

## HUMAN SACRIFICE AMONG PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS\*

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In Minucius Felix' dialogue on the value of Christianity, written in the late second or early third century C.E.,<sup>1</sup> the character Caecilius, who presents the anti-Christian arguments, recounts a story about their initiations, 'a story as loathsome as it is well known': after the initiate has struck a baby concealed under a covering of flour, those present drink the blood from its wounds and so seal their union (*Oct.* 9.5). Later in the dialogue, Octavius, the defender of Christianity, refutes this slander. The alleged crime, he argues, is so terrible that 'no one could believe it except the sort of person who would attempt it'. He goes on to point out that pagans, not Christians, are the ones who practise actual human sacrifice. He supports his claim by citing specific examples: the Africans who used to sacrifice their children to Saturn, the Taurians and the Egyptian Busiris who sacrificed foreigners, the Gauls, and lastly the Romans themselves, who in the past would bury alive two Greeks and two Gauls and who in his own day sacrifice men to Jupiter Latiaris (*Oct.* 30.1).

Although Caecilius describes the story he tells about the Christians as a *nota fabula*, it is somewhat difficult to determine exactly how widely known it was. Virtually every Christian apologist between 150 and 200 C.E. refers to the charge, but the evidence from the pagan side is much less extensive.<sup>2</sup> After investigating the activities of Christians in Bithynia, the younger Pliny notes in his report to Trajan that they gather together 'to take food, food that is ordinary enough and harmless' (*Ep.* x.96.7). The appended qualification suggests that in the 110s Pliny had already heard some version of these stories, and took them seriously enough to make inquiries.<sup>3</sup> Some years later, Fronto had heard enough about the charges to elaborate on them in a speech.<sup>4</sup> Later still, the citizens of *Lugdunum* who instituted a persecution of local Christians in 177 C.E. were apparently convinced of their truth, since they tried through torture to make one woman confess to such deeds (Eus., *HE* v.1.26). although the evidence is scanty, there is enough to suggest that at least some pagans both knew and believed these stories. After Minucius Felix and Tertullian, however, they disappear from the record, and by the 240s C.E. Origen could assert that even non-Christians agreed that they were false slanders.<sup>5</sup> Stories about human sacrifice thus seem to have been a phenomenon of the second century C.E., one that for a while reinforced the general hostility towards Christians but that, by the time Minucius Felix rallied his arguments against it, had already been played out.

The fascination that these stories hold for modern scholars, however, is far from played out. What was their source, and why did people believe them? In an effort to answer these

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<sup>1</sup> The date of the *Octavius* has been the subject of an extensive debate, as yet unresolved. For a useful summary, see G. W. Clarke in the introduction to his translation of the *Octavius* (Ancient Christian Writers xxxiv, 1974); see most recently C. Tibiletti, 'Il problema della priorità Tertulliano-Minucio Felice', in J. Granarolo (ed.), *Hommage à R. Braun, II: Autour de Tertullien* (1990), 23-34.

<sup>2</sup> In the 150s, Justin makes passing references to slanders about 'meals of human flesh' (*Apol.* 1.26.1; cf. *Apol.* 11.12.2 and *Tryph.* 10.1); he is followed by Tatian, who denies that there is *anthropophagia* among the Christians (*Or.* 25.3). In the 170s, Athenagoras refers to 'Thyestean banquets' (*Leg.* 3.1; cf. 31 and 35), as does the writer of the letter on the persecution of Christians in *Lugdunum* (ap. Eus., *HE* v.1.14; cf. v.1.26 and 52). In the early 180s, Theophilus of Antioch provides an oblique reference (*Ad Aut.* 3.4), while in the 190s Tertullian provides an account very similar to that of Minucius Felix (*Apol.* 4.11, 7.1 and 8.1-9; cf. *Ad Nat.* 1.7.23-8).

<sup>3</sup> Vettius Valens also seems to refer to them, without mentioning the Christians by name: 'some deny the divine and have a different worship or eat unlawful meals' (1v.15.4); his floruit is dated to the first half of the second century C.E. by O. Neugebauer, 'The chronology of Valens' *Anthologiae*', *HTR* 47 (1945), 65-7.

<sup>4</sup> Caecilius cites Fronto as the source of the specific story he relates (*Oct.* 9.6; cf. 31.2); for a general discussion, see Clarke, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 221-4 n. 123. The characterization of Christian crimes as Thyestean banquets and Oedipodal intercourse, found both in Athenagoras (*Leg.* 3) and the anonymous writer of *Lugdunum* (Eus., *HE* v.1.14), may in fact originate with Fronto: E. Champlin, *Fronto and Antonine Rome* (1980), 65. It seems unlikely, however, that he played such an important part in the formation of the stories as Benko (below (n. 6), 60-8) seems to attribute to him, nor is it necessarily the case that he recounted them in a speech *contra Christianos* (Champlin, *op. cit.*, 64-6); see most recently B. Baldwin, 'Fronto on the Christians', *ICS* 15 (1990), 177-84.

<sup>5</sup> *Cels.* 6.40; he otherwise only mentions the charge to say that it was originally due to the malevolence of the Jews (*Cels.* 6.27). The only later references occur in Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catech.* 16.8) and Salvian (*Gub. Dei* 4.17), both of whom are clearly referring to the past.

questions, a number of scholars have produced learned and perceptive works.<sup>6</sup> Some have suggested that the charge was linked to a misunderstanding of the language of the Eucharist, or derived from reports about the actual practices of some extreme gnostic sects. Although these arguments have valid aspects, they are perhaps too firmly locked into the folk adage that where there is smoke, there is fire: if such stories were told and believed, there must have been something to them, even if that something was misunderstood and misinterpreted. But smoke of this kind is not always produced by fire. When Arens began doing fieldwork in Tanzania, for example, he found himself the object of some suspicion among the natives because of a story, remarkably detailed and widely believed, that Europeans consume the blood of Africans.<sup>7</sup> There was virtually no evidence for this story, no facts that had been misinterpreted. The only fire in this case was metaphorical, in so far as the story that Westerners consume the blood of Africans could be taken as an essentially correct, if simplified and dramatic, assessment of the modern political situation. In a similar way, we can understand the stories told about Christians not as distorted accounts of an actual practice, but as accurate if metaphorical accounts of the Christians' place in Graeco-Roman society. This approach to the question was first taken by Dölger, who placed the charges against the Christians in the context of similar stories told about Jews, political conspirators, and magicians, while Edwards has recently developed it in an acute paper, arguing that 'Thyestean banquets and Oedipodal conjugations were maliciously inferred from that disdain for social usages which, though it was not peculiar to the Christians, was in them most ostentatious, and was expressed in two most public shows of abstinence — from the altar and from the bed'.<sup>8</sup> In the present paper I hope to expand further on this approach, by considering stories about human sacrifice not simply as a context for the charges against the Christians, but as part of a complex and wide-ranging Graeco-Roman discourse about civilization and religion.

Because the topic of human sacrifice in antiquity is a wide and fascinating one, I should make it clear from the outset that there are several important questions which I shall either not address or touch on only in passing. First of all, I shall not explore the ritual significance of stories about human sacrifice. Both classical scholars and anthropologists have inquired into the origin and meaning of blood sacrifice, and have found that such stories often yield valuable insights on this topic. My concerns, however, lie with their social rather than their ritual meaning.<sup>9</sup> I shall as a result exclude most mythological tales of human sacrifice, and concentrate on those told about historical groups or individuals. Secondly, I shall not discuss the historical reality of human sacrifice in the ancient Mediterranean and European world. Some ancient peoples did engage in the practice, including the Punic cities of the western Mediterranean, various German tribes, and perhaps some Celtic tribes as well.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the extent to which Greeks and Italians ever did so remains controversial; certainly in historical times human sacrifice did not regularly feature in either Greek or Roman religion.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Important discussions include J.-P. Waltzing, 'Le Crime rituel reproché aux chrétiens du IIe siècle', *Musée Belge* 29 (1925), 209–38; F. J. Dölger, 'Sacramentum infanticidii: Die Schlachtung eines Kindes und der Genuss seines Fleisches und Blutes als vermeintlicher Einweihungsakt im ältesten Christentum', *AC* 4 (1934), 188–228; W. Speyer, 'Zu den Vorwürfen der Heiden gegen die Christen', *JAC* 6 (1963), 129–35; R. Freudenberger, 'Der Vorwurf ritueller Verbrechen gegen die Christen im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert', *ThZ* 23 (1967), 97–107; A. Henrichs, 'Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians: A Reconsideration', in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann (eds), *Kyriakon: Festschrift J. Quasten* (1970), 18–35; R. M. Grant, 'Charges of "Immorality" against Various Religious Groups in Antiquity', in R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (eds), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religion Presented to G. Quispel* (1981), 161–70; S. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (1984), 54–78; M. Edwards, 'Some early Christian immoralities', *Ancient Society* 23 (1992), 72–82; A. McGowan, 'Eating people: accusations of cannibalism against the Christians in the second century', *JECs* 2 (1994), 413–42.

<sup>7</sup> W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (1979), 10–13.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, op. cit. (n. 6), 75; cf. McGowan, op. cit. (n. 6), 433–41.

<sup>9</sup> It is for this reason that I largely ignore the distinction between human sacrifice and ritualized murder, which in other contexts can be important: see, e.g., D. Hughes, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (1991), 1–12. But in most of the stories I shall discuss this distinction does not seem to have been significant. Those who tell them typically employ the regular vocabulary of sacrifice, even in cases that we might classify as ritual murder. For example, Diodorus Siculus (xxii.5.1) explicitly says that Apollodorus of Cassandria performed an oath ceremony 'by sacrificing a boy to the gods'.

<sup>10</sup> S. Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice* (1991), the most recent survey, presents a solid case for regular child sacrifice. On the interpretation of the 'bog people' as evidence for human sacrifice among the Germans, see the recent summary of M. Todd, *The Northern Barbarians 100 BC-AD 300* (rev. edn, 1987), 182–5. Archaeological corroboration for the similar claims made about the Celts is more ambiguous: see J.-L. Brunaux, *Les Gaulois: sanctuaires et rites* (1986), 24–6 and 128–35.

<sup>11</sup> F. Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern* (1915), now badly out of date in its archaeological material. For the Greek side, Hughes, op. cit. (n. 9); a comparable evaluation of the Roman evidence is lacking, but see below, n. 51.

This absence, as we shall see, was a necessary pre-condition for the significance that many stories about human sacrifice carried. Lastly, I shall limit my remarks fairly strictly to human sacrifice, and omit any discussion of related charges, most notably cannibalism and incest. The latter was so regularly linked with human sacrifice in the stories told about the Christians that some scholars have urged that what requires explanation are not the separate charges but the whole complex.<sup>12</sup> As for cannibalism, its connection with human sacrifice is so close as to be practically unavoidable, since in the type of sacrifice most commonly practised by Greeks and Romans the celebrants cooked and ate the flesh of what they had sacrificed. But while these related charges deal with some of the same issues as that of human sacrifice, they also introduce many others.<sup>13</sup> For the sake of clarity, then, I have limited my discussion to the specific motif of human sacrifice.

In this paper I shall analyse the meaning that stories about human sacrifice had for the people who told them. As Dölger and Edwards have established, people believed and repeated the stories about the Christians because those stories made sense to them, and expressed in a succinct and dramatic form the more general misgivings that they had about this odd group of people. In short, these stories about human sacrifice functioned as a sign, a cultural marker, in a discourse about the place of Christians in Graeco-Roman society. As any lexicographer knows, however, the meaning of a sign shifts according to its context. My intention, then, is to examine the range of contexts in which people used this particular sign, and thereby determine its significance. I shall conclude by suggesting that the motif of human sacrifice, with its fluctuating associations, serves as a valuable indicator of several important cultural shifts in the Graeco-Roman world.

