The Ancient Novels and the *New Testament*: Possible Contacts

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Late in the reign of Nero, in Rome, Petronius, a member of the so-called ‘Neronian Circle’ and Nero’s arbiter in matters of taste or *arbiter elegantiarum*, wrote his novel, *Satyricon*. It was during the time of, or soon after, the first Christian persecution, which was initiated by Nero himself against the members of a religion that a decision of the Senate in A.D. 35 had labelled as an ‘illicit superstition.’ According to Tertullian, Tiberius in the Senate proposed to recognize the Christians’ religion, but the senators refused, and proclaimed Christianity a *superstitio illicita*, so that every Christian could be put to death. But Tiberius, thanks to his *tribunicia potestas*, vetoed the Christians’ condemnations, and there was no Roman persecution until the time of Nero. According to Tacitus (*Ann*. 15, 44), in A.D. 64, at the time of the

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1 This article is the revised version of the paper presented at the SBL Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Nov. 22–25 2003, *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative Group.*

2 See e.g. Rowell 1958, 14–24, who identifies Petreites, mentioned in Sat. 52, 3 and 71, 6 with the famous gladiator of the Neronian age; Schmur 1959, and Moreno 1962/4, according to whom the economic background of the *Satyricon* points to the Neronian age; Rose 1962, who dates the novel between the end of A.D. 64 and the summer of 65; Id. 1971, esp. 46 and 76: Baldwin 1976, 35–36. It is certain that on this occasion the Romans were able to distinguish clearly between Jews and Christians: cf. Jossa 2004 with rich documentation on the first relationships between Judaism and Christianity. Add Tomson 2001; Bockmuehl 2003; Park 2003; Nickelsburg 2003; Lieu 2003; Das 2003.

3 Tertullian’s reliability is accepted by Sordi 2004, chs. 1–2, and confirmed by me with a new fragment in Sordi-Ramelli 2004, 59–67: Ramelli forthcoming b. On *superstitio* in the Roman world: Martin 2004, ch. 9. For early Christianity and Roman Empire add now: Novak 2001; Riley 2001; for early Christianity as *superstitio*: Kippenberg 2003. For Tiberius’ *tribunicia potestas* and the control over the Senate, see Rowe 2002, 43ff.; 54ff. For the Senate’s power: Griffin 1997, 249–253. For the absence of persecutions be-
infamous fire of Rome, the Christians, who were very numerous, a *multitudo ingens* in the city, a ἀπολύτως πλήθος according to Clement of Rome (*Cor.* 5), and were hated by people because of their supposed wrong-doings (*ob flagitia invisit*), were accused of arson and underwent spectacular tortures, which stirred pity (*miseratio*) even among pagan spectators.

At that time it is likely that Mark’s Gospel was already circulating in some form. In fact, according to the Christian tradition of the late first-early second century, represented by Papias (*ap. Eus. HE* 3, 39, 15), Clement of Alexandria (*Hypot. 6, ap. Eus. HE* 2, 15; 6, 14, 6, and F9 Staehlin), and Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer. 3, 1,1)*, it was written in Rome, at the beginning of Claudius’ reign after St. Peter’s preaching: the audience, imperial officials and Roman knights (*Caesariani et equites*), asked Mark for a written version of the oral preaching. Evidence for this early tradition may come from the possible identification of the Qumrân papyrus fragment 7Q5 with a short passage of Mark’s Gospel (6, 52–63). The fact that it is a link passage in the narrative texture may lead us to believe that it was written in a late phase of the composition of the Gospel – if we admit a ‘stratified’ writing, which some scholars do not accept.
This identification, asserted by José O’Callaghan and then by Carsten Peter Thiede, has been accepted also, e.g., by Orsolina Montevecchi, Sergio Daris, and, most recently, Karl Jarosh. The Gospel of Mark could thus have been written before A.D. 50, as suggested by the palaeographic style of the papyrus fragment, and in any case before A.D. 68, when the Qumrân Caves were definitively closed. The fragment itself was found in an amphora with the Aramaic word for ‘Rome’ on it: rwm. Anyway, contemporary scholarly research commonly acknowledges a date of composition before or around A.D. 70 for Mk, thus, it is possible that this Gospel circulated in a written form in Rome in the late Neronian age, and, in any case, it is probable that it circulated in an oral form in that period.

planation’ for the question of order (338); Burridge 2004, ch. 1, offers an overview of scholarship on the Gospels; ch. 4 especially for recent scholarship on the relationship between the Gospels and classical literature; also see ch. 2, p. 25ff., with methodological suggestions for inquiry in the literary genre of the Gospels (compared with Graeco-Roman biography). On the unity of Mk as a narrative: Rhoads 2004 with my review forthcoming in *Stylos*; Ramelli 2007.

8 E.g. M. Sordi, or Persili 2000, or Innocenti 2002, 6, or Ceruti 2004; Mejía 2000, 1–5. Distinction between oral and written modes of transmission in Mk is found in Kelber 1997; Gerhardsson 2001: the study of the origins of the Gospel tradition (1–58, in comparison with the Jewish tradition) allows us to conclude that the Gospels are historically reliable documents in which one can hear the voice of Jesus (89–143). Their ground is not the predication (κηρύγμα) of the post-Easter Church, but directly the Jesus tradition, handed down and giving rise to interpretation in the process of oral transmission between Jesus’ earthly life and the Evangelists’ writings (86). On the historicity of the Gospels and their setting in context see also: Drane 2001, chs. 1–10; historical perspective in Alonso 2001, esp. Part 1; Dawes 2001; Nodet 2003; Bauckham 2006; Ramelli 2007 and forthcoming d.


