

Epona Salvatrix?:
Isis and the Horse Goddess
in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

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Introduction: Looking for Isis Before Book 11

One of the principal problems for readers looking for unity in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* has been in coming to grips with the relationship of Book 11 to the rest of the novel. Especially upon a first reading, there is very little (if anything) which prepares the reader for or seems to foreshadow the details of the Isiac climax. In the face of this dearth of clues the majority of unified readings of the work have focused on broader, sustained thematic unities rather than specific clues scattered throughout the narrative which point to the novel's end. Pro-unity arguments have noted the reversals in Book 11 which seem to look back at the preceding narrative; for example: the divinity, morality, and transformative power of Isis are answers to or corrections of the black, erotic magic of the early books.¹ Many others have seen unity in that Apuleius' own philosophical leanings are woven as various Platonic subtexts throughout the novel.² Others still point to sustained themes in the narrative which remain in place throughout all eleven books such as Lucius'

¹ The scholarship is vast and so here and below I cite what I take to be representative works which address these questions: Griffiths 1975, Sandy 1978, Schlam 1978 and 1992, 3-4, 5 and 7; Tatum 1979, 80-91; Luck 1985, 21-22; Smith 1998, Murgatroyd 2001, Ruiz-Montero 2007.

² Drake 1968, Schlam 1970, DeFilippo 1990, Freudenburg 2007, Graverini 2012, 112ff.; Winkle 2013

obsessions with food, hair, and magic³ or even that Lucius remains a gullible dupe from beginning to end.⁴

All these takes on the novel would certainly agree that no matter how unified (or dis-unified) the narrative is along whatever lines one considers, the ending is both jarring, unexpected, and puzzling.⁵ But is there truly nothing in Books 1-10 of the *Metamorphoses* which hints, even for the attentive second reader, at the coming appearance of Isis? Clues are certainly thin on the ground. Some scholars have taken Apuleius' claim in the prologue that his tale is one written on an "Egyptian papyrus inscribed with the sharpness of a reed from the Nile"⁶ as an indirect nod toward the climax.⁷ Others have seen Isiac hints early in the novel in the names of Socrates' and Aristomenes' supernatural tormentors, Meroë and Panthia—Meroë, the name of an Isiac sanctuary on the Upper Nile; and Panthia, strikingly close to "Panthea" ("All-Divine"), a common epithet applied to the goddess Isis.⁸ These witches, then, are "corruptions" of the perfection we encounter in the last book as well as another one of the many "clues" scattered throughout the narrative which Lucius misses, misreads, misunderstands, or ignores. Peden⁹ has intriguingly suggested that we might see Isis lurking in the background as part of the statuary in Byrrhena's (Lucius' aunt) reception area:

³ Schmeling and Montiglio 2006.

⁴ Harrison 2000, 210-259; Zimmerman 2006; Montiglio 2013, 163-189.

⁵ Penwill 1990 sees "surprise" in and of itself as a kind of unifying factor in the novel; Book 11 is simply the last of many unexpected reversals in the text.

⁶ *Met.* 1.1.1: *...papyrum Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami...* Throughout this essay the Latin text of the *Metamorphoses* will be from Robertson 1971 and the translation from Hanson 1989 unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Drake (1968, n. 8) fuses author and protagonist together and argues, "Lucius-Apuleius in effect is saying that he will guide the reader through the subtleties of Egyptian theology. Plutarch, *Amatorius* 762A, remarks that Egyptian myths darkly point the way upwards for lovers. *Calami* therefore proleptically implies that the theme is the Isiac road to divine love." See also Grimal 1971, Gibson 2001.

⁸ On Meroë see Griffiths 1978, 143 as well as Juvenal 6.522f who links the place of Meroë with the Isis cult. On Panthia see Walsh 1970, 149 n. 2. Walsh also notes another side to the pun in that *Panthia* is also close to *Pentheia*, the sense of which is certainly brought out in Panthia's threat to dismember Socrates in a Bacchic frenzy at *Met.* 1.13. On Isis as Panthea (and other appellations) see Witt 1997, ch. 9. For a statuette of Isis Panthea (and her assimilation with Fortuna) see Pollini 2003. Apuleius may also be making use of double-entendres to undercut the "sacredness" of Meroë's name, which also sounds something like "drunkard" (*merum*). Photis' name too could mean either "illumination" or "to fuck" depending on which Greek root the reader seizes. See van Mal-Maeder 2001.

⁹ Peden 1985

Atria longe pulcherrima columnis quadrifariam per singulos angulos stantibus attolerabant statuas, palmaris deae facies, quae pinnis explicitis sine gressu, pilae volubilis instabile vestigium plantis roscidis delibantes, nec ut maneant inhaerent, et iam volare creduntur (2.4.1-2).

The atrium was particularly beautiful. Columns were erected in each of its four corners, and on these stood statues, likenesses of the palm-bearing goddess; their wings were outspread, but, instead of moving, their dewy feet barely touched the slippery surface of a rolling sphere; they were not positioned as though stationary, but you would think them to be in flight.