#### I. TAURIANS AND OTHER BARBARIANS

In Minucius Felix' dialogue, Octavius responds to Caecilius' charge of human sacrifice by reeling off a number of counter-examples. Among these are a group of ethnographic examples, peoples for whom human sacrifice was a traditional practice: Carthaginians, Taurians, and Gauls. Of these examples, that of the Taurians had the longest history.<sup>14</sup> Already in the late fifth century B.C.E., Euripides had popularized their story in his *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, where they appear as a barbarian people at the edge of the Greek world with the custom of sacrificing to Artemis any Greeks who land in their territory. This play, whose plot was probably original to Euripides, was one of lasting popularity. Pacuvius produced a well-known version in Rome, while it is illustrated by several wall-paintings from Pompeii. No doubt as a result of its popularity, the Taurians became one of the most well-known examples of a people who practised human sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, not everyone believed this tradition about their customs. Tertullian, for example, dismissed it with a sniff: 'I leave the Taurian tales to the theatres where they belong' (*Apol.* 9.5). But Tertullian was wrong about the theatrical abode of the Taurians. Some twenty years before Euripides presented them on the tragic stage, Herodotus had described them in a sober and matter-of-fact account. 'The Taurians', he says, 'have the following customs. They sacrifice to the Maiden both shipwrecked men and whatever Greeks they take when they put out to sea against them'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Henrichs, *op. cit.* (n. 6), 24-9 and, more implicitly, Benko, *op. cit.* (n. 6), 54-78.

<sup>13</sup> On the significance of cannibalism, see Hughes, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 188-9 and especially McGowan, *op. cit.* (n. 6); McGowan's paper, which appeared after I had completed my own, is in many ways its complement, since its general approach is similar but it deals with the associations of cannibalism rather than human sacrifice.

<sup>14</sup> The earliest extant ethnographic example is that of the Lemnians, who according to Hecataeus sacrificed maidens to their local goddess: *FGrHist* 1 F 138a; cf. L. Pearson, *Early Ionian Historians* (1939), 56. But the Lemnians, unlike the Taurians, did not become a literary topos.

<sup>15</sup> On Euripides' role in the development of the story, see A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (1971), 75; for

Pacuvius, see Cic., *Amic.* 24 and cf. *Fin.* v.63; for Pompeii, see P. L. de Bellefonds in *LIMC* v.1 (1990), 722-3. Ovid twice paraphrased the story in his poems written in Tomi: *Trist.* iv.4.61-82, *Pont.* iii.2.45-96. Brief references to the Taurians (sometimes called Scythians) as practitioners of human sacrifice include Cic., *Rep.* iii.15; Hyg., *Fab.* 120; Luc. 1.446; Juv. 15.116-19; Lucian, *Sacr.* 13 and *Tox.* 2; Athenag., *Leg.* 26.1 (perhaps an inserted gloss: see below n. 74); Sext. Emp., *Pyr.* 3.208; Clem., *Protr.* ii.42.3; Or., *Cels.* 5.27; Athan., *Gent.* 25; Serv. ad *Aen.* ii.116; Prud., *Symm.* 1.395.

<sup>16</sup> Her. iv.103.1. Herodotus' history is usually assumed to have appeared not long after 430 B.C.E.; the *I. T.* is dated on metrical grounds a little before the *Helen* of 412 B.C.E.

Before they entered the realm of legend, then, the Taurians were a historical people, whose homeland was in the present-day Crimea. The story that they sacrificed foreigners to their local goddess, whom the Greeks identified as Iphigeneia, seems to have been in circulation by the sixth century B.C.E. at the latest.<sup>17</sup> It is not difficult to discern the circumstances in which the story originally spread. In the seventh century B.C.E., the Greeks began to colonize the Black Sea area, and by the end of the century, when the Milesians had started to settle Panticapaeum on the Cimmerian Bosphorus, there must have been regular traffic past the shores of the Crimea.<sup>18</sup> The Taurians, who according to Herodotus (iv. 103.3) made their living from plunder and war, were no doubt regarded by the colonizing Greeks with dread.<sup>19</sup> Herodotus' account, which emphasizes the fact that they attacked the survivors of wrecks and sailed out against passing ships, seems to reflect the concerns of people who did have to sail past their country.

The Greeks, then, viewed the Taurians as an alien and hostile people. The story that they sacrificed strangers to their local goddess nicely encapsulated this view. On the one hand, it provided a forceful expression for Taurian hostility: they did not simply attack foreigners, but sacrificed them. On the other, it clearly defined the cultural distance between the Greeks, who would never engage in human sacrifice, and the Taurians, who did. There are obvious similarities, both in narrative detail and in significance, with the roughly contemporary story of the Egyptian king Busiris, although in that case the practice of human sacrifice was attributed to an individual rather than to the Egyptians in general.<sup>20</sup> As the boundaries of the Greek world expanded, the number of such stories grew. By the fifth century reports about the Carthaginian practice must have reached Athens, for Sophocles refers to a *nomos* among barbarians that humans should be sacrificed to Kronos.<sup>21</sup> The Romans inherited all these examples from the Greeks and later added their own. Stories that the Gauls engaged in human sacrifice probably began to spread in the wake of Roman expansion in Transalpine Gaul during the 120s B.C.E., while in the next generation the philosopher Posidonius probably gave an authoritative account of their practices in his *Histories*.<sup>22</sup> Although these were the most famous examples of barbarians who practised human sacrifice, they were not the only ones.<sup>23</sup>

In all these cases, the underlying discourse was one about civilization and barbarism. Human sacrifice functioned as a particularly efficient marker in this discourse because it

<sup>17</sup> The earliest literary reference to the Taurians was apparently in the epic *Cypria*, written in the seventh or sixth century B.C.E.: see the *Chrestomathia* of Proclus, in the Loeb of H. G. Evelyn White, *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, and Homerica*, p. 494; according to Herodotus (iv. 103.2), the Taurians identified the goddess to whom they sacrificed strangers as Iphigeneia. Euripides provides the earliest evidence for the alternative identification with Artemis, one that was no doubt made to explain the peculiar rites of Artemis Tauropolos at Halai in Attica, to which he alludes at the end of his play (*I. T.* 1449–61); see in general Burnett, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 73–5 and Hughes, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 89–90.

<sup>18</sup> See C. Roebuck, *Ionian Trade and Colonization* (1959), 121–3, and M. L. Bernhard and Z. Sztetyto in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites* (1976), 627–8; for the most recent work, see J. G. F. Hind, 'Archaeology of the Greeks and barbarian peoples around the Black Sea (1982–92)', *Arch. Reports* 39 (1993), 82–112, at 102–3.

<sup>19</sup> Greek fears of the Taurians are perhaps indicated by their hesitation to found colonies near their territory: see A. J. Graham in *CAH* xxx. 3<sup>2</sup> (1982), 122 and 129. Strabo (vii. 3.6) explained the Black Sea's Greek name of Axenos by reference to the Scythian practice of sacrificing strangers.

<sup>20</sup> Busiris first appears in fragments of Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 F 17), while Panyassis mentions human sacrifice among the Egyptians (fr. 26 Kinkel = Athenaeus 172d); representations of the myth on vases go back to the mid-sixth century: A.-F. Laurens in *LIMC* iii. 1 (1986), 151. On the reality of Egyptian human sacrifice, see the summary of A. B. Lloyd in his commentary on Herodotus Book II, vol. 2 (1976), 213–14. I owe many of my ideas about the significance of human sacrifice in the archaic

period to Andrew Gregory's as yet unpublished paper on Busiris.

<sup>21</sup> In the lost *Andromeda*, fr. 126 Radt; although Sophocles does not mention the Carthaginians by name, by Kronos he must mean the Phoenician Ba'al, and he is more likely to have in mind the western than the eastern Phoenicians. Certainly in later centuries references to Carthaginian child sacrifice were commonplace, whereas relatively little was said about human sacrifice among the Phoenicians of the Levant; the few exceptions include Wisdom of Solomon 12.3–6 and 14.23, Philo Byblius ap. Eus. *Praep. Evang.* iv. 16. 11 (= *FGrHist* 790 F 3b), and Curtius Rufus iv. 3.23. We should note, however, the many ambiguities in the Greek figure of Kronos, and in particular his associations with human sacrifice: see H. S. Versnel, *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (1993), 90–135, esp. 100–2.

<sup>22</sup> See J. J. Tierney, 'The Celtic ethnography of Posidonius', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* n. s. 60 (1960), 189–275, and the more cautious discussions of D. Nash, 'Reconstructing Posidonius' Celtic ethnography', *Britannia* 7 (1976), 111–26 and I. G. Kidd, *Posidonius II: The Commentary* (1988), 308–10. Gallic human sacrifice is described by Caesar (*BG* vi. 16), Strabo (iv. 4.5), and Diodorus Siculus (v. 31.3–4), all of whom probably drew on Posidonius. Strabo certainly took from Posidonius his immediately preceding information about the Gallic practice of displaying the severed heads of their enemies (F 274 Edelstein-Kidd).

<sup>23</sup> For example, the Scythians were also well-known, whose practice of sacrificing prisoners-of-war to Ares was reported by Herodotus (iv. 62); at a later date, Strabo recorded that both the Lusitanians (iii. 3.6) and the Albanians (xi. 4.7) also practised human sacrifice.

combined two of the most important areas in which the Greeks distinguished themselves from barbarians: religious customs, and respect for the lives and persons of free people.<sup>24</sup> Like many peoples, the Greeks, and later the Romans, considered their cultural norms to be the true and universal standards of civilization. Therefore, since the Graeco-Roman religious norms dictated the practice of animal sacrifice, human sacrifice was on the one hand an obviously deviant and perverse practice. On the other, considered simply as a type of murder that had been regularized and endowed with moral value, it exemplified the cruelty and contempt for human life that was thought to characterize barbarian mores. Through these stories of human sacrifice, then, Greeks and Romans were able to confirm their opinion of their own cultural superiority by attributing to a foreign people a practice that they considered cruel and perverse.

The significance of human sacrifice as a marker of barbarity was widely understood; so widely, in fact, that by the latter part of the fifth century B.C.E. people were able to manipulate its meaning in order to present new and challenging ideas. We can perhaps see the beginnings of this development in Herodotus' discussion of the Taurians. He refused to elaborate on the implications of barbarity contained in the stories about human sacrifice, but instead simply noted that such was the *nomos* of this particular people. Such a cool and objective treatment of human sacrifice invited the reader to consider the fact of the Taurians' cultural difference without the negative connotations of barbarism.<sup>25</sup> This objectivity was characteristic of the emerging genre of ethnography, which tended to circumscribe traditional Hellenocentrism and favour instead a cultural relativism.<sup>26</sup> But while ethnographers may have laid the groundwork for this new analysis of cultural standards, it was left to others to fashion the arguments in detail. According to some thinkers, the fact that *nomoi* differed from one place to another was an indication of the fact that they were all merely conventional, and that no absolute standards existed. Two extant texts indicate that the motif of human sacrifice could play an important role in such arguments.

The earlier of these is the Platonic (or pseudo-Platonic) dialogue *Minos*, between Socrates and an unnamed companion.<sup>27</sup> When Socrates argues that law is the discovery of reality, his interlocutor challenges this definition with an argument for cultural relativism. He points out that in their society human sacrifice is a terrible thing, but that among the Carthaginians it is both legal and holy, even though they sacrifice their own children to Kronos (315b-c). Because this text presents this argument as being in opposition to 'Socratic' thinking, it is somewhat ironic that two centuries later it was probably employed by the Academic philosopher Carneades. Although Carneades himself never wrote anything, Cicero reproduces some of his arguments in the third book of his dialogue *De Re Publica*.<sup>28</sup> That justice is a civil rather than a natural phenomenon, his character L. Furius Philus argues, is proved by the variety of human customs. If we were to travel through the world, we would for example observe that while the Greeks and Romans worship gods under human form, the Persians consider this a very wicked practice. 'How many peoples', he then exclaims, 'such as the Taurians in the Black Sea, Busiris the king of Egypt, the Gauls, and the Punics, have considered human sacrifice a pious act and one most pleasing to the immortal gods!' (*Rep.* III.13-15).

Arguments like those presented in the *Minos* and *De Re Publica* invited the audience to abstract the practice of human sacrifice from the moral context of their own culture, and see it simply as a sign of difference. Their effectiveness depended on the very fact that the meaning of human sacrifice as a marker of barbarism was so well known. If a practice recognized

<sup>24</sup> cf. E. Lévy, 'Hérodote *philobarbaros* ou la vision du barbare chez Hérodote', in R. Lonis (ed.), *L'Étranger dans le monde grec II* (1992), 193-244, at 207-17; on Greeks and barbarians, see in general F. Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus* (1988), and E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (1989).

