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Perceptions of Cultural Minorities

Anti-Associations and Their Banquets

Introduction

“These people are Antropophagos [*sic*] or Men Eaters.” This quotation is found on a map of inland Africa in William Snelgrave’s travel report of 1734, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade*.¹ At this point, inland Africa was, in reality, unknown to Britons. Yet the characterization of peoples living in a “Kingdom of Temian” as cannibals illustrates common processes of “othering,” identity formulation, and boundary marking that were also at work in antiquity.

These processes of describing foreign peoples or cultural minority groups as barbarous and threatening outsiders are reflected in Greek novels, histories, and ancient ethnographic materials. Here “ethnography” refers to ancient writings claiming to describe the customs of other ethnic groups or cultural minorities. In this chapter, I examine how cultural minority groups such as Judean (Jewish) gatherings and Christian congregations could, at times, be a target in these processes of identity construction and expression. Judeans and Christians were involved within ethnic rivalries in the ancient context.

Identity theorists are concerned not only with internal group identification, which has been the primary occupation in many chapters here, but also with how those outside a particular group categorize or label that group or its members.² Internally, I have shown numerous ways in which members of Judean gatherings and Christian congregations defined themselves and expressed group identity within a broader context. It is important to note that group identities could sometimes be expressed in ways that converged with certain external perceptions of synagogues and congregations, as I demonstrated regarding shared terminology and self-designations.

In this chapter, I turn to some negative aspects of external perceptions and consider how external processes of categorization were at work in the case of cultural minorities such as Judeans and followers of Jesus. I have already touched on the significance of ethnic stereotyping in discussing ethnic groups such as Syrians, Phoenicians, and Judeans. Social

1. See Wheeler 1999, 16–17.

2. On this, see especially Tajfel 1981; Hagendoorn 1993; Jenkins 1994.

and ethnic identity theorists, including Henri Tajfel and Richard Jenkins, stress that 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 and in the redefinition of group boundaries.

On the other hand, the act of describing those outside 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. So once again this pertains to issues of identity. Yet this chapter focusses on identity from the perspective of how some outsiders described peoples outside of their own group, peoples who were sometimes considered barbarous or dangerous.

Social customs of eating and banquets of associations specifically could play an important role in such discourses of "the other," discourses concerning other peoples or groups considered foreign in some way. In fact, accusations of cannibalism, together with accompanying notions of human sacrifice, were a recurring element in how certain people presented the identities of others—some Christians among them—as destructive to the very fabric of civilized society.

Mary Douglas's anthropological work on the ways in which the human, physical body and activities affecting the body (including eating, sexual customs, etc.) are representative of society and representations of society is suggestive here.³ From this body/society correspondence-theory perspective, the accusation of eating the human body can be interpreted as the equivalent of charging others with destroying human society itself.

The meal practices of small 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 categorizations and 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 cultural minority groups, such as the Judeans of Cyrene who were accused of eating human flesh and making belts from the entrails of their victims and the early Christian groups who were charged with Oedipean unions (incest) and Thyestean feasts (cannibalism).

3. Douglas 1973, 93–112.

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.”⁴ 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 cultural minority groups, on the other. In some novels ancient fiction writers specifically have associations in mind (whether an occupational guild, a cultic society, a foreign group, or a mixture of these) when they tell tales of such wild meetings and banquets, particularly in connection with brigands or bandits (*latrones* in Latin, λησται in Greek).⁵ In essence, the villainous group can be presented as the antitype 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 (the “anti-association,” as I call it), setting the stage for an evaluation of similar charges against real-life cultural minority groups and associations.

“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” (*Met.* 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” (*Met.* 6.31; also see 4.15; 7.1, 7, 8).⁶ 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 (*Met.* 4.8).

Here we are witnessing an inversion of common Greek banqueting values. The brigands are characterized as excessive and subhuman in their banqueting manners, as the comparison with the feast of the Lapiths and Centaurs indicates. The wedding celebration of

4. Stephens and Winkler 1995, 7.

5. On brigands in fiction see, most recently, Henrichs 1970, 18–35; Winkler 1980, 155–81; Jones 1980, 243–54; Bertrand 1988, 139–49; Hopwood 1998, 195–204; Trinquier 1999, 257–77; Watanabe 2003. On accusations of banditry as a metaphor for the “de-stated” or “barbaric” nonperson, see Shaw 1984, 3–52.

