

Litterae Latinae: Unit 7

A. Jacob's Ladder (adapted from St. Augustine, *City of God* 16.38)

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) was a Numidian bishop in Roman Africa. He is one of the most important early Christian philosophers and Church fathers. In *The City of God*, he challenges popular ideas that Christianity brought about the decline of the Roman empire and caused the **second sack of Rome by the Gauls** in 410 CE. In this passage, Augustine tells the story of Jacob's dream of the golden ladder to Heaven from *Genesis* 28:10-19.

Proficiscens itaque in Mesopotamiam Iacob in somnis accepit oraculum, de quo sic scriptum est: Et Iacob profectus est in Charran et venit in locum et dormivit ibi, sole cadente. Sumpsit aliquos ex lapidibus loci ut poneret eos sub caput suum. Dum dormiebat in loco illo, in somnis haec vidit. Et ecce scala super terram posita est, cuius caput tangebatur ad caelum. Et angeli Dei ascendebant et descendebant per illam. Deinde Dominus incumbebat super illam et dixit: "Ego sum Deus Abraham patris tui et Deus Isaac. Noli timere. Terram, in qua nunc tu dormis, tibi dabo illam et nato tuo; et postea erunt nati tui tanti ut non numerare eos possis. At differentur supra mare et in Africam et in cadentem solem et ad orientem solem. Nam benedicentur omnes gentes terrae in te et in natis tuis. Et ecce ego sum tecum, ut custodiam te in omni via quaque ibis. Adducam te in terram hanc, quia non te recedam, donec faciam omnia, quae tecum locutus sum." Et experrectum est Iacob de somno suo et dixit: "Si est Dominus in loco hoc, ego autem nesciebam." Et timuit et dixit: "Quam terribilis locus hic; quidem est hic domus Dei et haec porta est quoque caeli." Et surrexit Iacob et sumpsit lapidem, quem posuerat ibi sub caput suum, et statuit illum titulum et fudit oleum in eum. Vocavit Iacob nomen loci illius: domus Dei.

Nota

Mesopotamia, -ae f. - ancient Mesopotamia

Iacob: nom. of the proper name Jacob

oraculum, -i n. - oracle, prophecy

Charran: acc. sing. A place in the Hebrew Bible thought to be modern [Harran](#), a city in Asia Minor in Turkey

lapis, lapidis m. - stone

somnio (1) - to dream

ecce - behold

incumbo, -cumbere, -cubui, -cubitus - to lean on or over, recline

Abraham - Abraham (indeclinable proper name)

Isaac - Isaac (indeclinable proper name)

in cadentem solem et ad orientem solem: In antiquity it was common to refer to the West as the place of the setting sun and the East as the place of the rising sun.

benedico, -dicere, -dixi, -dictum - to praise, bless (*bene + dico*)

custodio, -ire, -i/-ivi, -itum - to watch, protect

terribilis, -e - terrible, dreadful, demanding reverence

titulus, -i m. - a sign, inscription, token

fundō, fundere, fūdī, fūsum - to pour

oleus, -i m. - oil

B. Pliny's Letter to Emperor Trajan (adapted from *Epistula* 10.96)

[Pliny the Younger](#) (Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, 61-113 C.E.) was a lawyer, author, and magistrate in Rome. One of his most famous letters is his exchange with the [Emperor Trajan](#) about the Christians in Bithynia and Pontus (in modern Turkey) where Pliny served as the governor. Pliny seeks Trajan's advice about the Christians in his province.

Omnes res, de quibus dubito, tibi committo, domine. Audiebam Christianos inter se frequenter colligere, sed interfui numquam: ideo cogito eos debere poenas dare, at nescio quomodo aut quācum poenā. Eis ad me tamquam Christianis relatis, hanc rationem sum secutus. Si fassi sunt se esse Christianos, repetivi tamen singulos iterum. Illis iterum fassis tertio postulavi et nunc dixi poenam graviolem esse. Deinde milites iussi sunt illos in suā fide constantes ad iudicium ducere. Alios, quia cives Romani erant, Romam dimisi.