<sup>25</sup> We may perhaps see a parallel development in the meaning of the word *barbaros* to the neutral sense of 'non-Greek': cf. E. Lévy, 'Naissance du concept de barbare', *Ktéma* 9 (1984), 5-14.

<sup>26</sup> cf. J. Redfield, 'Herodotus the tourist', *CP* 80 (1985), 97-118. The most famous example in Herodotus is at III.38.2-4; see further Lévy, op. cit. (n. 24), 196-226.

<sup>27</sup> The *Minos* has long been considered the work of a follower of Plato: see for example J. Souilhé, *Platon, Oeuvres complètes, vol. XIII. 2: Dialogues suspects* (1930), 81-5; more recently, G. R. Morrow has argued for its authenticity: *Plato's Cretan City: A Historical Interpretation of the Laws* (1960), 23-4 and 35-9.

<sup>28</sup> Cicero probably got his information about Carneades from a treatise of his student Clitomachus: J.-L. Ferrary, 'Le Discours de Philus (Cicéron, *De Re Publica* III, 8-31) et la philosophie de Carnéade', *REL* 55 (1977), 128-56. It is possible that other later examples of this argument also go back to Carneades: see Or., *Cels.* 5.27 with H. Chadwick, 'Origen, Celsus and the Stoa', *JTS* 48 (1948), 34-49, and cf. Sext. Emp., *Pyr.* 3.198-234.

immediately by the audience as wicked and barbarous was considered by other peoples to be instead proper and holy, could that not mean that the standards of the audience were themselves merely relative and conventional? The examples of the Carthaginians and the Gauls in fact differed from the earlier ones of the Taurians and Busiris in ways that made them particularly suitable for use in such arguments. In both cases, the victims of human sacrifice were not necessarily foreigners, but members of the group; accordingly, the stories did not carry the same implications of hostility towards outsiders. In the case of the Carthaginians, there was the further point that they were not savages but instead a culturally and politically sophisticated people. That they should practise human sacrifice perhaps made it all the more plausible that this was simply an example of cultural variation.<sup>29</sup> But as we see in the passage of Cicero, even the example of the Taurians could be used in such arguments as a marker not of barbarism but simply of 'the other'.

This neutral use of the motif of human sacrifice did not by any means replace the earlier negative one. Cicero himself had earlier shown how one could use the motif of human sacrifice to play on the prejudices of a Roman audience. In his defence of M. Fonteius, who after serving as governor of Transalpine Gaul in the late 70s had been accused of *repetundae*, he used the story of human sacrifice to attack the testimony of the provincials whom the prosecutors had brought forward. 'Lastly, can anything seem holy and sacred (*sanctum ac religiosum*) to men like these, who, even if they sometimes think under the influence of fear that they should appease the gods, pollute their altars and shrines with human victims? . . . Who is unaware that up to this very day they maintain that savage and barbarous custom (*immanem ac barbaram consuetudinem*) of sacrificing men? Accordingly, what sort of good faith, what sort of piety do you judge these men to have, who think that the easiest way to appease even the immortal gods is through human villainy and blood?' (*Font.* 31). Although the scene has changed from the colony to the court-room, this picture of the Gauls is much the same as that which the early Greeks had of the Taurians: they were not simply different, but barbaric, wicked, and untrustworthy.

We can thus trace the motif of human sacrifice as a sign of difference from Archaic Greece to Republican Rome. In the majority of cases, the difference it marks carried a strong negative connotation, so that it was essentially a sign of barbarism; in other cases it functioned as a proof that accepted ideas about civilization were merely conventional. In all cases, however, it functioned as a marker of cultural distance between the people who told the stories and the people about whom they were told. Furthermore, in the examples discussed so far, the peoples to whom the Greeks and Romans attributed human sacrifice all lived on the fringes of the known world. They constituted the periphery, physically as well as culturally, of the Graeco-Roman world. Consequently, the motif of human sacrifice served in all these cases as a way of marking off the civilized people within the Graeco-Roman world from the barbarians outside it. But the Graeco-Roman world was sufficiently cosmopolitan that the people who set its standards could never be quite sure that the barbarians in fact always were on the outside. As we shall see, they at times suspected various internal groups of a barbarity rivalling, if not surpassing, that attributed to the Taurians.

## II. THE ENEMY WITHIN

Under the Julio-Claudians, the *grammaticus* Apion of Alexandria wrote a history of Egypt, which, although it has not itself survived, is quoted by several later writers, particularly Josephus.<sup>30</sup> One of the passages that Josephus preserves concerns the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his looting of the temple in Jerusalem in 169 B.C.E. When Antiochus entered the temple, so the story goes, he found a man reclining on a couch in front of a sumptuous

<sup>29</sup> The unnamed speaker in the *Minos* undercuts the cultural distinction by noting that among the Greeks themselves there is human sacrifice in the Arcadian cult of Zeus Lykaios and against the descendants of Athamas; on these stories, see Hughes, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 92–107, with full references.

<sup>30</sup> The fragments are collected by Jacoby, *FGrHist* 616 F

1–21; see also M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (1976), 1, 389–416. Unfortunately, the fragment in question occurs in a lacuna common to all the Greek MSS of Josephus' *Contra Apionem* (11.52–113), and is only known from a Latin translation made in the early sixth century C.E.

banquet. The man greeted Antiochus as a saviour, and in response to his questions told his story. He was a Greek who, while travelling in that region, had been kidnapped by men of foreign birth and taken to the temple. There he had been kept hidden and constantly fed with rich feasts. By questioning the slaves who brought him these meals, he had finally learned 'the unspeakable law of the Jews'. Every year, at a set time, they would kidnap a Greek traveller and fatten him for a year; at the end of this time they would take him to a certain grove, slay him according to their ritual, eat some of his flesh, and while doing so swear an oath 'by the God who made heaven and earth and the sea to show no good will to anyone of another race, especially the Greeks'.<sup>31</sup>

We can locate this story in a more specific context than those discussed in the previous section. In the reign of Gaius there was a serious and sometimes violent quarrel between the Greek and Jewish residents of Alexandria. The latter lost their rights of citizenship in 38 C.E. and two years later sent an embassy to Gaius in an attempt to win them back. The Greeks sent an embassy of their own at the same time, of which Apion was the leader, in order to oppose them, although the situation was not finally resolved until the accession of Claudius.<sup>32</sup> According to Josephus (*Ap.* II.32–42), Apion used his Egyptian history as a vehicle for this quarrel, attacking the Alexandrian Jews and their claims to citizenship. The story of human sacrifice in the temple suited his polemical purpose, since it cast the Jews as the true aggressors and typified their hostility to the Greeks whose privileges they wanted to usurp. The story was not, however, original to Apion. Josephus alleges that in this particular case 'Apion has become the spokesman (*propheta*) of others' (*Ap.* II.91). These 'others' were writers who had invented this slander against the Jews in order to defend the sacrilegious actions of Antiochus (*Ap.* II.90 and 97). Although we tend to be more familiar with Antiochus as he appears in hostile Jewish sources, the more favourable tradition that survives among Greek writers suggests that he had his defenders as well as his opponents. In view of his record, however, it was not always easy to defend him: his campaigns against Egypt had resulted in humiliation at the hands of Rome, while his policy in Judaea had ultimately led to the loss of that territory. It was necessary, therefore, to prove that that policy had been the right one. The story of the Jews' custom of human sacrifice and oath of enmity to the Greeks provided suitable justification.<sup>33</sup>

While Greek defenders of Antiochus may have originated the story about the Jews that we find in Apion, that was clearly not the only version that circulated in the Graeco-Roman world. A certain Damocritus, known only through a brief notice in the *Suda*, reported that every seven years the Jews hunted and captured a foreigner, and killed him by shredding his flesh.<sup>34</sup> Both versions present clear and obvious indications of the ethnic issues involved. In the more detailed version of Apion, the kidnappers are described as *alienigeni* (*Jos.*, *Ap.* II.93), while their victims are *Graeci peregrini* (II.95); likewise, their oath is directed against people of another race, *allophylói* (II.121). In the same way, Damocritus described their victims as *xenoi*. As with the stories about the Taurians and Busiris, then, this story about the Jews embodied Graeco-Roman fears of a people perceived as foreign and hostile to strangers. Apion's version refines the earlier pattern by attributing to the Jews a formal oath of hostility to strangers, thus making explicit the message implied in the story about the Taurians.

But the story about the Jews has a striking feature not found in the earlier stories. This is the emphasis on secrecy: the kidnapped Greek was kept hidden in the innermost, secret part of the temple, and it was only through his fortuitous rescue that the secret and 'unspeakable law of the Jews' became known to outsiders. The story, then, is that the Jews do not practise human sacrifice openly like the Taurians and other barbarians, but in secret, unbeknown to their neighbours. The element of secrecy is significant because it conforms to the particular situation of the Jews. In the case of the Taurians, the Egyptians, the Carthaginians, and the Gauls, cultural distance was correlated with geographical distance. When the charge of human

<sup>31</sup> *Jos.*, *Ap.* II.92–6 and 121; on this charge, see especially E. Bickerman, 'Ritualmord und Eselskult. I: Tempelopfer', *Monatsschrift für Geschichte u. Wissenschaft des Judentums* 71 (1927), 171–87, reprinted in *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* II (1980), 225–55.

<sup>32</sup> For a concise account of these events, see E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. G. Vermes et al., I (1973), 389–94; Apion as leader of the Greek embassy: *Jos.*, *AJ* XVIII.8.1.

<sup>33</sup> This point has been argued in more detail by Bickerman, *op. cit.* (n. 31), 182–7.

<sup>34</sup> *FGrHist* 730; cf. Stern, *op. cit.* (n. 30), 1.530–1. Jacoby follows E. Schwartz in *RE* IV (1901), 2070 in assigning him a date sometime in the first century B.C.E. or C.E.

sacrifice was first made against the Jews, on the other hand, they were living not on the edges of the civilized world but in its midst. Nevertheless, by rejecting extensive assimilation to Graeco-Roman civilization, they had retained their cultural distance in spite of their geographical proximity. This cultural distance was at times read by non-Jews as implicit but veiled hostility. Tacitus, for example, affirmed that the Jews displayed 'the hatred of enemies (*hostile odium*) against all other peoples', citing as evidence the fact that they 'keep themselves separate in meals and marriages, and although as a people they are greatly inclined toward lust, they abstain from all intercourse with foreign women' (Tac., *Hist.* v.5). The motif of a secret rite of human sacrifice gave perfect expression to this perception of hidden hostility.

A paradigm for this type of hidden hostility towards society, one familiar enough in the Graeco-Roman world, was that of the political conspiracy: a small group of people who secretly banded together in order to impose their will on the people as a whole. Apion's version of the story clearly casts the Jews as political conspirators, specifically in the oath of hostility for which the human sacrifice served as the setting.<sup>35</sup> This use of stories about human sacrifice to mark political conspiracy goes back at least to the early Hellenistic period. The earliest extant example is the story of Apollodorus, who around 278 B.C.E. became tyrant of Cassandrea in the Chalcidice. According to Diodorus Siculus, 'in making his attempt on the tyranny, Apollodorus decided to confirm the conspiracy; he summoned a young lad who was friendly with him as if to a sacrifice, but instead sacrificed the lad himself to the gods. He then gave his entrails to the conspirators to eat and, after mixing his blood with wine, ordered them to drink'.<sup>36</sup> Apollodorus' attempt was successful: he did obtain power in Cassandrea, and maintained it for a couple of years. To his misfortune, however, Antigonus Gonatas was at the same time trying to consolidate his authority in Macedonia, and after a lengthy siege managed to take the city and kill Apollodorus around 276 B.C.E. The extant historical tradition presents Apollodorus in a consistently negative light, and he became along with Phalaris one of the standard examples of the cruel tyrant.<sup>37</sup> While he may indeed have been a cruel tyrant, it is also true that as an opponent of the local ruling classes and an enemy of the victorious Gonatas he would have had little support among those who shaped public opinion and the historical record.<sup>38</sup> The story of his human sacrifice provided his opponents with an effective proof of his inhumanity, and justified his downfall.

