

at times, left to stand on their own, with little indication of interpretation. For instance, how does one reconcile allusions to Ovid's Actaeon, Pyramus and Thisbe, Cephalus and Procris, all encapsulated in the Satricus episode, involving a fortuitous parricide? One wonders what B.'s take would be.

Flavian bidirectionality, mainly between Statius and Silius, is briefly mentioned in the introduction, but further developed in the commentary, where echoes and parallels are recorded, though not necessarily framed as such. Two possible instances for bidirectional readings are explicitly highlighted for *Pun.* 9. 244–5 and 307. Links with Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* are treated as early influence. B.'s position on the subject had been outlined in his commentary on *Punica* 2.

The crisis at the heart of Roman leadership at Cannae is a significant theme, which eminently feeds into the poetics of civil war. On the contrasting characterisation of the two consuls, Paulus and Varro, B. notes that Silius adopts a polarising approach that favours a much more hostile portrayal of Varro than we find in Livy. B., siding with R. Marks, also supports the argument that the conflict between the two leaders is one topic among others in *Punica* 9 that demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the Republic and the need for one-man rule. Scholarly views on Varro, however, are beginning to split. C. Burgeon (*La Virtus, la Fides et la Pietas dans les Punica de Silius Italicus* [2020]) recently argued for a positive reading of Varro's flight, in swiftly raising the alarm that allowed Rome to reorganise its army effectively in the aftermath of Cannae. B. omits Burgeon. In B.'s defence, however, publication is such a lengthy process that the latest scholarship is often missed out.

The bibliography, otherwise, offers an insightful guide to contemporary scholarship (with only one omission: Lucarini 2004 on p. 19 n. 40, in reference to 'Le fonte storiche di Silio Italicus', *Athenaeum* 92, pp. 103–26). The volume includes two useful indexes, with a particularly comprehensive *index locorum*, and a helpful list of key Latin words and phrases.

B.'s volume is a wonderful and essential addition to the existing commentaries on Silius. There is an enormous amount of material to stimulate discussion and further study of the *Punica*. Silius is at last gaining scholarly momentum, becoming increasingly well served by the OUP commentary series on Flavian Poetry.

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JEWISH AND EARLY CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES ON APULEIUS?

SMITH (W. S.) *Religion and Apuleius'* Golden Ass. Pp. xiv + 193, ills. London and New York: Routledge, 2023. Cased, £120, US\$160. ISBN: 978-1-032-19280-2.

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Scholars interested in the ancient novel may recall a monograph by G.G. Gamba, *Petronio Arbitro e i cristiani* (1998), who unconvincingly read the *Satyrica* as a narrative addressed to Nero and allegorically promoting Christianity – see C. Panayotakis, *CR* 49 (1999),

412–13, for a balanced appraisal that highlights the limits of Gamba's interpretation. The volume under review does not go as far as to propose a Jewish or a Christian reading of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. What it does, instead, is to suggest that Apuleius had knowledge of Jewish and especially early Christian literature and that this, in turn, is reflected in various episodes of the novel. These allusions are not meant to show Apuleius' penchant for Christianity or Judaism, with which he was at odds. S. motivates this by examining passages from the *Metamorphoses* that show certain analogies with the Bible, and Jewish and early Christian writings. His conclusion is that the novel, particularly Lucius' conversion and his initiations into the mysteries of Isis and Osiris in *Metamorphoses* 11, would have offered an alternative to curtail the spreading of Christianity during the second century. This expands on a view expressed by P.G. Walsh and summarised in the introduction to his translation of the novel for the *Oxford World's Classics* series (1994, pp. xxxvii–xxxix).

