

‘THESE PEOPLE ARE...MEN EATERS’:
BANQUETS OF THE ANTI-ASSOCIATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS
OF MINORITY CULTURAL GROUPS*

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Introduction

The quotation in the title is found on a map of inland Africa in William Snelgrave’s travel report of 1734.¹ At this point, inland Africa was, in reality, the unknown to Britons. Yet the characterization of peoples living in a ‘Kingdom of Temian’ as cannibals illustrates common processes of ‘othering’ that were also at work in antiquity. These processes of describing foreign or unknown peoples as barbarous and threatening outsiders are reflected in ancient ethnographic writings, Greek novels, and histories. As social identity theorists and others point out, how one is perceived by others, regardless of how far this is from any element of truth, plays some role in the construction, negotiation, and expression of identities. Furthermore, the process of describing those outside of one’s own cultural group is, in part, a process of describing one’s own communal identity. It is by defining ‘them’ that the sense of ‘us’ is reinforced or reformulated.

Social customs of eating or banqueting could play an important role in such discourses of ‘the other’. In fact, accusations of cannibalism, together with accompanying notions of human sacrifice, were a recurring element in how certain people presented the identity of others—Christians among them—as destructive to the very fabric of civilized society. The accusation

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1. *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade*. The full quote is ‘These People are Antropophagos [*sic*] or Men eaters’. See Roxann Wheeler, ‘Limited Visions of Africa: Geographies of Savagery and Civility in Early Eighteenth-Century Narratives’, in James S. Duncan and Derek Gregory (eds.), *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 14-48 (16-17).

of eating the human body can be interpreted, in anthropological terms, as the equivalent of charging others with destroying human society itself (in Mary Douglas's body/society correspondence theory).²

The meal practices of small social-religious groups or associations often play a role in these discourses of the other. Several ostensibly historical or openly fictional accounts from the Hellenistic and Roman periods present a picture of what one might call wildly transgressive behaviour within associations. In particular, there are a number of accounts of activities within associations that focus on human sacrifice, cannibalism, and extreme sexual activities, among other things. Within Greek and Roman novels, there is a consistency in the use of bandit associations, in particular, to present a picture of improper social, commensal, and ritual behaviour within informal, small group settings. Yet similar stereotypes also inform the likes of Livy's supposedly historical account of the 'alien' rites of Dionysiac associations in Rome.

Such stories of wild transgression in both fictional and historical narratives draw on ethnographic stereotypes of 'the other' in order to present a frightening picture of the dangerous or alien anti-association within society. This inversion depends on common knowledge of the far more tame convivial and ritual aims of real-life associations as attested in epigraphy. Moreover, the picture of the outlaw or foreign anti-association that emerges in the material discussed here provides an essential interpretive framework for allegations against early Christian groups, including charges of Oedipean unions (incest) and Thyestean feasts (cannibalism).

Wildly Transgressive Banquets in the Imagination

Several accounts of scurrilous banquets and rituals attributed to criminal and other low-life groups survive in Greek and Latin novels, such that Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler can suggest that these themes constitute a 'subgenre in the field of ancient fiction'.³ We shall see that there was a complicated interplay between these literary conventions, on the one hand, and both historical narratives and popular imagination about foreign peoples or minority cultural groups, on the other. In some novels, ancient fiction-writers specifically have associations in mind (whether an occupational guild, a cult-society, a foreign group, or a mixture of these) when they tell tales of such wild meetings and banquets, particularly in connection with

2. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 2nd edn, 1973).

3. Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels. The Fragments—Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 7.

brigands or bandits (*latrones* in Latin / λησταιί in Greek).⁴ In essence, the villainous group can be presented as the anti-type of what an association should be, as well as an inversion of all that is pious and right. Discussion of some narratives in both novels and historical works will flesh out this inverted picture of the association at banquet, setting the stage for an evaluation of similar charges against real-life cultural groups and associations.

a. *'They ate and drank in utter disorder'*

The connection with associations is most explicit in Apuleius's second-century story of a band of brigands (*latrones*) who captured both Lucius, the ass, and Charite, an upper-class 'maiden of refined qualities' (*Metam.* 3.28–4.25; 6.25–7.12). These brigands are cast as trained professionals (4.9) and military men, and they are repeatedly termed a 'guild' (*collegium*), as when a member addresses his fellows concerned that they behave in a manner 'in keeping with the principles of our guild' (6.31 [LCL]; also 4.15; 7.1, 7, 8). We are also told that the patron deity of this guild is Mars, to whom they offer their sacrifices.

In this story, the overall behaviour of the association at meals is summarized thus:

They ate and drank in utter disorder, swallowing meat by the heap, bread by the stack, and cups by the legion. They played raucously, sang deafeningly, and joked abusively, and in every other respect behaved just like those half-beasts, the Lapiths and Centaurs (*Metam.* 4.8 [LCL]).

Here we are witnessing an inversion of common Greek banqueting values. The brigands are characterized as excessive and sub-human in their banqueting manners, as the comparison with the feast of the Lapiths and Centaurs indicates. The wedding celebration of Peirithous, a Lapith, ended in utter

4. On brigands in fiction, see, most recently Albert Henrichs, 'Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians', in Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (eds.), *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1970), pp. 18-35; Jack Winkler, 'Lollianios and the Desperadoes', *JHS* 100 (1980), pp. 155-81; C.P. Jones, 'Apuleius' Metamorphoses and Lollianios' Phoinikika', *Phoenix* 34 (1980), pp. 243-54; Jean Marie Bertrand, 'Les Boucôloi, ou le monde a l'envers', *REA* 90 (1988), pp. 139-49; Keith Hopwood, "'All That May Become a Man": The Bandit in the Ancient Novel', in Lin Foxhall and John Salmon (eds.), *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 195-204; J. Trinquier, 'Le motif du repaire des brigands et le topos du locus horridus Apulée, *Métamorphoses*, IV, 6', *RPh* 73 (1999), pp. 257-77; A. Watanabe, 'Hippochoos the Lover, Bandit, and Friend: A Study on Elite Masculinity in the Novel' (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2003). On accusations of banditry as a metaphor for the 'de-stated' or 'barbaric' non-person, see Brent D. Shaw, 'Bandits in the Roman Empire', *P&P* 102 (1984), pp. 3-52.

