Apuleius' Greekness is found e.g. in Paratore 1942²: Apuleius 'conservò sempre la mentalità di un Greco' (p. 71); 'la sua opera e la sua personalità sono permeate di elementi greci, in quanto si distaccano fortemente dalla tradizione latina' (p. 79).

³⁴ Dowden 1994.

- In a work that contains a number of autobiographical reflections, Carthage is surprisingly absent from the *Metamorphoses*.

Dowden's first argument is too general to be fully considered here. I shall limit myself to suggesting that it is a little *a priori*, while we should at least leave due space for exceptions that prove the rule; and that, after all, the *Florida* and *Apologia* seem to have been written at least for *both* an African and Roman audience.³⁵ The *Florida* are a selection of Apuleius' speeches; and, given the relation that so many of the fragments show with Carthage and Africa, it is probable that 'the anthologist (whether Apuleius himself, or, more likely, someone else) did his work from a personal sense of national pride, or with his eyes set on a clearly marked audience, e.g. the city elite in Carthage'.³⁶

This leads us to the question of the transmission of Apuleius' works. If it was Rome and not Africa that ensured their preservation, this was due to historical processes, and not necessarily to Apuleius' intention. Their survival proves only that somebody in Rome read Apuleius, and not necessarily that Apuleius himself intended them to be read primarily in Rome – nor that he was actually read there more than in Africa. Instead, St. Augustine (*Epist.* 138,19) suggests that Apuleius, as an African, was more familiar to the Africans; and the *Historia Augusta* relates that Septimius Severus complained about Clodius Albinus' reputation of being a *litteratus*, while he used to read only 'the Milesian stories from Carthage that his friend Apuleius wrote'.³⁷

Regarding the absence of Carthage in the novel, this is indeed very striking, all the more so because almost all the Mediterranean world finds at least a small place in the prologue: Greece (*Hymettos Attica et Isthmos Ephyrea et*

³⁵ On the Carthaginian audience of the *Florida* see e.g. Vössing 1997, 444 ff. The Spanish Martial repeatedly and proudly states that his work is read all over the world: cf. e. g. 1,1,2; 7,88,1 ff.; 8,3,4; 8,61,3–5; 11,3,3 ff.. An useful collection of similar passages in other authors (especially Ovid) is in Citroni 1975, 15 (*ad* 1,1,2) and Nisbet-Hubbard 1978, 333 ff. (*ad* Horace, *C.* 2,20), who point out that 'the ambition for world-wide fame is attested as early as Alcman... and becomes a commonplace with Hellenistic and Roman poets'. Generally speaking, a view of Latin literary production less 'centripetal' than that of Dowden is offered e. g. by Gualandri 1989a.

³⁶ So Hunink 2001, 13; see also Harrison 2000, 132–134, who is more inclined than Hunink to think that Apuleius himself was the editor of the original four-book anthology from which our extant *Florida* seems to derive.

³⁷ *Hist. Aug. Alb.* 12,12 (trans. Magie 1967). For the early diffusion of Apuleius' works in Africa cf. Stramaglia 1996, 139 ff.

Taenaros Spartiatica), Rome (the *urbs Latia*), Egypt (*papyrus Aegyptia argutia Nilotici calami inscripta*), Asia Minor (*Milesius sermo*). Anyway, this absence can be explained by the fact that the *Metamorphoses* are after all the adaptation of a preexisting Greek work, so that its Greek setting was an almost unavoidable choice. The other geographical indications in the prologue mark specific literary choices made by Apuleius, i.e. the connection with *sermo Milesius*, Isiac cult and oriental religion, and the final movement to Rome (on which see *supra*). Therefore, it was difficult and pointless to integrate Africa into the prologue, or into the plot of the ass' story. Nevertheless, Africa is not completely absent from the novel. First of all, *celsa Carthago* is referred to at 6,4,1 with regard to the worship of Juno; but the most interesting passage is the notorious *Madaurensis* of 11,27,9. At the end of the *Onos*, there is a near-explicit invitation to identify the main character with the author. We can leave out the question of the author's name (there are definitely too many *Lucii* in this story!),³⁸ but I think it is meaningful that the newly reshaped Lucius declares that he is a writer of tales (55: *historion eimi syngrapheus*). I think that the lost Greek original may have had a similar joke (a fact which possibly contributed to the confusion between the character Lucius, and the writers Lucius of Patrae and Lucian). Apuleius evidently echoes this joke when, near the end of his novel, he unexpectedly identifies himself with his character.³⁹ He chooses to do this with a geographical indication, the *Madaurensis*, which could very well be, among other things,⁴⁰ a nice way to give a hint to an African audience, invited to sympathize with an African character-author.