The same motif appears in accounts of other would-be tyrants and political conspirators. Plutarch (*Publ.* 4.1) alleges that the supporters of the ousted Tarquinii did the same in archaic Rome, and even refers generically to 'those like Apollodorus who have sacrificed men for the sake of tyrannies and conspiracies'.<sup>39</sup> The most famous and best known example is that of the Catilinarian conspirators. According to Sallust, 'there were at the time those who said that Catiline, when he had finished his speech and was binding the associates of his crime with an oath, passed around bowls of human blood (*humani corporis sanguinem*) mixed together with wine; after everyone had uttered a curse and tasted of this, as is customary in solemn rites, he revealed his plan' (*Cat.* 22.1-2). Although Sallust does not specify the source of this blood, his account certainly implies human sacrifice. Later versions of the story make this explicit. Plutarch asserts that the conspirators pledged faith to each other by sacrificing a man and

<sup>35</sup> This point has been developed in some detail by Bickerman, *op. cit.* (n. 31), 172-6 and Dölger, *op. cit.* (n. 6), 207-10.

<sup>36</sup> Diod. Sic. xxii.5.1; the same story is found in Polyaeus (vi.7.2), who even gives the name of the boy, and is alluded to more briefly by Plutarch (*Sera Num. Vind.* 556d) and Aelian (*VH* xiv.41). See also the discussion of G. Marasco, 'Sacrifici umani e cospirazioni politiche', *Sileno* 7 (1981), 167-78.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Polyb. vii.7.2; Diod. Sic. xxxiii.14.3; Ov., *Pont.* ii.9.43; Sen., *Ir.* ii.5.1 and *Ben.* vii.19.5; Plut., *Cum Princ. Phil.* 778e. Human sacrifice was ascribed to other tyrants, such as Diegylis of Thrace (Diod. Sic. xxxiii.14.5) and Commodus (*SHA Comm.* 9.6). See also n. 67 below.

<sup>38</sup> Diodorus Siculus (xxii.5.2) notes that he confiscated property from the wealthy and shared it among the poor;

A. Fuks, 'Patterns and types of social economic revolution in Greece from the fourth to the second century B.C.', *Anc. Soc* 5 (1974), 51-81, at 71, concludes that his tyranny 'had a clearly social-revolutionary character'. See the general account of W. W. Tarn, *Antigonus Gonatas* (1913), 159-60 and 162; full references to the ancient sources are given by Fuks, *op. cit.*, n. 23. Marasco, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 168 n. 8 suggests the story goes back to Hieronymus of Cardia, but J. Hornblower is more cautious: *Hieronimus of Cardia* (1981), 49-50 n. 104; Tarn, 162, on the other hand, suggests the story may have come from the *Cassandreis* of Lycophron.

<sup>39</sup> *Sera Num. Vind.* 556d; Dio (Lxxi.4.1) records a very similar story that when the Boukoloi of Egypt rose up against Rome they sacrificed a companion of the local officer, swore an oath over his entrails, and ate him.



tasting his flesh (*Cic.* 10.4), while Dio claims that Catiline 'sacrificed a boy, administered the oath over his guts, and then ate these with the others'.<sup>40</sup>

Since we know much more about the historical context of this story than about the story of Apollodorus, we are in a much better position to assess its origin and significance. As many scholars have noted, the figure of Catiline is surrounded in the historical record by a thick haze of rumour and innuendo. Most people now agree that the so-called First Conspiracy is largely a fabrication, while some have suggested that the received account of the main conspiracy also contains serious distortions.<sup>41</sup> But whatever the truth of the Catilinarian conspiracy, the fact that Catiline had significant popular support made it difficult for Cicero and his other political opponents to deal with him in a summary fashion. It was for this reason that Cicero took such care to depict Catiline as a monster of depravity intent on destroying society. Catiline was credited, justly or not, with a variety of criminal deeds which involved breaking or perverting the norms of civilized people: he had sex with a Vestal virgin, he proscribed his brother-in-law, he married his daughter, he murdered his son.<sup>42</sup> The rumour that the conspirators had sealed their oaths by drinking human blood was of a piece with these others. Although there is no evidence that Cicero was responsible for this particular charge, he does in several places hint darkly at Catiline's perversion of normal religious practices, and was willing to charge another political opponent with human sacrifice in the context of necromancy.<sup>43</sup> It is even possible that Cicero devised the allegation specifically as an echo of the story told about Apollodorus, of whom he was well aware (*ND* III.82). But regardless of how the charge began, it clearly functioned well as a means of vilifying Catiline and his fellows. The effect of the story was to 'barbarize' a Roman, to put the Catilinarian conspirators outside the pale of civilization as everyone in Rome, of whatever political inclinations, would define it. The rumour of their monstrous oath sacrifice was an indication and confirmation of the extent to which they had voluntarily abandoned their membership in civilized society and had made themselves into its enemies.

Despite the important differences in the stories about the Jews, Apollodorus, and Catiline, they all serve to prove that the people about whom they were told had a contempt for the standards of humanity prevalent in the Graeco-Roman world, and so in a sense were themselves not fully human. But unlike external barbarians such as Taurians and Gauls, whose lack of full humanity could in a sense be expected, these people were thought to disguise their true nature and pass themselves off as normal members of society. Allegations of secret human sacrifice served to illustrate their hidden barbarity and inhumanity. The discourse in which these stories take their meaning was thus no longer one about civilized peoples and barbarians, in which cultural distance was correlated with geographical distance. It was rather a discourse about internal divisions, in which the lines between 'them' and 'us' were drawn between neighbours. We might consider the Jews a transitional case, given their origins as barbarians. The story about Jewish human sacrifice acted to define and interpret their cultural distance, even in the absence of geographical distance. Apollodorus and Catiline, on the other hand, were not barbarians, even in origin. On the contrary, Catiline belonged to an old and distinguished patrician *gens*. In his case it is clear that the story about human sacrifice served to create cultural distance where originally there had been none; it is likely that the story about Apollodorus had a similar function.

Human sacrifice thus functioned as an important sign in a fundamental discourse about culture and humanity. When told about barbarians, it served to mark, usually with negative connotations, the cultural distance that existed as a corollary of geographical distance. When told about neighbours, it served to create cultural distance even in the absence of geographical

<sup>40</sup> xxxvii.30.3; see also Florus (II.12.4): 'additum est pignus coniorationis sanguis humanus, quem circumlatum pateris bibere'; the story is briefly noted by Tertullian (*Apol.* 9.9) and Minucius Felix (*Oct.* 30.5); see further Dölger, op. cit. (n.6), 207-10 and Marasco, op. cit. (n.36).

<sup>41</sup> On the 'First Conspiracy', see R. Syme, *Sallust* (1964), 86-102 with earlier bibliography, and E. S. Gruen, 'Notes on the "First Catilinarian Conspiracy"', *CP* 64 (1969), 20-4; on the main conspiracy, see K. H. Waters, 'Cicero, Sallust and Catiline', *Historia* 19 (1970), 195-215, and R. Seager, 'Iusta Catilinae', *Historia* 22 (1973), 240-8.

<sup>42</sup> Cicero referred obliquely to the affair with the Vestal and openly to the incest in his speech *In Toga Candida* (ap. Asc. 91 Clark); he added the charge of his son's murder in *Cat.* 1.14, while the proscription of his brother-in-law appears in *Comm. Pet.* 9; by the time of Plutarch the latter had been transformed into a brother (*Sull.* 32.2; *Cic.* 10.3); see further Syme, op. cit. (n.41), 84-5.

<sup>43</sup> Catiline's perversions of religion: *Cat.* 1.16 ('sica . . . quae quidem quibus abs te initiata sacris ac devota sit nescio'); cf. *Cat.* 1.24 and 2.13. Cicero charged Vatinius with necromancy: *Vat.* 14.

distance (or in the case of the Jews, to emphasize and mark the negative value of a pre-existing cultural distance). It is easy enough to see how the accusations of child sacrifice made against the Christians functioned along the same general lines.<sup>44</sup> There was a certain amount of justification for these attitudes. The Christians had after all ostentatiously set themselves apart from their fellows both socially and in religious usages. To all appearances, they had barbarized themselves, renouncing their membership in Graeco-Roman society. In fact, while the stories about child sacrifice were no doubt false, their underlying message was true: Christians were indeed people who had in many respects distanced themselves from their general cultural context. To borrow a term from contemporary sociology, Christians constituted a subculture within the general Graeco-Roman culture of the Empire.<sup>45</sup>

An interesting feature of subcultures is that while they usually define themselves in distinction to the general culture, they necessarily do so by employing the basic assumptions and terminology of that culture. They both take part in the general culture and at the same time reject it, by appropriating and redefining some of its distinctive features. This was certainly true of the Christians. Despite what both they and their opponents thought, Christians were in the imperial period an integral part of the Graeco-Roman world. They too were engaged in much the same discourse about culture and religion as were their non-Christian fellows, and used many of the same signs, including stories about human sacrifice. In appropriating the motif of human sacrifice, Christians were able to create their own cultural categories, and ultimately to turn the tables on their opponents.

### III. TURNING THE TABLES

The earliest surviving example of this appropriation occurs in the *Second Apology* of Justin Martyr, written in the 150s C.E. The brave manner in which Christians face death, Justin argues, is itself a refutation of the charges against them. What person who eats human flesh would court death in this way? Such people would rather avoid the law in order to continue enjoying their wicked pleasures. The truth is that the persecutors torture the servants of the Christians in order to obtain 'a confession of those fictitious crimes which they themselves publicly commit'. He goes on to ask 'for why do we not publicly acknowledge that these things are good and proclaim them as divine philosophy, asserting that in human sacrifice we celebrate the mysteries of Kronos, and in the taking of one's fill of blood we celebrate the equivalent of the idol honoured by you, on which is sprinkled the blood not only of dumb animals but also of humans, when through the most distinguished and noble man among you you sprinkle slain men's blood' (*Apol.* II. 12.5). Justin is not always the most lucid of writers, but in this passage he is clearly comparing the alleged practices of Christians with the public practices of pagans. By the 'mysteries of Kronos' he is presumably referring to Carthaginian child sacrifice, and while he does not specify the identity of the idol sprinkled with human blood, many scholars have understood it to be that of Jupiter Latiaris. At any rate, there is no confusion about Justin's underlying point: those who accuse Christians of human sacrifice themselves do things equally bloody and wicked.<sup>46</sup>

In terms of rhetorical strategy, what Justin did in this passage was construct a retorsion argument, in which he refuted the charge by turning it back (*retorquere*) against his accuser. Although this tactic is common enough in early Christian literature, most writers who employed it tended to focus on the beliefs of the Greeks and Romans as embodied in poetic and philosophical texts. A few, however, developed the approach suggested by Justin, and

<sup>44</sup> This point is admirably made by Edwards, *op. cit.* (n. 6); see also McGowan, *op. cit.* (n. 6). Suspicions of political conspiracy in particular perhaps lay behind the language of Pliny (*Ep.* x.96.7: *hetaeria*) and Tertullian (*Apol.* 39.1 and 20-1: *factio, illicita coitio*), while Minucius Felix describes the alleged rite of child sacrifice in terms of a conspiracy: 'hac foederantur hostia, hac conscientia sceleris ad silentium mutuum pignerantur' (*Oct.* 9.5).

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., J. M. Yinger, 'Contrastructure and subculture', *American Sociological Review* 25 (1960), 625-35;

more briefly, J. F. Short, s.v. 'subculture', in A. and J. Keper (eds), *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (1985), 840-1.