violence between the two peoples due to the drunken behaviour of a Centaur, and these mythical figures were considered the epitome of terrible and violent banqueting behaviour, as evidenced in the title of Lucian's satirical *Symposium, or The Lapiths*, and in many artistic representations.⁵ The main characteristic of the situation in Apuleius's novel is that disorder prevails within the *collegium*. The conversation of the bandits while feasting heightens the sense of impropriety as it centers on the details of their underhanded activities that day, which are far from appropriate topics for the symposium as outlined by the likes of Plutarch (*Symposium*). What comes to the fore in other accounts of the brigands' meals is only hinted at in Apuleius's story in connection with their new brigand-chief from Thrace who was 'nursed on human blood' (*Metam.* 7.5; cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.64).

b. *'They sacrificed a human being and partook of the flesh'*

Particularly common in portraits of the anti-banquets of brigand and other groups is the transgressive practice of human sacrifice accompanied by a cannibalistic meal, the ultimate parody of the sacrificial banquet. Such tales of human sacrifice are found in a variety of contexts in antiquity, particularly in ethnographic descriptions of foreign peoples or minority cultural groups, in narratives of conspiracy (which effectively barbarize certain Greeks or Romans), and in narratives with entertainment purposes, namely novels. James Rives's study of the social meaning of human sacrifice in antiquity shows how human sacrifice acts as a sign within discourses of barbarity vs. civilization and of piety vs. superstition or magic.⁶ Moreover, in virtually all accounts of such wild transgressions, we are witnessing ethnographic discourses that deal with description of the other, whether that other is a remote 'barbarian' people or a more dangerous enemy within. Here I focus primarily on associations specifically, only touching on broader issues of human sacrifice in so far as they clarify notions of counter-cultural behaviour within small-group settings.

Among the more controversial accounts is the description of a human sacrifice (a child or a servant) and the accompanying meal in fragments of a second-century Greek novel by Lollianos, entitled *A Phoenician Story* (*Phoenikika*).⁷ The instigators of the sacrifice in this fragment are never

5. Cf. Homer, *Od.* 21.285-304; Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.17.2; 1.28.2; 5.10.8.

6. James Rives, 'Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians', *JRS* 85 (1995), pp. 65-85.

7. *POxy.* 1368 + *PColon* 3328 (here the focus is on the narrative in B1 recto). For a critical edition of the text, see Albert Henrichs, *Die Phoinikika des Lollianos: Fragmente eines neuen griechischen Romans* (Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 14; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1972) and, most recently, Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 314-57 (with Greek text and extensive commentary).

expressly called brigands, even though most scholars who have dealt with the passage assume so.⁸ Perhaps we are safer in generally referring to them as ‘low-lives’ or, as Winkler puts it, ‘desperadoes’.

For present purposes, it is important to point to an explicit designation in the fragmentary text: in the midst of the narrative, there is a reference to the ‘ones being initiated’ (τοῖς μουμένοις). We need not agree with those who read the novels allegorically and see hidden mystic connections throughout (as does Merkelbach, reflected in Henrichs), or with those who, in reaction, tend to downplay the author’s explicit references to mysteries (Winkler and Jones).⁹ I would suggest that we can discuss this episode in terms of a low-life association of initiates, an inverted picture of associations of initiates (μύσται) that are widely attested in the epigraphic record. As we shall see with Livy’s account of the Bacchanalia, there are cases when ancient authors ascribe ritual murder and related criminal activities to real-life groups that engaged in mysteries, particularly those devoted to foreign deities.¹⁰

The fragmentary episode in Lollianos—which begins with the sacrifice of the child or servant, a sacrificial oath ritual, and a sacrificial meal—runs as follows:

Meanwhile another man, who was naked, walked by, wearing a crimson loincloth, and throwing the body of the *pais* (child or servant) on its back, he cut it up, and tore out its heart and placed it upon the fire. Then, he took up [the cooked heart] and sliced it up to the middle. And on the surface [of the slices] he sprinkled [barley groats] and wet it with oil; and when he had sufficiently prepared them, [he gave them to the] initiates, and those who held

8. Henrichs goes further in identifying them with the brigand cowherds (βουκόλοι) attested in Dio Cassius and in other novels (Henrichs, ‘Pagan Ritual’, pp. 33, 35). On the civic rather than rural setting of the episode, and hence the problems with seeing the culprits as βουκόλοι, see Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 319-21.

9. Henrichs seems to share Merkelbach’s allegorical theory, which views the novels themselves as encoded religious texts relating to the mysteries (most recently Reinhold Merkelbach, *Isis regina—Zeus Sarapis. Die griechisch-ägyptische Religion nach den Quellen dargestellt* [Stuttgart-Leipzig: Teubner, 1995]). See the critique in Winkler, ‘Lollianos and the Desperadoes’ and Jones, ‘Apuleius’ Metamorphoses’. Roger Beck shows the problems with Merkelbach’s theory as a whole (Roger Beck, ‘Mystery Religions, Aretalogy, and the Ancient Novel’, in G. Schmeling [ed.], *The Novel in the Ancient World* [Brill: Leiden, 1996], pp. 131-50). But this need not exclude any references to initiations or mysteries within the literal content of the novels (as in the episode discussed here).

10. On ritual murder and Mithras, see M.J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, The Secret God* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), pp. 166-68; Robert Turcan, ‘Le sacrifice mithraïque: innovations de sens et de modalités’, in Jean Rudhardt and Olivier Reverdin (eds.), *Le sacrifice dans l’antiquité* (Genève: Vandœuvres, 1981), p. 350 nn. 6-7. On ‘jars of human flesh’ accidentally discovered in the temple of Bellona (often identified with the Cappadocian goddess Ma), see Dio Cassius, 42.26.2-3.