6. Trans. Hanson 1989 (LCL).



Figure 19. Architrave depicting a struggle between a Lapith and Centaur, from the Parthenon at Athens, now in the British Museum (fifth cent. BCE)

Peirithous, a Lapith, ended in utter violence between the two peoples as a result of the drunken behaviour of a Centaur. 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.⁷ Pictured in figure 19 is a struggle between a Lapith and a Centaur as portrayed above the architrave of the Parthenon at Athens (fifth cent. BCE).

The main characteristic of the situation in Apuleius's novel is that disorder prevails within the association, or *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 in his *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" (*Met.* 7.5; cf. Herodotus *Hist.* 4.64).

7. Cf. Homer *Od.* 21.285–304; Pausanias *Descr.* 1.17.2; 1.28.2; 5.10.8.

"They Sacrificed a Human Being and Partook of the Flesh"

Particularly common in portraits of the antibanquets 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 cultural minority groups, in narratives of conspiracy (which effectively barbarize certain Greeks or Romans), and in narratives with entertainment purposes, such as 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 versus civilization and of piety versus "superstition" or "magic" (namely, activities perceived as inappropriate ritual practice).⁸ 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 insofar as they clarify notions of supposed 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*).⁹ The instigators of the sacrifice in this fragment are never expressly called brigands, even though most scholars who have dealt with the passage assume so.¹⁰ 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 Reinhold Merkelbach, reflected in Henrichs), nor with those who, in reaction, tend to downplay the author's explicit references to mysteries (e.g., Winkler and C. P. Jones).¹¹ 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 discussed in previous chapters. As I show in connection 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.¹²

8. Rives 1995, 65–85.

9. *POxy* 1368 + *PColon* 3328 (here the focus is on the narrative in B₁ recto). For a critical edition of the text see Henrichs 1972 and, most recently, Stephens and Winkler 1995, 314–57 (with Greek text and extensive commentary).

10. Henrichs goes further in identifying them with the brigand "cowherds" (βουκόλοι) attested in Dio Cassius and in other novels (Henrichs 1970, 33, 35). On the problems with that view, see Stephens and Winkler 1995, 319–21.

11. E.g., Merkelbach 1995. See the critique in Winkler 1980; Jones 1980; Beck 1996, 131–50.

12. On ritual murder and Mithras, see Vermaseren 1963, 166–68; Turcan 1981, 350 nn. 6–7. On "jars of human flesh" accidentally discovered in the temple of Bellona (often identified with the Capadocian goddess Ma), see Dio Cassius 42.26.2–3.

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 (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.¹³

As Henrichs points out, this whole sacrificial scene follows the usual Greek pattern of sacrifice, including the central importance of the internal organs or entrails (*σπλάγχνα*).¹⁴ 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 in honour of the gods, is the fact that it is a human, rather than an 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).¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

Cataline was among the main political opponents of Cicero (for the consulship, the highest political position at that time) in the city of Rome during the Republican era (in the 60s BCE). Legends about his conspiratorial activities involving human sacrifice developed over time: 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); 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* [child or servant] and after administering the oath over his vitals, ate these in company with the others” (37.30.3).¹⁷ Such accusations against one’s compatriots were a succinct way of placing opponents, or disliked

13. *PColon* 3328, B 1 recto, lines 9–16. Trans. Stephens and Winkler 1995, 338–41.

14. Henrichs 1970, 33–34.

15. Both Jones and Stephens and Winkler point out some striking similarities between the story here and that in Apuleius’s *Met.* (esp. 4.8–33), including a reference to Lapiths as prototypes of unruly banqueters, such that some literary relation is likely (see Jones 1980; Winkler 1980; Stephens and Winkler 1995, 322–25).

16. Cf. Dölger 1934, 207–10; Rives 1995, 72–73; Diodorus Siculus 22.3.5; Plutarch *Publ.* 4.1; Philostratus *Vit. Apoll.* 7.11, 20, 33.

