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Journal

JOURNAL OF LATE ANTIQUITY, 14(2)

ISSN

1939-6716

Author

Macrae, Duncan

Publication Date

2021

Duncan E. MacRae
Journal of Late Antiquity 14.2

Ludibrium Paulinae: Historiography, Anti-Pagan Polemic, and Aristocratic Marriage in *De excidio Hierosolymitano* 2.4

This article argues that the neglected classicizing Latin history of the Jewish Great Revolt, De excidio Hierosolymitano*, often now known as the work of Pseudo-Hegesippus and misunderstood as a translation of Josephus, engages with the religious and social concerns of late fourth-century Rome. A single episode from the second book of the history—a story of the sexual assault of Paulina, an aristocratic Roman woman, in the temple of Isis—is taken as the focus: the author has reworked a Josephan narrative into a piece of anti-pagan apologetic and satirical polemic against Fabia Aconia Paulina, wife of the prominent pagan aristocrat, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus. At the same time, the depiction of a warped pagan marriage shows traces of the rhetoric associated with the late fourth-century arguments around elite asceticism and marriage. The Paulina episode is an example of late antique historiography as cultural practice: a reappropriation of older cultural materials in the context of profound social contestation and change.*

The five-book late antique Latin history of the Jewish Great Revolt and the destruction of the Second Temple—*De excidio Hierosolymitano* (hereafter *DEH*), sometimes known by the name of its non-author, pseudo-Hegesippus—has not found many modern readers.[1] The central reason for this neglect is surely the reputation of the book as a condensed version or even translation of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum*, rendering it otiose as a historical source and derivative as a composition. Most of the little scholarship that has been done on the work has focused on foundational philological questions, particularly the identity of the author—still unresolved—and

This article was written during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period where scholarly community and interdependence—at a distance—have been particularly essential. I owe great thanks to Carson Bay for his exceptional kindness in providing me access to important Hegesippan bibliography and for his comments on an earlier version of this paper and to Susanna Elm for her reading, encouragement and advice. I wish to thank Jeremy Ott (UC Berkeley Library) who enabled access to library materials at a critical moment for completing this work. Andrew Cain and the readers for *JLA* made suggestions that have significantly improved the final version. All translations and all errors are my own.

[1] By contrast, *DEH* was a widely-read and influential text in the medieval period: Pollard 2015. The absence of published translations into modern vernaculars is surely the best index (and a reason) for the lack of modern interest in the text.

the Latinity of the text, which has suggested that it is a product of an author with a fourth-century rhetorical education.[2]

The work of Albert Bell Jr. in the 1970s and 1980s and growing interest in the reception of Josephus, however, has begun to broaden our understanding of *DEH*.[3] It is ironic that one of the central outcomes of this recent work has been to stress the independence of *DEH*: although Josephus is the central source for the main narrative, the work deserves to be read as a freestanding piece of rhetorical and Christian historiography.[4] At the same time, a new wave of work on late antique historiography, advancing beyond more established questions of *Quellenforschung* and genre, opens up new opportunities for placing the history within its own literary and cultural context.[5] Peter Van Nuffelen, in particular, has advocated that scholars view late antique historiography as "cultural practice," as a site for the shaping of late ancient culture,

[2] Somenzi 2009 represents the most advanced discussion of both lines of scholarship, though her case for the identity of the author of *DEH* with Ambrose has not received wider assent (see Alciati 2011; Raimondi 2011). Earlier work on authorship: Vogel 1881 and 1883; Landgraf 1902; Ussani 1906; Scholz 1909; Stiglmayr 1914; Mras and Ussani 1960: xxv–xxxvii; Lumpe 1968; Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2020. For Latinity, see Rönsch 1891, Dwyer 1931, McCormick 1935.

[3] Bell Jr. 1977 is his dissertation; Bell Jr. 1980 and 1987 represent condensations of his work. Work on the reception and translations of Josephus has been increasing on both sides of the Atlantic: Goodman 2019 emerges from an Oxford-based project on Josephus in Jewish culture; another project on Josephus in the Middle Ages is underway in Bern; the recent essay by Molinier-Ando 2020 emerges from a French project on receptions of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE; American work on the reception of Josephus is well represented in the relevant section of the *Companion to Josephus* (Chapman and Rodgers 2016); the earlier work of Schreckenberg 1972 and Leoni 2007 mapped much of the territory.

[4] See the work of Bell Jr. in the previous note. The Florida State dissertation by Carson Bay (Bay 2018) represents the state of the art; recent work by Bay (Bay 2020 and 2021) illuminates the literary orientation and theological perspective of the author.

[5] Alciati 2011, 361 calls for this form of contextualization for *DEH.* Aside from the work of Van Nuffelen below, see the following recent studies of late antique historiography in cultural and political contexts: Kelly 2010; Wood 2013; Elm 2018; Corke-Webster 2019; Kruse 2019 (I set aside studies of Ammianus Marcellinus, who has benefited from greater attention for longer). For fuller overviews, organized by genre, see the up-to-date essays in the recent *Companion to Late Antique Literature*: Kulikowski 2018; Van Nuffelen 2018; Burgess 2018.

both by incorporation of earlier forms of discourse and through engagement in religious and political polemic.[6] This article offers an example of reading *DEH* in context and as cultural practice, by pursuing a close study of one chapter of the work as both a reworking of a Josephan digression and as engaged with contemporary polemics against "paganism" and around aristocratic marriage and asceticism. In *DEH* 2.4, the author introduces from Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* the story of a Roman aristocratic woman, Paulina, who is tricked into spending the night in the temple of Isis so that an admirer, posing as the god Anubis, can sexually assault her.

In the first part of the article, I begin from the text of *DEH* 2.4 and its Josephan source to show how the author has reshaped the story of Paulina in order to make a critique of paganism along the lines of contemporary Christian apologetic literature; in the following section, I argue that the main target of this polemic is a particular pagan member of the fourth-century Roman aristocracy, Fabia Aconia Paulina, the wife of the prominent Vettius Agorius Praetextatus. In the conclusion I draw attention to a larger context for the polemic in *DEH* 2.4: the contest over aristocratic marital norms that was provoked by the adoption of ascetic lifestyles among the Roman urban elite in the second half of the fourth century. To be clear from the outset, I assume that this text belongs to the final third of the fourth century CE and that the author had some connection to the elite circles of Latin-speaking Christianity—which we can assume on the basis of the education implied throughout the text—but I take no stand on the authorship or specific date of composition of *DEH*, though I admit that my argument probably precludes some

[6] Van Nuffelen 2015, building on Van Nuffelen 2012.

candidates for either.[7] Rather, this article offers a different kind of historicization by putting the rhetoric of one passage in the text into a broader context of late fourth-century anti-pagan polemic, including one of its favorite targets, and inner-Christian debate.

The Paganism of Paulina

Following the pattern of Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum*, book 2 of *DEH* opens with the burial of Herod and the maneuvers of his descendants to gain power in Judaea—an account that is significantly condensed from the narrative by Josephus. The author then briefly narrates the reign of Tiberius and the third chapter of the book closes with the author marveling at how the personal morality of Tiberius did not provoke a successful assassination.[8] At this point in the narrative, the author introduces a story taken from the *Antiquitates Judaicae*, the story of the rape of Paulina (*AJ* 18.65–80).[9] In the absence of a published translation of *DEH* and the relative unfamiliarity of the text, it will be worth quoting the ensuing chapter in full (*DEH* 2.4):[10]

[7] In particular, an early date in the 350s, favored by Callu 2006, or the author as a young Ambrose, advanced most recently by Somenzi 2009, are probably unlikely if the following contextualization of *DEH* 2.4 is correct.
[8] A fully negative view of Tiberius is unusual in late antique Christian construals of imperial history, in part because, influentially, Eusebius (*HE* 2.2) had followed Tertullian in claiming that Tiberius had favored senatorial recognition of Jesus as a god; Oros. 7.4 combines the Eusebian version with a Tacitean/Suetonian image of an old cruel Tiberius. See, now, Corke-Webster 2019, 249–251 for the strategy behind Eusebius' portrayal of Tiberius.
[9] We can be certain that Josephus' *Antiquitates* is the source: before the middle Byzantine period, the story of Paulina is only found in these two texts and the use of the *Antiquitates* by the author of *DEH* is certain. But both narratives belong to a widely diffused story-type about a deceived woman and a pretended god, the motif of the "trick of Nectanebo" that perhaps originated in early versions of the *Alexander Romance* and is studied by Weinreich 1911.
[10] This text and all references to *DEH* in this article follow the edition by Ussani (*CSEL* 66.1).