(a slice?) [he ordered] to swear in the blood of the heart that they would neither give up nor betray [-----], not [even if they are led off to prison], nor yet if they be tortured (*PColon* 3328, B 1 Recto, lines 9-16).¹¹

As Henrichs points out, this whole sacrificial scene follows the usual Greek pattern of sacrifice, including the central importance of the internal organs (σπλάγχνα).¹² Also not unusual is the accompanying oath ceremony, in which portions of the innards were consumed together as a symbolic means of binding participants. What is extremely unusual, and deliberately inverts what would otherwise be considered pious activity among initiates in honour of the gods, is the fact that it is a human, rather than animal, victim in this ritual. Following the sacrifice, the oath ceremony, and the meal, came further drinking and entertainment as ‘they sang, drank, had intercourse with the women in full view of Androtimos’ (either the leader of the initiates or a captive of the outlaws; B1 Verso, lines 20-21).¹³ Shortly thereafter the participants put on robes, smeared their faces with black or white, and departed, likely to engage in further criminal activity in disguise.

The author of this novel is certainly not the first to combine both human sacrifice and oath-taking in an inversion of common ritual, as the tales of the conspiracy (*coniuratio*; lit. ‘swearing together’) of Cataline clearly show (in connection with his political opposition to Cicero in the 60s BCE).¹⁴ Such accusations against one’s compatriots were a succinct way of placing opponents, or disliked politicians of the past, beyond the pale of humanity and civilization, a way of ‘barbarizing’ a fellow Greek or Roman, as Rives puts it.¹⁵

11. Translation by Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 338-41.

12. Henrichs, ‘Pagan Ritual’, pp. 33-34.

13. Both Jones and Stephens and Winkler point out some striking similarities between the story here and that in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (esp. 4.8-33), including a reference to Lapiths as prototypes of unruly banqueters, such that some literary relation is likely (see Jones, ‘Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*’; Winkler ‘Lollianos and the Desperadoes’; Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, pp. 322-25).

14. These tales developed over the years: Sallust mentions Cataline and his co-conspirator’s oath that was sealed by partaking from ‘bowls of human blood mixed with wine’ (*Bell. Cat.* 22.1-2 [LCL]); Plutarch claims that ‘they sacrificed a human being and partook of the flesh’ (*Cic.* 10.4); and Dio Cassius asserts that the conspirators ‘sacrificed a *pais*, and after administering the oath over his vitals, ate these in company with the others’ (37.30.3). Cf. Franz Dölger, “‘Sacramentum infanticidii.’ Die Schlachtung eines Kindes und der Genuß seines Fleisches und Blutes als vermeintlicher Einweihungsakt im ältesten Christentum’, *Antike und Christentum* 4 (1934), pp. 207-10; Rives, ‘Human Sacrifice’, pp. 72-73; Diodorus Siculus, 22.3.5; Plutarch, *Publ.* 4.1; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.11, 20, 33.

15. Rives, ‘Human Sacrifice’, 73. On the ‘political cannibal’, see Andrew McGowan, ‘Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism against Christians in the Second Century’, *JECS* 2 (1994), pp. 413-42 (431-33).

Though references to ‘initiates’ are lacking in some other cases, there are similar stories of human sacrifice in other novels that present bands of brigands as the ultimate criminal cultic group or association. Thus, in Xenophon’s second-century *Ephesian Tale*, we find a band of brigands (ληστήριον), led by one Hippothoos, collecting statues, wood, and garlands in preparation for a sacrifice in honour of their patron deity, Ares. It turns out that the ‘usual manner’ for their sacrifices is to ‘hang the intended victim, human or animal, from a tree and throw javelins at it from a distance’ (2.13). In this case, their intended victim is saved at the last moment by the police-chief of Cilicia, who has most of the brigands killed.

Another instance involves a close call, but in Achilles Tatius’ second-century novel (c. 150–175 CE) the sacrifice apparently takes place.¹⁶ This episode includes the cowherd bandits (βουκόλοι) of the Egyptian Delta based at a place called Nikochis (*Leucippe and Clitophon* 4.12.8). It combines the internal threat of robbers with the common fear of ‘barbarian’ (non-Greek) peoples, which is characteristic of ancient travel literature or ethnography. The βουκόλοι, who are recurring characters not only in novels but also historical writings, are here presented as ‘wild frightening men, all large and black’ and they ‘all shouted in a foreign language’ (3.9); the narrator (Clitophon) wishes that they had been captured by Greek bandits instead (3.10).

Ultimately, Clitophon and Leucippe, the protagonists, are separated and Clitophon escapes from the brigands when they are attacked by the Egyptian army (*Leuc. Clit.* 3.13–14). Then, from a distance, Clitophon witnesses his beloved Leucippe, still in the hands of the brigands. The first-person narrative heightens the horror as we witness the brigands’ preparations for a sacrifice under the direction of their ‘priest’ (ἱερεύς), creating an altar and pouring a libation over Leucippe’s head. The participants lead her in a sacrificial procession to the accompaniment of flutes as the Egyptian priest chants a hymn:

Then at a signal they all moved far away from the altar. One of the attendants laid her on her back and tied her to stakes fixed in the ground... He next raised a sword and plunged it into her heart and then sawed all the way down to her abdomen. Her viscera leaped out. The attendants pulled out her entrails and carried them in their hands over to the altar. When it was well done they carved the whole lot up, and all the bandits shared the meal... All this was done according to the rubrics sanctioned by the priest (*Leuc. Clit.* 3.15).¹⁷

16. Cf. Bertrand, ‘Les Boucôloi’.

17. Translation by Winkler in B.P. Reardon (ed.), *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 216.

Clitophon stood there in ‘sheer shock’, a shock that no doubt is meant to be shared by the reader or hearer. But we soon learn that Leucippe is alive and well, and the two men (who had only pretended to join the brigand group after their capture) had successfully fooled the brigands using some stage props and special effects (animals’ entrails and a trick-sword).

The sacrifice of a virgin was, in part,¹⁸ to be the ‘initiation’ of these two men into the brigand association, as the chief-brigand (ληστήρχος) informed them: ‘We have a tradition that sacrifices, especially human sacrifices, must be performed by the newly initiated (πρωτομούστας)’. ‘Yes sir! We are ready to live up to the highest standards of banditry’ was the reply of the initiates-to-be (*Leuc. Clit.* 3.22; cf. 3.19).