<sup>46</sup> As pointed out by Grant, *op. cit.* (n. 6), 169-70. It is possible that Justin had in mind Roman rather than Carthaginian practices, since fourth-century Christian texts describe the annual gladiatorial games in December as sacrifices to Saturn much as other texts describe the games of Jupiter Latiaris: see Versnel, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 211-16.

attacked actual cult practices instead. The best examples of this particular strategy occur in the Latin apologies of Tertullian and Minucius Felix. As we have already seen, in refuting the charge that Christians practise child sacrifice, Minucius Felix argued that the only people capable of believing such a thing were those capable of doing it themselves.<sup>47</sup> Tertullian was even more explicit. Near the beginning of his work he declares that 'I will now take the stand on the plea of innocence; I will not only refute the charges made against us, but also twist them back (*retorquebo*) against the very people who make them . . . . We will respond to the particular acts which we are said to commit in secret, but which we have found them committing openly'.<sup>48</sup>

In the specific case of human sacrifice, however, there was an obvious difficulty in employing the retorsion argument. As we have seen, human sacrifice was in the Graeco-Roman tradition always a characteristic of 'the other'. When attributed to foreign barbarians or political conspirators, it signified the cultural distance between those groups and proper Greeks and Romans, whose standards served as the norms of civilized humanity. In short, while barbarians and deviants might engage in human sacrifice, good Greeks and Romans never did. But Tertullian and Minucius Felix were skilled enough in rhetorical technique not to let this problem stand in their way. As any good orator knew, an approximate counter-example could serve just as well as an exact one, provided that one presented it with enough rhetorical flash to blind the minds of the audience. Both Tertullian and Minucius Felix did exactly this, letting forth a barrage of illustrations without giving their audiences too much time to think. For example, both writers pointed out that pagans are in the habit of murdering their children, in as much as they expose unwanted children and practise abortions.<sup>49</sup> But while this was a valid charge, it was not exactly child sacrifice, the real point at issue. They thus also included some of the standard examples of human sacrifice, probably taken from Cicero's list in the *De Re Publica*: Tertullian cites the Carthaginians, the Taurians, and the Gauls, to which Minucius Felix adds Busiris.<sup>50</sup>

Yet there still remained a slight gap to bridge: they had a case for child murder as practised by Romans, and human sacrifice as practised by other peoples. If they could come up with anything like human sacrifice as practised by Romans, they could clinch their argument. And of course they did so. Minucius Felix recalled the story that the Romans had in the past buried alive two Greeks and two Gauls. This story would have been readily available in any historical handbook, and had already exercised the curiosity of Plutarch.<sup>51</sup> But Minucius Felix also referred to the rites of Jupiter Latiaris, to which Tertullian devoted his exclusive attention. This example was very popular among Christian apologists, and at a later date even Porphyry refers to it, but it remains somewhat mysterious.<sup>52</sup> Jupiter Latiaris was the old federal god of the Latins, whose festival, the *feriae Latinae*, was since the fourth century B.C.E. celebrated under the presidency of Roman magistrates. The central sacrifice was that of a white heifer, but by the late Republic there were also games of some sort. The descriptions of the apologists suggest that the blood of performers killed during those games was in some way poured on the statue of the god. If this interpretation is correct, it constituted an approximate form of human sacrifice.<sup>53</sup> But it had the advantage of being a current practice, unlike that of

<sup>47</sup> *Oct.* 30.1: 'Nemo hoc potest credere nisi qui possit audere'; cf. 29.1: 'ea enim de castis fingitis et pudicis, quae fieri non crederemus, nisi de vobis probaretis'.

<sup>48</sup> *Apol.* 4.1-2; cf. *Apol.* 9.1: 'haec quo magis refutaverim, a vobis fieri ostendam partim in aperto, partim in occulto, per quod forsitan et de nobis credidistis'.

<sup>49</sup> *Tert.*, *Apol.* 9.6-8; *Min. Fel.*, *Oct.* 30.2. This point was already a commonplace: cf. *Did.* 2.2 and 5.2, *Barn.* 19.5 and 20.2, *Ad Diog.* 5.6, *Athenag.*, *Leg.* 35.2, *Just.*, *Apol.* 1.27; see further F. Dölger, 'Das Lebensrecht des ungeborenen Kindes und die Fruchtabtreibung in der Bewertung der heidnischen und christlichen Antike', *AC* 4 (1934), 1-61.

<sup>50</sup> Minucius Felix' list is exactly the same as that in *Rep.* 11.15, and in almost the same order. Minucius Felix knew his Cicero: see Clarke, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 26-7 and his notes at *Oct.* 10.5, 17.3, 18.4, and especially 19.3-13. Tertullian alleged Punic child sacrifice lasted into the Roman period; see my discussion, 'Tertullian on child sacrifice', *MH* 51 (1994), 54-63.

<sup>51</sup> Livy recorded instances of this ceremony for the years 216 B.C.E. (xxii.57.2-6) and 114 B.C.E. (*Per.* 63; cf. *Plut.*, *Quaest. Rom.* 83 = 284c), and it may have been performed in 228 B.C.E. as well (Oros. iv.13.3); see further C. Cichorius, 'Staatliche Menschenopfer', in *Römische Studien* (1922), 7-21; A. M. Eckstein, 'Human sacrifice and fear of military disaster in Republican Rome', *AJAH* 7 (1982), 69-95; and D. Porte, 'Les Enterrements expiatoires à Rome', *RPh* 58 (1984), 233-43.

<sup>52</sup> *Just.*, *Apol.* 11.12.5 (without name); *Theoph.*, *Ad Aut.* 3.8; *Tat.*, *Or.* 29.1; *Lact.*, *Div. Inst.* 1.21.3; *Athan.*, *Gen.* 25; *Porph.*, *Abst.* 11.56.9; *Eus.*, *Laud. Const.* 13.8; *Firm. Mat.*, *Err. Prof. Rel.* 26.2; *Prud.*, *Symm.* 1.396; cf. H. J. Rose, 'De Iove Latiari', *Mnemosyne* ns 55 (1927), 273-9.

<sup>53</sup> As K. Hopkins has suggested, many of those present at gladiatorial games may have associated them with religious sacrifice: *Death and Renewal* (1983), 4-5. For a recent and stimulating discussion of these questions, see Versnel, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 210-27.

the inhumation of Gauls and Greeks, and as it was passed down and cited by people who knew nothing about the *feriae Latinae*, it became a canonical example of Roman human sacrifice.

The use of stories about human sacrifice in a retorsion argument, as begun by Justin and developed by Tertullian and Minucius Felix, was an explicit turning of the tables. These Christian writers employed the topos of human sacrifice in exactly the same way as their non-Christian fellows, as a way of marking off civilized people from the barbarous, yet they redefined the boundary between these two groups. The important division was not between proper Greeks and Romans on the one hand and barbarians and social deviants on the other, but between Christians and non-Christians. The Romans had shown themselves by their actions to be no different from the barbarians at whom they professed to be horrified. Tertullian works through his list of barbarians, and then exclaims 'and look, in that most religious of cities, the city of the pious sons of Aeneas, there is a certain Jupiter whom they drench during his games with human blood' (*Apol.* 9.5). Any claims that this is different from the practices of barbarians, he adds, are specious at best. A century later, another African Christian, Lactantius, made the same point even more explicitly. After discussing the Taurians and the Gauls, he claims that 'even now Jupiter Latiaris is worshipped with human blood' (*Div. Inst.* 1.21.3). 'But in the case of barbarians', he continues, 'it is not so astonishing, since their religion corresponds to their culture; but our people, who have always claimed for themselves the glory of gentleness and humanity, are they not shown to be even more monstrous because of these sacrilegious rites? For those people are considered more criminal, who although they have been refined by the study of the liberal arts, abandon their humanity, than those who, barbarous and untutored, slip into evil deeds through ignorance of good ones'.<sup>54</sup>

The manipulation of the motif of human sacrifice thus played an important role in the Christian construction of the category of 'pagan'. Although the use of the actual word 'pagan' in its modern sense did not become established until the late fourth century C.E., the lack of an accepted name does not mean that the category itself lacked definition.<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, it was clearly defined by such markers as stories about human sacrifice. As we have seen, earlier Graeco-Roman writers used similar stories to define the cultural distance which they insisted separated themselves from barbarians. Christian writers, by citing examples of Graeco-Roman human sacrifice, were able to demonstrate that this vaunted cultural distance was in fact of no real significance: all those who maintained traditional beliefs and practices, whether Greeks, Romans, or barbarians, were stained with the same crimes and thus belonged to the same category. In this way the Christian writers of the second and early third centuries C.E. reworked the Graeco-Roman discourse about cultural distance to suit their own needs. The key categories were now 'Christian', representing the cultural norms of humanity, and 'pagan', representing deviation from those norms, yet they were marked as before by the absence or presence of human sacrifice.

The discourse about cultural distance, however, was not the only one adapted by the Christians in their construction of the category 'pagan'. We may note this even in the *Oratio ad Graecos* of Justin's one-time pupil Tatian, a work which to a large extent takes the delineation of cultural boundaries as its main task. Tatian begins, for example, with a claim that most elements of Greek culture are in fact of barbarian origin, and ends with an extended demonstration that Moses, the source of the barbarian wisdom represented by Christianity, is much older than Homer or any of the other Greek cultural heroes.<sup>56</sup> In the main body of his work Tatian intersperses expositions of Christian beliefs with virulent attacks on Greek culture in all its aspects. He concludes one particularly wide-ranging attack, which takes on pagan entertainments, teachings, and legislation, by saying that 'when I had seen these things and had also taken part in mysteries . . . and found that among the Romans their Zeus Latiaris took pleasure in men's gore and blood shed by manslaughter and that Artemis not far from the great city practised arts of the same sort and that different demons in different places were busily encouraging wrong-doing, when I was by myself I began to seek by what means I could

<sup>54</sup> *Div. Inst.* 1.21.4–5; at the beginning of the fifth century C.E. Prudentius made much the same argument in his *Contra Symmachum* (1.395–8): 'incassum arguere iam Taurica sacra solemus: funditur humanus Latiari in munere sanguis, consessusque ille spectantum solvit ad aram Plutonis fera vota sui'.

<sup>55</sup> See *TLL*, s.v. 'paganus' II A.

<sup>56</sup> *Tat., Or.* 31–41; for a similar and contemporary interpretation of Christianity as 'barbarian wisdom', see Melito of Sardis ap. Eus. *HE* 1v.26.7.

discover the truth'.<sup>57</sup> The motif of human sacrifice serves here to prove that pagan practices are wicked, just as it does in Minucius Felix and Tertullian. Yet there is a further dimension as well: paganism is not only wicked, but it is false. In making this point, Tatian touched on another long-standing Graeco-Roman discourse in which human sacrifice had served as an important sign, that about good and bad religion.

#### IV. BAD RELIGION

In the Graeco-Roman world, there was considerable overlap between the discourse about cultural distance and that about good and bad religion. We can see this overlap very clearly in what Roman writers of the early imperial period had to say about the Gauls. In the geographical handbook that he wrote under Gaius, Pomponius Mela declared that the Gauls are 'an arrogant and superstitious people, at times even so savage (*immanes*) that they believe that a human being is the best victim and the one most pleasing to the gods' (III.18). The contrast with Caesar's account is instructive. In substance the two are the same: both writers agree that the Gauls attach excessive importance to their religious rites, and both note their practice of human sacrifice. But whereas Caesar reported the latter in a detached fashion, using it at most to suggest the barbarity of the Gauls, Mela used it to indict them of bad religion: they are not simply *dediti religionibus* (Caes., *BG* VI.16.1), but *superstitiosi*. The elder Pliny, writing a few decades after Mela, criticized human sacrifice in much the same way, declaring that 'the debt owed to the Romans cannot be sufficiently assessed, who did away with those horrors (*monstra*), in which to kill a man was the most religious of acts (*religiosissimum*), and to eat him the most salutary'.<sup>58</sup> Pliny, however, located Gallic religion in a vaguely defined complex of beliefs and practices that he labels as magic. Both writers use the story of Gallic human sacrifice in much the same way, to prove that Gallic religion is deviant, that in significant respects it does not conform to the norms of proper religion. The differences lie in the choice of vocabulary, Mela preferring that of superstition, Pliny that of magic. These characterizations of Gallic religion as superstition and magic might seem to be simply new expressions of the discourse about cultural identity and difference that I discussed in the previous sections. But while their connections with that discourse are obvious enough, discussions of magic and superstition also raise a further set of concerns.