The palm-bearing goddess here, Peden argues, is not simply a Victory, but rather “a concealed epiphany of Isis in her role as Isis-Victoria-Fortuna”¹⁰ quietly making her presence known on the margins and in particular guises which she herself emphasizes in Book 11. Thus, when Byrrhena intones her loaded invitation to Lucius at 2.5.1—*tua sunt...cuncta quae vides*—the *cuncta* encapsulate not just Lucius’ imminent transformation as prefigured by the statue-group of Diana and Actaeon (2.4) but also the providence of and his eventual salvation by the goddess peering in from the sidelines.

In the pages that follow I suggest that we might see another specific hint of the Isiac epiphany to come in Lucius’ encounter with the shrine of the horse goddess Epona immediately following his transformation into an ass:¹¹

Dumque de insolentia collegarum meorum mecum cogito atque in alterum diem auxilio rosario Lucius denuo futurus equi perfidi vindictam meditor, respicio pilae mediae, quae stabuli trabes sustinebat, in ipso fere meditullio Eponae deae simulacrum residens aediculae, quod accurate corollis roseis equidem recentibus fuerat ornatum (3.27.1-2).

While I was pondering the effrontery of my colleagues and plotting the revenge I would take on my treacherous horse the next day, when I became Lucius again with the aid of the roses, I caught sight of a statue of Epona seated in a little shrine at almost the exact midpoint of the central

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 382

¹¹ Fry (1984) also argues for Isiac clues scattered throughout the novel, seeing, in particular, Isiac presence in the many mentions of Fortune. He also sees Isis “lurking” in the figure of Epona in this passage and elsewhere in the narrative. For the literary, intra-Apuleian part of my argument I take my cue from Fry in several places, especially in the latter part of this essay. For Fry on Isis and Epona see especially pp. 152-158.

pillar supporting the stable's roof beams. The statue had been carefully decorated with garlands of roses, fresh roses.

What does Epona have to do with Isis? Quite a lot, I hope to convince the reader, and I will explore both the broader, extra-Apuleian and possible intra-Apuleian connections between these two goddesses in the pages to follow. But to begin, I submit that even this short scene may invite comparison with the Isiac climax, the two goddesses acting almost as bookends to the tale, marking, as it were, Lucius' transformation and retransformation. Broadly, the matter of the roses decorating Epona's shrine strikes me as a rather clear foreshadowing of Lucius' ultimate retransformation at 11.13 (and we shall see below that the rose was a symbol associated with both Epona and Isis), but more specifically there is something of a verbal correspondence between the description of Epona's shrine and the shrine of Isis before which Lucius stands at 11.24 immediately following his Isiac initiation. Compare:

...respicio pilae mediae, quae stabuli trabes sustinebat, **in ipso** fere **meditullio** Eponae **deae simulacrum** residens aediculae...(3.27.2).

...I caught sight of a statue of Epona seated in a little shrine at almost the exact midpoint of the central pillar supporting the stable's roof beams.

Namque **in ipso** aedis sacrae **meditullio** ante **deae simulacrum** constitutum tribunal ligneum iussus superstiti byssina quidem sed floride depicta veste conspicuus (11.24.2).

Following instructions I stood on a wooden platform set up in the very centre of the holy shrine in front of the goddess' statue, the focus of attention because of my garment, which was only linen, but elaborately embroidered.

One, of course, can make too much of these kinds of verbal echoes and recurrent motifs in the novel, but here I rather follow Schlam in his argument that such in Apuleius are "not...arbitrary abstractions, but part of the language of and texture of the *Metamorphoses*"¹² than Heine's caution that repetitions in the text prove only that Apuleius' "wealth of words and ideas

¹² Schlam 1992, 6

and his structural resources are not totally unlimited.”¹³ The echo above is not, obviously, exact but there is enough here, I think, to judge the correspondence as not coincidental and as inviting further exploration (especially noting the recurrence of the rather rare word *meditullium*)¹⁴ of possible links between the two scenes and the two goddesses at their centers. Before we turn to the specifics of these links, let us first set the stage with an overview of Epona herself and her various aspects as they were understood during the imperial period.

Epona beyond the stable: overlaps with Isiac aspects

The goddess Epona is notable in that she was the only Celtic deity to be fully incorporated into the pantheon of the Roman Empire, even receiving an official feast day (December 18th) of her own.¹⁵ Our knowledge of this goddess comes primarily from material remains (literary references to Epona in classical texts are rare);¹⁶ she appears on a variety of monuments (throughout the Empire, but particularly in Gallic and Celtic lands and in areas north of Rome and Athens),¹⁷ usually seated side-saddle on a mare or between two horses or donkeys, feeding them from food gathered in her lap. She is also often depicted carrying a variety of items, most commonly a *patera* laden with fruit, a cornucopia, or a key.¹⁸ She is primarily remembered (and rightly so) as the *protectrix* of the stable and its denizens as well as a kind of patron

¹³ Heine 1978, 34. For more on verbal echoes in Apuleius see van Mal-Maeder 2001, 411 and Montiglio 2012, 177-179.