Eo imperante [sc. Tiberius] famosum ludibrium Paulinae spectatissimi generis feminae Romae percelebratum est. quae cum egregiam castitatis apud omnes famam haberet, esset autem praestantissimi decoris et eminentis gratiae, temtata Mundi equestris militiae ducis interpellationibus nec inflexa, uitio nimiae superstitionis patuit errori, namque subornatis Isidis sacerdotibus qui uelut Anubis ad eam mandata perferrent, quod eam ad templum inuitaret, delectatum se eius sedulitate et pudicitia noctem poscere, habere se quod eidem secreto uellet committere. quod illa accipiens laeta ad maritum detulit, deum suis adesse uotis, a deo suam posci praesentiam, negare se non posse oboedientiam.

itaque et ex sua et ex mariti sententia pergit ad templum Isidis, noctem exegit remotisque procul arbitris quasi sacri cognitionem mysterii perceptura sese stratis conposuit suis, aestimans quod ad eam deus suus in somnis ueniret et per uisionem sese eidem demonstraret. uerum ubi aliquid noctis processit, quo facilius mulier plena somni deciperetur, Mundus assumto uultu Anubis habituque aduenit, uestimenta ableuat, in oscula ruit. expergefactae mulieri Anubem se esse dicit, uultum Anubis praetendit. illa deum credidit, beatam se adserit quod eam dignatus sit uisitare dominus deus suus. amplexum petenti non negat, refert tamen utrum deus possit homini misceri. ille promit exempla quod et Iouem summum deorum Alcmena susceperit et Leda eiusdem concubitu potita et plurimae aliae, quae ediderint deos partu. de se quoque et illa deum esse generandum persuadet mulieri, concubitu miscetur. redit ad maritum laetior, dicens quod mixta deo sit mulier et eius promissu deum esset generatura. fit ingens in stupro mulieris mariti gaudium.

postea occurrit Mundus mulieri et ait: 'beata Paulina concubitu dei, magnus deus Anubis, cuius tu accepisti mysteria. sed disce te sicut diis ita et hominibus non negare, quibus tribuunt quod tu negaueris, quia nec formas suas dare nobis nec nomina dedignantur. ecce ad sacra sua deus Anubis uocauit et Mundum ut tibi iungeret. quid tibi profuit duritia tua, nisi ut te XX milium quae obtuleram conpendio defraudaret? imitare deos indulgentiores, qui nobis sine pretio tribuunt quod abs te magno pretio impetrari nequitum. quodsi te humana offendunt uocabula, Anubem me uocari placuit et nominis huius gratia effectum iuuit'.

praestricta sermone mulier inlusum sibi intellexit et dolens iniuriam pudicitiae confessa est fraudem marito. ille nihil habens quod uxori indignaretur, cui ipse cubandi in templo potestatem permiserat, et conscius coniugalis castimoniae principi querellam detulit. qui motus potentis uiri contumelia atque atrocis flagitii commento sacerdotes templo rapuit, quaestioni subicit, confessos necat, simulacrum Isidis Tiberi demergit. Mundo fugiendi potestas permissa, eo quod ui amoris et formae superatus gratia leuioribus commissorum suorum pretiis multandus aestimaretur.

When Tiberius was emperor, the notorious licentiousness of Paulina, a woman of the highest nobility, was the subject of rumor all over Rome. Despite her outstanding reputation for chastity, she was nevertheless remarkably beautiful and exceptionally charming; propositioned by Mundus, a cavalry commander, she resisted, but was exposed to error by the vice of excessive superstition. For corrupted priests of Isis brought orders to her, as if they were from Anubis, in

which he invited her to his temple and asked her, since he was delighted by her zeal and modesty, to spend the night and said that he had something that he wanted to tell her secretly. Delighted, she received this news and brought it to her husband, telling him that the god had answered their prayers, that her presence had been requested by the god and that she could not refuse obedience.

And so, in accordance with both her wishes and those of her husband, she came to the temple of Isis and spent the night. When witnesses had been dismissed, she lay herself down on her bedding as if she was about to gain knowledge of a sacred mystery, thinking that her god would visit her in her dreams and show himself to her in a vision. But actually, when some of the night had passed so that, in deep sleep, the woman might be deceived more easily, Mundus put on a mask and dress of Anubis and entered. He lifted the bedclothes and pushed on with kissing her. When she had woken up, he told the woman that he was Anubis and showed her the mask of the god. She believed he was the god and declared that she was blessed that her lord deigned to visit her. She did not deny her embrace to him as he sought it, but asked whether a god could sleep with a human. He brought up, as examples, that Alcmena snagged Jupiter, king of the gods and that Leda got to sleep with the same god and there were many other women, who had given birth to gods. He persuaded the woman that a god would also be born to them and had sex with her. She returned to her husband all the happier, saying that she was a woman who had slept with a god and that, according to his promise, she was pregnant with a god. His wife's adultery was a huge joy to her husband.

> Later Mundus came across the woman and said: "Paulina, blessed by intercourse with a god, great god Anubis, into whose mysteries you were initiated. But learn that, just as you do not reject gods, so you do not reject men, to whom they give what you have denied, since they do not deny to us either their looks or names. See, the god Anubis called you to his rites to get Mundus together you. What did you get for your resistance, except that it cheated you of the twenty thousand that I had offered you as a price. Imitate the more generous gods, who give to us for free what could not be got from you for free. But if human names offend you, I liked being called Anubis and enjoyed what that name achieved."
>
> When the speech was finished, the woman realized that she had been deceived and, upset about the sexual harassment,[11] confessed the deceit to her husband. He, having no reason to be angry with his wife, to whom he had given permission to sleep in the temple, and knowing his wife's chastity, brought a complaint to the emperor. The emperor, moved by the insult to a powerful man and the deceit of a horrendous disgrace, seized the priests from the temple, forced them into interrogation, killed them when they confessed, and sunk the statue of Isis in the Tiber. The right of exile was granted to Mundus, because it was thought, since he had been overwhelmed by the power of love and the charm of beauty, that he should be punished with a lighter sentence for his crimes.

The author of *DEH* justifies the story at the start of the following chapter as an example of the corruption (*deformitas*) of the ruling emperor: bad emperors encourage bad public

[11] My translation here attempts to reflect an apparent use of legal language: *iniuria de pudicitia adtemptata* was a delict in Roman law: see Lenel 1907, 400 (§127).

morality. This leads into a reflection on how Tiberius had sent the wicked Pontius Pilate to Judaea as governor. This apparent narrative function may not, however, exhaust the significance of the Paulina story for the author of *DEH*; rather, I suggest, if we look closer at the differences between this version and the Josephan original we can see how it has been shaped by the polemical concerns of the author in a fourth-century Christian context.

Both the setting and narration of the Paulina story in Josephus' *Antiquitates* differ in significant ways. The story is introduced as a break from events in Judaea during the prefecture of Pontius Pilate, including that official's attempt to introduce images to Jerusalem and—if it stood in the original text—the short notice of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth (the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*).[12] "At the same time," the historian writes, there was also a significant uproar in Rome among the Jews and "deeds—not free from shame—took place in the temple of Isis."[13] He goes on to tell the Paulina story first, before marking it as a digression by "returning" to the narrative of the expulsion of the Roman Jews, provoked, he claims, by the crimes perpetrated on another female aristocrat by a fraudulent preacher.[14] As several scholars have noted, Josephus has bent the timeline at this point in his eighteenth book: the scandals around the Isis temple and the Jewish community did not happen in the period of Pilate's

[12] No footnote can do justice to the scholarly literature on the *Testimonium Flavianum*. Significant recent works: Victor 2010; Feldman 2012; Bermejo-Rubio 2014; Curran 2017 (all with copious bibliography). For the Latin versions of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, including the one at *DEH* 2.12, see Levenson and Martin 2014. For a fuller intellectual history of the problem: Whealey 2003.