17. Trans. Rolfe 1921 (LCL); Perrin 1916–20 (LCL); Cary 1960–84 (LCL).

politicians of the past, beyond the pale of humanity and civilization, a way of “barbarizing” a fellow Greek or Roman, as Rives puts it.¹⁸

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” (*Ephesiaka* 2.13). In this case, their intended victim is saved at the last moment by the police chief of the region of Cilicia in Asia Minor, who has most of the brigands killed.

Another instance involves a close call, but in Achilles Tatius’s second-century novel (ca. 150–175 CE) the sacrifice apparently takes place.¹⁹ This episode includes the bandit “herdsmen” or “cowherds” (βουκόλοι) of the Egyptian Delta, based at a place called Nikochis (*Leuc. Clit.* 4.12.8). It combines the internal threat of robbers with the common fear of “barbarian” (here non-Greek) peoples which is characteristic of ancient travel literature, or ethnography. The “cowherds,” 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 he and his travelling companions 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” (ιερεύς), 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)²⁰

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

18. Rives 1995, 73. On the “political cannibal” see McGowan 1994, 431–33.

19. Cf. Bertrand 1988.

20. Trans. Winkler in Reardon 1989, 216.

The sacrifice of a virgin was, in part,²¹ to be the “initiation” of these two men into the brigand association, as the chief brigand (ληστάρχος) informed them: “We have a tradition that sacrifices, especially human sacrifices, must be performed by the newly initiated (πρωτομύσται).” “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 “cowherds” 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.²² We know from Strabo that there were indeed people that went by the designation “cowherds” (βουκόλοι) in the Egyptian Delta region before the time of Augustus. Yet these are initially described as herdspeople who were also brigands (λησταί) in a matter-of-fact manner with no elaboration on any extreme social or ritual 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; 17.1.19).

Now a papyrus scroll from the Egyptian Delta confirms ongoing references to these brigands in 166/167 CE, where they are described by an outsider as “the impious Neikokeitai (τῶν ἀνοσίων Νεικωκεϊτῶν),” which is in keeping with the base at Nikochis which Tatius mentions in his novel.²³ The same descriptive term, “impious” (ἀνοσίος), is used of the Judeans in connection with the revolt under Trajan, by the way. Furthermore, another second-century papyrus contains an oracle that deals with disturbances and seems to refer to the death of “cowherds,” presumably as part of the solution to the disturbance.²⁴ By the time Dio Cassius writes his history (ca. 211–222 CE), then, there has been opportunity for the development of tales surrounding these threatening figures of the Delta. As Winkler convincingly argues, we are here witnessing a case of “history imitating story,” more so than the other way around.²⁵

Dio’s account of a revolt in 172/173 CE involving the “cowherds” happens to mention that the group was led by an Egyptian priest (ιερέυς) Isidorus.²⁶ Dio claims that some of the “cowherds” 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”

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

22. On the “cowherds,” also see Heliodorus *An Ethiopian Story* (cf. Xenophon *An Ephesian Tale* 3.12); Winkler 1980, 175–81; Bowersock 1994, 51–53; Frankfurter 1998, 207–8; Rutherford 2000.

23. See Fuks 1953, 157–58.

24. *PThmouis* 1, col. 104, line 13 and col. 116, lines 4–5. See Shelton 1976, 209–13; Frankfurter 1998, 208 n. 46; cf. Bertrand 1988; Bowersock 1994, 53.

25. Winkler 1980, 178. Cf. Herodotus *Hist.* 4.106, describing the so-called Androphagi.

26. This priestly leadership of the group seems to be echoed in Heliodorus’s fictional narrative in which the brigand chief Thyamis is the son of a high priest of Memphis (*An Ethiopian Story* 1.19; cf. Frankfurter 1998, 208). The account in Tatius, discussed above, likewise mentions the presence of a priest within the group.

peoples: “They also sacrificed his [the centurion’s] companion, and after swearing an oath over his entrails, they devoured them” (Dio Cassius 72.4.1–2).²⁷

Furthermore, there seems to be some consistency in Dio’s choice of the charge of human sacrifice and cannibalism against supposedly barbarous peoples in connection with revolts specifically. For when he describes the revolt of Judeans 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: Dio 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, that Dio’s account of the “cowherds” illustrates so well extends to other supposed historical accounts and popular reports concerning real-life associations and cultural minorities.