Superstition, for example, was by no means limited to barbarian religion. Roman writers instead used the term as the antithesis of *religio*, to denote a faulty attitude towards the gods. The defining fault of *superstitio* was an excessive fear of the gods, which resulted in inappropriate and irrational behaviour. Cicero defined it as *timor inanis deorum*, an illusory fear of the gods (*ND* I.117), and attempted to account for its etymology by asserting that those 'who used to pray and sacrifice for days at a time in order that their children might survive them (*ut sibi sui liberi superstites essent*) were called *superstitiosi*' (*ND* II.72). Although this etymology is almost certainly fantastic, it illustrates nicely the connotations of obsessive and irrational religious observance that the word carried.<sup>59</sup> It is likely that in defining *superstitio* Cicero was borrowing from Greek discussions of *deisidaimonia*, a much more direct and self-explanatory term. Theophrastus, for example, defined *deisidaimonia* as 'a sort of cowardice with regard to the divine' (*Char.* 16.1), but the most thorough extant discussion is Plutarch's essay *Peri Deisidaimonias*.

Plutarch's basic point in this essay is the demonstration that atheism and superstition are two extreme and, therefore, faulty reactions to the divine. One is deficient and the other excessive, whereas true piety lies in between. Of the two, however, superstition is the worse, since the denial of the gods does not result in such terrible acts as can an excessive fear of the gods. Chief among the latter is the practice of human sacrifice. 'Would it not have been better', he asks, 'for those Gauls and Scythians to have had absolutely no conception, no vision, no tradition regarding the gods than to believe in the existence of gods who take delight in the

<sup>57</sup> *Or.* 29.1; I have used the translation of M. Whittaker in the Oxford Early Christian Texts series (1982).

<sup>58</sup> *NH* xxx.13; while he does not refer here explicitly to the Gauls, his discussion of them a few sentences before suggests that he had them in mind.

<sup>59</sup> Ancient scholars proposed a number of etymologies, conveniently collected by A. S. Pease in his commentary on Cicero's *De Divinatione* (1920), at II.148.

blood of human sacrifice and hold this to be the most perfect offering and holy rite? Again, would it not have been far better for the Carthaginians to have taken Critias or Diagoras to draw up their law code at the very beginning, and so not to believe in any divine power or god, rather than to offer such sacrifices as they used to offer to Kronos?<sup>60</sup> Human sacrifice forms the climax to Plutarch's argument as the most horrific act to which the perversion of proper religion can lead. It is worth noting that the examples of human sacrifice that he provides are the standard ethnographic ones, so that the practice appears as characteristic of barbarian religion.<sup>61</sup> His overall analysis, however, shows clearly that he considered *deisidaimonia* to be a philosophical or moral fault, one that can aptly be illustrated by the examples of barbarians but is by no means limited to them.<sup>62</sup> Thus in his climactic example of human sacrifice, the fact that it is a barbarian practice is not really the relevant point: it is rather that human sacrifice is a sign of a religiosity that has exceeded all proper bounds. In short, philosophical critique has replaced cultural critique as the context for this motif.

What constituted the proper bounds of religiosity was of course a topic of debate. Some philosophers attacked traditional Graeco-Roman practices as themselves faulty and excessive. Although such critiques dated back at least to Heraclitus, one of the earliest treatises devoted to the topic seems to have been Theophrastus' *On Piety*.<sup>63</sup> In this treatise, Theophrastus apparently attacked the whole system of blood sacrifice that was characteristic of Greek and indeed most ancient religious traditions, arguing among other points that its origins lay in human sacrifice and cannibalism (ap. Porph., *Abst.* 11.27.1–3). In the next generation, Epicurus provided the basis for an even more extensive critique of conventional religious practices with his doctrine that the gods take no interest in human affairs, and therefore cannot be influenced by prayers and sacrifices. Traditional religion was in fact pernicious in its effects, since it contributed to human anxiety and led to irrational and wicked behaviour. As Epicurus' Roman disciple Lucretius would later say, '*religio* has very often given rise to criminal and wicked deeds' (1.82–3). Lucretius drove his point home by recounting one of the most famous mythological cases of human sacrifice, that of Iphigeneia at Aulis, and concluding that 'so great are the evils that *religio* has been able to suggest' (1.101). For Lucretius, all *religio* is *superstitio*, and he characterizes its extremes in the same way that Plutarch does *deisidaimonia*, by stressing the horrors of human sacrifice. But whether they defined it as *superstitio* or *religio*, everyone agreed that excessive religiosity was bad religion, and used stories about human sacrifice to mark that excess.

The motif of human sacrifice as a marker of magic takes its place in the same broad discourse about good and bad religion, I would argue, but with significant differences as well. One of the latter was simply the fact that superstition, although regarded as foolish and reprehensible, was not illegal: magic was. The best evidence for this is in the *Sententiae Pauli*, an anthology of legal prescriptions compiled in the late third and early fourth centuries C.E.<sup>64</sup> Under the heading of the old *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* we find the statement that 'there is a ruling that those guilty of the magical art (*magicae artis conscios*) are to undergo the supreme punishment, that is, to be thrown to the beasts or crucified; magicians (*magi*) themselves, however, are to be burned alive' (*Sent. Paul.* v.23.17). Now to declare a certain type of religious practice illegal was obviously to mark it off as a form of bad religion, but to do

<sup>60</sup> Plut., *Superst.* 171b–c, in the Loeb translation of F. C. Babbitt.

<sup>61</sup> There are certain hints in this essay that Plutarch, like Mela and Cicero, tended to think of foreign religious practices as essentially superstitious. For example, in an earlier passage he quotes Euripides (*Troad.* 764), 'O Greeks, who have learned the wicked ways of barbarians', and adds himself, 'through superstition'. He then goes on to say that people should pray with their mouths aright, and should not, 'by distorting and sullyng their tongues with strange names and barbarous phrases, disgrace and transgress the god-given ancestral dignity of our religion' (*Superst.* 166a–b).

<sup>62</sup> As an example of superstition leading to military disaster, for example, he briefly notes the Jews and their refusal to fight on the Sabbath (*Superst.* 169c), but puts more emphasis on the Athenian commander Nicias' unwillingness to act in Sicily as the result of an eclipse

(169a); similarly, he mentions abject fear of the Dea Syria (170d), but dwells at length on that of Artemis (170a–c).

<sup>63</sup> For Heraclitus, see especially his attack on images (Diels-Kranz<sup>8</sup> 22 B 5). Theophrastus' treatise is known largely from the extracts in Porphyry, *De Abstinentia*, most recently edited by W. W. Fortenbaugh, *Quellen zur Ethik Theophrasts* (1984), 54–65 (text) and 262–74 (commentary); see also D. Obbink, 'The Origins of Greek Sacrifice: Theophrastus on Religion and Cultural History', in W. W. Fortenbaugh and R. W. Sharples (eds), *Theophrastean Studies* (1988), 272–95.

<sup>64</sup> On the date, see W. Schulz, *History of Roman Legal Science* (1946), 176–9. The standard, but dated, discussion is E. Massonneau, *Le Crime de magie dans le droit romain* (1933); see more recently C. R. Phillips III, 'Nullum Crimen sine Lege: Socioreligious Sanctions on Magic', in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (1991), 260–76.

so in a different way than the philosophers mentioned above did. As several scholars have argued, magic was illegal because it was widely considered 'inherently subversive of the politico-religious claims of the dominant groups in ancient society'; magicians were viewed as 'enemies of the Roman order'.<sup>65</sup> Magic was thus not so much a moral or philosophical error as a social and political transgression. Given the fact that religion was just as much a socio-political as a philosophical phenomenon, it is not surprising that 'bad religion' would appear in this guise as well. Magic was, in short, a term used to designate 'bad religion' in a socio-political, rather than a philosophical, context.

But what exactly was magic?<sup>66</sup> Although the *Sententiae Pauli* records its prohibition, it does not define it. In the place of definition, it offers enumeration: there are specific rulings directed against people 'who have performed wicked or nocturnal rites, so that they may enchant, bewitch, or bind someone (*obcantarent defigerent obligarent*)' and people 'who have sacrificed (*immolaverint*) a man or obtained omens from his blood' (v.23.15-16). Human sacrifice thus appears in this text simply as a characteristic practice of magic. The same is true of other, non-legal texts. One of the most important discussions of magic from the Roman world is that of the elder Pliny. In a rambling survey he describes its progress from Persia, Greece, and Judaea to Italy, Gaul, and Britain (*NH* xxx.1-13). Like the compiler of the *Sententiae Pauli*, Pliny provides no definition of magic, but does not for that reason seem to have been at a loss to identify it. He concludes his survey by praising Rome for putting an end to human sacrifice, in the passage quoted above. Again, human sacrifice appears as a defining feature of magic. In so far as magic is a type of bad religion, the function of human sacrifice in these texts seems much the same as in the texts that deal with superstition, as a sign of bad religion. Yet Plutarch cites human sacrifice as proof for his philosophical analysis of superstition as a form of excess; the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of Lucretius. For Pliny, on the other hand, human sacrifice was simply a practice typical of magic, so that where human sacrifice existed, there you could identify magic.<sup>67</sup> Magic, in other words, was not defined by analysis, but simply identified on the basis of features commonly believed to characterize it, such as human sacrifice.

Because magic was in some senses bad religion considered from a socio-political perspective, the use of human sacrifice as a marker of magic tended to overlap with its use as a marker of political conspiracy. In both cases there was a concern with social and political transgression. A striking example of this overlap occurs in Philostratus' account of Apollonius of Tyana. Apollonius, in his philosophical opposition to tyranny, publicly criticized the emperor Domitian, and thereby provoked his hostility. Domitian responded by accusing Apollonius of supporting the future emperor Nerva in a conspiracy against him. One of the chief charges was that Apollonius had sacrificed a boy in order to divine the future from his entrails, thereby stirring up Nerva's ambitions (Philostr., *V. Apoll.* 7.11 and 20). Although Apollonius is repeatedly accused of being a *goês*, a magician, an accusation supported by the story that he had engaged in human sacrifice, the key charge seems to be that he did so in order to further a political conspiracy.<sup>68</sup> Thus when Domitian is questioning him in court, he does not ask him directly about his involvement in the political conspiracy, but rather asks for whom he sacrificed the boy (*V. Apoll.* 8.5). Nevertheless, this association of human sacrifice with conspiracy is in a way fortuitous: it is simply used as a means to an end, whereas in the story about Catiline, human sacrifice helped constitute the conspiracy. The discourse thus remains primarily one about good and bad religion.

<sup>65</sup> The first quote is taken from R. Gordon, 'Aelian's peony: the location of magic in the Graeco-Roman tradition', *Comparative Criticism* 9 (1987), 59-95, at 60; for the second, see R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (1966), esp. 95-127.

<sup>66</sup> On the problem of defining magic in the Graeco-Roman world, see in particular R. Garosi, 'Indagine sulla formazione del concetto di magia nella cultura romana', in *Magia: Studi di storia delle religioni in memoria di Raffaella Garosi* (1976), 13-93 with the comments of J. A. North in *JRS* 70 (1980), 187-8, A. F. Segal, 'Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition', in R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (eds), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religion presented to G. Quispel* (1981),

349-75, reprinted in A. F. Segal, *The Other Judaism of Late Antiquity* (1987), 79-108, and Gordon, op. cit. (n. 65).

<sup>67</sup> For the association of human sacrifice with magic, see especially Dölger, op. cit. (n. 6), 211-17. The charge of human sacrifice, as a magic rite, is attributed to a whole series of 'bad' emperors, beginning with Didius Julianus (Dio LXXIII.16.5) and Elagabalus (Dio LXXIX.11; SHA *El.* 8.1-2); Christian writers then pick up the charge and bring it against emperors who opposed Christianity, including Valerian (Eus., *HE* VII.10.4), Maxentius (Eus., *V. Const.* 1.36; *HE* VIII.14.5), and Julian (Theodoret, *HE* III.26-7).

<sup>68</sup> *V. Apoll.* VII.17, VII.33-4, cf. VIII.7.2-3.