[13] Joseph. *AJ* 18.65 (*Loeb* 433: 50): καὶ ὑπὸ τοὺς αὐτοὺς χρόνους ἕτερόν τι δεινὸν ἐθορύβει τοὺς Ἰουδαίους καὶ περὶ τὸ ἱερὸν τῆς Ἴσιδος τὸ ἐν Ῥώμῃ πράξεις αἰσχυνῶν οὐκ ἀπηλλαγμέναι συντυγχάνουσιν.

[14] Joseph. *AJ* 18.80 (*Loeb* 433: 58): ἐπάνειμι δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀφήγησιν τῶν ἐν Ῥώμῃ Ἰουδαίοις κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον συντυχόντων, ὥς μοι καὶ προαπεσήμηνεν ὁ λόγος. This verb is favored by Josephus to mark the return to his narrative from a digression: compare *AJ* 6.350 (the virtue of Saul); 16.178 (the decrees on Jewish rights); *BJ* 3.109 (the organization of the Roman army); 7.274 (summaries of the lawlessness of the Jewish rebels).

prefecture (26–36 CE), but some years earlier in 19 CE.[15] As we have seen, the author of *DEH* follows Josephus in this displacement, but only for the Paulina story and justified on the surface by the claim that both Paulina and Pilate were symptomatic of public morality under Tiberius. It is less clear why Josephus chose to include the Isiac scandal in his *Antiquitates*: one recently popular explanation has been to read it as significantly juxtaposed with the mention of Jesus and of the fraudulent Jewish holy man as a set of portraits of religious fakery.[16]

Turning to the narrative about Paulina itself, we find that Josephus also gives a longer and distinct version of the story that we encounter in *DEH*, which it would be otiose to quote here in full, but a summary will reveal the differences.[17] In Josephus' account, Paulina was an aristocratic woman, apparently of exceptional virtue and beauty, and married to a man of her own rank named Saturninus. Decius Mundus, an equestrian, had come to desire her, but could not persuade her to adultery and his final indecent proposal that she spend the night with him for two hundred thousand drachmas met her rebuff. When he had resolved to starve himself to death, his freedwoman Ida announced she had a plan: for just fifty thousand drachmas she would bring about a sexual liaison between him and Paulina. Her plan, it emerges, was to bribe the priests of Isis to invite the woman to the temple under the pretext that Anubis had fallen in love with her. After the eldest of the priests had delivered the message, Paulina boasted about the invite to her friends and received her husband's permission to go to share the dinner and bed of the god. In a

[15] See Feldman 1965, *ad loc.* for the chronological distortion. The expulsions of 19 CE: the key ancient sources beside Josephus are Tac. *Ann*. 2.85 and Suet. *Tib*. 36; see discussions by Moehring 1959; Williams 1989; Rutgers 1994, 60-65; Botermann 2003; Van der Lans 2015.
[16] The connection with the *Testimonium Flavianum*: Pharr 1927; Bell Jr. 1976; Gasparini 2017.
[17] Recent scholarship on the Latin versions of Josephus has affirmed the independence of *DEH* from the wording of the Greek text of Josephus (especially compared to the Latin "translations" assigned to Rufinus or produced in the circle of Cassiodorus): see Leoni 2007, 484–85; Levenson and Martin 2014; and Bay 2021. *DEH* uses Josephus as a source and generic model, but does not provide a translation.

single sentence, Josephus concisely narrates her arrival in the temple, Mundus' rape, and her conviction that he was the god. The next day, Paulina boasted again to her friends about what had happened; they were incredulous, but unable to explain what had taken place. Two days later, Mundus met her on the street and revealed the truth—saying that she had saved him two hundred thousand drachmas. Humiliated, Paulina demanded her husband seek redress; the emperor Tiberius had the priests of Isis and Ida, the cause of the whole affair, crucified, and destroyed the temple of Isis, but Mundus was only exiled, on the grounds that he had committed a crime of passion. "These were the crimes of the priests of the temple of Isis," writes Josephus to conclude his story.[18]

The version of the story in the *Antiquitates* depends on recognizable comedic and novelistic tropes: a "nurse" figure, Ida, is pivotal to the plot; Paulina plays *uxor gloriosa*—both credulous dupe and bragging wife; there are hints at the novelistic trope of a sexual initiation; the recognition scene provides a dramatic reversal; the marriage is affirmed at the end.[19] It is striking that the author of *DEH* dispenses with many of these elements, even at the cost of narrative coherence. In the Christian version, Mundus' first offer of two hundred thousand drachmas is dropped—even though it is referenced in his speech later; Ida and the skeptical friends do not appear at all; the invitation is more ambiguous so that Paulina does not know the "god's" sexual intentions before her arrival in the temple and expects him to appear in a dream.

[18] *AJ* 18.80 (*Loeb* 433: 58): καὶ τὰ μὲν περὶ τὸ ἱερὸν τῆς Ἴσιδος τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν ὑβρισμένα τοιαῦτα ἦν.
[19] Moehring 1959; Heyob 1975, 117–19, S. Matthews 2001, 19–25. It is possible that, in fact, the Josephan narrative does draw on a dramatic version of the story: cf. Tert. *Apol.* 15.1 on Anubis in a mime and Reich 1903, 593 n.5 and Weinreich 1911, 25–27 for the likely connection. A recent, but unconvincing, defense of the historicity of the story: Klotz 2012.

The central effect of the changes made by the author of *DEH* is to emphasize the religious error of Paulina herself. As Valentino Gasparini has recently underlined, Josephus himself draws on the gendered commonplaces of Roman anti-Isiac discourse, including horrified fascination with the jackal-headed Anubis and suspicion around elite female devotion to the cult.[20] The *DEH*, however, goes further than Josephus in making "pagan" religious delusion, rather than the plot of deception, the central point of the story. Explicitly, in a phrase that has no equivalent in the Josephan text, her *superstitio* is what leaves Paulina vulnerable to the scheme of Mundus. Unlike her predecessor in the first century, the late antique Paulina naively believes that she is going to be initiated into a sacred mystery (*sacri cognitionem mysterii perceptura*) and must be persuaded by Mundus/Anubis of the propriety of sex with a deity. The author emphasizes the role of the mask of Anubis (*vultus Anubis*)—not a part of the story in Josephus but a popular target of anti-pagan invective of the late fourth century—in persuading Paulina that Mundus was the god.[21]

In contrast with the concern elsewhere in this chapter to shorten the anecdote, the *DEH* introduces at this point a short reported speech by Mundus that uses the example of Jupiter to

[20] Gasparini 2017. See also S. Matthews 2001, 21.
[21] Gasparini 2017, 396 emphasizes that there is no sign in Josephus' story that Mundus wore an Anubis mask. The face of Anubis in fourth-century polemic: Ambrosiaster, *Quaestio* 114.11 (*SCh* 512: 130): *Et Cynocefalus ille, qui nutabundus per omnia se circumfert loca quaerens membra adulteri Osiris, viri Isidis*; *Poema Ultimum* (ps.-Paulinus) 117-8 (*CSEL* 30: 333–34): *quid quod et Isiaca sistrumque caputque caninum/ non magis abscondunt, sed per loca publica ponunt*?; *Carmen ad quendam senatorem* (ps.-Cyprian) 31-33 (*CSEL* 23: 228): *teque domo propria pictum cum fascibus ante/ nunc quoque cum sistro faciem portare caninam./ Haec tua humilitas et humilitatis imago est!* See McLynn 2016, 236–37 for the polemic use of the mask of Anubis in these latter two poems. The dog head of Anubis is also featured in the mid-fourth-century apologetic of Firmicus Maternus: *Err. prof. relig.* 2.2. The emblem of a male devotee of Isis with the mask for the month of November in the illustrated *Calendar of 354* supports that it was an *au courant* emblem for the (civic!) cult in the fourth-century and, so, not just a literary conceit.