10 For a recent survey on the Caves, see Magness 2004, who accepts de Vaux’s thesis, now challenged (see Bioul 2004), that the inhabitants of the caves were Essenes.


12 See e.g. Thiede 2002; Nock 1972, 49–133: 104: ‘He [Mark] and the other synoptic strain represent a remarkably careful attempt to reproduce a record of the past, rather than an adaptation thereof to present needs and experience;’ Sherwin White 1963, 186–193, uses Mk and the NT as historical sources; also Blomberg 2001. A very late date (toward the close of the first century, in Rome) is proposed for Mk by Peabody 2002, with the rethinking (17–54, 344–47) of a hypothesis of J.J. Griesbach (XIX cent.) and W.R. Farmer (middle XX cent.), which however was already present in Augustine, and the demonstration of Mk’s alternative use of Mt and Lk through the pericopae and within each, and
In this context it is not so strange that in the literary work of Petronius, a pagan author who was close to Nero and to his court and was proconsul of Bithynia (probably an already Christianized region at the beginning of the Sixties of the first century, as is clear from Pliny’s well-known letter to Trajan on the Christian question), and on the other hand was interested in certain aspects of the Judaic culture, although from a critical point of view, around the year A.D. 64, it is possible to point out probable traces of knowledge of Christianity—even if partial and expressed with irony, if not with hostility—and perhaps, as it seems, also of the Gospel of Mark. Petronius clearly alludes to the fire of Rome in his novel and writes during the persecution against the Christians, or immediately after it.

I shall expand here on the passages in which the Satyricon seems to reveal some knowledge of the Christian sect and, in particular, of Mark’s Gospel. First of all, Petronius in Sat. 77, 7–78, 4 seems to present a parody of the Anointing of Jesus in Bethania, narrated in Mk 14, 3–9, where Trimalchio’s use of the ointment nardum—the most important among ointments according to Plin. NH 12, 26, 42: *principale in unguentis*, commonly used in the Greek


15 As for the date of the Satyricon, to the above cited bibliography I add Vieilberg 2002, 32, who dates the novel to A.D. 65. See also von Albrecht 1992, 961 nn. 4–6.

16 Analysis of this scene in Rigato 2003 [2005], 190–197.
and Roman world both in convivial and in funereal contexts – is in a convivial context\(^{17}\) as a prefiguration of a funeralunction: it is the only such usage in all of classical literature. After Petronius and the Gospel, Pliny will notice the adoption of perfume by the Romans in both occasions, convivial and funereal.\(^ {18}\) The impressive parallels between the Gospel passage and the Petronian one were already noted – although only very partially – a century ago by Erwin Preuschen,\(^ {19}\) but he supposed that Mark’s Gospel was written after the *Satyricon* and stated that it was Mark who imitated the novelist and not vice-versa. I believe that we should invert the terms of the relationship.

In fact, the points of contact between the two texts are remarkable: in both passages, the scene is a banquet;\(^ {20}\) an ointment is brought in, and precisely a small jar of *nardum*, which is smeared on the protagonist, in the case of Jesus, or by him, in that of Trimalchio, in prefiguration of his funeral anointing for burial, as the protagonist himself declares:

> Stichus, please bring me the ointment […] at once he [sc. Trimalchio] opened a small jar and smeared us all, and said: ‘I hope that this will be good for me after my death as much as before […] Please consider yourselves invited to my funeral party’. The business was becoming particularly nauseating…\(^ {21}\) (*Sat. 77, 7–78, 4*)

> While he was lying, a woman came bringing a small jar of valuable, expensive *nardum* ointment; she broke the jar and poured [the ointment] on his head […] Jesus said: ‘Leave her in peace […] she did a good thing

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\(^{17}\) On convivial practices in ancient Rome see now Dunbabin 2004. On the multivalence of spices and perfumes see Detienne 1972; Attridge 2003, 86–87, who also reads 2Cor 2, 14–17 as playing on the double use of perfume, for life and for death; the euôdia is that of the Anointed One, anointed in life in anticipation of his death and anointed in a death that brought life to the whole world.

\(^{18}\) *NH* 13, 2: ‘The pleasure of perfume was also admitted by our fellow countrymen as well among the most elegant and also most honourable enjoyments of life, and even began to be an appropriate tribute to the dead’.

\(^{19}\) Preuschen 1902/3. On the contacts between the Gospels and the ancient novels add Thomas 2003.

\(^{20}\) On banquets in the New Testament and in early Christianity, on the background of banquets in Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures, see Smith 2003.