Aside from these considerations, the case for an extended and pervasive presence of Roman culture in the *Metamorphoses* is of course very strong. Modern scholarship has increasingly tended to highlight the importance of the Latin literary tradition for our novel. And in at least one case, I think, we can identify a process of 'translation' of literary allusion: where the *Onos* exploits a Greek intertext, Apuleius seems to 'reply' with a Latin one.⁴¹ Interesting above all here is the wide influence that Roman culture has on the 'Realien' of the *Metamorphoses*: the languages of Roman law, religion, and

³⁸ For this problem, cf. e. g. Mason 1994, 1669 ff.

³⁹ the *Madaurensis* passage in book 11 represents, I think, a small but remarkable exception to the standard opinion that 'the end of book 10 is the point where *Met.* and *Onos* diverge permanently' (cf. Zimmerman 2000, 18, with further references).

⁴⁰ For the different interpretative possibilities see Harrison 2000, 228 ff.

⁴¹ Graverini 2001b, 444 f.

daily life are frequently employed throughout the novel, and even toponyms referring to places in the city of Rome appear here and there. The details are often duly highlighted by commentaries and have been collected in a well informed paper by G. Rosati.⁴² These specifically ‘Roman’ cultural notes, he shows, are many in Apuleius’ novel, and could easily form the basis of a book on ‘The Roman World of Apuleius’ – a book that Rosati suggests needs to be written.

Nevertheless, I still wonder if there is anything in these details that a literate, Latin-speaking reader in Africa (or in Greece, or elsewhere in the Empire far from the city of Rome) could not understand. Again, since it is impossible here to discuss every single point, I will try to challenge just a few of the strongest arguments that can be used in favour of a Roman audience for our novel.

Three times (1,24,3; 1,25,1; 2,2,1) Apuleius mentions a *forum cupidinis* in Hypata; Scivoletto argues that this is a (very) learned allusion to an old *forum cupidinis* that existed in Rome three centuries before Apuleius, rather than to a real place in the Greek town of Hypata.⁴³ In other words, the allusion is obscure and utterly ‘Roman’, referring to a particular place that had long ceased to exist in the city of Rome. Anyway, Scivoletto himself emphasizes that Apuleius knew it from antiquarian and literary sources: which of course were available, and read, not only in Rome.

The second case, concerning the *metae Murtiae* in the Circus Maximus, is more interesting, since these structures still existed in the times of Apuleius. In 6,8,2 Mercury mentions them, saying that there Venus will reward with eight kisses the *index* who reveals the place where the fugitive Psyche has taken refuge. The sketch is even more humorous if one knows that inside the Circus Maximus, where the old shrine of *Venus Murtia* was located, ‘passaggiavano gli *scortilla* di maggior pretesa’,⁴⁴ to whom Venus is playfully assimilated. Because this shrine of *Venus Murtia*⁴⁵ is sometimes referred to in literature, I think we have reasonable grounds for doubting that the reference was obscure and unintelligible to people not living in Rome: close to

⁴² Rosati, forthcoming.

⁴³ Scivoletto 1963, 236 ff. Cf. also van Mal-Maeder 1998, 76 *ad loc.*, who emphasizes the pun (‘pour un Lucius en quête d’une pleine satisfaction des ses désirs... tout les chemins mènent au *forum cupidinis*’) but is more sceptical about Scivoletto’s conclusions.

⁴⁴ Marmorale 1965, 203; cf. also Harrison 1998, 64 f.

⁴⁵ For information about the shrine and the goddess, the best sources are Humphrey 1986, 60 f. and 95 ff.; Coarelli 1996; Coarelli 1999.

Apuleius’ times, we have e. g. Plutarch (*Q. Rom.* 20, 268E) and Tertullian (*spect.* 8: curious and well informed Africans abound, as it seems!), who probably did not think of people living in Rome as their primarily intended audience. Of course their writings had certain didactic aims, while the *Metamorphoses* are more allusive, and difficult to understand. But I think that neither Plutarch nor Tertullian would have dealt with things that were totally abstruse for their readers. Because the Circus was also reproduced in coins, mosaics and reliefs, its shape was familiar throughout the Empire, as were its restorations and reconstructions by various emperors. In these iconographic media, the shrine of Venus Murtia/Murcia is sometimes recognizable (e.g. a relief in Foligno; a mosaic in Piazza Armerina; some coins of Trajan⁴⁶). Finally, it is worth quoting the *elogium* of M. Valerius Maximus (*CIL* I² p. 189 n. V), originally located in the *Forum Augustum*, that survived to us in a copy found in Arretium. The inscription says that the dictator obtained the honour of a curule seat *ad Murciae spectandi causa*, that is in a privileged place in the Circus, near the shrine. The *elogia* of the Forum Augustum, as well as other monuments, were reproduced in Arretium and elsewhere. It is therefore through literature, inscriptions, iconography, and coins that the shape of the capital of the empire, its monuments, topography, and toponyms, were made familiar even to those who never visited it.⁴⁷