Paucis diebus plura genera criminum inciderunt. Dilatus est libellus sine auctore multorum nomina habens. Quosquos solvi, qui negabant esse se Christianos aut fuisse. Primum iusseram imagines numinum afferri ut illos experirem. Deos veros enim appellaverunt et imaginem tuam ture ac vino coluerunt. Et praeterea sine metu dicebant male Christo, quod Christiani re verā nihil cogi possunt. Alii fassi sunt se prius Christianos fuisse quidem, sed desiisse. Fatebantur autem has fuisse vel culpas suas vel errores: stato die ante lucem conveniebant, et carmen Christo quasi deo dicebat. Tunc iuraverunt se nullam fidem fallere. Inde egressi rediebant ut cibum caperent. Dixerunt eadem desisse post edictum meum. Putabam necesse esse ex duabus ancillis veritatem per tormenta petere. Nihil aliud inveni quam superstitionem maximam et turpissimam.

Visa est enim mihi res tam difficilis ut deberes iudicare. Aliquibus Christianis saepe non concedentibus, plures enim etiam vocabuntur in maius periculum.

B. Nota

Christianus, -a, -um - Christian

frequenter - frequently (adv.)

quomodo - in what way, how?

tertio: "for the third time"

libellus, -i m. - little book, pamphlet

tus, turis n. - incense

male dicebant Christo: "to speak badly against Christ" i.e. to denounce Christ

edictum, -i n. - proclamation, edict

necesse (indecl.) - necessary

ancilla, -ae f. - female servant, handmaid

veritas, -tatis f. - truth

tormentum, -i n. - punishment

superstitio, -onis f. - superstition, unreasonable religious belief

C. Isis Appears to Apuleius (adapted from Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5)

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (or *The Golden Ass*) is one of the best sources on the cult of **Isis**, the Egyptian deity who was seen as a protector and law-giver. The novel chronicles the misadventures of Lucius, a young man transformed into a jackass through his relentless curiosity about magic. In this passage, Lucius finds salvation and regains his human form through the grace of Isis who appears to him.

"Ecce, Luci," dicit Isis, "tuis precibus fidelibus tam mota sum ut adsim, naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies prima, suprema numinum, deorum dearumque facies uniformis, quae caeli clarissima supera, maris salubres fluctus, inferorum regiones tacitas rego. Meum numen solum multiformi facie, pluris templis, nominibus diversis totus mundus coluit. Primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deorum matrem appellant, autochthones Attici Cecropeiam Minervam, gaudentes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynnam Dianam, Siculi trilingues Stygiam Proserpinam, Eleusinii veteres Actaeam Cererem. Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatam isti, Rhamnusia illi, et Aethiopes validique Aegyptii plurimis caerimoniis meam potestatem colentes appellant me vero nomine, reginam Isidem. Accessi tuos casus dolens ut nunc te de dolore solvam. Noli timere; iam tibi gratiā meā pervenit dies salutis."

C. Nota

Ecce: "Behold!" (interjection to call attention or to show surprise)

Lucius, -i m. - Lucius (central figure in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*)

Isis, Isidis f. - Isis (Egyptian deity)

elementum, -i n. - first principle, element

progenies, -ei f. - offspring

uniformis, -e - having one shape, uniform

salubris, -e - health-giving, healthful

multiformis, -e - many-shaped (related to *uniformis* above)

species, -ei f. - aspect, appearance

primigenii Phryges: “First-born Phrygians.” Phrygians were the inhabitants of [Phrygia](#) (Asia Minor) where ancient Troy was located.

Pessinuntiam deorum matrem: “Pessinuntian mother of the gods” - a cult name for the Phrygian goddess [Cybele](#) (Roman Magna Mater).

autochthones Attici: “people of Attica, born from the earth.” [Attica](#) is the region of Greece surrounding Athens.