¹⁴ Used in three other places in the *Met.*: 5.1.2 (referring to the center of the grove where Cupid’s palace stands), 7.19.4 (referring to the center of the bundle the ass carries into which the sadistic boy inserts a burning coal) and 10.32.1 (referring to the center of the stage which the actress playing Venus graces in the Corinthian spectacle). The word appears in one other place in the Apuleian canon at *De Plat.* 2.5.

¹⁵ For the fullest and most recent scholarly treatments of Epona see Linduff 1979, Oakes 1986 and 1987, Green 1989, 16ff. and Speidel 1994, 141ff. There is also a rather useful (if a bit disorganized) Epona resource online (still available as of this writing) at <http://www.epona.net>, last updated in 2007.

¹⁶ Epona is briefly mentioned by only a few authors from Greco-Roman antiquity: Apuleius, *Met.* 3.27; Juvenal 9.157; Tertullian, *Apol.* 16.5; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 28.7; Prudentius, *Apotheosis* line 197.

¹⁷ See Linduff 1979, Pls. XXXV and XXXVI for maps detailing the distribution of Epona monuments in Europe.

¹⁸ For a full catalogue of Epona monuments categorized by pose and accessories see Boucher 1990.

deity for Roman cavalry.¹⁹ But perhaps one of the reasons that Epona has not played a significant role in Apuleian studies²⁰ is that her other funerary, chthonic, liminal, maternal, and psychopompic associations have been largely ignored or misunderstood. As Green notes, a broad archeological survey of depictions of Epona throughout the Empire and beyond reveals that “Epona’s cult [was]...far more profound than her role as stable guardian”²¹ and that “the goddess had a complex set of roles and functions which ranged from that of benefactress and dispenser of life’s bounties—in fact a form of mother-goddess—to presider over healing thermal sanctuaries and over the dead in their tombs.”²² It is in these associations outside of the stable that we see striking overlaps with aspects of the Apuleian Isis.

*Goddesses of Death and Regeneration*²³

On a number of funerary monuments Epona seems to play the role of guardian of the dead or of *psychopomp*, overseeing the transition from this life to the next. In at least two or three representations²⁴ we see her clutching a key, a common symbol of liminal, *psychopompic*, “gate-keeper” figures,²⁵ which Benoît compares to the key-holding Cybele who is able to unlock celestial gates for the departed.²⁶ Green describes a graveyard in la Horgne in which several Eponae appear: “...on one of these [funerary monuments] the chthonic symbolism is clear: the goddess sits on her mare accompanied by an individual who follows close behind; Epona is here a tomb-protectress, leading the soul of the dead to the afterlife.”²⁷ We also find Epona on a 2nd c.

¹⁹ Speidel 1994, 141f.

²⁰ As far as I can tell in the whole of Apuleian scholarship only Sandy (1978, 127) and Fry (1984, esp. pp. 152-158) have noted the link between Isis and Epona. Sandy merely observes the link without pursuing it, while Fry makes more of the connection between the goddesses and suggests that we may see something of an Isiac clue in the presence of Epona in Book 3 and elsewhere.

²¹ Green 1989, 23

²² *ibid.*, 17

²³ Clearly all the aspects I have chosen to examine briefly here have shared points of contact and overlap to some degree—such is indicative of the fluid syncretism of the era. But I hope that drawing attention to these shared elements puts the reader on solid footing for the more specific links explored in the next section.

²⁴ See Magnen and Thevenot 1953, pls. 21 and 22. Also, Webster 1986, pl. 15 (though the identification of this figure is disputed)

²⁵ For instance, compare Aion from Mithraic mythology or the iconography of St. Peter, for that matter.

²⁶ Benoît 1950, 56-57. See also Benoît 1965.

²⁷ Green 1989, 19.

funerary monument discovered near Oran, Algeria, where we see the goddess flanked by two equines standing in front of what may be the door to the Underworld²⁸ (a monument also notable for its geographic and temporal proximity to Apuleius himself). Apuleius also presents Isis as a kind of key-holder or tomb-guardian. Compare the above with the following excerpt from Lucius' description of one of Isis' liminal roles in his initial prayer to the moon goddess at 11.2.2:

...seu nocturnis ululatibus horrenda Proserpina triformi facie larvales impetus comprimens terraeque claustra cohibens lucos diversos inerrans vario cultu propitiaris...

or [you are] dreaded Proserpina of the nocturnal howls, who in triple form repress the attacks of ghosts and keep the gates to earth closed fast, roam through widely scattered groves and are propitiated by diverse rites...

In her self-identification at 11.5 Isis confirms her association with the dead while fleshing out her liminal, intermediary aspects by stressing her traffic in heavenly, earthly, and chthonic realms:

adsum...summa numinum, regina manium, prima caelitum, deorum dearumque facies uniformis, quae caeli luminosa culmina, maris salubria flamina, inferum deplorata silentia nutibus meis dispenso...(11.5.1).

I have come...I the mightiest of deities, queen of the dead, and foremost of heavenly beings; my one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses. With my nod I rule the starry heights of heaven, the health-giving breezes of the sea, and the plaintive silences of the underworld...