Accusations of Wild Transgression and Cultural Minority Groups

“Away . . . You Who Suck Men’s Blood”

Notorious is the case of the suppression of worshippers of Bacchus, namely Dionysos, in Rome and Italy beginning in 186 BCE (Livy *Hist. Rom.* 39.8–19). Many studies have struggled with historical, political, ritual, and other dimensions of Livy’s account of the Bacchanalia and with the epigraphic decree concerning actions by the Roman senate, which shows that Livy is not making the whole thing up.²⁸ 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 the Roman historian Livy, in about 20 BCE, presents this particular case as a story of a “foreign” (Greek) association threatening the Roman way of life and contributing to moral decline.²⁹ 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. It is important to consider to what degree the charges of ritual murder and sexual perversion may be a consequence of Livy’s ethnographic, artistic, or novelistic license.

It is important to note the position 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. From Livy’s perspective, the moral decline was due, in large part, to the influence of foreign ways and featured, in particular,

27. Trans. Cary 1960–84 (LCL).

28. See, more recently, North 1979, 85–103; Rousselle 1982; Gruen 1990, 34–78; Walsh 1996, 188–203.

29. Cf. Dio Cassius, 52.36.2.

imported styles of convivial entertainment and elaborate banquets from “Asia” (*Hist. Rom.* 39.6).³⁰ 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 regarding the relative reliability of two main sections of the narrative, between the first, longer section (*Livy Hist. Rom.* 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’s] report, whereas what follows is based on senatorial records, and is more solidly historical.”³¹ It is precisely in the former, novelistic section that descriptions of wild activities of the association are elaborated in most lurid detail.

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 then 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).³² Among the ongoing jokes in Plautus about the dangers of Bacchic orgies (also cited in this section’s subtitle) is one character’s statement: “Away from me, sisters [bacchantes], you who suck men’s blood.”³³

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 [revealer of sacred objects] of secret ceremonies performed at night” (*Livy Hist. Rom.* 39.8).³⁴ The initiations, Livy continues, “soon began to be widespread among men and women. The pleasures of drinking and feasting were added to the rituals 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 judgement, 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 spells 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.³⁵ First, Livy has Hispala outline the crimes in private to warn the initiate-to-be, her lover, Aebutius (*Livy Hist. Rom.* 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

30. Cf. Walsh 1996, 189–90.

31. Walsh 1996, 193.

32. Gruen 1990, 62; Walsh 1996, 192.

33. *Bacchides* 52ff., 368ff., as cited by Walsh 1996.

34. Trans. Bettenson 1976, with minor adaptations (text in Sage 1965).

35. Cf. North 1979, 88–90; Gruen 1990, 61–65.

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, 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’s account of the Judeans’ supposed “unlawful” sexual behaviour (*Hist.* 5.5.2; cf. *Martial Epigr.* 7.30).³⁶ 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, are again at 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 and been uncovered (such as the rule of the Iobacchoi at Athens sketched in figure 20) are concerned with issues of order and decorum in meetings, rituals, and banquets.³⁷ 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 another’s pedigrees at the

36. Cf. Tertullian *Marc.*, 1, where Tertullian speaks of the unusual sexual practices of the people of Pontus in an attempt to critique his Christian opponent, Marcion of Pontus.

37. See, for instance, the regulations of the *collegium* devoted to Diana and Antinoos 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. Boak 1937, 210–19; Dennis E. Smith 2003, 97–131.

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; ca. 69–58 BCE).³⁸ 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 descriptive of real activities in immigrant or cultural minority groups, or in other associations.

“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.³⁹ 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—eating the body and blood of Christ—and the custom of addressing one another as “brother” or “sister”).⁴⁰ Edwards convincingly argues that it is what the Christians did *not* do—that they did not sacrifice to or fully acknowledge the gods of the Greeks and Romans—that made them stand out as foreign. Dölger was “correct to surmise that pagan controversialists were filling a lacuna in their knowledge of Christian practice, just as they were wont to attribute every peculiarity to barbarians.”⁴¹

Although the accusations against Christians, as well as their Judean precedents, have drawn the attention of many scholars, few fully address these allegations within the framework of ethnography and descriptions of dangerous or foreign *associations* specifically. Whereas the material concerning the outlaws in Lollianos’s episode figure somewhat importantly in recent discussions of the Christian evidence, especially Henrich’s study,⁴² few sufficiently place the discussion within the framework of the outlaw or foreign anti-associations discussed here. Nor have these ethnographic discourses and accusations been explained within the framework of theories of social identity and external categorization, which I have outlined in connection with stereotypes about Syrians and others in chapter 5.