The preface, where S.'s general ideas are expounded, is followed by ten chapters. Chapter 1 is a collection of passages from the Old and the New Testament, as well as classical authors, on the ass. S. argues that Jewish and Christian writings point to a less negative perception of this animal, which was mocked and demonised by the Greeks and the Romans. Among the passages mentioned we do not find *Job* 11:12, where a witless person becoming wise is compared *per absurdum* to a young ass turning into a human, contradicting the trend S. establishes. For S., the compassion that the initiates into the cult of Isis show to Lucius-ass in *Met.* 11 is similar to the sympathetic treatment of donkeys in Christian and Jewish sources. However, the positive treatment of Lucius-ass does not correspond to a positive perception of the animal in Apuleius: thanks to his anamorphosis Lucius is, in fact, liberated from his abominable asinine shape (*Met.* 11.14.4). The following chapters are loosely related to S.'s main argument and investigate various thematic aspects of the *Metamorphoses*. Chapter 2 focuses on the inset tale of Aristomenes and Socrates (*Met.* 1.5–19), a story about witches that sets the tone for the initial books of the *Metamorphoses*. Attention is also paid to the novel's Greek counterpart, the *Onos*, preserved in Lucian's corpus and spuriously attributed to him. S. focuses on Lucius' host in the Thessalian city of Hypata, Milo in the *Metamorphoses*, Hipparchus in the *Onos*, drawing attention to the different characterisation of the two figures. Chapter 3 continues the parallel exploration of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Onos*, considering the function of fortune and providence within their plots. S. notes how the ironic tone of the *Onos* is consistent throughout whereas the tone of the *Metamorphoses* changes substantially in Book 11. Chapters 4 and 5 are respectively devoted to the figures of the robbers and their heroic self-fashioning in *Met.* 4 and to the tale of Cupid and Psyche (*Met.* 4.28–6.24). Chapter 6 goes back to S.'s idea that the allusions to Jewish and Christian literature in the *Metamorphoses* are meant to offer a negative depiction of these beliefs in an attempt to curb these cults, Christianity in particular. S. discusses the episode of the evil baker's wife, who sacrilegiously believed in one God (*Met.* 9.14.5). This is generally taken as a reference to Judaism or Christianity, though Apuleius might not have differentiated one religion from the other (cf. B.L. Hijmans et al., *Apuleius Madaurensis. Metamorphoses Book 9* [1995], pp. 380–2). Such prejudice and imprecise knowledge are also visible in *Apol.* 90.6, a passage not cited in the volume, which is largely modelled on Plin. *Nat.* 30.11. There Moses and the Egyptian priest Jannes are listed among various practitioners of magic (cf. L. Costantini, *Magic in Apuleius' Apologia* [2019], pp. 244–5). S. analyses the writings of Justin the Martyr, Minucius Felix and Tertullian, proposing that they might be levelling criticism at Apuleius' novel. If this is true, it does not show Apuleius' engagement with any of these authors.

Chapters 7–10 discuss other possible Apuleian allusions to Christianity. The most interesting of them is perhaps Charite's speech in praise of Lucius-ass at *Met.* 6.28.3–29. Given that Christians were believed to worship a donkey-headed god, S. argues that Charite's promise to venerate the ass may be evidence of her status as a Christian. This speech foreshadows the ensuing scene at *Met.* 7.12.5–13.2, in which Charite is brought back to her village on the donkey's back, which S. compares to Mary's escape to Egypt also on a donkey's back (*Matthew* 2:13–14). However, no direct mention of an ass is given in *Matthew*, and the same scene in the *Metamorphoses* features in the pseudo-Lucianic *Onos* 26.5–27.1 (ed. H. Van Thiel). Both probably derive from the lost *Ur-ass-novel* by Lucius of Patras (Photius, *Bibl.* 129), and the scene should not be seen as an innovation by Apuleius to hint at Christian traditions. Chapter 10 serves as a conclusion, recapping how Apuleius attempts to challenge Jewish and Christian beliefs in his novel. This is followed by an appendix on *Met.* 11.27.9, a passage where the identity of the narrator Lucius and that of author Apuleius seem to overlap. The volume closes with a bibliography and a general index.

There are a few small misprints, and some illustrations are not of the same quality as others (e.g. fig. 7.3 on p. 91). In general, engaging with recent scholarship on the novelistic features of hagiographical writings as well as on the possible influence of Jewish literature on the novelistic tradition (on the latter, see T. Whitmarsh, *Dirty Love* [2018], pp. 87–121) could have provided a broader literary framing for S.'s ideas. Ultimately, I find this reading of Apuleius' novel unpersuasive, given that the analogies detected are vague if not unconvincing. For this interpretation to be more compelling, it would have been helpful to address its potential ramifications. For instance, why would Apuleius need to write his novel as an anti-Christian response without explicitly engaging with or criticising these beliefs, as did for example the second-century Platonist Celsus? And, if that truly was Apuleius' scope, why did he have to be so (unnecessarily) cryptic in the novel, at a time in which Christianity was forbidden and persecuted? Whether readers will be persuaded, they will undoubtedly find in this book a different take on the *Metamorphoses* and much food for thought, inviting further reflection on the religious and socio-cultural background of Apuleius and his contemporaries.

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LACTANTIUS AND EMPERORS

ZIPP (G.) *Gewalt in Laktanz' De mortibus persecutorum*. (Millennium-Studien 95.) Pp. xvi + 298. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021. Cased, £100, €109.95, US\$126.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-074066-0. Open access.
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Z.'s study of *De mortibus persecutorum* (*DMP*) makes a welcome contribution to the ongoing study of Lactantius and his role in early Christianity in the Roman Empire. Invited from Carthage to Nicomedia under Diocletian, the Christian orator and apologist became an eyewitness to his court and the persecution that bears his name. In writing *DMP*, Lactantius made himself a principal source for the historical understanding of