[...] she did what she could: she anointed my body in advance, for the burial.\footnote{22} (Mk 14, 3–8)

In addition, in Mk 14, 3 the Latin version of the Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis, surely written before the Vulgata and even dated by Antonio Ammassari to the first century A.D.,\footnote{23} presents the reading ampullam as a translation of ἀλάβαστρον, a unique variant in all the Greek and Latin manuscripts, even compared with the Greek parallel of the Codex Cantabrigiensis itself (D): at this point, the Vulgata presents the reading alabastrum and the Greek text gives ἀλάβαστρον, both here in Mark and in the synoptic parallel of Mt 26, 7, whereas Jn 2, 3 has libram, Greek λίτραν.\footnote{24} Ampullam nardi, the variant of the Latin column of the Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis for the scene of the Bethany Anointing in Mark, is identical with the ampullam nardi of our Petronian passage.

Moreover, it is remarkable that the whole Cena Trimalchionis is presented as a ‘Last Supper’, because in the scene of the ‘funeral anointing’ Trimalchio clearly invites the guests to regard the Cena as a funeral banquet, and because the references to the death-theme are numerous and constant, disseminated all over the novel, and noted by many scholars.\footnote{25} But, thanks to a prediction which he steadfastly believes, Trimalchio knows very well that he will live for many more years: in Sat. 78, 1 he himself says that an astrologer, whom he consulted, foretold that he would enjoy more than thirty years of life. So, if in the immediate context there is nothing which suggests that we regard the Cena as a funeral banquet, it may well be that Petronius drew his inspiration for it from an outside source in which the death-theme was connected with a convivial one – maybe from the Gospel scene itself, even if Petronius seems to allude to it in a parodic manner and has Encolpius

\footnote{22} Κατακεκμένου αὐτοί ἦλθεν γυνὴ ἐχουσα ἀλαβαστρον μύρου νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτελοῦς· συντρίψασα τὴν ἀλαβαστρον κατέχεεν αὐτοῦ τῆς κεφαλῆς [...] ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔδειξεν ἅφετε αὐτήν [...] καλὸν ἔργον εἰργάσατο [...] ὃ ἔσχεν ἐποίησεν προέλαβεν μψαται τὸ σῶμα μου εἰς τὸν ἐνταφιασμὸν. Ed. Merk 1984.


\footnote{24} On this Gospel according to the earliest Christian tradition see Bauckham 1993, 24–69.

\footnote{25} See Arrowsmith 1966, 304–331, who, in the context of a reappraisal of Petronius’ work as a coherent description of a corrupted society, studied the realism and symbolism of the Cena. The fact is, however, that Trimalchio knew, or at least believed, that he still had many years to live. Also see Bodel 1994, 237–259.
express a certain disgust. The comment which concludes the episode reads: 'the business was becoming particularly nauseating.'

But there are also other traces that may lead us to suppose a certain knowledge of Christian narratives in Petronius. In the same context of the Cena Trimalchionis at Sat. 74, 1–3, a cock’s crow is presented by Petronius as sign of a negative and funereal event, such as a fire or somebody’s death, whereas in classical literature it foretells only happy events, such as victories. Moreover, the cock is described by Petronius as *index*, ‘accuser, denouncer:’

While he was saying so, a cock crew. At that cry, Trimalchio got upset, and had some wine poured under the table and also on the lamp. Besides, he transferred his ring to his right hand and said: ‘It is not without a reason that this trumpeter gave a sign: there will surely be a fire, or someone in the neighbourhood will kick the bucket. May this be far from us! So, whoever brings me this *index* will receive a reward.’ And before he finished speaking, the cock was brought in from the neighbourhood, and Trimalchio ordered that he should be cooked in a bronze vessel. Thus, carved by that most skilled cook, he was put in a pot.

The question arises whether this characterization, which is so different from the one that was widespread in classical antiquity, can represent – although here the context is comic and the cock is immediately put in a pot! – a reminiscence of the well-known Gospel episode of the cock’s crow connected with Peter’s betrayal: here the cock is really a ‘denouncer,’ an *index*.

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26 On which see Miller 1997.
27 *Haec dicente eo gallus gallinaceus cantavit. Qua voce confusus Trimalchio vinum sub mensa iussit effundi lucernamque etiam mero spargi. Immo anulum traiecit in dexteram manum et: ’Non sine causa, inquit, hic bucinus signum dedit; nam aut incendium operet fiat, aut aliquis in vicinia animam abiciat. Longe a nobis! Itaque quisquis hunc indicem attulerit, corollarium accipiet.’ Dicto citius de vicinia gallus allatus est, quem Trimalchio iussit ut aeno coctus fieret. Laceratus igitur ab illo doctissimo coco […] in caccabum est coniectus.
28 This question was posed, although on more partial bases, by Cabaniss 1960, 36–39. Petronius knew at least an oral version of the Christian message.
29 The Gospel episode of Peter with the cock was known to the pagan polemicist Celsus (*ap. Orig. C.Cels. 2, 45*) and at that time the iconographical representation of the Saint with the cock had spread. Cf. Thiede 1998, *passim*; Rinaldi 1998, 2, 431–432, nr. 587; Id.
dex, and his crowing marks the beginning of a day of pain and death, the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. Also in this case, it could be meaningful that the Gospel of Mark is the one which most of all stresses this detail of the cock, with a double crow (Mk 14, 30; 14, 68; 14, 72).