Returning to these ancient instances of social categorization, it is important to outline some of the Judean precedents before moving on to allegations against others who hon-

38. Trans. Roberts, Skeat, and Nock 1936, 42, with adaptations.

39. Henrichs 1970. Cf. Henrichs 1981, 195–235; Grant 1981, 161–70.

40. Edwards 1992, 71–82; McGowan 1994. See chapter 3 in this volume, which shows the difficulties in assuming that the Christian practice of calling one another “brother” was unique (which is an assumption behind Grant’s theory).

41. Edwards 1992, 74; cf. Rives 1995.

42. Henrichs 1970.



Figure 20. Sketch of the rules of the Bacchic association (Iobacchoi) at Athens, from Harrison 1906, figure 25.

oured the Judean God, namely, followers of Jesus.⁴³ Many ancient ethnographic descriptions of the Judeans by Greek, Egyptian, and other authors have been gathered together in Menahem Stern's *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (1974–84) and have been recently discussed in works such as Peter Schäfer's *Judeophobia* (1997). These descriptions provide important evidence regarding external categorizations and stereotypes regarding Judeans.

In discussing 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 the Greek author 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.⁴⁴ There is a sense in which the accusation of human sacrifice is a short form for notions of Judeans' supposed hostility

43. On such accusations against Judeans, see Bickerman 1980, 225–55; Feldman 1993, 123–76; Peter Schäfer 1997.

44. Trans. by Stern 1974–84, 1.531.

to foreigners (μισόξενος βίος), as in Hecataeus (ca. 300 BCE), and hatred of human kind (μισανθρωπία), as in Apollonios Molon (first century BCE).⁴⁵

More extensive is the tale of the Judeans' sacrifice of foreigners, namely Greeks, as told by Apion (contemporary of Philo in first-century Alexandria, Egypt). This Apion authored works that critiqued the ways of Judeans and others; this spurred a response by Josephus, appropriately called *Against Apion*. Apion also played a more direct role as an ambassador for the Greeks of Alexandria in their rivalries with local Judeans, which I mentioned in chapter 1 in connection with Philo's role as ambassador for the Judeans.

Apion's account of an incident in connection with the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (160s BCE) claims to be based on the report of a fattened escapee.⁴⁶ According to the story, 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" (Josephus *C. Ap.* 2.91–96).⁴⁷

Here there is once again the reference to making an 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's novel. Similar charges continued against Judean associations in the diaspora specifically. We have already seen this in the case of Dio Cassius's 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 another set of cultural minority groups with Judean connections in the diaspora setting: followers of Jesus. This is not the place to engage in full analysis of all cases that have been discussed at length in scholarship.⁴⁸ 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 cultural minority 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 (ca. 110 CE), who as we saw in chapter 1 thinks of the Christians as both an "association" and an un-Roman or foreign "superstition," there are indications that rumours were circulating about the Christians in Pontus. At least this seems to be the case, 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 (Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.7; cf. Tacitus *Ann.* 15.44.2).⁴⁹ 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

45. Texts in Stern 1974–84. Cf. Feldman 1993, 125–48; Peter Schäfer 1997, 15–17, 21–22, 170–79.

46. Schäfer convincingly argues against Bickerman's view that Apion's story originated in the time of Epiphanes (Schäfer 1997, 62–65; cf. Rives 1995, 70–71).

47. Trans. Thackeray 1926 (LCL).

48. See, most recently, Henrichs 1970; Benko 1980, 1055–118; Edwards 1992; McGowan 1994.

49. On rumours of "crimes" (*flagitia*), see Tacitus *Ann.* 15.44 and Suetonius *Nero* 16.2.

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).⁵⁰

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) 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. There the accused are also charged with "atheism" (ἄθεος) and "impiety" (ἄσεβής; Eusebius *HE* 5.1.3–5.2.8).