legitimize—even ironically sanctify—the sexual union and make an empty promise of divine offspring.[22] The mockery of the moral example provided by Jupiter's mythological adulteries is familiar from Christian apologetic and in this context has the effect of expanding the critique from the Isiac cult to pagan culture more generally.[23] The human examples of Alcmena and Leda also comment on the dramatic situation—the first as an adultery engineered by a deception and the second bathetically links Jupiter's cygnomorphism with the situation of Mundus wearing the canine mask of Anubis. The author introduces further religious ridicule into Mundus' second speech, which does have an approximate predecessor in the *Antiquitates*, when the speaker calls Paulina "blessed with intercourse" (*beata…concubitu*) and refers sarcastically to the *mysteria* of Anubis. In sum, these changes, by playing down the machinations of Ida and the priests, shift the moral focus of the story to Paulina's superstitious credulousness, exploited by the lascivious—and not at all "pure"—Mundus.[24]

This orientation towards Paulina is signaled at the start of the story by the shorthand adopted by *DEH*, *famosum ludibrium Paulinae*—a phrase that contrasts with Josephus' final emphasis on the priests of Isis—and is sharpened by a remarkable allusion to the first chapter of Luke's gospel, pointed out in Ussani's edition and extended by Bell Jr., that serves to characterize Paulina as a sham version of the mother of Jesus.[25] The version of the story in

[22] Ussani 1906, 261 briefly mentions the double move of compression and addition in the author's reworking of the Paulina story of Josephus, but does not attempt to explain it.
[23] The adulteries of Jupiter in general: Tert. *Apol.* 21; Prudent. *Perist.* 2.465. Leda and Jupiter as swan: *Carmen contra paganos* 9-10; Firm. Mat. *Err. prof. relig.* 12.2; *Poema Ultimum* 58-59; Prudent. *C. Symm.* 1.62-64 and *Perist.* 10.221. Adultery with Alcmena: Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.9; Prudent. *Perist.* 10.226-227.
[24] *DEH* only gives the name of "Mundus," not the fuller "Decimus Mundus" named in Josephus, perhaps to intensify the irony of the name. See a similar apologetic use of irony around the word at *Carm. contra pag.* 62, with McLynn 1996, 325.
[25] Bell Jr. 1976, 20.

Josephus' history had not contemplated Paulina's fertility; the whole motif is a novelty on the part of *DEH*: the initial invitation to the temple is presented as an answer to the prayers of the couple (*deum adesse votis*) and Paulina's happy report to her husband includes her pregnancy.[26] In the biblical text, following the annunciation by Gabriel of the conception of Jesus, Mary visits her relative Elizabeth. On her arrival, Elizabeth calls her "blessed, for you believed" (Luke 1:45: *beata quae credidisti*) and Mary replies with the Magnificat, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior…Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:46-48: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo… ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes*).[27] Later in the chapter, Luke describes the joyful reaction of Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, to the birth of his son John (the Baptist): "Blessed be the God of Israel, for he has visited [his people]" (Luke 1.68: *Benedictus* [*Dominus*] *Deus Istrahel, quia visitavit…*).[28] *DEH* echoes this language in the sentence that describes Paulina's response to seeing Mundus wearing the clothing and mask of Anubis in the temple: "She believed he was the god and declared that she was blessed that her lord deigned to visit her" (*illa deum credidit, beatam se adserit quod eam dignatus sit uisitare dominus deus suus*). Although it has not been noticed by previous scholars, the allusion may be extended in the first words of the direct speech of Mundus: "'Paulina, blessed by intercourse with a god, great god

[26] The issue of procreation is central to the original version of this "trick of Nectanebo" story in the Alexander Romance (*AR* 1.4-8 recension α)—where it explains Nectanebo's and Ammon's alleged paternity of Alexander—but there is no sign of direct dependence on that narrative in *DEH*.
[27] This is the Old Latin "Itala" text printed in Jülicher, Matzkow and Aland 1975. In the absence of a better Vetus Latina edition, this is a plausible but approximate guide to the text available to the author of *DEH*. Houghton 2016, 125–27 sets out the deficiencies of the edition.
[28] The word *Dominus* is not printed as the Itala text by Jülicher, Matzkow and Aland 1975, but their apparatus shows that it commonly appears in testimonies of the Old Latin to translate the Κύριος found in the Greek of this verse.

Anubis…'" ('*beata Paulina concubitu dei, magnus deus Anubis*…').[29] Remarkably, *DEH* alludes to the evangelist's celebration of the Annunciation as a *Kontrastimitation*—the distinctive late antique form of allusion where the source passage stands in theological contrast with the content of the alluding text—within his version of the story of Paulina the devotee of Isis.[30]

The allusion to Mary appears to raise the stakes: nowhere else in his history does the author use allusion to the gospels as an ironic commentary on narrated events.[31] Despite the explicit claim that it illustrates the morality of the age of Tiberius, the tale seems remarkably ornamental to the general narrative and elsewhere the author turns to the *Antiquitates* as a supplement for his main model almost exclusively for material that is very germane to his Christian perspective.[32] But why did the author of *DEH* go to these lengths to include and elaborate the story of Paulina? Bell Jr. is the only scholar to have ventured an opinion on the

[29] According to searches made in the Brepols *Library of Latin Texts* databases, this is the only attestation in Latin of the epithet of *magnus* for Anubis.
[30] *Kontrastimitation*: Lühken 2002, 273–76. Allusions of this kind are often to classical texts that contrast with the Christian content of the late antique work; *DEH* offers the opposite case. There has been some recent critique of critical emphasis on late antique *Kontrastimitationen* of classical poetry—see Pelttari 2014, 115–60—but that critique does not apply to biblical allusion.
[31] Using the *index locorum* in Mras and Ussani 1960, a survey of allusions and quotations of the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles reveals that the *DEH* generally uses these books of the New Testament in four ways: as an historical source; as a resource for authorial commentary on events (notably the extended interventions at 2.12 and 5.2); in extended speeches assigned to Agrippa, Josephus, Vespasian and Titus (the allusions to the gospels do not contrast with the speakers and situations, but rather validate, even baptize, their arguments); as a linguistic resource of memorable phrases (i.e. quotations that do not "allude" but enliven the language and may not be conscious on the part of an educated Christian author). Among the list of references given by Ussani, there is nothing similar to the *Kontrastimitation* of Mary and Paulina in 2.4. The author's use of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible is more complex and central to his historical consciousness: see the discussion by Somenzi 2009, 61–127 and the very good treatment (in relation of *DEH* 5.2) by Bay 2018, 110–32.
[32] Bell Jr. 1977, 87–89 and 112–13.

motivation for passage—that the author was indulging his literary sense of humor.[33] There is humor in this passage, but it is derived from mockery. I propose that there are more compelling reasons for the inclusion of the story: the borrowing from the *Antiquitates* allows the author to include anti-pagan apologetic—focused on some particular bête-noires of fourth-century critique of paganism: high-status pagans, nocturnal rituals and mystery cults—in his history alongside the anti-Jewish analysis of the narrated events that pervades his whole work.[34] Latin anti-pagan polemic of the late fourth century has a reputation for "shadow-boxing," but that is not the case here, I suggest.[35] Rather, the narrative in *DEH* 2.4 constitutes a piece of sexual slander against a contemporary pagan member of the Roman aristocracy, Fabia Aconia Paulina.