Another Gospel scene that may be parodied in Petronius is that of the institution of the Eucharist: in the final episode at Croton (Sat. 141, 2) Eu molpus promises with solemnity to leave his whole heritage to those who will divide his flesh in parts and eat it in front of the people: Omnes qui in testamento meo legata habent [...] hac condicione percipiant quae dedi, si corpus meum in partes conciderint et astante populo come derint.30 In this case the possible polemical allusion on the part of Petronius would fit very well in the context of the contemporary anti-Christian accusation of anthropophagy – one of the presumed wrong-doings (flagitia) of the Christians in Tac. Ann. 15, 44 –, that originated from a misunderstanding of the Eucharist.31

Finally, it seems possible to point out some precise allusions to the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ in the brief tale of the Widow of Ephesus:32 in this episode, as we shall see, there may be some echoes of the anti-Christian charges which form the basis of the so-called Nazareth Edict, a document – as it seems – of the Neronian age. In Sat. 111, 5 –112, 3, in fact, the story concerns three men who have been condemned by a provincial governor around A.D. 3033 and crucified, and who are guarded by a soldier

30 Bowersock 1994, 134ff. too suggests that in this Petronian passage there is a reference to the Christian Eucharist. For the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist see e.g. Nodet-Taylor 2000.
31 See Nagy 2001, 223–249: the accusation of human sacrifice and cannibalism was already alive against the Jews: see Isaac 2004, 466–478; 210 for this accusation against the Christians; also Waltzing 1925; Rives 1995; Ramelli 2001b, 245–274.
33 Already A. Sogliano had seen in Petronius a parody of Jesus’ resurrection (Archiv. St. Prov. Napol. 21, 1896, 178). Colin 1953, 101ff. proposes in Petr. 111, 10 the reading acetabuleo odore corrupta, ‘corrupted by the smell of the vinegar,’ when the soldier who guarded the crucified offered the vinegar drink to the widow, and thus finds a further possible parallelism with Mk 15, 36, where Jesus on the cross receives vinegar from the
during the night, in order that no one can steal their bodies. But on the third
day one of the corpses is stolen and replaced with another. The people won-
der at the reanimation of the crucified man: and Petronius seems to smile at
this sarcastically.

It is important to notice that the Jews actually accused the Christians of
stealing a dead body (τυφλοπυρήνα), according to Mt 28, 2, and that on this
charge the so-called Nazareth Edict seems to be founded. It orders the death
of those who have stolen a corpse from its grave: it was a very severe pen-
alty for a crime that was usually punished only by a fine. This imperial edict
(διάταγμα Καισαρος) was probably promulgated under Nero, and it probably
was aimed precisely at the Christians,34 because it condemned not only the
stealers of dead bodies, as the Christians were regarded, but also – according
to E. Grzybek’s interpretation – those who worshipped a human being, while
only the gods should be worshipped. As for Petronius himself, he certainly
seems interested in life after death: Trimalchio says to Habinnas: ‘I beg you
to represent a little bitch at the feet of my statue [sc. on the tomb], and gar-
lands, and ointments, and all the fights of Petraites, in order that, thanks to
you, I can live after my death.’35 But this kind of life after the present life is
very different from that of the Christian resurrection, at which Petronius
seems to be poking fun.

So, all these clues taken together can lead us to suppose a certain knowl-
edge of the Christian narratives by Petronius, and perhaps knowledge of
Mark’s Gospel. The novelist’s attitude is certainly full of irony and his ap-
proach parodic.36

34 So Grzybek-Sordi 1998, 279–291. On the Nazareth Edict (SEG 8, 1937, nr. 13) and the
possibility of a Claudian date cf. also Boffo 1994, 319–333; Bruce 1962, 309–326. For
the link between the edict and Petronius and Chariton see Ramelli 2001, chs. 1; 8. For Mt
28, 12 I add now the Catena commentaries in Simonetti 2001.

35 Valde te rogo ut secundum pedes statuae meae catellam pingas, et coronas et unguenta
et Petraitis omnes pugnas, ut mihi contingat tuo beneficio post mortem vivere.

36 Bibliography in Ramelli 2001, ch. 8 and 266–267; see also Plaza 2000; Brioso Sánchez
2000, 121–141.
These suggestions have been kept alive, commented on and developed, to my knowledge, by scholars of different interests, such as M. Sordi, C.P. Thiede, G.G. Gamba, A. Setaioli, B.P. Reardon, A. Casalboni, L. Motti, A. Tornielli and G. Ravasi.

Moreover, a possible parody of the Christian initiation rite may be suggested by a parallel, already observed by Quasten, between another episode of the Cena Trimalchionis, at Sat. 40, where the guests swear after raising their arms to the ceiling, and the baptismal rite as described by Ps. Dionysius Areopagite, where the man/woman to be baptized swears to submit to Christ after raising his/her arms to heaven (Eccl. Hier. 2, 2, 6). However, here the parallel would not be with the Gospel, but with a liturgical practice, and it seems to me rather doubtful.