More explicit and detailed charges of infant sacrifice within associations of Jesus-followers come to the fore in the writings of Tertullian and in 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, Caecilius critiques the atheistic, Christian "gang . . . of discredited and proscribed desperadoes" (*deploratae, illicitae ac desperatae factionis*) (*Octavius* 8.3).⁵¹ 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" (*Oct.* 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 (*Oct.* 9.2–4).

According to Caecilius, 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 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. (*Oct.* 9.5–6)

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. 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 (*Oct.* 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 "foreign"

50. Trans. Radice 1969 (LCL). I am not convinced by Robert M. Grant's suggestion that Pliny may actually have in mind Livy's account of the Bacchanalia (Grant 1948, 273–74; cf. Grant 1970, 12–17).

51. Trans. Glover and Rendall 1931 (LCL). Caecilius's opinions may draw on an earlier source by Marcus Cornelius Fronto (ca. 100–166 CE), on which see *Oct.* 9.6 and Benko 1980, 1081.

association (e.g., Bacchanalia), common allegations against Judean groups specifically, and novelistic or popular stories of the internal threat often associated with criminal or low-life anti-associations. Overall, this is part of the process of Greek or Roman self-definition by means of external categorizations of foreign peoples or cultural minority groups, in this case Christians. In virtually all the cases in this chapter, 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.

The reactions of certain Judeans and Christians, including Tertullian, to such stereotypes can be placed within the context of social identity theory regarding the relation of external categorizations to internal self-definition. Jenkins outlines a variety of scenarios in how members of a particular cultural minority group react to and internalize external attempts at categorization, categorizations which may be positive, neutral, or pejorative. There are cases when external categorizations overlap significantly with some internal modes of self-identification, as we saw in connection with Judean gatherings and Christian congregations as associations in chapter 1. In such cases of overlap, there may be ready assimilation of external categories to internal identifications and, as Jenkins notes, "some degree of external reinforcement or validation is crucial for the successful maintenance of internal (group) definitions."⁵²

At the other end of the continuum are active attempts to resist or reject negative external categorizations. This is what we are seeing in the likes of Justin and Tertullian, who focus on rebutting characterizations of Jesus-followers. Yet even in such cases of resistance, the categorization nonetheless plays a role in internal reconfigurations of self-definition: "the very act of defying categorization, of striving for an autonomy of self-identification, is, of course, an effect of being categorized in the first place. The rejected external definition is internalized, but paradoxically, as the focus of denial."⁵³

Judean and Christian Critique of the Associations of "Others"

Furthermore, there is something that we could call a backlash in the form of moral critique of the associations of others by some Judean and Christian authors. Like the stereotypes about minority groups, this critique also emphasizes disorderly or dangerous convivial activities of the associations of others. Judeans and Christians themselves engaged in ethnic rivalries. Once again, it is by characterizing outside groups as dangerous and barbarous that particular Judean or Christian authors engage in the expression of their own identities over against the stereotyped image of other cultural or ethnic groups, such as Greeks, Romans, Canaanites, and Egyptians. Categorizing others in negative terms contributes towards internal group self-definition and the negotiation of boundaries between "us" and "them."

Writing some time in the first century BCE or CE, for instance, the author of the *Wisdom of Solomon* describes the "detestable" activities of those who inhabited the "holy land"

52. Jenkins 1994, 216.

53. Jenkins 1994, 217.

before the arrival of the Israelites (the Canaanites, predecessors of the Phoenicians). It seems that this gives this Judean author opportunity to critique contemporary associations or societies of initiates outside of the Judean sphere in the process, calling on the same sort of stereotypes we have seen in Greek or Roman slander against Judeans (with the help of certain passages in the Hebrew Bible which also accuse Canaanites of similar things). God “hated them for practicing the most detestable things—deeds of sorcery and unholy rites (τελετὰς ἀνοσίου), merciless slaughters of children, sacrificial feasting on human flesh and blood—those initiates from the midst of a society (ἐκ μέσου μύστας θιάσου) and parents who murder helpless lives, you willed to destroy . . .” (Wis 12:4–5; cf. Wis 14:15–23).⁵⁴

At the same time, personified Wisdom herself is an initiate of another, superior kind, an “initiate (μύστις) in the knowledge of God” (Wis 8:4). Elsewhere the author critiques the “idolatry” of Greeks generally, the “impious ones” (ἄσεβοῦς) who do not know such “divine mysteries” (2:22) and who instead establish their own inferior “mysteries and rites” (μυστήρια καὶ τελετάς; 14:15): “For whether performing ritual murders of children or secret mysteries or frenzied revels connected with strange laws, they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either kill one another by treachery or grieve one another by adultery” (Wis 14:23–24). Once again, ritual murder and sexual perversion converge in this characterization of the associations of another ethnic group.