As we noted above, both Epona and Isis shared the rose as one of their divine symbols, and for both it seems to have represented death and rebirth. Green notes that the rose is a common symbol on funerary monuments featuring Epona²⁹ (and a symbol often associated with the dead in Roman cul-

²⁸ For image see Magnen and Thevenot 1953, pl. 45. For the association with the underworld see Benoît 1950, 58. Some believe that the door here may simply be the door to a stable. See also Magnen and Thevenot 1953, 58.

²⁹ Green 1989, 18-19. For specific Epona monuments featuring the rose see Magnen and Thevenot 1953, no. 181; Espérandieu 1907-1966, nos. 5320, 5341, and 5342; Pobe and Roubier 1961, fig. 179.

ture in general)³⁰ which likely underlines her chthonic and psychopompic roles. Isis likely inherited the rose as one of her symbols in large part due to her identification with Venus³¹ for whom it, too, conveyed a regenerative power, it often being the flower which springs forth from the spilled blood of Adonis in ancient poetry.³² This, of course, dovetails nicely with her notable role in the reassembling and resurrection of her brother/consort Osiris in Egyptian mythology.

Associations with the Maternal, the Earth, and Fortune

Inseparable from these aspects of regeneration is Isis' noted identity as Panthea or "All-Mother" seen in myriad places outside of the *Metamorphoses* (e.g. her common depiction with horns of plenty as well as her role as the seated mother nursing the child Horus or the young pharaoh),³³ but also foregrounded by Apuleius in Book 11. At 11.2 Lucius identifies the goddess with Ceres (and thus the abundance of the earth) and credits the goddesses with "nourish[ing] the joyous seeds with [her] moist fires"³⁴ as well as being the spark behind the sexual union and reproduction of humans. When the goddess first appears to Lucius at 11.3.4-5 he describes her as wearing a crown bedecked with flowers (*corona multiformis variis floribus*) along with outstretched ears of wheat (*spicis etiam Cerialibus desuper porrectis*). At 11.5.1 Isis begins her aretology giving primacy to her role as "Mother Nature" (*rerum naturae parens*).

Representations of Epona, too, stressed her maternal aspects and several surviving monuments directly connect her with the Matres or Matrones, these being the Celto-Gallo-Germanic triple-form goddesses worshipped primarily in NW Europe between the 1st and 5th centuries.³⁵ Again, Green: "Epona shows her concern for fertility and the well-being of human- and animal-kind by her possession of the attributes of the earth's fruitfulness—corn, *paterae*, fruit and bread. In this she has clear links with the mother-

³⁰ For example, the Festival of the *Rosalia* (May 23) during which graves were garlanded with roses.

³¹ e.g. *Met.* 11.2.1 and 11.5.2. Witt 1997, fig. 49 shows an Isiac altar with relief sculpture on all four sides, one of which shows an Isiac worshipper garlanding himself with roses.

³² e.g. Bion of Smyrna (2nd c.), *Epitaph of Adonis*, line 64f.

³³ For Isis with Horus, see Witt 1997, pls. 55 and 69; Isis with Pharaoh, see Witt 1997, pl. 3. See also n. 8 above.

³⁴ ...*udis ignibus nutriens laeta semina...*

³⁵ On the Matres in general see Ferguson 1970, 213-214; Lindow 2001, 224; Rives 2007, 75-76, 102. Evidence for this goddess seems to be exclusively *material*.

goddesses.³⁶ Gallic evidence in particular points up the connection: a 3rd c. dedication mentions Epona along with the Matres³⁷, on another monument the image of Epona appears alongside depictions of the Matres³⁸, and on yet another Epona is presented in triple-form, as the three Matrones were usually depicted.³⁹ Maternity along with symbols of abundance and fertility are, of course, also commonly associated with and displayed by figures of Fortune in Greco-Roman antiquity. Isis (who is of course identified as *Fortuna Videns* in the *Metamorphoses*) was often depicted as Isis-Fortuna or Isis-Victoria-Fortuna, usually clutching the cornucopia in one hand and a rudder in the other, while standing on a globe.⁴⁰ A consequence of Epona's connections with earthly abundance (see above) was that she was commonly depicted holding the cornucopia as well.⁴¹

Epona and Isis: literary and material links

Between the intra-Apuleian verbal echoes and the overlap of divine aspects and similarity of physical attributes, I hope that I have laid the groundwork for pursuing more direct connections between Epona and Isis in Roman an-

³⁶ Green 1989, 21. For illustrations see figures 8 and 9 on pp. 20-21. See also Lambrechts 1950 and Johns 1971-1972, 39 on Epona's connection to the Matres.

³⁷ *CIL*, XIII, n. 5622

³⁸ Thevenot 1968, 185f.

³⁹ Magnen and Thevenot 1953, 117. On triplism in Celtic imagery see Green 1989, ch. 6 as well as Rives 2007, 102.

⁴⁰ Archaeological evidence is legion. For material examples of Isis-Fortuna see Tran Tam Tinh 1990, 784-786, 794-795; Witt 1997, pls. 18 and 24; and Pollini 2003. Peden (1985, 382-383) argues that Isis-Victoria-Fortuna is "by far the most visually obvious cult figure at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and this assimilation is represented strikingly in cult prayer also." See also Coarelli 1994.