After a methodical analysis on the ancient novels I feel that several motifs that seem linked to the Gospel narratives are present not only in Petronius, but also in other classical novelists. For example, Chariton of Aphrodisias, who probably was a contemporary of Petronius or wrote soon after him in an area already populated by Christians, presents scenes of crucifixion, defilement of tombs by the theft of bodies, and resurrection: all of these are apparent. In particular with regard to resurrection, Glen Bowersock posed the question whether Chariton could have been influenced by the Christian narratives; more recently Carsten Peter Thiede analysed the Charitonian scenes in detail, and pointed out remarkable affinities with the Gospel narratives.

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37 Sordi 1998, 217–229; Thiede 1998, 96–123; 2004b, 331–332; 398–399; 406–407; Gamba 1998, but at least with Ramelli 1999, 207–210. Even though I find it unlikely, according to Thomas Völker (I am deeply grateful to the author, who communicated with me per litteras) Petronius, who wrote in A.D. 62, read also Jn and Mt; he finds a number of parallels in sequence, and he thinks that the so-called catholic epistles (1, 2Pt; 1, 2, 3Jn) include references to Petronius when they speak of irrision and blasphemia. All this is very problematic.

38 Setaioli 2000, 159–172; Reardon 2001.


40 Quasten 1935–37, 281 n. 6.

41 Ramelli 2001 and further reflections; Ead. forthcoming d.

narratives, above all with the Gospel of John, which was written in a geographical area next to that in which Chariton wrote, and with the Gospel of Matthew, the only one that mentions the anti-Christian accusation of τυμβωρυχα. The crucifixion Chariton describes is that of Chaereas — ordered and then revoked by the oriental governor Mithridates, together with other wrong-doers. Chaereas, keeping silence, and without accusing anyone, not even the girl who is responsible for his troubles, carries his cross himself and is ‘delivered into the hands of the executioners’ (see the parallels in Mt 36, 45; Mk 9, 31; 14, 41; Lk 9, 44; 24, 7). There is also the exhortation to Chaereas to get down from the cross: κατάβηθι (4, 3), precisely the same verbal form as in Mt 27, 40: it is also the only occurrence in the whole novel.

Moreover, a particularly interesting scene is that of the τυμβωρυχα and of Callirhoe’s ‘death’ and ‘resurrection,’ both apparent, in 3, 2–3. This episode is linked both with the previously mentioned episode of the Widow of Ephesus and with the Gospel narratives: first C.P. Thiede and then I pointed out many evident lexical and syntactical affinities between Chariton and the Gospels. The third day after the burial, at dawn, after the night during which Callirhoe has been stolen from the tomb by the τυμβωρυχοι (3, 3, 1–7), Chaereas comes to the grave and brings funeral offerings, but finds the stones rolled away from the entrance, and he does not know what to do or

43 Bowersock 1994, 119; Thiede 1998, 130–132. Of course we must remember the existence of dying and rising gods like Osiris (see e.g. Casadio 1999, 180 on Aion = Osiris as a rising god; Id. 2003, 250ff. for Adonis and Osiris as rising gods; Id. 2005, 208; Griffiths 1980), but the chronological coincidence with the birth of Christianity and the affinity of scenes and themes seem to suggest possible ‘Christian’ references.

44 Blomberg 2001 through each pericope demonstrates the historicity of the Gospel and the authorship of John, the son of Zebedee, who wrote it near the end of the first century (80s–90s or somewhat earlier) for churches in and around Ephesus in Western Asia Minor (41–44). There is a special link with Mk, the Gospel that Petronius perhaps knew: ‘numerous features of his narrative read as if he is trying to allude to events in Mark for those who are familiar with them’ (48), because all four Gospels would have circulated widely quite quickly. But he is an ‘independent witness to the words and works of the historical Jesus’ (49). See also Dodd 1983; Barrett 1983; Hill 1998, 582–629; Busse 2002; Hill 2004, a fresh examination of how the books traditionally associated with John the Apostle, which constitute a major portion of the Christian NT, were accepted or not accepted, in the early Church. On the ancient sources concerning the redaction of the Gospel of John see Ramelli 2007. The topos of the apparent resurrection in ancient narratives is now studied by Prince 2003; for a comparison with that of Christ in the NT see e.g. Persili 2000; Thiede 2001 and Bieringer 2002.


think. Then Rumour, represented as an ἄγγελος, rapidly spreads the paradoxical piece of news, and so all the people run to the grave, but nobody dares to go in before Hermocrates, Callirhoe’s father, allows it. Then Chariton insists on the bystanders’ incredulity (ἀπιστία, ἀπίστον) before the empty grave: they wonder where the corpse is. Some people ascribe the disappearance of the girl to τυμβορώχοι, who, they suppose, have stolen her (ἐκλέψαν αὐτήν: Mt 28, 13 ἐκλέψαν αὐτόν), while Chaereas goes in, and, ‘eyes raised to heaven, arms outstretched,’ proclaims Callirhoe’s divinization and assumption in heaven.47

The stealing of a corpse in the τυμβορώχοι is the only element that, unlike the others mentioned above – crucifixion, apparent death, resurrection –, did not become a commonplace in the ancient novels. The noun τυμβορώχοι, which occurs 16 times in Chariton’s novel and sometimes also in the grave inscriptions of Aphrodisias, does not occur in any other Greek novel. This seems to confirm that at the time of Chariton the anti-Christian accusation of τυμβορώχα was current, as attested by Mt 28, 13: this accusation is probably reflected in Petronius, in the episode of the Widow of Ephesus included in the Satyricon, and in the so-called Nazareth Edict: in fact, the Gospel of Matthew, the novels of Petronius and Chariton, and the Edict are roughly contemporary documents.48