The Two Paulinas

Late in the year 384 CE, the consul designate and leading member of the senatorial aristocracy, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus died. He did not die as a leader of the "pagan opposition"—as some scholars used to suppose—but as the embodiment of the traditional urban aristocracy.[36] His death provoked widespread grief, perhaps especially among the resident nobility of the city, and left a mark on the rich literary and epigraphic record of late fourth-century Rome. The most famous friend of Praetextatus, Q. Aurelius Symmachus, then serving as *praefectus urbi Romae*,

[33] Bell Jr. 1976, 20–21.
[34] See Somenzi 2009, 151–82 and Bay 2018 *passim* for the anti-Judaism of *DEH*. For the focus on so-called "Oriental" cults in Christian polemic of this period, see J. Matthews 1973, Di Santo 2008, 134–37, for an emphasis on these cults and mysteries in the late-fourth century polemics of Ambrosiaster, and Cameron 2011, 148 for attacks on Isis.
[35] "Shadow-boxing": Markus 1974, 8.
[36] Bloch 1945 tells a thrilling tale, with Praetextatus as a key figure; unfortunately, the story told goes beyond what the evidence will support: Cameron 2011 represents the definitive refutation of the narrative. For more balanced—empire-wide—overviews of the (elite) "last pagans", see McLynn 2009; Jones 2014; Watts 2015.

reported to the imperial court that the shocking news had caused the urban population to abandon the theatres and to shout acclamations; Jerome—no admirer of Praetextatus, as we will see—admitted that the whole city had been thrown into confusion by the death.[37] The apparent outpouring of public grief was a spur to projects of memorialization. In his role as prefect, Symmachus conveyed the request of the senate to both courts for permission to set up a public statue to display the remarkable Praetextatus to "the eyes of future generations"; in due time one was set up in the Forum Romanum.[38] Only part of the inscribed base survives, but, judging by similar monuments of this period and a strong hint in the Symmachan *Relatio* 12, the senate hoped that the monument would display a laudatory imperial *oratio* on the deceased.[39] More controversially, at least in the eyes of Symmachus, the Vestal Virgins set up a statue to commemorate Praetextatus—an honor not even granted to Numa or the Republican *pontifex maximus* Metellus, he complained in a letter to the elder Flavianus Nicomachus.[40]

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[37] Symm. *Rel.* 10.2 (ed. Seeck 1883, 288): *Nam ubi primum Romae amarus de eo rumor increpuit, recusavit populus sollemnes theatri voluptates memoriamque inlustrem eius multa adclamatione testatus …* Cf. *Rel.* 11 (ed. Seeck 1883, 299): *summo patriae gemitu* and *Rel*. 24 (ed. Seeck 1883, 299): *iudicium vero civium*, *quod supremo die de virtute atque innocentia eius habuerunt*. Jer. *Ep.* 23.3 (*CSEL* 54: 213): *ad cuius interitum urbs universa commota est*.
[38] *Rel.* 12.2 (ed. Seeck 1883, 289): *etiam senatus inpatiens dispendii sui solacium petit de honore virtutis vestrumque numen precatur, ut virum nostra aetate mirabilem statuarum diuturnitas tradat oculis posterorum*. For the exceptional significance of the location of the statue in the Forum Romanum, see Niquet 2000, 20–21 and Chenault 2012, 125.
[39] *CIL* 6.1779a. *Rel*. 12.4 (ed. Seeck 1883, 290): *clementiae vestrae testimonio cuncta servanda sunt; inlustrior enim laus de caelesti profecta iudicio*. For the inclusion of imperial *orationes* on public honorary monuments in the fourth and fifth century, see Weisweiler 2012, 336–50, though he is cautious about whether such an *oratio* was included on Praetextatus' public monument (349); Chenault 2012, 125 tentatively identifies *CIL* 6.41357 as this *oratio*.
[40] Symm. *Ep*. 2.36 (ed. Seeck 1883, 54): *neque more fieri, quid Numa auctor, Metellus conservator religionum omnesque pontifices maximi numquam ante meruerunt*. Sogno 2006, 56–57 sees this vote as a significant setback—a "last straw"—for Symmachus in this phase of his political career.

The existence of a private honorary statue dedicated to the chief Vestal, Coelia Concordia, by Praetextatus' wife, Fabia Aconia Paulina, in reciprocal thanks for the statue for her husband suggests that the latter had some hand in encouraging the Vestals to extend this exceptional honor to the deceased aristocrat.[41] The texts inscribed on other private monuments for both Praetextatus and his wife are extant and emphasize their priesthoods and initiations into mystery cults: the one for Paulina recalls that she was initiate or priestess in seven distinct cults, including as an *Isiaca*.[42] The most remarkable commemorative monument, however, is dedicated to both husband and wife: a private funerary altar inscribed with a main dedication and three poems, two praising Paulina in the voice of Praetextatus and one apparently by Paulina in praise of her husband (*CIL* 6.1779). Alan Cameron has called this inscription "the best known and most discussed epigraphic text of the fourth-century West."[43] The inscription on the front face (Side A) highlights the couple's priesthoods and initiations—ten for Praetextatus and four for Paulina—and their forty years of marriage, while the poems emphasize the religious experiences and commitments of the couple.[44] On each of the sides, in two short poems (Sides B and C: 6

[41] *CIL* 6.2145: *Coeliae Concordiae virgini*/*Vestali maximae, Fabia Pau*/*lina c*(*larissima*) *f*(*emina*) *statuam facien*/*dam conlocandamque*/*curavit…quod*/ *haec prior eius viro*/ *Vettio Agorio Praetexta*/*to, v*(*iro*) *c*(*larissimo*)*, omnia singulari*/ *dignoque etiam ab huius*/ *modi virginibus et sa*/*cerdotibus coli statu*/*am conlocarat*. For discussion, see Frei-Stolba 2003.
[42] *CIL* 6.1780: *Fabiae Aconiae Paulinae, c(larissimae) f(eminae),*/ *filiae Aconis Catullini, v(iri) c(larissimi), ex praef(ecto) et consule ord(inario),*/ *uxori Vetti Praetextati, v(iri) c(larissimi), praef(ecti) et consulis designati,*/ *sacratae apud Eleusinam deo Iaccho Cereri et Corae,*/ *sacratae apud Laernam deo Libero et Cereri et Corae,*/ *sacratae apud Aeginam deabus, tauroboliatae, Isiacae,*/ *hierophantriae deae Hecatae, Graeco sacraneae deae Cereris*. See also the (contemporary?) private monument for Praetextatus: *CIL* 6.1778. Another possible private monument, recently discovered in the Arno valley, is too fragmentary to reveal whether his religious affiliations were mentioned: *AE* 1997, 526. A private statue dedicated, by a nameless child, to Praetextatus—*CIL* 6.1777—does not mention his priesthoods at all, perhaps because of a conversion to Christianity (this is suggested by Cameron 2011, 158).
[43] Cameron 2011, 158. See, especially, the studies by Lambrechts 1955, Polara 1967 and Niquet 2000, 237–52.
[44] Observed by Polara 1967, 274 and 278.

and 12 lines long), Praetextatus praises his wife for her traditional conjugal virtues, but also her dedication to the temples and the gods (B 4: *dicata templis atq(ue) amica numinum*). One phrase, *utile penatibus* (B 7), in the poem on the right-side of the altar, probably combines the two laudatory themes by exploiting the ambiguity of *penates* as meaning both the household gods and, by synecdoche, the household itself.[45] He also describes her marital fidelity as a product of avowedly polytheistic providence: "a gift of the gods who bind the marital bed with affectionate and modest bonds" (C 7-8: *munus deorum, qui maritalem torum*/ *nectunt amicis et pudicis nexibus*).