The case of the βουκόλοι (‘herdsmen’) of Egypt happens to provide an instance where history and fiction are intimately intertwined, and where the accusations of barbaric human sacrifice recur again in historical sources.¹⁹ We know from Strabo that there were indeed βουκόλοι in the Egyptian Delta region before the time of Augustus. Yet these are initially described in a matter-of-fact manner as herdsmen who were also brigands (λησταί) with no elaboration on any extreme social or religious conventions beyond their occupation, which included the positive role (in the view of earlier Egyptian kings, so Strabo claims) of warding off foreigners, namely Greeks (*Geogr.* 17.1.6, 19). Now a papyrus scroll from the Egyptian Delta confirms the continued existence of these brigands in 166/7 CE, where they are described as ‘the impious Neikokeitai (τῶν ἀνοσίων Νεικωκειτῶν)’, which is in keeping with the base at Nikochis Tattius mentions in his novel. Furthermore, another second-century papyrus contains an oracle that deals with disturbances and seems to refer to the death of βουκόλοι, presumably as part of the solution to the disturbance.²⁰ By the time Dio Cassius writes his history (c. 211–222 CE), then, there has been opportunity for the development of

18. The sacrifice was simultaneously the means by which the brigands hoped to purify their citadel and gain the upper hand in battles with Egyptian troops (3.19).

19. On the βουκόλοι, also see Heliodorus’ *An Ethiopian Story* (cf. Xenophon, *An Ephesian Tale* 3.12); Winkler, ‘Lollianos and the Desperadoes’, pp. 175-81; G.W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Sather Classical Lectures, 58; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 51-53; David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 207-208.

20. *PThmouis* 1, col. 104, line 13 and col. 116, lines 4-5; *PStanford* inv. G93bv. See John C. Shelton, ‘An Astrological Prediction of Disturbances in Egypt’, *AncSoc* 7 (1976), pp. 209-13; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, p. 208 n. 46; cf. Bertrand, ‘Les Boucôloi’; Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, p. 53. The same descriptive term, ἀνόσιος, is consistently used of the Judeans in connection with the revolt under Trajan. See A. Fuks, ‘The Jewish Revolt in Egypt (AD 115–117) in the Light of the Papyri’, *Aegyptus* 33 (1953), pp. 157-58.

tales surrounding these threatening figures of the Delta, and, as Winkler convincingly argues, we are here witnessing a case of ‘history imitating story’, more so than the other way around.²¹

Dio’s account of a revolt in 172/73 CE involving the βουκόλοι happens to mention that the group was led by an Egyptian priest (ἱερεύς), Isidorus.²² Dio claims that some of the βουκόλοι dressed as women and pretended to offer ransom for the release of prisoners in order to deceive and capture a Roman centurion and other soldiers involved in quelling the revolt. This is where Dio moves on to the sort of stereotypical accusations that are in keeping with tales of the supposed criminal behaviour of political conspirators and barbarous peoples: ‘They also sacrificed his [the centurion’s] companion, and after swearing an oath over his entrails, they devoured them’ (72.4.1-2 [LCL]).

Furthermore, there seems to be some consistency in Dio’s choice of the human-sacrifice-and-cannibalism charge against supposedly barbarous peoples in connection with revolts specifically. For when he describes the revolt of Judeans (or Jews) in Cyrene, who were ‘destroying both the Romans and the Greeks’, he claims that ‘they would eat the flesh of their victims, make belts for themselves of their entrails, anoint themselves with their blood and wear their skins for clothing’ (68.32.1-2). For Dio and some others, this was not out of the ordinary for such foreign peoples; he suggests that the Judean immigrants in Egypt and on Cyprus had ‘perpetrated many similar outrages’ (68.32.2). The blurring of the line between history and reality, fact and fiction, which Dio’s account of the βουκόλοι illustrates so well, extends to other supposed historical accounts and popular reports concerning real-life associations.

Accusations of Wild Transgression

a. *‘Away...you who suck men’s blood’*

Notorious is the case of the suppression of the Bacchanalia in Rome and Italy beginning in 186 BCE (Livy, *Hist. Rom.* 39.8-19). Many studies have struggled with the historical, political, religious, and other dimensions of

21. Winkler, ‘Lollianos and the Desperadoes’, p. 178. Previously it had been common to suggest that Tatius and other novels were dependent on Dio for their tales of the βουκόλοι. There are other cases when the supposed barbarism of herdsmen and nomadic peoples is expressed in terms of cannibalism, as in Herodotus’ description of the Androphagi, north of the Black Sea (*Hist.* 4.106). It is these sorts of ethnographic traditions that may underlie the legends surrounding the βουκόλοι as expressed by Dio.

22. This priestly leadership of the group seems to be echoed in Heliodorus’ fictional narrative in which the brigand chief, Thyamis, is the son of a high priest of Memphis (*An Ethiopian Story* 1.19; cf. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, p. 208). The account in Tatius, discussed above, likewise mentions the presence of a priest within the group.

Livy's account and with the epigraphic decree concerning actions by the Roman senate, which shows that Livy is not making the whole thing up.²³ Here I am less concerned with the question of Roman suppression of Bacchic groups in the early second century, which has been dealt with extensively in scholarship. Instead, I want to consider how Livy, in about 20 BCE, presents this particular case as a story of a foreign (Greek) cultic association threatening the Roman way of life and contributing to moral decline.²⁴ I am interested in Livy's account as description of the alien 'other' within, and in what accusations of wild transgression are made concerning the nature of the meetings, initiations, and banquets of these Dionysiac associations. I want to evaluate to what degree the charges of ritual murder and sexual perversion may be due to Livy's ethnographic, artistic, or novelistic license.

It is important to note the overall context of this whole incident within Livy's history: the Bacchanalia affair takes place almost immediately following Livy's characterization of the 180s BCE as the 'seeds' of moral decline at Rome. The moral decline was due, in large part, to the influence of foreign ways and featured, in particular, imported styles of convivial entertainment and elaborate banquets from 'Asia' (*Hist. Rom.* 39.6).²⁵ The Bacchanalia incident is presented as one further case of this decline. As P.G. Walsh convincingly shows, there is no need to doubt the 'bare bones' of Livy's account in terms of the overall incident and the action of the senate, but there is an important distinction to be made between two main sections of the narrative, between the first, longer section (39.8.1–39.14.3) and the second, shorter section dealing with the meeting with the senate (from 39.14.3). 'What goes before is clearly a romantic and dramatic expansion of [Postumius'] report, whereas what follows is based on senatorial records, and is more solidly historical'.²⁶ It is precisely in the former, novelistic section that descriptions of wild activities of the association are elaborated in the most lurid detail.