Subsequently, this charge lost vigour: it is not present in the later literature, nor in the novels (at least after Xenophon of Ephesus), where however the other themes continue to occur, as I pointed out in detail in a recent analysis of the ancient novels.49 In fact, crucifixion, apparent death and resurrection are frequent elements in the ancient novels,50 precisely from the middle of the first century A.D. on. Thus in another early novel, that of

48 They would be roughly contemporary even if we accepted a very late date for the composition of Mt, as A.D. 85–90 proposed by Schnackenburg 2002. But several scholars think of an early date. Cf. Clarke 2003.
50 To bibliography given in my work add McGill 2000, 323–326, who investigates one avatar of this topos: Cleitophon’s speech over Leucippe’s supposed corpse in Achilles Tatius (5, 7) reworks a motif present in some sepulchral epigrams (AP 7, 288; 7, 506; 7, 542); Bremmer 2002, chs. 1; 4; for the resurrection theme in the Near East and its presence in local religious traditions, see Mettinger 2001.
Xenophon of Ephesus,\textsuperscript{51} there is the crucifixion of the male protagonist and the apparent death and resurrection of the female, in connection with a τυμβωρυχία episode. In Iamblichus\textsuperscript{52} the episodes of unsuccessful crucifixion number three, and also the scenes of apparent death and ‘resurrection’ multiply; in one of these Iamblichus seems to be engaged in a polemic against those who believe in resurrection, an attitude very similar to that of Petronius in the tale of the Widow of Ephesus. Moreover, the murder of Setapus by Sinonis exhibits interesting parallels with the Old Testament scene of Judith killing Holophernes. In Achilles Tatius,\textsuperscript{53} the scenes of apparent death and ‘resurrection’ multiply and thicken, perhaps even more than in Iamblichus.

Other important themes in the novels are the proclamation of non-violence, the opposition to suicide and the praise of chastity – also in the form of male virginity, scarcely known and esteemed previously in the pagan world, but very much in the Christian one.\textsuperscript{54} In Lollianus – whose fragmentary novel I did not take into consideration in my monograph, but studied only later – the theme of male virginity is present too.\textsuperscript{55} Photius in an epi-

\textsuperscript{51} Ramelli 2001, ch. 2; to bibliography I add at least Cueva 2004, ch. 2.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. ch. 3.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. ch. 4. To add: Cueva 2004, ch. 4.
\textsuperscript{54} In addition to the bibliography given in my book, I also refer to: Gasparro 1984; Drijvers 1987, 241–273; Brown 1988; 1990; Cameron 1989; Elm 1994; Lalanne 1999; Rodríguez Martin 2002; Foskett 2002, on the portrayal of Mary as a virgin in Lk and the Protoevangelium of James. On the significance of early Christian virginity: Milazzo 2002; McInerney 2003, chs. 1–2; Feichtinger-Seng 2004. For the chastity theme in early Christian and Jewish narrative: Wudel 2003. On the perception of chastity in Judaism: Horst 2002, ch. 10, ‘Celibacy in Early Judaism’; Deming 2004. Encratism is seen as the normal form of Christianity in Syriac regions by Lloyd-Moffett 2003; see also Gero 1986, 287–307; Bengoechea Jove 1999, 267–281. For the encratic trend of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles see Tissot 1981, 109–119; Burrus 1987; Goldhill 1995; Cooper 1996; Konstan 1998, 15–36. See also Gaca 2003, and, on love relationships in the ancient novels, Konstan 1987, 21 and 23; Id. 1994, who shows the equivalence of the roles of the female and male protagonists in the ancient novels; Id. 1997, 117–133. On the feminine characters in the ancient novel see Pouderon 2001: here in particular Reardon 2001b, who investigates the role of the heroines, beginning with Chariton’s novel: he notices a shift of the author’s interest from the adventures to the emotions and the ethical character of the female protagonist; this development is also present in other novels of the first century A.D., such as Chione and Metiochus and Parthenope.
\textsuperscript{55} Fr. A2r, which parallels a passage of Achilles Tatius’ novel, describes the offering of a payment for a man’s lost virginity. Sandy 1979, 367–376, compares Lollianus’ fragments with the novels by Petronius and Achilles Tatius and investigates a strange mystery ritual described in his novel. See also Jones 1980, 243–254, who analyses the parallels between
gram appreciated very much this high esteem for chastity, which in the novel of Iamblichus can even turn into an acceptance of martyrdom: this theme of the martyrdom was very conspicuous in contemporary Christianity, and we can find several indications of it in the pagan literature of the time, too. Also Longus, in his preface, prays that the deity allow him to live always in chastity and write the love stories of other people. Heliodorus\textsuperscript{56} seems characterized by a deep religious feeling and by a particular insistence on the chastity motif, including male chastity; here too, episodes of apparent death and ‘resurrection’ multiply and for the first of these it is even possible to give precise Gospel parallels. Moreover, it is important to note that suicide is described as an impiety. We may note, too, that certain Christians valued the novel of Heliodorus very highly.