The most spectacular element of the monument is the longer poem on the back of the altar (Side D: 41 lines long) in the voice of Paulina. In the first lines, she praises her husband for both his social and ethical distinction and his achievements in *paideia*, but leaves off from this topic after twelve lines: "but these things are trivial" (D 13: *sed ista parva*). She turns instead to his religious commitments and his care to initiate her into mysteries: "you lead me into the temples and call me a servant of the gods. With you as a witness I am initiated into all the mysteries" (D 22-25: *Tu me … / in templa ducis ac famulam divis dicas*./ *… Te teste cunctis imbuor mysteriis*). In the following section of the poem, Paulina credits Praetextatus for her fame and exemplarity: "because of you, all call me blessed, call me pious, because you spread my good reputation throughout the whole world: unknown before, I am now known to all" (D 30-32: *Te propter omnis me beatam, me piam*/ *celebrant, quod ipse me bonam disseminas*/ *totum per orbem: ignota noscor omnibu*s). In a recent article, Meghan DiLuzio has argued convincingly that these lines allude to the Magnificat, especially the Lukan phrase *beatam me dicent omnes generationes* (Lk 1:48), in order to portray Paulina as a "correction" to the Christian *exemplum*

[45] Polara 1967, 275.

of Mary.[46] In the final lines of the poem, the Roman widow laments the death of her husband, but expresses confidence in a posthumous existence.

Not everybody felt the same way about Praetextatus and his wife. The dyspeptic Jerome, resident in the city in this period, twice refers to the pagan couple in letters written to their Christian aristocratic peers in the wake of the death of Praetextatus.[47] In a letter to Marcella on the death of the ascetic widow Lea, which coincided with the passing of the pagan man, Jerome compares the two deceased Romans to Lazarus and the rich man. "How things have changed!" he writes, "he … is now abandoned, naked, not in the milky palace of heaven, as his bereft wife pretends, but is imprisoned in the filthy darkness."[48] In another letter of consolation, written to his patron Paula on the death of her daughter Blesilla, Jerome uses the figure of prosopopoeia to reproach her excessive grief in the voice of Jesus: "The servant of the devil (*diaboli ancilla*) is better than my servant. She imagines that her infidel husband has been taken into heaven; you don't believe or don't want to believe that your daughter dwells with me."[49] Significantly, Jerome emphasizes Paulina's pagan—and conjugal—response to the death of Praetextatus as part of the rhetoric of consolation and correction aimed at the recipients of his letters. It has been suspected that Jerome knew either the poem found on the funerary monument to the couple (though hardly the funerary monument itself) or a text that expressed similar thoughts, since he

[46] DiLuzio 2017.
[47] For the religious and social context of Jerome's attack on Paulina, see Cooper 1996, especially 100–101.
[48] Jer. *Ep.* 23.3 (*CSEL* 54: 213)*: o rerum quanta mutatio! Ille … nunc desolatus est, nudus, non in lacteo caeli palatio, ut uxor conmentitur infelix, sed in sordentibus tenebris continetur.* For the rhetorical construction of the contrast, see Cain 2009, 76–78.
[49] Jer. *Ep.* 39.3 (CSEL 54: 300): *"melior diaboli ancilla quam mea est. illa infidelem maritum translatum fingit in caelum, tu mecum tuam filiam commorantem aut non credis aut non uis."*

seems to reverse Paulina's claim to be *famula divis*.[50] A growing scholarly consensus supports the idea that another text, the *Carmen contra paganos*, is also invective against Praetextatus and very likely dates to the same period after the death of the consul designate.[51] If the identification is correct, the poem, like the letters of Jerome, concludes by taking the mourning Paulina as the final target of its pitiless criticism:

> the wife, as a suppliant, with her hands heaps up the altars with grain and gifts, and she prepares in front of the temples to fulfil her vows to the gods and goddesses, and she threatens the divinities; seeking to call up the powers of the underworld with magic spells, she sends the wretched man straight down to Tartarus.[52]

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[50] See DiLuzio 2017, 440 on *diaboli ancilla* as a reference to Paulina's poem and a refutation of the allusion to the Magnificat. Jerome's knowledge of the poem on *CIL* 6.1779 is a complicated issue: there is no clear referent for the references to heaven or the stars that are central to Jerome's polemic (D 9: *porta…caeli* does not quite constitute one). On the other hand, Symmachus seems to acknowledge the poem in his *Relatio* 12, when he writes that Pratextatus "scorned the earthly pleasures as transitory" (*gaudia corporis…ut caduca calcavit*), a sonorous phrase that seems to echo the words of Paulina: "Why would I now speak of honors and offices and the pleasures sought out in the prayers of men? Which you always reckon as transitory and minor" (D 18-20: *Quid nunc honores aut potestates loquar/ hominumque votis adpetita gaudia?/ Quae tu caduca ac parva semper autumans …*), which might make a Jeromian allusion to this text in 384 or 385 more plausible. The question depends, in part, on dating and whether the inscribed poems circulated during the lives of Praetextatus and Paulina, perhaps as either an occasional poem or as a poetic *laudatio funebris*. For discussion, see Polara 2000, 115–18; Consolino 2013, 101–102 (both against an allusion by Jerome); and Lambrechts 1955, 9–10 n.5; Cracco Ruggini 1979, 17 n.39; Kahlos 1994, 17–19 and 2002, 160–62; Cameron 2011, 301–5 (all in favor of the allusion).

[51] The identification of the target of the *Carmen contra paganos* as Praetextatus: Cracco Ruggini 1979; Cameron 2011, 273–309; Consolino 2013, 94–102. Cooper 1996, 101–103 focuses on the identification of the wife of the prefect with Paulina. For arguments for other possible targets: J. Matthews 1970; Musso 1979.

[52] *Carmen contra paganos*, 116-120 (ed. Shackleton Bailey, *Teubner*): *ipsa mola et manibus coniunx altaria supplex/ dum cumulat donis votaque in limine templi/ solvere dis deabusque parat superis minatur,/ carminibus magicis cupiens Acheronta movere,/ praecipitem inferias miserum sub Tartara misit*.

As Alan Cameron observes, these texts indicate that "Paulina was something of a public figure and pagan activist in her own right."[53]

We can return now to the Paulina story in *DEH* 2.4. The narrative presents an aristocratic (*spectatissimi generis feminae*) and famously virtuous (*egregiam castitatis apud omnes famam*) woman named Paulina. Her superstition defines her: she renders herself vulnerable through her commitment to the Egyptian cult of Anubis and desire to be initiated into a new mystery (*uitium nimiae superstitionis … sedulitas … oboedientia*). She participates in the "ritual" with the consent and even encouragement of her husband (*et ex sua et ex mariti sententia*). I contend that a reader in late fourth-century Rome would have thought of Fabia Aconia Paulina. An argument of this kind is not susceptible to verification in empirical terms; we must be content with finding a possible contemporary reading of the passage's referentiality. To control the argument, however, I focus, on the one hand, on the elements of the Paulina story in *DEH* that are distinct from the version in Josephus' *Antiquitates* and, on the other hand, on what we can know about Fabia Aconia Paulina's public image—the evidence is clustered around the death of her husband in 384 and has been laid out in the previous paragraphs—and, so, on what might be available to a contemporary reader of *DEH*.[54]

We can start from the more general similarities and proceed towards more specific references. The name of Paulina is highlighted right from the start of *DEH* 2.4. Fabia Aconia Paulina was known consistently as Paulina: wherever she is named in our evidence she is called

[53] Cameron 2011, 307.
[54] No non-imperial Roman woman had a truly "public" image: I use the term here to denote the idea of Paulina that may have been in circulation among the rarified circle of the Roman senatorial aristocracy and those with access to this network (like Jerome). Note, especially, the emphasis on "fame" in *CIL* 6.1779 D 30-37.

"Paulina"; the other elements of her name appear more flexibly.[55] At the same time, *DEH* omits the name, given by Josephus, of the husband of the central figure of the story: Saturninus.[56] Given the convention that Roman women could be identified through the name of their husbands, this omission opens up possible identifications of "Paulina" for the reader.