⁴¹ As one of this article's referees pointed out, the case for commonly held notions concerning aspects shared by both Epona and Isis throughout the Roman Empire (and thus readily available as an interpretive lens for Apuleius' audience) would be stronger if there was more archaeological evidence from Italy or Greece itself, rather than mostly from Gaul and other points north. I admit that depictions of Epona as *psychopomp* or mother-goddess are thin on the ground in and around Rome, but I would add that Eponae of this sort are indeed widespread particularly across the northern border of the Empire and not as localized as the examples I have chosen might suggest. Surely, given the syncretistic tendencies and relative peace of the Empire during the 2nd century these aspects of Epona may have had more currency than the archaeological records seems to support. See Oaks 1986 and 1987. Below I attempt to show that Epona and Isis are directly linked or even fused in representations found in Pompeian frescoes, but similar depictions have not been found elsewhere.

tiquity. The evidence is admittedly thin on the ground but there are threads in both the ancient literary and material record which certainly seems to reduce the distance between these two goddesses. First, a literary connection: we find a striking link drawn between Isis and Epona in a passage from Minucius Felix's *Octavius* (late 2nd/early 3rd c.). Here Felix, an early Christian apologist, makes an argument about what he takes to be ridiculous aspects of pagan worship:

Quis tam stultus, ut hoc colat? Quis stultior, ut hoc coli credat? Nisi quod vos et totos asinos in stabulis cum vestra vel sua Epona consecratis et eosdem asinos cum Iside religiose decoratis⁴²... (28,7).

Who is so stupid as to worship this kind of thing? Who is even more stupid so as to believe such a thing is worshipped? Unless, of course, you consecrate and decorate all the asses in your stables along with your—or, rather, *their own*—Epona and you reverently do the same to all your asses with Isis.⁴³

A striking connection not just in the mentioning of the two deities together and linking the use of asses in their respective rituals, but also in that Felix himself was (likely) a North African who lived and wrote roughly between AD 150 and 250,⁴⁴ which places him near Apuleius both in culture and chronology. Granted, it is risky making a claim based on a single piece of evidence, but might Apuleius, a countryman and possible contemporary of Felix, have also naturally connected these deities together?

⁴² There is particular dispute on this word in the manuscript tradition, others offering *adoratis*, *denotatis*, or *devoratis*. On the last of these some have suggested a connection with Plut. *De Isid. Et Osir.* 362 where that author mentions cakes imprinted with an ass (symbol of Seth-Typhon, the nemesis of Isis) which would be burnt and then devoured by the worshipper. On *devoratis* see Waltzing 1909, Beaujeu 1964, 137 and Clarke 1974, 323. On the variant readings in general see Halm 1867, 41 and Beaujeu 1964, 49. Latin text of the *Octavius* comes from Halm 1867.

⁴³ Translation mine.

⁴⁴ Biographical information on Felix is thin; he is known mainly through *Octavius*, the only surviving work attributed to him. His North African identity is deduced from (among other details) the fact the names of the participants in the argument in *Octavius* are epigraphically North African. For Felix as a North African and for his dates see von Albrecht 1987, 157. It is also worth noting that *Octavius* has many verbal and argumentative touch-points with another North African Tertullian (whom Felix may have either directly influenced or borrowed from), including a mention of Epona at *Apol.* 16.

There are also a few pieces of material evidence which may suggest that Isis and Epona were linked or even syncretized into a single deity, Isis-Epona. On the back wall of a niche in a *lararium* on the wall of a Pompeian stable (IX.2.24) we find what many have taken to be a painting of an Isis-Epona. Boyce describes the figure as “having blond hair and a veil falling down over the back of her head and wearing a white tunic and white boots, [and] seated upon the back of an ass which advances to the left; [on the right] she holds the red reins, [on the left] a child in green swaddling clothes which holds out its arms to her.”⁴⁵ The fact that the painting is in a stable makes the identification of an Epona here extremely likely; the further identification with Isis is more problematic, but as Reinach notes, we likely see here an Epona κουροτρόφος which seems to merge the figure of Epona as stable guardian with the well-attested type-scene of Isis attending to the infant Horus.⁴⁶ Weinrich and Fröhlich have also identified this painting as that of an Isis-Epona.⁴⁷

Elsewhere in Pompeii on the wall of a *pistrinum* (IX.3.10-12) was a fresco which may have depicted Isis and Epona flanking a *lararium* niche. The fresco itself is now lost but survives in an engraving which first appeared in Jordan (1872) and has been reproduced in a number of other places.⁴⁸ Jordan’s drawing depicts the following:⁴⁹ 1) on the left side of the panel, an Isis-Fortuna-Victoria—winged, with lunar horns crowning her head, clutching a cornucopia in her right hand, a rudder in her left, balancing on a globe—leaning against a pillar on top of which sits a *sistrum*. 2) To the immediate right of Isis is a small, naked, winged boy holding a torch which may be Hesperos or Amor.⁵⁰ 3) On the right side of the panel, on the other side of the *lararium* niche, is a woman, naked to the waist, riding a horse in full gallop (facing left) sidesaddle and holding an extended torch.