23. See, more recently, J.A. North, 'Religious Toleration in Republican Rome', *PCPS* 25 (1979), pp. 85-103; R.J. Rousselle, 'The Roman Persecution of the Bacchic Cult, 186–180 B.C.' (PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1982); Erich S. Gruen, 'The Bacchanalian Affair', in his *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Cincinnati Classical Studies, 7; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), pp. 34-78; P.G. Walsh, 'Making a Drama Out of a Crisis: Livy on the Bacchanalia', *G&R* 43 (1996), pp. 188-203.

24. Livy's attitudes regarding the threat of foreign ways are paralleled in the speech to Octavian, which Dio Cassius puts in the mouth of Agrippa: 'Those who attempt to distort our religion with strange rites you should abhor... because such men, by bringing in new divinities in place of the old persuade many to adopt foreign practices, from which spring conspiracies, factions, and cabals...' (Dio Cass. 52.36.2 [LCL]).

25. Cf. Walsh, 'Making a Drama', pp. 189-90.

26. Walsh, 'Making a Drama', p. 193.

In agreement with Erich Gruen's observation that the account 'evokes the atmosphere of a romantic novel—or better, Hellenistic and Roman New Comedy'—Walsh goes on to argue that evidence in Plautus, a contemporary of the Bacchic suppression, suggests that Bacchic themes 'may have featured as the plot of a comic or mimic drama' and that this 'has left its mark on the historiographical tradition' (on both Livy's sources and on Livy's own history-writing).²⁷ Among the on-going jokes in Plautus about the dangers of Bacchic orgies (also cited in this section's sub-title) is one character's statement: 'Away from me, sisters [bacchantes], you who suck men's blood'.²⁸

Livy's account begins with the alien nature of these Dionysiac groups, speaking of a 'Greek of humble origin' whose 'method of infecting people's minds with error was not by the open practice of his rites and the public advertisement of his trade and his system; he was the hierophant of secret ceremonies performed at night' (*Hist. Rom.* 39.8).²⁹ The initiations, Livy continues,

soon began to be widespread among men and women. The pleasures of drinking and feasting were added to the religious rites, to attract a larger number of followers. When wine had inflamed their feelings, and night and the mingling of the sexes and of different ages had extinguished all power of moral judgment, all sorts of corruption began to be practiced (39.8).

We then learn of other illegal activities, including supply of false witnesses, forging of documents, perjury, and, most frighteningly, wholesale murder.

The most lurid accusations in Livy's account, which spell out the aforementioned 'corruption', appear in a passage that is considered among the least historical sections of the story: namely, the first-hand descriptions of the secretive practices of a former member, Hispala, that had for some reason remained undetected until her report.³⁰ First, Livy has Hispala outline the crimes in private to warn the initiate-to-be, her lover Aebutius (39.9-10). But it is in the second more official report to the consul, Postumius (39.13), that the lurid details of extreme sex and ritual murder come to the fore.

In this second report to the consul, Hispala relates how initiations in the Dionysiac mysteries originally only took place three times a year in daylight, but that more recently the meetings had increased to five days each month at night. Not only that, but membership had increased greatly by this time,

27. Gruen, 'The Bacchanalian Affair', p. 62; Walsh, 'Making a Drama', p. 192.

28. *Bacchides* 52ff., 368ff., as cited by Walsh, 'Making a Drama'.

29. Translation by Henry Bettenson (trans.), *Livy: Rome and the Mediterranean* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976).

30. Cf. North, 'Religious Toleration', pp. 88-90; Gruen, 'The Bacchanalian Affair', pp. 61-65.

including participants from among the Roman elites. Then come the details of moral degradation inspired by foreign rites:

From the time when the rites were held promiscuously, with men and women mixed together, and when the license offered by darkness had been added, no sort of crime, no kind of immorality, was left unattempted. There were more obscenities practiced between men than between men and women. Anyone refusing to submit to outrage or reluctant to commit crimes was slaughtered as a sacrificial victim. To regard nothing as forbidden was among these people the summit of religious achievement (Livy, *Hist. Rom.* 39.13).

Here we are seeing the common stereotypes so familiar to us now of wild banquets combined with human sacrifice. Yet added to this is the accusation of sexual ‘perversions’ that accompanied the drinking. Ethnographic descriptions in which foreign peoples are accused of unusual sexual practices are common, as in Tacitus’ account of the Judeans’ supposed ‘unlawful’ sexual behaviour (*Hist.* 5.5.2; cf. Martial, *Epigr.* 7.30). This combination of inverted banqueting and perverted sexual practices would recur in the list of counter-cultural practices attributed to the early Christians as well. Livy provides another clear case where fiction informed by ethnographic stereotypes of the criminal tendencies of foreign peoples informs the description of real-life associations, in this case an association with mysteries. Inversion of proper banqueting and drinking practices, as well as distorted sacrificial rites, again stand out as the heart of the allegations.

Inscriptional and papyrological evidence for the actual banqueting and sacrificial activities of associations of various kinds, including many Dionysiac associations, comes across as far less exciting, one might even say bland, in relation to these more extreme, imaginative materials. In particular, although there are indications of abusive conduct, and drinking was most certainly a component in such matters, there were simultaneously widely shared values, which set parameters on banqueting behaviour within associations and which, from time to time, could be carved in stone. Moreover, the association regulations or sacred laws of the Greco-Roman era that have survived to us are concerned with issues of order and decorum in meetings, rituals, and banquets.³¹ For example, the rules of the devotees of Zeus Hypsistos, which are echoed elsewhere, include the following: ‘It shall not be permissible for any one of [the members]...to make factions or to leave the brotherhood of the president for another, or for men to enter into one

31. See, for instance, the regulations of the *collegium* devoted to Diana and Antionooos at Lanuvium in Italy (*CIL* XIV 2112; 136 CE), the devotees of Bacchos at Athens (*IG* II² 1368; 176 CE), and several associations at Tebtunis in Egypt (*PMich* V 243-245; mid-first century CE). Cf. A.E.R. Boak, ‘An Ordinance of the Salt Merchants’, *AJP* 58 (1937), pp. 210-19; Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 97-131.