The emphasis on mysteries and the idea of a nocturnal initiation in *DEH*—not present in Josephus, where there is no cultic pretext for the rendezvous—is matched by the centrality placed on such experiences in the self-presentation of Paulina and her husband. Both are associated with long lists of initiations on their commemorative monuments: we—and presumably her contemporaries—read that Paulina was an initiate of the mysteries at Eleusis (Iacchus, Ceres, Kore), Lerna (Liber, Ceres, Kore) and Aegina (Hecate), participated in the rituals of the Magna Mater and, most relevantly, had a status in the cult of Isis.[57] A similar pattern is found in the dedications to Praetextatus, though with the addition of the title of *pater* in the cult of Mithras, which, as an all-male cult, was unavailable to Paulina.[58] The couple's joint commitment to the mystery cult—recall again the phrase *et ex sua et ex mariti sententia* in *DEH* 2.4—is a significant theme, as we have seen, in the poem on the back of CIL 6.1779. The piety of Praetextatus, the ostensible object of praise in the later part of the poem, is demonstrated by his commitment to the initiations of his wife: Paulina, as speaker, declares, "With you as a witness I am initiated into all the mysteries" (D 25: *Te teste cunctis imbuor mysteriis*). The emphasis on shared marital concern with mystery cult—as opposed to domestic cult—is relatively rare in Roman imperial evidence, which suggests that the centrality of this theme on

[55] Kahlos 2002, 23 n.90.
[56] If he is real (but this is a significant assumption), this Saturninus could have been a member the Augustan aristocratic family of the Sentii Saturnini: Rogers 1932.
[57] *CIL* 6.1779 and 1780.
[58] Mithras cult as all-male: Griffith 2006.

the funerary altar is intended to distinguish the marriage of Praetextatus and Paulina.[59] We can, therefore, find a pointedness in the prominence of the language of mystery cult and marital consensus around it in *DEH* 2.4.

This brings us to the possibility that the author of *DEH*, like Jerome and Symmachus, alludes to the poems that are inscribed on their joint funerary monument.[60] One of the more remarkable elements of the Paulina story in *DEH* is the allusive reference to Mary and the Lukan Magnificat. It may be explained, however, by the allusion observed by DiLuzio (and conceivably by Jerome) to the same passage in the inscribed poem. If we read the texts together, the allusion in *DEH* comes into focus as a "correction" of the *Kontrastimitation* found on CIL 6.1779, where the *pia* Fabia Aconia Paulina is exulted over Mary: in *DEH* "Paulina," unlike Mary, is just a deluded mark in Mundus' confidence trick. If this convinces, intertextuality between the historical work and inscribed poetry opens up. In the concluding section of the story, the husband of the deluded Paulina is described as "knowing his wife's chastity" (*conscius coniugalis castimoniae*), a *iunctura* that strikingly resembles the compliment paid to Paulina (B 3: *castitatis conscia*) and is otherwise hard to parallel in ancient Latin. This reversal of the qualities may also

[59] Kahlos 1994 and 2002, 148–50 stresses the traditionality of the rhetoric (see also Cooper 1996, 97–99 on the relationship of the text to classical ideals of conjugal unity), but the stress on mystery cult is particular to this couple. Festugière 1963 adduces a third-century sarcophagus from Ravenna as a parallel (*RICIS* II.512), but the connection with mystery cult there is allusive. There is a joint fourth-century dedication of husband and wife from the Vatican Phrygianum, *CIL* 6.509, though the Greek text may indicate that only the husband was recipient of the taurobolium and criobolium.

[60] To be clear, unlike the references by Symmachus and Jerome, there is no need for *DEH* to be dated narrowly to the period following the death of the prefect. If Cameron is right to think that the allusions to *CIL* 6.1779 are explained by an earlier circulation of the poem while the couple were alive, an earlier date is possible; but the late date for Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum* relative to the events of 384 might suggest the possibility that it could have been published some years later and Praetextatus remained a prominent figure in social memory, as is implied by his image in Ammianus Marcellinus, Macrobius and Zosimus.

extend to the next line of the same poem, where the commonplace that Fabia Paulina was a "friend of the gods" (B 4: *numinum amica*) may be re-read, through *DEH* 2.4, as a hint that Paulina was also a "girlfriend of the gods."[61] Finally, we might note the contrast between Fabia Aconia Paulina's claim that her husband was a "witness" to her initiations (*te teste*) and the detail in the history that witnesses were removed (*remotis ... arbitris*) from the temple before Paulina's encounter with Mundus.

We can, therefore, place the author among a group of satirical Christian apologists of the later fourth century: Jerome and the author of the *Carmen contra paganos*, of course, but also the other verse apologists—the authors of the *Carmen contra quendam senatorem* and the *Poema Ultimum* (*Carmen ad Antonium*) and Prudentius—and, in prose, the author known as Ambrosiaster.[62] Dennis Trout—with an *à propos* comparison to paranoia about "Reds under the bed" in Fifties America—has linked this apparent flourishing of satirical apologetic to the particular social situation of the final quarter of the fourth century, where patterns of religiosity left much of the elite improvising combinations of traditional roles and their new commitments.[63] At the same time, as Alan Cameron has argued for the *Carmen contra paganos* and, more recently, Neil McLynn for the *Carmen contra quendam senatorem*, these polemics

[61] Kahlos 2002, 162 suggests that the reference to Praetextatus as an *infidelem maritum* in Jer. *Ep*. 39.3 is a similar "malicious double-entendre." For "friends of gods," see Kahlos 2002, 159 and the sweeping view of the history of the trope to the fourth century in Brown 1978, 54-80.
[62] Ambrosiaster *Quaestio* 114 belongs alongside the poetic apologies: for the similarity in context and apologetic approach, see Cracco Ruggini 1979, 32 and Di Santo 2008, 123-131. For Ambrosiaster's apologetics in this historical context, see Hunter 2009 and the introductions of Bussières 2007 and of De Bruyn, Cooper and Hunter 2017.
[63] Trout 2016, building on Cameron 2011, 273-352. See also Trout 2001 for a good example of such improvisation (the epitaphs of Petronius Probus). A more benign reading of the poetic apologies of this age: Corsano 2000. The actual numerical proportions of pagan and Christian senators at this time is a notoriously difficult issue and much discussed in relation to the Altar of Victory controversy. Salzman 2002, 78–80 gives an overview of the problem.

were not aimed *purely* at projections, but could be targeted at actual elites.[64] Certainty is bound to be elusive, but the accumulation of parallels makes it likely that the author of *DEH* adapted the story from Josephus' *Antiquitates*—probably encountered by the author during a reading of the contiguous *Testimonium Flavianum*—into an allusive polemic against the "pagan activist" Fabia Aconia Paulina. In counterpoint to the pointedly nameless libels of Jerome and, likely, the *Carmen contra paganos*, the technique of *DEH* depends on the ambiguous referentiality of names as a starting point for innuendo-laden slander of a leading figure of the senatorial aristocracy.

Paulina the Pagan Wife

We can, in fine, remark that the contemporary polemic that is visible in this passage in *DEH* took its power from a satirical implication about aristocratic marital ethics, an implication that elite pagans found joy in adultery (*ingens in stupro … gaudium*). Accusations of sexual immorality in religious satire stretch back in the Greco-Roman tradition at least to fifth-century BCE Athens, but Rome in the late fourth century presented a significant conjuncture of religious polemic, shifting ideologies of marriage, and particular high-profile commitments to ascetic lifestyles by aristocratic women.[65] Prompted by charismatic individuals and the transmission of ideas from the eastern empire, some aristocratic women, including Marcella, Lea, Blesilla and Paula, whom we have already encountered, started to commit to ascetic lifestyles, including sexual

[64] Cameron 2011, 273–319, esp. at 284; McLynn 2016.
[65] For charges of sexual immorality in ancient Christian polemic: Knust 2006.

renunciation and the evasion of marriage.[66] Although social historians now largely emphasize that these renunciations could be more strategic and less radical than some sources imply, the possibility of marital forbearance seems to have stirred deeper and, certainly, more noisy arguments among both Christian thinkers and the aristocracy.[67] To suggest how the story of Paulina in *DEH* may belong to this historical and rhetorical context, I set that text, in this final section, alongside examples from the letters and pamphlets of the great polemicist of this Roman struggle over aristocratic marriage and female asceticism, Jerome.