⁴⁵ Boyce 1937, 82. Figure is shown in Pl. 24, 2.

⁴⁶ Reinach 1895, 188-9. Reinach also mentions here the passage from Minucius Felix quoted above.

⁴⁷ Fröhlich 1991, 160 and Weinrich 1931, 20. Other scholars identify the figure as Epona but fail to make the Isiac connection. See Schefold 1957, 245 and Schleiermacher 1933, 132.

⁴⁸ Jordan 1872, plates B and C. See also Fröhlich 1991, and Petersen 2006, Fig. 26.

⁴⁹ My description here only attends to the anthropomorphic figures in the scene.

⁵⁰ For Hesperos see Fröhlich 1991, 295 and n. 85. For Amor see Boyce 1937, 83.

The figure on the left is undoubtedly Isis and, in my opinion, undoubtedly a depiction of a syncretized Isis-Victoria-Fortuna.⁵¹ The presentation here directly recalls the statues in the background of the Diana-Actaeon group which we examined above. The figure on the right is more controversial, but I believe a case can be made for an identification with Epona. Jordan (in whose work the engraving of the fresco first appears) identified the figure as Epona,⁵² but later scholars have more readily seen her as a representation of Luna, an extension of Isis' well-known associations with the moon.⁵³ The torch is difficult to explain if we take the figure to be an Epona, though I suppose one could see a connection with Epona's funerary, chthonic associations detailed above. However the figure is identified, the location of the fresco certainly strikes a very Apuleian note—the painting once watched over a bakery/mill (*pistrinum*) and the large millstones to which asses were once lashed to plod their weary circuit still stand in the space in front of where the fresco once stood. The very space of the building recalls Lucius-as-ass led off to work by the baker at *Met.* 9.10-11:

protinusque frumento etiam coempto adfatim onustum per iter arduum scrupis et cuiusce modi stirpibus infestum ad **pistrinum** quod exercebat perducit. Ibi complurium iumentorum multivii circuitus intorquebant molas ambage varia nec die tantum, verum perpeti etiam nocte prorsus instabili machinarum vertigine lucubrabant pervigilem farinam...die sequenti molae quae maxima videbatur matutinus adstituor et ilico velata facie propellor ad incurva spatia flexuosi canalisis, ut in orbe termini circumfluentis reciproco gressu mea recalcans vestigia vagarer errore certo.

Immediately [the baker] loaded me to capacity with grain that he purchased as well, and took me, by way of a steep path dangerously full of sharp stones and all sorts of underbrush, to the mill which he operated. There the multiple circuits performed by numerous beasts kept turning millstones of varying circumference, and not merely by day but throughout the night they would sleeplessly produce flour with the non-stop rotation of the machines...The next day I was attached early in the morning to what appeared to be the largest of the mill-wheels. My head was

⁵¹ Others simply identify the figure as Isis-Fortuna. See Boyce 1937, 83 and Petersen 2006, 42.

⁵² Jordan 1872, 42ff.

⁵³ Not the least of which we see at *Met.* 11.1ff. For the fresco figure as Luna see: Boyce 1937, 83; Schefold 1957, 250; Tran Tam Tinh 1964, 79; Fröhlich 1991, 295.

covered and I was immediately given a push along the curved track of a circular channel. Within an orbit circumscribed all round, ever going back over my own path, I retraced my very footsteps and blindly wandered on an invariable course.

Though it certainly does not account for all the varied imagery in the fresco, would not an image of Epona make a kind of practical sense for a *pistrinum* as it would for a stable given the faunal denizens of both? As it is difficult not to see a larger metaphor for Lucius' past and ongoing sufferings in his blind wanderings in the mill which keep taking him back to the same place over and over again, it too, I submit, is difficult not to envision the scene in these kind of Pompeian surroundings. It is tempting to imagine that, just as the simple antidote of the roses is often tragically just out of Lucius' reach, the would-be savior goddesses which more or less bookend the novel are staring down at the blindfolded ass stumbling unawares just a few paces in front of them.⁵⁴

Charite and Candidus: Intra-Apuleian references to Epona?

In this last section we will attend to a couple of scenes in the *Metamorphoses* where I suggest we might see allusions to Epona acting as a kind of thread which stretches from the scene in the stable immediately following Lucius' metamorphosis in Book 3 all the way to the end of the novel. Or to frame it in a question: is there anything else in the novel that suggests we might tie the identity of the horse goddess to that of Isis? Let us turn to the following episode—Charite's and Lucius' aborted escape from the robbers in Book 6. At 6.27 Lucius snaps his tether and he, with Charite on his back, makes a dash for freedom. In her exhilaration, Charite addresses the ass:

Iam primum iubam istam tuam probe pectinatam meis virginalibus monilibus adornabo...bullisque te multis aureis inoculatum...sinu serico progestans nucleos et edulia mitiora, te meum sospitorem cotidie saginabo...et depictam in tabula fugae praesentis imaginem meae domus atrio dedicabo (6.28-29).