As I have suggested, human sacrifice served as a marker of bad religion, whether analysed philosophically as superstition or legally banned as magic. In both cases, the discourse is specifically about religion and not about cultural definition, although the two overlap in a number of specific instances. Yet both ways of talking about bad religion defined it in terms of human culture, either as philosophical error or as social transgression. There was, however, a third way of talking about bad religion, which set it into a cosmic rather than a human context. When Tatian referred to human sacrifice among the Romans, for example, he connected it not with superstition or magic but with the fact that 'different demons in different places [were] busily encouraging wrong-doing' (*Or.* 29.1). While élite intellectuals such as the younger Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Celsus could despise Christianity as *superstitio* or magic, the Christians themselves were developing arguments to prove that paganism was itself bad religion in the form of demonic influence, arguments for which charges of human sacrifice provided a convincing proof.<sup>69</sup>

#### V. THE SWAY OF DEMONS

Tatian's teacher Justin was one of the first Christian writers to work out in much detail the idea that paganism was nothing more than the worship of evil demons. The groundwork for such a view already existed in the Septuagint, as for example in the translation of Psalm 96: 5 as 'all the gods of the nations are demons'.<sup>70</sup> But Christians did not develop this analysis of bad religion as the worship of demons on their own. On the contrary, they drew heavily on a long-standing Platonic tradition represented in works like Plutarch's dialogue *On the Obsolescence of Oracles*. Demons, Plutarch argues, are beings intermediary between gods and mortals both in position and nature: they have the emotions of mortals but the powers of gods. Consequently, just as among people there are different degrees of virtue, so too are there among demons. In some there is only a trace of the emotional and the irrational, while in others that element waxes strong (*Defect.* 416d-417b). It is to appease the latter, the *phauloi daimones*, that people perform ceremonies involving the eating of raw flesh, the tearing of victims into pieces, fasting, and lamentation. 'Nor would kings and generals have endured giving up their own children to no purpose, performing the preparatory rites and slaughtering them, except for averting and satisfying the wrath and sullenness of cruel and irritable avenging spirits' (*Defect.* 417c-d). As in his essay on superstition, Plutarch uses human sacrifice as a sign of bad religion, but in this case bad religion is the result not of human error but of pressure from evil demons.<sup>71</sup>

The analysis of bad religion in terms of evil demons was by no means peculiar to Plutarch, nor a late development. On the contrary, Plutarch explicitly attributes his interpretation of apotropaic rites to Xenocrates.<sup>72</sup> By the second century C.E., the notion that wicked demons were behind some of the more primitive practices of traditional religion was fairly widespread. Some philosophers even attributed the custom of blood sacrifice to their need for nourishment.<sup>73</sup> The effect of this analysis was to project onto a superhuman level the same standards with which these philosophers evaluated human affairs. Depending on the extent to which reason or passion was the dominant element in their soul, demons, like mortals, could be good

<sup>69</sup> *Superstitio*: Plin., *Ep.* x.96.8 (note his qualification of it as *immodica*); Tac., *Ann.* xv.44; Suet., *Ner.* 16.2. Magic: Celsus ap. Or., *Cels.* 1.6, 6.39-40 and 8.37; cf. *Pass. Perp.* 16 (*incantationes magicæ*).

<sup>70</sup> The translation is apparently inaccurate: the New English Bible renders the passage 'For the gods of the nations are idols every one'. Cf. however, Lev. 17: 7, Deut. 32: 17, Ps. 106: 37, and Bar. 4: 7.

<sup>71</sup> H. Erbse, 'Plutarchs Schrift *Peri Deisidaimonias*', *Hermes* 80 (1952), 296-314, has demonstrated that there is no essential difference in Plutarch's attitude as expressed in his various works. On Plutarch's ideas about demons, see further G. Soury, *La Démonologie de Plutarque* (1942) and F. E. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives* (1977).

<sup>72</sup> *Is. et Os.* 361b; see further R. Heinze, *Xenocrates*

(1892), 78-123, and M. Détiéne, 'Xénocrate et la démonologie pythagoricienne', *REA* 60 (1958), 271-9.

<sup>73</sup> The article on 'Geister' in *RLAC* 9 (1974), 546-797 provides a comprehensive discussion of demonology in the ancient world, while E. Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (1984), is a useful introduction; for a methodological critique, see J. Z. Smith, 'Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity', *ANRW* 11.16.1 (1978), 425-39. On demons and animal sacrifice, see, e.g., the anonymous Pythagorean ap. Or., *Cels.* 7.6; Celsus ap. Or., *Cels.* 8.60; *Sent. Sext.* 564; Porph., *Abst.* 1.42.3; cf. Smith, op. cit., 428. The notion was very widespread among Christian writers: e.g. Just., *Apol.* 1.12.5; Athenag., *Leg.* 26-7; Tert., *Apol.* 22.6 and 23.14; Or., *Cels.* 3.28, 4. 2, 7.5, 7.35, and 8.30.



or bad. But when Christians adopted this analysis, they altered it to support their own attacks on paganism by manipulating among other things the motif of human sacrifice.

While Tatian hinted at this line of argument, the first to develop it was his near contemporary Athenagoras. While refuting charges of Christian atheism, Athenagoras replies to those who complain that Christians do not honour the statues of the gods by asserting that these statues are mere lumps of stone and metal worked by mortals, and therefore unworthy of worship (*Leg.* 15–17). When the objection is raised that these statues move and have powers, Athenagoras explains that these wonders are the work not of gods but of fallen angels, evil demons who have taken on the identities of the gods of myth (*Leg.* 23–7). He clinches his argument by reference to the bloody rites that take place in their cults. ‘That it is the evil spirits who usurp these names one can prove from the cult-operations in each case: some, for instance, emasculate themselves, as do the devotees of Rhea; others, the devotees of Artemis, make incisions and gashes (and the Tauric goddess puts strangers to death)’.<sup>74</sup>

In the following generation, Clement of Alexandria developed this argument at much greater length. The gods of the pagans, he insists, are not merely demons, but ‘inhuman and man-hating demons, who not only exult over the insanity of men, but go so far as to enjoy human slaughter. They provide for themselves sources of pleasure, at one time in the armed contests of the stadium, at another in the innumerable rivalries of war, in order to secure every possible opportunity of glutting themselves to the full with human blood. Before now, too, they have fallen like plagues on whole cities and nations, and have demanded drink-offerings of a savage character’. He supports his assertion with a lengthy and elaborately documented list of peoples and individuals who have practised human sacrifice. For example, ‘Monimus, in his collection of *Thaumasia*, relates that in Pella of Thessaly human sacrifice is offered to Peleus and Cheiron, the victim being an Achaean. Thus too, Anticleides in his *Nostoi* declares that the Lyctians, a race of Cretans, slaughter men to Zeus, and Dosidas says that Lesbians offer a similar sacrifice to Dionysus’. He provides similar evidence about Aristomenes the Messenian, the Taurians, the Phocaeans, Erectheus the Athenian, and Marius the Roman.<sup>75</sup> After this deluge of examples and authorities, he gives his audience no time to ponder other aspects of paganism, but hurries them on with the sarcastic comment, ‘kindly beings to be sure the demons are, as these instances plainly show’. Their worship is nothing more than murder, he concludes, and their evil natures are thereby revealed. What defence, then, could there be for paganism? ‘What possible truth could evil beings utter, or whom could they benefit?’

Like Tertullian and Minucius Felix, Clement was here exploiting the common ground between himself and pagans that was provided by the motif of human sacrifice, but adapting it to serve his specific needs. We have seen that in constructing the category ‘pagan’ the earlier writers cited cases of specifically Roman human sacrifice and thereby eradicated the distinctions made by earlier Graeco-Roman writers, who attributed human sacrifice to others but not to themselves. Similarly, in his analysis of paganism as the worship of demons, Clement dismissed the idea that there were both good and bad demons by emphasizing how common a part of paganism human sacrifice really was. Both he and his intended pagan audience could agree that human sacrifice was due to evil demons; by overwhelming them with detailed evidence for that practice, he could apparently prove that the only demons were evil demons, and that paganism, as the worship of these demons, could only be evil as well. Perhaps the most striking example of this rhetorical strategy is Eusebius’ use of Porphyry in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*.<sup>76</sup> In the introduction to this work he proclaims his use of this tactic: he will not simply present his own arguments that paganism is a false and morally corrupt religion, but will instead quote passages ‘of those who have taken the greatest interest in the worship of those whom they call gods’ (*Praep. Evang.* 1.5.14). But before we consider his use of Porphyry, we should consider briefly Porphyry himself.

<sup>74</sup> *Leg.* 26.1; I have used the translation of J. H. Crehan in the Ancient Christian Writers series (1955). The last clause was deleted as a gloss by E. Schwartz in his important edition (*Texte und Untersuchungen* IV.3, 1891); M. Marcovich (1990) retains it as a parenthesis, while B. Pouderon (*Sources Chrétiennes* 379, 1992) follows Schwartz.

<sup>75</sup> *Protr.* III.42.1–43.2, in the Loeb translation of G. W. Butterworth. Hughes, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 119–22, provides a useful analysis of these examples.

<sup>76</sup> Note also Athanasius, *Genet.* 25, who explicitly argues that this practice does not only exist among naturally barbarous peoples like the Scythians, but is typical of the evil caused everywhere by demons.

Porphyry's *De Abstinētia* is a lengthy and elaborate defence of vegetarianism, a practice inherited from the Pythagorean tradition.<sup>77</sup> In the second book, with which we are concerned, he deals with the objection that eating meat is an inevitable corollary of animal sacrifice. He devotes the majority of the book to an argument that animal sacrifice is not itself necessary: it does not in fact conform to the standards of true piety (*Abst.* II.5–32), and moreover tends to attract malevolent demons (*Abst.* II.34–50). Like earlier pagan writers, Porphyry insists here on the difference between good and bad demons. The latter are those who allow themselves to be dominated by their corporeal or 'pneumatic' part and are consequently subject to the same passions and desires as mortals (*Abst.* II.38). Unlike the Christians writers, Porphyry does not connect human sacrifice with these malevolent demons at all. Human sacrifice only enters into his argument towards the end of the book, when he briefly answers the specific objection that animal sacrifice is necessary for divination. After a few arguments to the contrary, he concludes by pointing out that even if animal sacrifice is necessary, eating meat is not. After all, history has recorded many cases in which human sacrifice was necessary, but it does not follow that we should practise cannibalism (*Abst.* II.53.3). It is at this point that he includes a list of examples that is even more lengthy and detailed than that given by Clement (*Abst.* II.54–6).

Eusebius quotes from the second book of *De Abstinētia* at great length in the fourth book of his *Praeparatio Evangelica*. The argument of this book is the familiar one, that the gods of the pagans are in fact evil demons, but as he promises, he proves this point by using Porphyry's own words. Porphyry asserts that 'whoever is concerned with piety knows very well that one does not sacrifice any living being to the gods, but to the demons and the others, either good or bad' (*Praep. Evang.* IV.15.1 = Porph., *Abst.* II.36.5). But how could these demons be anything but wicked and evil, Eusebius asks, if they demand not only animal sacrifice but human sacrifice? He follows this up by quoting Porphyry's own catalogue of examples, bolstered by other lengthy extracts from Philo Byblius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus Siculus, and, not surprisingly, Clement of Alexandria.<sup>78</sup> The tactic is, in fact, exactly the same as that which Clement himself had used. If some demons demand such a terrible thing as human sacrifice, how can any of them be good? Eusebius can make this point with confidence, because his extensive catalogue of examples seems to prove that human sacrifice is not an aberration in paganism, but a regular and recurring feature. It is worth noting, however, that he is greatly helped here by the fact that the category 'pagan' was by his time well established. Many of the passages that he quotes have to do not with Greeks or Romans, but with other peoples, peoples whom earlier Greeks and Romans regarded as foreigners and barbarians: Phoenicians, Pelasgians, and Carthaginians. For Eusebius, however, all these peoples were simply pagans, all enslaved to the same wicked demons. The motif of human sacrifice thus acts as the linch-pin in this argument that all demons are evil, and that consequently all paganism is bad religion.