another's pedigrees at the symposium or to abuse one another at the symposium or to chatter or to indict or accuse another or to resign the course of the year or again to bring the symposia to nought...' (*PLond* 2710; c. 69–58 BCE).³² Although rules may often be drawn up to deal with problems that were actually encountered, the regulations suggest that 'good order'—as defined by such groups—remained a prevalent value in many banqueting settings. So we should not imagine that stories of wild transgression are actually descriptive of real activities in ethnic-based groups or other associations.

b. *'Come! Plunge the knife into the baby': Judeans and Jesus-followers*

Since the classic work on accusations of infanticide against Christians by F.J. Dölger, a number of studies have focused on explaining the Thyestean feasts (cannibalism) and Oedipean unions (incest) mentioned in connection with the martyrs of Lyons, among them the important contributions by Albert Henrichs and Robert M. Grant.³³ More recently, M.J. Edwards and Andrew McGowan have independently focused their attention on the Christian evidence and have come to similar conclusions regarding the origins of these accusations; both scholars challenge the suggestion of Grant and others that the accusations emerged out of a misunderstanding of the actual practices of Christians (namely, a misunderstanding of the eucharist and the custom of addressing one another as 'brother' or 'sister').³⁴ Edwards convincingly argues that it is what the Christians did not do (sacrifice to the gods) that made them stand out as foreign. Dölger was 'correct to surmise that pagan controversialists were filling a lacuna in their knowledge of Christian practices, just as they were wont to attribute every peculiarity to barbarians'.³⁵ Although the accusations against Christians, as well as their Jewish

32. Translation by Colin H. Roberts *et al.*, 'The Gild of Zeus Hypsistos', *HTR* 29 (1936), pp. 39-88 (42), with adaptations.

33. Henrichs, 'Pagan Ritual'. Cf. Albert Henrichs, 'Human Sacrifice in Greek Religion: Three Case Studies', in Jean Rudhardt and Olivier Reverdin (eds.), *Le Sacrifice dans l'Antiquité* (Genève: Vandœuvres, 1981), pp. 195-235; R.M. Grant, 'Charges of "Immorality" Against Various Groups in Antiquity', in R. Broeck and M.J. Vermaseren (eds.), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, vol. 91 (EPRO; Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp. 161-70.

34. Mark J. Edwards, 'Some Early Christian Immoralities', *AncSoc* 23 (1992), pp. 71-82; McGowan, 'Eating People'. The argument against viewing the accusations of incest as a misunderstanding of the supposedly unique use of brother language within Christian groups is further supported, now, by epigraphic evidence. See Philip A. Harland, 'Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: "Brothers" (ἀδελφοί) in Associations of the Greek East', *JBL* 124 (2005), pp. 491-513.

35. Edwards, 'Some Early Christian Immoralities', p. 74; cf. Rives, 'Human Sacrifice'.

precedents, have drawn the attention of many scholars, few have fully addressed these allegations within the context of ethnography and descriptions of dangerous or foreign *associations* specifically. Whereas the material concerning the outlaws in Lollianos' episode has figured somewhat importantly in recent discussions of the Christian evidence, especially Henrich's study,³⁶ few sufficiently place the discussion within the framework of the outlaw or foreign anti-associations discussed here.

It is important to mention some of the Jewish precedents before moving on to allegations against Christians.³⁷ In ethnographic descriptions of the customs of the Judeans, both Damocritos and Apion (or Apion's source) give credence to rumours, or simply create stories, that Judeans engaged in human sacrifice. Attributed to Damocritos (perhaps late first-century CE) is the idea that Judeans worshiped the statue of an ass and that every seven years they 'caught a foreigner and sacrificed him', cutting him into pieces.³⁸ There is a sense in which the accusation of human sacrifice is a short form for notions of Judeans' supposed hostility to foreigners (μισόξενος βίος), as in Hecataeus (c. 300 BCE), and hatred of human kind (μισανθρωπία), as in Apollonios Molon (first century BCE).³⁹

More extensive is the tale of the Judeans' sacrifice of foreigners, namely Greeks, as told by Apion (also first-century) in connection with the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.⁴⁰ According to the supposed report of a fattened escapee, the Judeans had captured this Greek in order to fulfill the 'unutterable law of the Judeans': annually, 'they would kidnap a Greek foreigner, fatten him up for a year, and then convey him to a wood, where they slew him, sacrificed his body with their customary ritual, partook of his flesh, and, while immolating the Greek, swore an oath of hostility to the Greeks' (*Apion* 2.91-96 [LCL]). Here there is once again the reference to making an

36. Henrichs, 'Pagan Ritual'.

37. On accusations against Judeans involving human sacrifice and cannibalism, see Elias Bickerman, 'Ritualmord und Eselskult: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte antiker Publizistik', in his *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* (AGJU, 9; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), pp. 225-55; Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 123-76; Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

38. Translation by Menahem Stern (ed. and trans.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974-84), I, p. 531.

39. Cf. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp. 125-48; Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, pp. 15-17, 21-22, 170-79.

40. Schäfer convincingly argues against Bickerman's view that Apion's story originated in the time of Epiphanes (Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, pp. 62-65; cf. Rives, 'Human Sacrifice', pp. 70-71).

oath on a human victim, which was common in stories of criminal or political conspiracy, such as those associated with Cataline and the bandits in Lollianos' novel. Similar charges continued against Jewish associations in the diaspora specifically, as we have already seen in the case of Dio Cassius' account of the supposed cannibalistic commensal behaviour of Judeans during the revolts in Cyrene, Cyprus, and Egypt.

This brings us, finally, to the anti-banquets attributed to associations devoted to Jesus in the diaspora setting. This is not the place to engage in full analysis of all cases that have been discussed at length in scholarship.⁴¹ Yet it will be worthwhile briefly to outline some of the Christian evidence in order to place it in the context of the present discussion of minority cultural groups and discourses of the other. These accusations, like the stories of bandit anti-associations, political conspiracy, and alien cults, arise from a common stockpile of stereotypes of the threatening other and there is no need to look for any basis in the reality of actual practices.