⁵⁴ Lucius is also harnessed to a grinding mill earlier in the novel at 7.15.

First I shall lovingly comb this mane of yours, and adorn it with childhood trinkets...you will be decked with lots of gold medals...I shall stuff you every day with nuts and softer delicacies carried in the folds of my silk apron...I shall have a picture painted of this flight of mine, and consecrate it in the atrium of my house.

Not only do Charite's words invite us to imagine the scene as a work of art,⁵⁵ but her pose and actions recall artistic renderings of Epona. Weinrich has noted how this scene seems to directly recall the pose and composition of the (likely) Isis-Epona we examined above, interpreting Charite's promise of a painting as referring to the very kinds of votive scenes we find in Pompeii.⁵⁶ In numerous other sculptures she appears as a young maiden riding a horse or donkey sidesaddle clutching a bowl or basket of food, or seated in a stable feeding equines with food gathered on her lap in her apron.⁵⁷ Consider again the lines from Minucius Felix's *Octavius* in which the worship of Epona is associated with the decoration of asses with Charite's blandishments (promising to adorn Lucius with trinkets and medals) in mind:

Quis tam stultus, ut hoc colat? Quis stultior, ut hoc coli credat? Nisi quod vos et totos asinos in stabulis cum vestra vel sua Epona consecratis et eosdem asinos cum Iside religiose **decoratis**⁵⁸...(28.7)

⁵⁵ Many scholars have noted how the *Metamorphoses* is a novel which is interested in the blurred boundaries between the static and the living and which is very aware of itself as a work of art alongside other works of art, to the degree that the visual repertoire of its audience is time and again brought into interpretive play. In book 2, Lucius' fevered, magical imagination has him seeing statues come to life and hearing walls speaking; elsewhere Lucius himself figuratively becomes a statue for the communal gaze at both the Risus and Isiac festivals. In still other places, characters take on poses which immediately conjure up well-known, oft-painted and sculpted scenes—Photis becomes both the bashful Venus and the Venus upon the waves in her love-play with Lucius (2.17). Venus herself in the Cupid and Psyche tale appears the ocean-riding goddess attended by her maritime retinue in a florid *ekphrasis* (4.31). See Slater 1998.

⁵⁶ Weinrich 1931, 20. He comments: "Charite auf dem Esel als Votivebild im Atrium ihres Hauses kann man sich vorstellen etwa nach Analogie jener auf einem Esel thronenden Epona—oder wohl richtiger Isis-Epona—an der Wand eines Stalles in Pompeji." Hijmans notes "...the custom of dedicating a picture of the danger from which one has escaped is known to us from literature and art" (1995, 56). Cf. Hor. *Carm* 1.5.13ff and *Sat*. 2.1.32ff.

⁵⁷ See Pobe and Roubier 1961, figures 179, 180, and 181. For a comprehensive list of extant Eponae categorized according to pose, see Boucher 1990.

⁵⁸ See n. 42 above for possible variants in the manuscript tradition.

Who is so stupid as to worship this kind of thing? Who is even more stupid so as to believe such a thing is worshipped? Unless, of course, you consecrate and **decorate** all the asses in your stables along with your—or, rather, *their own*—Epona and you reverently do the same to all your asses with Isis.

I gently suggest, then, we might see a clue planted here for the attentive reader (perhaps along the lines of Winkler's "detective novel" model),⁵⁹ another clue which the wayward Lucius, of course, fails to interpret properly.⁶⁰ Along these lines we might see both Charite and Lucius—at one level at least—misreading the scene, seeing resonations with Dirce, Phrixus, Arion, and Europa rather than the goddess lurking in the scene.⁶¹ Charite acts as a would-be (but ultimately failed) savior for Lucius, a figure who is but a simulacrum of the savior goddess he is yet to meet. As opposed to most of the other women in the novel Charite is marked by honor, chastity, and decency, aspects which, perhaps foreshadow the godhead of Isis and life within her care.⁶² But Charite is mortal and like Lucius she, too, is presented as a victim of cruel Fortune. Both Charite and Lucius are soon caught by the brigands as they act at cross purposes at a crossroads and of course, Charite's own tale ends extremely tragically.⁶³ But in that brief moment of near escape Charite's Epona-like pose and susurrations in Lucius' ear there is a whiff of the divine and, perhaps, a subtle pointer to the final book.⁶⁴

The last scene I wish to consider is from the final book (11.20) where Lucius has a puzzling dream in which an Isiac priest tells him of the impending return of a slave of his named Candidus. Upon his awaking the meaning of the dream is quickly revealed:

⁵⁹ Winkler 1985, 103

⁶⁰ Fry 1984 makes a similar argument. See esp. pp. 156ff.

⁶¹ *Met.* 6.27 and 29. One of this article's referees suggests, fairly, that any reference to Epona here would be a slight overtone and that "Europa on the bull" is the most immediate reference in the scene (Europa also "decorates" the bull with garlands—see Ovid, *Met.* 2.866ff.). Still, I would contend that the "misreading" of referents here is in keeping with Lucius' inability to recognize cautionary signposts throughout his journey and offer Epona as a possible iconographic model against which to read the scene. See also note 55 above.