In any case, the Apuleian text does not seem to make well defined claims regarding its readers’ cultural horizons⁴⁸ and their knowledge of the city of Rome. Even though a well informed reader (the ‘careful reader’ of 9,30,1) might easily comprehend these references, others could well ignore everything about the *forum Cupidinis* or the *metae Murtiae* (taking them at face

⁴⁶ Sources in Humphrey 1986, and Coarelli 1996 and 1999.

⁴⁷ In Carthage, we know of copies of the *Ara Pacis Augustae* and of the *elogium* of M. Claudius Marcellus: see Torelli 1975, 99–100 and Galinsky 1996, 150 (with further bibliography). We might also assume that on the periphery of the Empire there were a great number of Roman citizens carrying out their administrative functions, or doing their own business, and that local élites often travelled to Rome: Ann Kuttner suggests to me *per litteras* that ‘a shared knowledge of the city of Rome’ contributed to the bonding of Roman élites abroad. Of course, poetry and iconography also made the whole empire familiar to the citizens of Rome. For a short but dense survey of geographical and iconographical themes in imperial poetry cf. Connors 2000, 508 ff. On the *metae Murtiae* and Apuleius’ cultural identity see also Stephen Harrison’s paper in this volume, pp. 49 f.

⁴⁸ On the readership of the ancient novels, and its degree of literary education, see Wesselung 1988 and Stephens 1994. For the *Florida*, too, we must imagine a broad Carthaginian audience, provided with highly different levels of culture: cf. Vössing 1997, 444 ff. (esp. 466 f.).

value, i.e. for simple toponyms), and still enjoy the sketches of the *curator annonae* Pythias trampling the fish Lucius has just bought, or of Mercury advertising the voluptuous reward promised by Venus. Thus, in the end, I think that none of these ‘specific’ references to the city requires an audience living in Rome, or even terribly familiar with it.

But is this enough to prove a non-Romanocentric point of view in Apuleius? As I stated above, Corinth does not help us – and *e silentio* we can also affirm that, if Apuleius really desired to show or suggest a polemical attitude towards Rome, it is strange that he missed the easy occasion that the Corinthian setting offered.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, there are some points that can be made to challenge still further the idea of a novel ‘written in Rome for the Romans’, and to emphasize the possibility that an African, or more generally a provincial audience was also important for Apuleius. Here is a rough list:

- Rome is the setting of the last chapters of the novel, but it is never described in minute detail; a detailed Roman setting could alienate non-Roman readers much more than the allusive passages that I have mentioned *supra*, and probably Apuleius did not want to take such a risk.
- there are two episodes, in which the donkey tries to appeal to the Emperor, or to the people of Rome.⁵⁰ Of course, this is a joke made at the expense of Lucius, but maybe it is not very polite or respectful for Apuleius (and of the author of the lost Greek original, which had at least one of these episodes) to transform the name of *Caesar* and of *Quirites* into the braying of an ass.⁵¹
- the famous episode of the Latin-speaking soldier who beats the poor gardener who cannot understand him (9,39,2 ff.) is worth quoting as well. The phraseology seems to imply that the *superbia* shown by this *miles* is typical of all soldiers, and most probably of all Latin-speaking

⁴⁹ Apuleius also held, in Carthage, the office of *sacerdos provinciae*, connected with the cult of Rome and the emperor: cf. *Florida* 16. On the office see Vössing 1997, 429 ff. Anyway, Rives 1995 argues that a truly ‘Roman’ religious identity did not develop in Carthage, where the local elite had strong familiar and religious bonds with Africa.

⁵⁰ 3,29,2–3; 8,29,5. Cf. also 7,3,3 and 7,13,3.