As early as Pliny the Younger (c. 110 CE), who thinks of the Christians as both an association (*hetaeria*) and an un-Roman 'superstition', there are indications that rumours were circulating about the Christians in Pontus; that is, if we can read Pliny's mention of 'food of an ordinary and harmless kind' as an allusion to a rumoured 'crime' (*flagitium*) of cannibalism (*Ep.* 10.96.7; cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2).⁴² In fact, Pliny seems to have in mind the typical portrait of the criminal, conspiratorial, or low-life association (though not necessarily the Bacchanalia specifically) when he states that these Christians 'bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it' (*Ep.* 10.96.7 [LCL]).⁴³ Around 150 CE, Justin Martyr mentions the accusations of sexual licence and eating of human flesh (*Apol.* 1.26.7). The charges of 'Thyestean feasts' (cannibalism)

41. See, most recently, Henrichs, 'Pagan Ritual'; Stephen Benko, 'Pagan Criticism of Christianity During the First Two Centuries A.D', *ANRW* 2.23.2 (1980), pp. 1055-118; Edwards, 'Early Christian Immoralities'; McGowan, 'Eating People'.

42. On rumours of 'crimes' (*flagitia*), see Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44 and Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2. On Pliny's view of these Christians as a cultic association, see Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 70-72.

43. Robert M. Grant's suggestion that Pliny may actually have in mind Livy's account of the Bacchanalia is less than convincing; still Grant is certainly right that in each case we are seeing Roman stereotypes regarding foreign superstitions or minority groups. See Robert M. Grant, 'Pliny and the Christians', *HTR* 41 (1948), pp. 273-74; cf. Grant, 'Sacrifices and Oaths as Required of Early Christians', in Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (eds.), *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1970), pp. 12-17.

and ‘Oedipean unions’ (incest) are explicit in the letter from the Greek-speaking Christians of Vienne and Lyons to the Christians in Asia and Phrygia concerning the martyrdoms in 177 CE (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.3-2.8).

More explicit and detailed charges of infant sacrifice within associations of Jesus-followers come to the fore in the work of Tertullian and Minucius Felix. In his discussion of Rumour personified, for instance, Tertullian refutes the charges by exaggerating them to show their absurdity: ‘Come! plunge the knife into the baby, nobody’s enemy, guilty of nothing, everybody’s child...catch the infant blood; steep your bread with it; eat and enjoy it’ (*Apol.* 8.2).

In Minucius Felix’s dialogue, Caecilius⁴⁴ critiques the atheistic, Christian ‘gang...of discredited and proscribed desperadoes (*deploratae, illicitae ac desperatae factionis*)’ (*Octavius* 8.3 [LCL]). They consist of the dregs of society and women, who are also considered ‘profane conspirators (*profanae coniurationis*) leagued together by meetings at night and ritual fasts’ (8.3-4). This ‘superstition’ (*superstitio*) is a ‘promiscuous “brotherhood” and “sisterhood” (*fratres et sorores*)’ that worship an ass and adore the genitals of their high priest (9.2-4).

The initiation of new members takes place in a sacrificial banquet that once again echoes the anti-banquets we have seen in both novels and historical or ethnographic sources:

An infant, cased in dough to deceive the unsuspecting, is placed beside the person to be initiated. The novice is thereupon induced to inflict what seems to be harmless blows upon the dough, and unintentionally the infant is killed by his unsuspecting blows; the blood—oh, horrible—they lap up greedily; the limbs they tear to pieces eagerly; and over the victim they make league and covenant, and by complicity in guilt pledge themselves to mutual silence (*Octavius* 9.5-6 [LCL]).

Finally, reminiscent of Livy’s tales of the Bacchanalia, Caecilius speaks of the Christians’ banquets in more detail, in which people of all ages and both sexes mingle and, after feasting, ‘when the blood is heated and drink has inflamed the passions of incestuous lust’ the lamps are overturned and indiscriminate, incestuous sexual escapades take place in the dark (*Octavius* 9.6-7).

In many respects, then, what we are witnessing with these allegations against Christians is the convergence of several factors: ethnographic stereotypes of the alien or immigrant cultic association (e.g. Bacchanalia), common allegations against Judean cultural groups specifically, and novelistic or popular stories of the internal threat often associated with criminal or

44. Caecilius’ opinions may draw on an earlier source by Marcus Cornelius Fronto (c. 100–166 CE; cf. *Octavius* 9.6 and Benko, ‘Pagan Criticism’, p. 1081).

low-life anti-associations. In virtually all the cases dealt with throughout this essay, the inversion or perversion of the shared meal, along with inherent sacrificial connections, stands out as a symbol of the group's relation to surrounding society, as a sign of an anti-societal threat and the epitome of social and religious disorder.

*Jewish and Christian Critique of 'Pagan'
Associations and 'Heretical' Groups*

Somewhat more restrained, though related, is what we could call a backlash in the form of moral critique of 'pagan' associations by some Jewish and Christian authors, which also emphasize disorderly convivial activities of associations. Once again, it is by characterizing outsiders as dangerous and barbarous that particular Jewish or Christian authors engage in the expression of their own identities over against the stereotyped image of the non-Judean or non-Christian. Thus, for instance, Philo's account of the gatherings of the Jewish Therapeutai in Egypt draws out a comparison and contrast with the 'frenzy and madness' of the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian banquets and drinking parties (*Contempl.* 40-41).⁴⁵ For Philo, the associations specifically were 'founded on no sound principle but on strong liquor, drunkenness, intoxicated violence and their offspring, wantonness' (*Flacc.* 136-37 [trans. adapted from LCL]; cf. *Legat.* 312-13).⁴⁶ Though there may be truth in the fact that drunkenness was a part of the religious and social celebrations of associations, scholars need to refrain from adopting the moralists' critique as a sign that the associations were all about partying and could not care less about honouring the gods.⁴⁷ Far less restrained, though drawing on the same stockpile of stereotypes of the anti-association, are some Christian attacks on other Christians who were considered heretics, including the Montanists and 'gnostics'.⁴⁸

45. Cf. Torrey Seland, 'Philo and the Clubs and Associations of Alexandria', in John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 110-27.