On the whole, from a systematic analysis of the novels it has often been possible to recognize some linguistic elements that are common also to early Christian literature, and some moral values, such as loyalty, chastity, faith, respect for human life, that point to a spiritual and cultural world close to the Christian one, and seem to suggest a common Weltanschauung.\textsuperscript{57}

Moreover, David Konstan\textsuperscript{58} has recently pointed out that the Jewish-Christian God is strongly characterized by pity, unlike the Greco-Roman divinities, who, according to Aristotle’s definition of pity in \textit{Rhet.} 2, 8, 2, would be immune to this pathos, because they are not liable to the same misfortunes that the pitied suffer, and because pity implies suffering in those who feel pity as well. Many examples from literature and Greek epigraphy adduced by this scholar show that, if it is not always absent, at least pity is very problematic for the pagan gods, and in any case it is not part of their essence. Thus, it seems very interesting to me that in the Greek and Latin novels it is possible to find explicit appeals to the gods’ pity, as in the Chris-

\textsuperscript{56} Ramelli 2001, ch. 6. See now Konstan forthcoming. I am deeply grateful to the author, who kindly let me read the article and discussed with me Heliodorus’ possible relationship to Judaic and Christian culture. On Heliodorus also add at least Cueva 2004, ch. 5, according to whom Heliodorus is the Greek novelist who makes the most extensive and consistent use of mythology, and now Ramelli forthcoming e on the virtue of chastity in Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus.

\textsuperscript{57} Another common topic between Hellenistic culture (of which the ancient novels are an expression) and early Christianity has been recently explored in Horst 2003.

\textsuperscript{58} Konstan 2001, ch. 4.
tian world. I think that this may be another trait that links the ancient novels to Christianity, and Konstan in fact does not exclude some interaction, remarking rightly that Christianity developed within the Graeco-Roman world, in continuous cultural exchange with it.

On the basis of a methodical analysis and further research I have tried to demonstrate a knowledge of Christians and Christianity in several Greek and Latin novels in and after the first century A.D.: in some cases, this knowledge seems certain or very probable, in others, at least possible. It is demonstrably the case in Lucian and almost certainly, for example, in the second-century novelist Apuleius, who seems to allude to the Christians in an ironical tone not so different from that of Petronius. In fact, he presents a mass of current anti-Christian accusations in the description of the miller’s wife in *Met.* 9, 14–15. The woman is charged with: cruelty (*saevitia*), obstinacy (*pertinacia*), drunkenness, atheism, lasciviousness (*lascivia*), immodesty (*impudicitia*), witchcraft. Further references to Christianity seem to be present also in the *De magia* or *Apologia.* At *Apol.* 90, 5–6 a catalogue of magicians includes the names of Moses and, perhaps, Jesus; at *Apol.* 56 Aemilianus, the brother of Pudentilla’s first husband, is presented as an atheist who despised gods, temples and sacred ceremonies, and derided religion as if it were a joke (*facetiae sibi habere res divinas deridere*). It seems particularly significant to me that Aemilianus was called ‘Charon’ because of the gloomy sadness of his face and soul: the accusation of *tristitia* was a typical anti-Christian charge from the second half of the first century (see Ramelli 2001d).

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60 Rinaldi 1998, 1, 100–101; Ramelli 2001, ch. 7.
61 Ramelli 2001, ch. 9; Ead. 2001b; Ead. forthcoming d, Part I, ch. 3, with further documentation and bibliography; Frangoulidis 2000, 57–66; to the references already provided in the book add at least Moreschini 1983, 133–161; above all Ruggiero 2002, ch. 3, who agrees with me in seeing a probable parody of a Christian woman in the portrait of the miller’s wife. Rinaldi 1995b, 99–100 and Moreschini 2004, 28 also accept the Christianity of this woman depicted by Apuleius. Schmidt 1997 and 2003, too, studies the passage of the miller’s wife and maintains that hostility against the Christians is expressed in it, and that there may be an allusion to the Eucharist; Apuleius is the first philosopher who contrasts the characterization of the Christian God as the only and sole God. For the pagans on Christian women in antiquity see Mac Donald 1996, 49–126.
62 Ramelli 2001, ch. 9, with bibliography, to which add McNamara 2003.
63 In addition to my bibliographical references see Rinaldi 1998, 1, 99–100; 2, nrs. 125 and 649. As for the ass, which the Christians were accused of adoring, see Vischer 1951, 15–16; Ramelli 2001b, 245–274; Albrile 2004, 457–472.
Some further points: according to the *Suda, s.v.*, Achilles Tatius, the author of *Leucippe and Cleitophon*, was a Christian, and, according to Socrates, the historian of the Christian Church (5, 22, 50–51), Heliodorus, the author of the *Aethiopica*, was bishop of Tricca, in Thessaly, where he introduced the rule of ecclesiastical celibacy: the first statement seems rather suspect and in any case it is neither verifiable nor deniable, while I have tried to advance some arguments in favour of the trustworthiness of the second, put in its context and considered in the light of Socrates’ serious historiographical methodology: it seems that Socrates learnt this information directly in Thessaly, thanks to his knowledge of local customs and episcopal lists.\(^{64}\) It is interesting to note that the novel that makes the most of the chastity theme is that by Heliodorus (together with the novel of Achilles Tatius, the other supposed bishop), who introduced celibacy for the ecclesiastics in his diocese.