Some years later, Eusebius again made use of this motif. In 335 C.E., during the celebrations for the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine's accession, the leaders of the Church gathered in Jerusalem for the dedication of one of his great monuments, the splendid church of the Holy Sepulchre. Eusebius' oration on this occasion has survived as the second half of the *Laudes Constantini*.<sup>79</sup> To justify Constantine's actions, he included a brief exposition of Christian beliefs. After discussing the one transcendent God and the role of the Word of God, Eusebius addresses the question of why the Word descended to live among mortals. In their ignorance of the true God, he explains, people had become enslaved to wicked demons and were as a result tortured by those beings as well as by their own moral corruption (*Laud. Const.* 13). He paints a gruesome picture of the human condition before the coming of Christ, a condition which was the same, he emphasizes, for 'the whole human race,' for 'all nations, whether civilized or barbarous' (*Laud. Const.* 13.9). He prepares for these generalizations by cataloguing specific cases of human sacrifice (*Laud. Const.* 13.7–8). But all that changed with

<sup>77</sup> See now the Budé edition in three volumes by J. Bouffartigue and M. Patillon, with extensive introductions and notes (1977–94).

<sup>78</sup> *Praep. Evang.* IV.16.1–9, 10 = Porph., *Abst.* II.54–6, 27; *Praep. Evang.* IV.16.11 = Philo Byblius *FGrHist* 790 F 3b; *Praep. Evang.* IV.16.12f. = Clem., *Protr.* III.42.1–43.1; *Praep. Evang.* IV.16.15–17, 18 = Dion. Hal. I.23.1–24.4, 38.2–3; *Praep. Evang.* V.16.19 = Diod. Sic. XX.14.4–6.

<sup>79</sup> *Laud. Const.* 11–18; see H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* (1976), esp. 30–45, and T. D. Barnes, 'Two speeches by Eusebius', *GRBS* 18 (1977), 342–5; on the church itself, see Eus., *V. Const.* 3.25–40, and C. Coüasnon, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem* (1974).

the coming of Christ. It was in fact the divine influence of the Word of God that led to the end of human sacrifice, finally abolished in the reign of Hadrian.<sup>80</sup> It is interesting to note that although Eusebius used the same material that he had gathered in the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, the tone of the two works is very different. He knew that with the conversion of Constantine he had finally won his case against Porphyry and his like, no matter what arguments they mustered, and that the views he presented about civilization and barbarism, about good and bad religion, would for the future be the prevailing ones.

## VI. CONCLUSION

With the triumph of the Church, the wide-ranging discourse about civilization, morality, and religion that I have traced over several centuries began to settle into a new pattern. In Eusebius' oration the motif of human sacrifice became a sign marking off the period before the Incarnation from that which followed. It was according to this distinction, the distinction between those with and those without divine illumination, that all the earlier discourses were now ordered. Good religion was defined by the acceptance and proper understanding of that illumination, while bad religion involved its rejection or distortion. Moreover, the prevailing standards of civilization and humanity were seen as necessarily linked to good religion, so that religious deviance inevitably entailed immoral and inhuman behaviour. Thus in the later fourth century C.E. we find human sacrifice attributed to the pagans who rejected Christianity and to the heretics who distorted it.<sup>81</sup> Among the latter it was for some reason the Montanists in particular who were liable to this charge; the story that they used the blood of infants in their eucharist was apparently widespread.<sup>82</sup> When the charge resurfaced centuries later in the form of the notorious 'blood libel' against the Jews, its significance was much the same: it marked off as immoral and inhuman the most obvious aliens in late medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>83</sup>

From the Greeks who colonized the shores of the Black Sea in the late seventh century B.C.E., to the Christians assembled in Jerusalem in the early fourth century C.E., the motif of human sacrifice played a regular role in discussions of civilization, morality, and religion. The variety of contexts in which it is found proves, I think, that it was not simply a literary motif whose appearance might be ascribed to specific lines of influence, although as I have suggested these are on occasion indeed discernible. Rather, human sacrifice functioned in the Graeco-Roman world, as in our own, as a basic cultural sign whose essential meaning was understood by all.<sup>84</sup> When we try to isolate that essential meaning, however, we come up with something rather banal. We can say that human sacrifice was always an attribute of 'the other', that it was an indicator of cultural standards at great variance with those of the people who told stories about it. We can also say that it almost always had strong negative connotations, and marked cultural standards regarded not simply as different but as barbarous or wicked. While such obvious generalizations hardly seem profound, it was their very banality that made the motif human sacrifice so useful in articulating and communicating a variety of ideas, even when those ideas were novel, alien, or antithetical to the people to whom they were presented.

<sup>80</sup> *Laud. Const.* 16.10; cf. *Praep. Evang.* iv.15.6 and iv.17.4; the source for this assertion is again Porphyry (*Abst.* 11.56.3), whom he quotes at *Praep. Evang.* iv.16.7. We may note, however, that Porphyry himself apparently believed that human sacrifice continued to be offered to Jupiter Latiaris (*Abst.* 11.56.9); cf. J. Bouffartigue, *ad loc.*, pp. 227–8.

<sup>81</sup> Charges of human sacrifice continued to be made against pagans in general, but probably not, as Schwenn, *op. cit.* (n.11), 194 asserts, against Mithraists in particular.

<sup>82</sup> See Cyr. Jer., *Catech.* 16.8; Epiph., *Haer.* XLVIII.14.5; Philast., *Div. Haer.* 49.5; Isid. Pel., *Ep.* 1.242; Jer., *Ep.* XLI.4.1; Aug., *Haer.* 26–7; *Praedestinatus* 26; see further my forthcoming paper, 'The Blood Libel against the Montanists'. For the pre-Constantinian period, we have only the tentative remarks of Justin about Marcionites (*Apol.* 1.26), and the vague suggestions of Irenaeus about the Carpocratians (*Adv. Haer.* 1.25.3–4,

elaborated with more assurance by Eusebius, *HE* iv.7.10–11); Clement of Alexandria claims that the latter engaged in incestuous orgies, but says nothing about human sacrifice (*Strom.* III.2.10.1). It is not until the late eighth century C.E. that we find the Syriac writer Theodor bar Konai asserting that Manichees 'offer men in demonic mysteries [and] fornicate without shame': A. Adam (ed.), *Texte zum Manichäismus* (2nd edn, 1969).

<sup>83</sup> See most recently R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (1988), and *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial* (1992).

<sup>84</sup> For stories about contemporary human sacrifice, see e.g. P. Tierney, *The Highest Altar: The Story of Human Sacrifice* (1989), who discusses contemporary human sacrifice in the Andes. The most publicized cases, at least in the Anglophone world, are those connected with Satanic cults, on which see, e.g., L. Kahaner, *Cults that Kill: Probing the Underworld of Occult Crime* (1988).

As we have seen, a number of different groups employed stories about human sacrifice to attain their own objectives, objectives that were in most cases fairly straightforward and often immediately practical: Apion used them to discredit the Jewish community in Alexandria, Cicero to blacken political opponents in Rome, the elder Pliny to justify Roman policy in Gaul, Tertullian to attack Roman policy towards the Christians, and Eusebius, lastly, to prove the essential viciousness of paganism. In all these cases, the audience knew what the writer meant. Building on this common ground, the writer could then elaborate on the specific implications of the motif, and if necessary lead his audience from the familiar to the unfamiliar. In this way the significance of stories about human sacrifice slowly expanded and shifted; as a motif it acquired new associations and placed old ones in new contexts. This process was of course far from a straightforward linear development, since it was the product of numerous particular and *ad hoc* applications. As a result, while we can discern some significant patterns by tracing these over the centuries, these patterns remain somewhat vague and overlapping.

For example, the motif sheds light on the complex evolution of cultural identities in the Graeco-Roman world. In its earliest appearances, it served to underline the relative simplicity of the opposition between Greeks and barbarians. But with the expansion of the Greek world in the wake of Alexander the Great, that distinction became increasingly blurred. To what extent were the Jews, some of whom spoke Greek and lived in Greek cities, actually Greeks? The various stories about their secret rites of human sacrifice provided a narrative expression of the tensions that this issue engendered. The same problem recurred in a more acute form during the Roman period. As Rome conquered and then absorbed the Punics and the Gauls, it banned or at least discouraged the practice of human sacrifice that marked these peoples as barbarians. The matter was not so simple, however, since the Romans themselves had been barbarians in the eyes of the Greeks. Even Plutarch, who was in many ways very favourable towards Rome, wondered why the Romans would forbid a barbarian tribe from practising human sacrifice when they themselves had recently buried alive two Greeks and two Gauls (*Quaest. Rom.* 83 = 283f). Plutarch's question, if not his answer, suggests that for some Greeks the distinction between Romans and barbarians continued to be problematic. Tatian, on the other hand, who prided himself on being a 'barbarian' and explicitly attacked the Greeks and their culture, introduced as a climactic example two distinctively Latin cults, those of Jupiter Latiaris and Diana Nemorensis (*Or.* 29. 1): the assumption here is perhaps that while Rome may not have been Greek, it could as the champion of Greek culture be counted as such. Stories about human sacrifice could thus be used in various ways to define and redefine the cultural identity of a people. Tatian was, of course, a Christian, and it was the Christians above all who exploited the complexities and inconsistencies of cultural identity in the Roman Empire, in order to redraw the boundaries according to their own views.

The motif of human sacrifice provides particularly interesting insight into the relationship between Christianity and the Graeco-Roman tradition. On the one hand, it constitutes a particular example of a broader phenomenon, Christian appropriation and adaptation of pagan culture. Just as Christians from Justin to Augustine presented Christianity as the fulfilment of Graeco-Roman philosophy, so too their attacks on the pagan practice of human sacrifice allowed them to represent themselves as the true caretakers of the civilized values that the Greeks and Romans had first espoused. On the other hand, the Christian deployment of this motif marks an important stage in what appears to be a fundamental shift in the nature of religious life. When the Christians redrew the boundaries between civilization and barbarism in such a way as to place the Greeks and Romans in the latter category, they were doing much more than rearranging the established cultural map; they were also rewriting the rules that determined the production of such a map.

As I noted, the motif of human sacrifice appears first in discussions about civilization and barbarism and only later in discussions about good and bad religion. This shift in usage seems to correlate with the emergence of religion as an autonomous area of discourse, an important phenomenon to which scholars have recently called attention.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, however, this shift was very gradual and never complete. By the late fourth century B.C.E. Theophrastus and perhaps Xenocrates were already using the motif of human sacrifice to talk about good and

<sup>85</sup> See especially J. North, 'Religious toleration in Republican Rome', *PCPS* ns 25 (1979), 85–103, and 'The Development of Religious Pluralism', in J. Lieu, J.

North, and T. Rajak (eds), *The Jews among Pagans and Christians* (1992), 174–93.

bad religion, while for Lactantius in the early fourth century C.E. it still served as a marker of barbarism. Throughout the entire period, in fact, there was constant interaction between discussions about good and bad religion on the one hand and those about civilization and barbarism on the other. The nature of that interaction, however, underwent a significant change. For the early Greeks, religious practices were a defining feature of an *ethnos*. When Herodotus wanted to define *to Hellenikon*, for example, he mentioned four things: identity of blood and language, common shrines and sacrifices of the gods, and shared customs (VIII.144.2). It was for this reason that a religious practice such as human sacrifice could be used as a marker of a cultural condition. Eusebius, on the other hand, may have considered human sacrifice a marker of barbarism, but he viewed barbarism itself as a spiritual condition, resulting from the lack of divine grace: it was only after the appearance and acceptance of that grace that barbarism, and with it human sacrifice, began to disappear. For Christians like Eusebius, religious practices no longer reflected civilization or the lack thereof; on the contrary, those sorts of cultural status were themselves simply social expressions of different relationships with the divine world. Although this idea may not have been peculiar to Christians, they were the ones who made it dominant. In short, Christians used the motif of human sacrifice to develop a new kind of cultural map, in which cosmic realities preceded and determined human societies.

Like any cultural sign, the meaning of human sacrifice was determined by the contexts in which it was used. To determine its general meaning is a useful task, but the result is of no more inherent interest than the definition of the word in a dictionary. As with words, so with other signs: the interest lies in mapping out the interplay between their general meaning and their specific context, in examining their use in particular situations. In this way we see not only their meaning, but to some extent the complexities of how that meaning was produced. By tracing the motif of human sacrifice in the Graeco-Roman world we can gain some insight not only into what the people of that world thought, but also into how they thought.

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