46. Compare Tertullian's defence of the Christian association (*factio, corpus*) against accusations such as those mentioned earlier. The defence includes his retort that financial contributions made by members of Christian associations are 'not spent upon banquets nor drinking-parties nor thankless eating-houses', but on helping the poor and facilitating burial of the dead (*Apol.* 39.5-6 and 38-39 [LCL]).

47. Martin P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1957), is among those who tend to adopt the moralistic critique of ancient authors. See Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, pp. 55-87; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*.

48. See Dölger, '“Sacramentum infanticidii”', pp. 217-23. On the Montanists' sacrifice of children or use of childrens' blood, see, for instance, Philastrius, *Diversarum*

Conclusions

This trio of ritual atrocity (human sacrifice, cannibalism, and sexual perversion) has a long history in discourses of the other and the trio raises its head again not only in accusations against Jews, ‘heretics’, and witches in the medieval and early modern periods, for instance, but also in the more recent ‘Satanic ritual abuse’ scare of the 1980s, as recently discussed by David Frankfurter.⁴⁹

Frankfurter notes how even academic scholarship has sometimes bought into the rhetoric of such charges, including the ancient cases discussed here. Thus, scholars might (in less blatant terms) join with Franz Cumont in speaking of the ‘return to savagery’ characteristic of mystery cults, or claim that, with the ‘adoption of the Oriental mysteries, barbarous, cruel and obscene practices were undoubtedly spread’.⁵⁰ Essentially, we are seeing the rhetoric of the likes of Livy about threatening and abhorrent foreign rites in a new guise. In a similar vein and also in connection with ‘mysteries’ (in Lollianos), Henrichs expressed a belief that ‘even slanderous accounts of ritual performances can be used as reliable evidence of *actual religious practices in antiquity* if interpreted properly, and that the uniform pattern in the various rumors of ritual murder points to *concrete rites* that were celebrated by ethnic or tribal minorities’.⁵¹ Similarly, Stephen Benko gives credence to accounts of wild sexual and commensal activities, even the most

hereseon 49.5; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48.14.5-6; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 16.8. The Manichees were also charged with ‘sacrificing men in demonic mysteries’ (Theodore bar Konai [seventh century CE]; Alfred Adam, *Texte zum Manichaismus* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969]).

49. David Frankfurter, ‘Ritual as Accusation and Atrocity: Satanic Ritual Abuse, Gnostic Libertinism, and Primal Murders’, *HR* 40 (2001), pp. 352-81. Thus, for instance, one first-hand account of the supposed ceremony of a Satanist cult group relates how ‘The service continued to increase in intensity always resulting in the sexual molestation of children on the altar and during some ceremonies the killing of those children’. A recent ‘professional’ definition of Satanic ritual abuse (from 2000) refers to the supposed commonality of ‘the actual or simulated killing or mutilation of a person [and] forced ingestion of real or simulated human body fluids, excrement or flesh’ (both cited in Frankfurter, ‘Ritual as Accusation’, pp. 357-58).

50. Franz Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 6; see Frankfurter, ‘Ritual as Accusation’, pp. 363-65.

51. Henrichs, ‘Pagan Ritual’, p. 33 (italics mine). Henrichs (‘Human Sacrifice’) seems to back away from this suggestion in a later publication that again deals with human sacrifice and Lollianos. It is worth noting Henrichs’s greater caution in his assessment of whether or not the tearing apart and consumption of the raw flesh of animals took place within real-life groups of bacchantes. With reference to epigraphic evidence concerning actual groups of maenads, he answers clearly in the negative in Albert Henrichs, ‘Greek Maenadism from Olympos to Messalina’, *HSCP* 82 (1978), pp. 121-60.

extreme ones described by Epiphanius in his critique of the ‘gnostic’ Phibionites (*Panarion* 26).⁵² In this problematic view, such accounts refer to actual rituals that were practiced in some fringe groups.

Instead, the approach here has been to emphasize the manner in which charges of wild transgression are part of a more encompassing discourse that reflects the methods and rhetoric of ancient ethnography in order to describe and distance the ‘other’ from one’s own cultural group. In the process, the activities of others are defined as dangerous inversions of social and religious order. The anti-association or anti-banquet idea is part of this overall strategy.

In light of this understanding of the charges in terms of discourses of the other, it is important to reiterate some meanings of these discourses. Mary Douglas has taught us how views of the body, including issues of the consumption of food, reflect views of society and the boundaries within and around society.⁵³ Moreover, the boundaries that are violated in the ritual murder and consumption of fellow humans can symbolize the destruction of society itself. It is the prior understanding of the other as a dangerous threat to society that leads ancient authors, whether in history or fiction, to draw on a common stockpile of typical anti-societal actions, cannibalism being the ultimate offence. Allegations of destroying and consuming humanity itself are another way of reinforcing the notion that these groups should be labeled as criminal or barbaric threats. Within the context of such discourses, we have seen that small social-religious groups of outlaws or associations of foreigners or immigrants specifically can play a noteworthy role in representing the alien or criminal threat within.

Evidently, banqueting practices played an important role in discourses of identity, in which certain authors, representative in some ways of their cultural group, engaged in the process of defining his or her own group as civilized by alienating another as barbarous. These authors of both fiction and history played on what was commonly expected social and religious behaviour within associations by presenting alien associations or low-life criminal guilds as the inversion of all that was pious and right. Ritual murder and the accompanying cannibalistic meal, symbolic of inverting piety and destroying society itself, stand out as the epitome of the anti-banquet. Tales of this sort, informed by ethnographic discourses, were frightening precisely because they represented a distortion of the goals of most associations, namely, the intimately related goals of appropriately honouring the gods (through sacrifice) and feasting with friends. Sometimes, both Judean synagogues and Christian groups were targets of this technique of defining

52. Benko, ‘Pagan Criticism’, pp. 1087-89.

53. Douglas, *Natural Symbols*.

oneself over against the other, primarily due to the foreignness of their non-participation in honouring, or sacrificing to, the Greek or Roman gods, because of their monotheism. Yet, some Judean and Christian authors employed similar techniques in defining themselves as the civilized ones and others, whether external or internal opponents, as the barbarians.