The above argument also has interesting consequences for our estimation of the novelists’ public.\(^{65}\) If we admit that the authors insert parodies and allusions to Christians and Christianity in their works, we ought to assume that also their public had some knowledge of the Christians, so that they could appreciate these references. This is very probable in the case of Petronius, who wrote in Rome soon after the Neronian persecution and who clearly alludes in his *Satyricon* to the fire of Rome, which caused so many spectacular executions of Christians. Moreover, in the court *milieu*, which Petronius frequented and addressed, the presence of Christians is attested already in the New Testament: St. Paul in the Letter to the Philippians (4, 22) mentions Christians ‘of the house of Caesar.’ Chariton, who wrote in Caria in the second half of the 1 century A.D., lived very close to areas of the Asia Minor where Christianity had already spread, thanks to St. Paul’s preaching.\(^{66}\) In both cases, the narratives of the New Testament, especially related to the crucifixion and the resurrection, could have been known both to the novelists and to their public.

Furthermore the Gospel narratives related to Christ’s passion, death and resurrection seem perhaps to be known not only to Petronius and Chariton, but also to a contemporary of theirs, the author – whoever he is – of the trag-

\(^{64}\) Ramelli 2001, ch. 6. To the bibliography on contemporary Christianity add now Burkett 2002; Brown 2003.

\(^{65}\) See Brioso Sánchez 2000/1; Holzberg 2001; Ramelli 2001, ch. 1 and *passim*.

\(^{66}\) See Ramelli 2001, ch. 8.
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edy Hercules Oetaeus, which has been handed down in Seneca’s corpus but is nowadays regarded by most scholars as spurious, as the work of a Stoic imitator of Seneca.  

Moreover, the crucifixion theme, also linked to the episode of the spectacular executions in Rome in A.D. 64, is present in other roughly contemporary pagan authors. For example Martial, who was in Rome in A.D. 64 and who probably was aware of the facts connected with the fire, in Spect. 8 recalls a particularly spectacular and bloody performance of the Laureolus mime, in which the protagonist, a slave, was really crucified, and presents as reason for this punishment the fact that he set the fire in Rome. It is precisely the incrimination used against the Christians: it is perfectly possible that here Martial was thinking of the Neronian episode. Seneca, too, seems to have been greatly impressed by the torment of the cross, which he mentions several times in his works, especially in the Ep. 14 and 101, written during his retirement from the political scene, viz. during the Neronian persecution against the Christians; moreover, Seneca says that Atilius Regulus suffered the cross (Ep. 98, 12; Prov. 3), unlike all other preceding authors. Soon after Seneca, Silius too affirms that Regulus suffered that torment, and he thinks of it as an instrument of glory more than a mortal torture. So, these are

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67 Ramelli 1998, 11–31; Ead. forthcoming d, Part II, ch. 5. Christian echoes in Hercules Oetaeus were noted especially by Pfister 1937, 58ff.; Deschner 1986, 70–72. I observe that Seneca sees Hercules’ death on Mount Oeta as a figure of the Stoic universal conflagration (ἐκπύρωσις) and an element of identification between Hercules and Juppiter: [Io- vem nominant] Herculem, quia vis eius invicta sit quandoque lassata fuerit operibus editis, in ignem recessura: ‘They call Juppiter Hercules, because his power is invincible and, once relaxed after the completion of his works, it will withdraw and change into fire’ (Ben. 4, 8, 1). See Torre 2000, 182–183. On the phenomena that occurred at Jesus’ death and at Hercules’, see Peláez 2001, 139–157, according to whom all these indicate a theophany.

68 Ramelli 1999b, 241–252, with bibliography on Neronian spectacles to which add e.g. Köhne 2001, not concerned only with gladiatorial spectacles; Ramelli forthcoming d, Part I, chs. 6–8.

69 For Martial’s chronology and work, bibliographical references in Ramelli 1999b, to which add Scherf 2001; Holzberg 2002.

70 Cotta Ramosino 1999, 93–106.

71 Manilius too, in the Andromeda episode (Astr. 5, 538–619), deliberately alters the mythographical tradition: he maintains that the heroine suffered the cross and he praises her for the dignity and the decorum shown by her during the torment.
themes that, in the second half of the first century A.D., seem to have had some influence on pagan literature.\textsuperscript{72}

It seems possible, in conclusion, that there was some interest in and knowledge of New Testament episodes, and in particular of those aspects of Christianity – viz. the Eucharist as eating Christ’s body, the crucifixion and the resurrection – which generally surprised the pagans and which probably were objects of polemic for them. And if Petronius and his public had such a knowledge of Christianity, it is plausible that other novelists too knew something about it and alluded to it in their writings.

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\textsuperscript{72} All this could be an example of reciprocal influence between pagan and Christian culture, on which see Oakes 2002. For knowledge of the Sacred Scripture among the pagans, note e.g. Cook 2000; Rinaldi 1998.
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