The internal Christian theological arguments over the place of female asceticism, particularly associated in the late fourth-century Latin sphere with the challenges from Helvidius and Jovinian to the high valuation of ascetic virginity within the Church, foregrounded Mary's exemplarity. Helvidius, who wrote a pamphlet in the 380s that argued against a special status for Christian virgins, appears to have claimed that Mary could serve, through her marriage to Joseph, as an exemplary wife.[68] Ambrose's response to the views of Jovinian in the following decade on the specific question of Mary's maintenance of her virginity in childbirth (*virginitas in partu*) suggest that skepticism towards this doctrine was part of Jovinian's argument for the relative value of Christian marriage.[69] By contrast, at the pens of the proponents of female

[66] The story of this development has often been told. See the following large-scale studies from a variety of perspectives (with further references): Brown 1988, 341–427; Vogüé 1991–2008; Jenal 1995.
[67] For asceticism and elite strategy: see Harries 1984; Clark 1986; Salzman 2001; Brown 2012, 268–272. Opposition to aristocratic female asceticism, particularly around the person and writings of Jerome, has attracted much scholarly attention. See Jenal 1995, 421–71 for an overview and earlier literature. On Christian opponents, Helvidius and Jovinian, see Jouassard 1944; Hunter 2007; Brown 2012: 282–88. For aristocratic opponents: Sivan 1993 (with caution about the extent of opposition to aristocratic female asceticism); Cooper 1996, 92–115; Curran 1997; Cain 2009, 99–128.
[68] Hunter 1993, 47–50.
[69] Hunter 2007, 20–24.

asceticism a perpetually virginal Mary became the pivotal *exemplum* for ascetic women and the church itself.[70] DiLuzio has already argued that the contemporary prominence of Mary gave a polemical power to the allusion to the Magnificat on the monument of Praetextatus and Paulina.[71] The *Kontrastimitation* in *DEH* 2.4, particularly if it engages with the epigraphic text, should be read in a similar way: by contrasting the first-century Paulina with Mary, the historian debunks aristocratic marital chastity as preferable to Marian virginity.

Even beyond the Marian allusion, the author of the history draws attention to how outward claims of chaste marriage are undermined by pagan *superstitio*: despite his trust in her "chastity," Paulina's nameless and hypocritical husband encourages her "initiation" and is delighted at her adultery with a god. The connection of marriage and its defenders with paganism is a tactic that appears several times in Jerome's contributions to the late fourth-century arguments over sacred virginity. For the aristocratic class—Christian and not—the elevation of asceticism may have threatened aristocratic norms and elite familial reproduction; Jerome suggests that their opposition may have been based on more general hostility to Christianity. In the letter on the death of Blesilla, he complains to Paula about a group of "whisperers" at the funeral who had blamed monks like him for the death of the young woman and claimed that pagan mothers did not mourn for their children as she did (*nulla gentilium ita … deflevit*): "Satan exalts" in such talk, he writes.[72] Another incident from around this period also suggests direct interventions to maintain class and gender norms: writing from Bethlehem some years later, Jerome recalls an incident when a certain Praetextata, a relative of Paula by marriage and likely a close relation, even daughter, of Praetextatus and Paulina, had tried to draw Blesilla's sister,

[70] Brown 1988, 351–365; Hunter 2007, 171–204; Shoemaker 2016, 169–74.
[71] DiLuzio 2017, 445–46.
[72] Jer. *Ep.* 39.6 (*CSEL* 54: 306): *putas ad istas voces … quomodo exultasse satanan …?*

Eustochium, away from asceticism: Praetextata "changed her dress and jewelry, and wove a wave into her neglected hair, hoping to defeat both the intention of the girl and the desire of her mother."[73] Jerome, though, hastens to explain to his addressee that Praetextata was assailed by an angel in a dream and soon died: "so Christ punishes those who desecrate his temple, so he protects his jewels and valuable regalia."[74] Even though Jerome is hardly a reliable reporter and it is possible that none of his antagonists was a 'pagan', we can observe in these stories how contests over the bodies of late-fourth-century aristocratic women could also be occasions for religious polemic.

Elsewhere in his defenses of ascetic virginity Jerome opted for a tactic of insinuation. For instance, he suggests an association between married life and pagan worship in a purple passage in his refutation of Helvidius, where he rhetorically conjures an image of a wife, unlike the consecrated virgin, who is beset by too many distractions to have a thought for God.[75] Strikingly, he writes that the sounds of *tympana*, *tibia* and *cymbala* during dinner and the presence of barely-dressed prostitutes, "victims of lust" (*libidinum victimae*), make correct fear of God impossible: the sacrificial language and nods to cultic instruments imply that a pagan atmosphere is envisioned. More plainly a few years later, the combative Stridonian puns on the name of

[73] Jer. *Ep.* 107.5 (*CSEL* 55: 296): *Praetextata, nobilissima quondam femina, iubente viro Hymetio, qui patruus Eustochiae virginis fuit, habitum eius cultumque mutavit et neglectum crinem undanti gradu texuit vincere cupiens et virginis propositum et matris desiderium*.
[74] Jer. *Ep.* 107.5 (*CSEL* 55: 296): *sic ulciscitur Christus violatores templi sui, sic gemmas et pretiosissima ornamenta defendit*?
[75] Jer. *Helv*. 20 (*PL* 23: 214): *Responde, quaeso, inter ista ubi sit Dei cogitatio*? *Et hae felices domus? Caeterum ubi tympana sonant, tibia clamitat, lyra garret, cymbalum concrepat, quis ibi Dei timor? Parasitus in contumeliis gloriatur: ingrediuntur expositae libidinum victimae, et tenuitate vestium unde impudicis oculis ingeruntur*. For the cultic resonances of the instruments, see the prominence of such contexts in the lemma in *TLL* s.v. *cymbalum* iv 1588.61–1589.41 (note the number of passages in this article that also mention the *tympanum*). On the satirical construction of this passage, see Wiesen 1964, 150–52; Courtray 2020, §37–38.

Jovinian to suggest a link between the defender of marriage and the old chief deity: "Beware of the name of Jovinian, which comes from an idol. The Capitolium is neglected, the temples and ceremonies of Jupiter have disappeared. Why are his name and vices in high repute among you?"[76] The insinuation is audacious: the views on marriage of Jovinian continue the vices of Jupiter. The appearances of Fabia Aconia Paulina as a negative example in the letters on the deaths of Lea and Blesilla can be read as instances of this gambit. Fabia Paulina was clearly aggravating to men like Jerome, but she also made a better contrast with the subjects and addressees of the letters than any Christian wife could have done. In this context, we can see, therefore, how the story of Paulina the deluded wife may have been a timely inclusion in *DEH*.[77]

The author of *DEH* need not, therefore, remain a "lonely historian."[78] Whether we read the story of Paulina in *DEH* 2.4 as a general mockery of "paganism" or as specific ridicule of Fabia Aconia Paulina, here is the historiography of *DEH* as cultural practice: a pointed retelling of a Josephan tale to deride adherents—and perhaps one adherent in particular—of the traditional cults and to link those cults with the deprecated institution of aristocratic marriage.

University of California, Berkeley

duncanmacrae@berkeley.edu

[76] Jer. *Jov*. 2.38 (*PL* 23: 352): *Cave Joviniani nomen*, *quod de idolo derivatum est. Squalet Capitolium, templa Jovis et caeremoniae conciderunt*. *Cur vocabulum eius, et vitia apud te vigeant*?

[77] Bell 1977, 70–71 briefly observes that the text consistently displays misogyny, but fuller study of the gender politics of *DEH* is a significant scholarly desideratum. *Per litteras* Carson Bay points out the apparent allegorical (ecclesiological?) reading in *DEH* 5.16.1 (*triumphavit Dauid cum Bersabeam hoc est filiam Sabbati suo coniugio propheticis mysteriis copulavisset*) as another important passage for the author's view of marriage.

[78] I allude to the title of Momigliano 1980, a study of the other surviving "classicizing" late antique Latin historian.

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