⁶² On this point see Schlam 1992, 75-76.

⁶³ Even here Schlam notes that "Charite commits suicide in the tradition of manly heroism, with a sword" (*ibid.*, 76).

⁶⁴ For possible Platonic echoes in this scene see Winkle 2013, 23ff.

Quare sollertiam somni tum mirabar vel maxime, quod praeter congruentiam lucrosae pollicitationis argumento servi Candidi equum reddidisset colore candidum.

Then it was that I particularly marveled at the prophetic nature of the dream, for, besides having its promise of gain confirmed, it foretold under the symbol of a slave Candidus (which means white) the recovery of my white horse.

Many scholars have noted a likely Platonic sheen to this scene—the “shining white” horse refers to the elevated, noble, white horse which draws the soul toward the divine in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and thus the return of Lucius’ horse underlines his own psychic elevation under the care of Isis.⁶⁵ I suggest that we might also read the return of Lucius’ horse as one final Eponian echo which—in addition to striking the Platonic note—draws the two goddesses together as the novel draws to a close.

What does Candidus have to do with Epona? Though we do not know from the ancient literary record or from the material remains themselves what color (if any) was associated with the mounts that Epona herself rode, there is wide agreement that the goddess Epona was the divine figure out of which ultimately developed the deity Rhiannon who looms large in Welsh mythology and indeed shares many things with Epona in terms of appearance and aspect. On the general connection between these two Hemming comments, “The prevailing interpretation...is that Rhiannon is the literary descendant of a British goddess called Rigantona...who was herself a regional variant of the widely-attested Continental divinity Epona whose mythic affinity to horses has never been seriously in dispute.”⁶⁶ “Rigantona” means something along the lines of “Great Queen” which recalls the honorific title “Regina” which Epona received after being incorporated into the list of official imperial cults.⁶⁷ In addition, not only did Rhiannon have strong equine associations, but in particular was closely identified with a shining, white horse. In her stories and in artistic renderings Rhiannon usually strikes an Eponian pose, appearing as a beautiful, divine woman riding side-saddle

⁶⁵ *Phdr.* 244a-257b. See Thibau 1965, 102; Drake 1968; Dowden 1977; Griffiths 1978, 160-161; Tatum 1979, 34; James 2001, 263; Keulen 2007, 100; Winkle 2013.

⁶⁶ Hemming 1998, 20. See Gruffydd 1958 for an early argument for linking Epona to Rhiannon and n.3 in Hemming for further bibliography concerning the connections between Epona, Rigantona, and Rhiannon.

⁶⁷ See Vallaint 1951. *CIL* III 7750 addresses her as “Epona Regina Sancta”.

on a shining white horse.⁶⁸ Also like Epona, Rhiannon had psychopompic duties and was commonly endowed with otherworldly, chthonic, and funerary symbols, such as her “three magic birds” which could wake the dead and put the living to sleep.⁶⁹

Given these connections and overlaps might the appearance of the white horse at the end of the *Metamorphoses* have caused at least some in its original audience to consider the link between the two deities? By underlining Isis’ saving graces by once more drawing attention to her Eponian identity, I cautiously submit that we might see, at the very end, Apuleius bringing us back to that moment in the stable where the newly asinine Lucius stands flustered and panicked before the image of Epona. He does not, of course, see it at the time or perhaps even fully understand it as Book 11 comes to a close, but to the attentive reader, the goddess was already present at the very beginning.

Conclusion

So, then, I also submit this piece as support to arguments for the overall unity of the Apuleian novel. When all the above evidence is considered together I argue that there is enough to accept that Epona and Isis act as a set of bookends to the novel which to some degree hold the novel together as a coherent whole. The roses at Epona’s shrine do seem to foreshadow the roses which Lucius finally consumes at the Isiac festival. The very language used in Book 3 to describe the shrine is echoed in Book 11. The material evidence demonstrates that Epona and Isis shared many divine aspects and in the loose syncretism of the first centuries their godheads may have even occasionally merged. The literary evidence—scant as it is—also suggests that these goddesses were paired with regard to their associations and rituals. The ending of the novel will always be something of a jolt for first readers of the novel, but perhaps for its original audience the appearance of Epona early in the novel—while yet another of the many cautionary tableaux that Lu-

⁶⁸ The principle source for Rhiannon is the *Mabigion*, a collection of Welsh folktales which draw upon Celtic, pre-Christian mythology. In the best known tale about her, she appears on a white horse to Pwyll, king of Dyfed, who pursues her but is unable to catch her even though she does not appear to be riding very quickly at all. Eventually Pwyll eventually wins her hand by trickery and she reveals herself as a “generous, bountiful queen-goddess” (Aldhouse-Green 1992, 176) when she gives precious gifts to all the nobles in Pwyll’s court.

⁶⁹ See Vallaint 1951, 202-3; Aldhouse-Green 1992, 176 and Linduff 1979, 834.

cius fails to recognize and understand—functioned as a specific, concrete clue in the text which prepared the discerning reader for interpreting later scenes and especially for the Isiac finale.

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