⁵¹ An opposite view is found in Millar 1981, 66: the episode ‘offer a very significant image... of how the Emperor was conceived of as an ever-present protector’. But on the very next page the author states that ‘it was only in special circumstances that the Emperor would make his distant presence felt’.

soldiers (‘a legionary... inquired in a haughty and arrogant tone where my master was taking his empty ass... the soldier, unable to restrain his natural insolence...’⁵²). And certainly the episode is a sharp representation of the brutality and arrogance with which the central imperial power could sometimes manifest itself.⁵³

- the character of Charite recalls the Dido of Virgil, but is more faithful than Dido to her husband. This reaction to the literary model could be ascribed, as Ellen Finkelpearl has shown in a well documented study,⁵⁴ to a kind of African national pride.

The praises of Carthage in the *Florida* (e. g. the famous 20,9–10, where Carthage is commended as ‘heavenly Muse of Africa’, and the Carthaginians as ‘very learned’), and the praise of provincial life in Hypata pronounced by Byrrhena in *Metamorphoses* 2,19,5–6, make it clear that a provincial milieu did not mean *ipso facto* frustration of someone’s ambition for an interesting life or even for literary glory – even though, of course, the provincial cities are painted as a ‘derivative Rome’.⁵⁵ The province offered a vital environment for literary activity and, as the passage of St. Augustine I mentioned above seems to imply, a receptive market for Apuleius’ works.

To sum up, I think that we can confidently define Apuleius’ cultural identity as a Latin one (not forgetting his bilingual education), and indeed ‘Romanocentrism’ offers a good interpretative category for the *Metamorphoses*. However, we should be cautious to place the city of Rome at the centre of Apuleius’ interests and to make its residents his primary ‘intended audience’.⁵⁶ Of course Apuleius has been read, and intended to be read, also in

⁵² Trans. Hanson 1989.

⁵³ Summers 1970, 526: ‘this scene, which is found in the *asinus* (44–45), has been adapted by Apuleius to place in clear focus the resentment of provincials toward the system of requisitions by the imperial government’. See also Hijmans et al. 1995, 325 (*ad* 9,39,2 *superbo atque adroganti sermone*) and 326 (*ad* 9,39,4 *Graece*).

⁵⁴ Finkelpearl 1998, 131 ff. Of course I also agree with Finkelpearl’s argument (pp. 141–143) about Apuleius’ intended audience, not limited to the city of Rome. There was also some difference between Roman and Carthaginian cultural identities, as Finkelpearl states; anyway, Gualandri 1989b, 521 correctly points out that ‘l’africanità... difficilmente potrebbe apparire come resistenza culturale a Roma’.

⁵⁵ Dowden 1994, 423.

⁵⁶ This is more or less the conclusion also of Méthy 1983, who states (p. 46) that ‘le patriotisme d’Apulée et de Fronton se définit... comme un patriotisme occidental’ (as opposed to Roman, Greek and African patriotism). I recommend her paper for a valuable analysis of a number of points I could not consider here; however, I would not subscribe to the

Rome. But the Empire was full of learned Romans travelling abroad, and of learned provincials visiting Rome for various reasons and becoming acquainted with its culture, its way of life, its monuments.⁵⁷ And provinces in general, and Africa in particular, were not short of learned people able to understand the subtleties of language and culture that Apuleius incorporates into his works.⁵⁸ Since the hypothesis of a stylistic and lexical *Africitas* in Apuleius has been rightly rejected,⁵⁹ there have not been many attempts to evaluate the importance that the provincial milieu can have had in the composition of the *Metamorphoses*; I hope that my arguments are at least suggestive of the possibility of ‘provincial’ interpretations of (parts of) the novel, and of the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role that issues such as Romanization and Hellenization play in this context.⁶⁰

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use of the term ‘patriotisme’ here, nor am I so completely sceptical as she is about the possibility of identifying sometimes an African, or provincial, point of view in Apuleius.

⁵⁷ Cf. Noy 2000; in particular, see pp. 252 ss. for people coming from North Africa. See also Fantham 1996, 236 ff. on the African travelling poet Annius Florus; and p. 253 on the cultural level of the African elite.

⁵⁸ For a similar view cf. Dewar 2000, 521; on the African cultural milieu, see also Fick 1987. Harris 1989, 267 states that ‘only Africa Proconsularis, Numidia, Dalmatia and Narbonensis are likely, as provinces, to have reached Italian levels of literacy’. For an evaluation of the size, wealth, and importance of the city of Carthage from the 2nd century AD onwards, see Hurst 1993, 327–337.

⁵⁹ Norden 1909², 588 ff. Anyway, Kenney 1990, 29 affirms that Apuleius’ language suggests ‘the experimental exploitation of an adopted tongue’.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Alessandro Barchiesi, Ann Kuttner, and Kirk Freudenburg, who gave me useful advice on this paper; Gianpiero Rosati also let me read a preliminary version of his forthcoming paper.

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