Cecropeiam Minervam: “Cecropian Minerva.” [Cecrops](#) was a mythical king of Athens who was born from the earth; [Minerva](#) (Greek Athena) is the goddess of war, wisdom, and handicrafts.

Cyprius, -a, -um - Cyprian, from the island of [Cyprus](#)

Paphiam Venerem: “Venus from Paphos.” [Paphos](#) was an important cult center of Aphrodite (Roman Venus) on the island of Cyprus.

Cretes sagittiferi: “arrow-bearing Cretans.” The people who lived on the Greek island of Crete were famous archers.

Dictynnam Dianam: “Diana Dictynna.” Dictynna (“of the hunting nets”) was one of the cult names of the goddess [Diana](#) (Greek Artemis)

Siculi trilingues: “triple-tongued Sicilians.” The people of Sicily were said to have spoken three languages during the history of their island: Sicilian, Greek, and, finally, Latin.

Stygiam Proserpinam: “Stygian Persephone.” The river Styx was the river of the Underworld where the goddess [Persephone](#) ruled beside her husband Hades.

Eleusinus, -a, -um - Eleusinian, inhabitant of Eleusis, Greece which was the site of the main cult of Demeter.

Actaeam Cererem: “Actaeon [of Attica] Ceres” [Ceres](#) (Greek Demeter) was the goddess of agriculture

Iunonem: [Juno](#) (Greek Hera), wife of Jupiter (Greek Zeus), was the queen of the gods and goddess of marriage.

Hecatam: [Hecate](#), the goddess of magic, ghosts, and necromancy.

Rhamnusia: “Rhamnusia,” a cult name of [Nemesis](#), the goddess of retribution and punishment for evil deeds. Rhamnus in Greece is the site of one of her temples.

Aethiopes, -um m. pl. - Ethiopians

Aegyptius, -a, -um - Egyptian

caerimonia, -ae f. - sacred rite, religious ceremony

regina, -ae f. - queen

D. Lucretius on Freedom from the Constraining Power of Religion (adapted from Lucretius, *De Rerum Naturā* 1.62-79)

Lucretius (99-55 B.C.E.) was an Epicurean philosopher. His only surviving work is *de Rerum Naturā*, a didactic poem in six books of Latin hexameters. The poem instructs readers in **Epicurean philosophy**, including an atomic theory that explains how all matter in the universe is made by the chance union of indivisible, indestructible particles, and not by the will of the Roman gods. In the passage below, Lucretius depicts Epicurus as a visionary who releases humans from the oppression of irrational religious obligation through knowledge of the workings of the universe.

Dum vita humana, pressa graviore sub religione, ante oculos nostros in terris turpiter iacebat, religio ipsa caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat, facie terrente supra homines stans. Primum Graius homo tollere contra eam oculos est ausus primusque obsistere contra. Ille neque famam deorum nec fulmina nec caelum minitanti murmure timuit. Tam acriter virtutem animi hortatus est ut primus portas naturae frangeret.

Ergo valida vis animi vicit et processit longe extra flammantia moenia mundi atque mente animoque omne immensum spatium transiit. Unde victor omnia nobis refert: Quid potest oriri? Quid non? Quanta vis in quāquā re adest? Quā ratione finis constitutus est? Mentibus ratione de religione solutis, victoria eius caelo nos exaequat.

D. Nota

religio, -onis f. - religious obligation (for a deeper understanding of this term see Springer's "The Role of *Religio*, *Solvo* and *Ratio* in Lucretius" *CW* 1977 [55-61])

opprimō, -primere, -pressī, -pressum - to press down, suppress

insto, -stare, -stiti, -statum - to press upon, threaten (+ dat.)

obsistō, -sistere, -stitī, -stitum - oppose, resist

fulmen, fulminis n. - lightning, thunderbolt

minitanti murmure: "with menacing crash"

vividus, -a, -um - full of life, vigorous

extra - outside of, beyond (+ acc.)

flammo (1) - to kindle, blaze

victoria, -ae f. - victory

exaequo (1) - to make even or equal (make (acc.) equal to (dat.))