Torrey Seland’s (1996) study explores evidence for associations in Philo’s writings, where Philo compares Judean and other associations. Philo paints a negative picture of the associations of outsiders. Thus, for instance, Philo’s account of the gatherings of the Judean therapeutists in Egypt draws out a comparison of the therapeutists’ “synods and symposia” with the “frenzy and madness” of the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian banquets and drinking parties (*Vit. Cont.* 40–41). For Philo, who views Judean gatherings as associations of a superior kind, the associations of others were “founded on no sound principle but on strong liquor, drunkenness, intoxicated violence and their offspring, wantonness” (*Flacc.* 136–37).⁵⁵

In a manner similar to the stories discussed earlier, Philo also accuses non-Judean associations in Egypt of conspiratorial activity: “the associations and synods (ἐταιρείας καὶ συνόδους) [in Alexandria] . . . were constantly holding feasts under pretext of sacrifice in which drunkenness vented itself in political intrigue” (*Flacc.* 4). Philo is also sounding a bit like other upper-class authors such as Pliny the Younger, cited in chapter 1. In fact, in this particular case, Philo is identifying with, and assessing positively, the actions of Flaccus, the Roman imperial prefect (governor) of Egypt. Flaccus had engaged in actions to control some associations that were under the benefactor Isidoros of Alexandria (another ambassador for the Greeks in opposition to the Judeans); these associations had happened to engage in rivalries with Judean groups in Alexandria (cf. *Flacc.* 135–45).⁵⁶

This attempt to compare a minority group with associations while simultaneously claiming the superiority of the minority group and the inferiority of outside groups is also reflected in sections of Tertullian’s *Apology*. Tertullian defends the Christian association

54. Trans. NETS, with adaptations.

55. Cf. *Spec. leg.* 2.145–48; *Leg. Gai.* 312–13.

56. On Isodoros, who went from a supporter of Flaccus to a key opponent, also see the so-called *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* (Musurillo 1954, 98, 117–40; cf. Philo *Flacc.* 137–38).

(*factio, corpus*), in part, by portraying other associations negatively. For instance, he claims 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).⁵⁷

Though there may be truth in the fact that drinking was a part of the celebrations of associations, scholars need to refrain from adopting the moralists’ critique as a sign that Greco-Roman or Egyptian associations were all about partying and could not care less about honouring the gods.⁵⁸ With both Philo and Tertullian, we are witnessing the expression of Judean or Christian identities in relation to the associations in a way that illustrates the internalization of external categorizations that I outlined in chapter 1. As well, we are seeing resistance to certain aspects of other external categorizations such as the stereotypes discussed here.

Struggles between Different Minority Groups: Intergroup Rivalries among Christians

There are also times when these ethnographic discourses and rivalries play a role in internal struggles and boundary definitions among different cultural minority groups. Early Christian groups, for instance, struggled to establish their own legitimacy and find a place for themselves in contradistinction to other followers of Jesus whose practices they considered unacceptable, dangerous, or “heretical” in some way.⁵⁹

Here there are similar strategies in the social categorization of others as part of the process of group self-definition and differentiation. Epiphanius’s fourth-century rhetorical attacks on the supposed devilish rituals of the Christian Phibionites is among the most extreme cases.⁶⁰ There Epiphanius describes in gory detail how “they even foul their assembly, if you please, with dirt from promiscuous fornication; and they eat and handle both human flesh and uncleanness” (*Pan.* 26.3.3).⁶¹ The account in *Panarion* (26.3.3–5.7) culminates in Epiphanius’s discussion of this group’s supposed ritual slaughter and consumption of the unwanted fetuses that resulted from the sexual rites of the group.

Yet the Christian groups that, ultimately, became marginalized and lost the struggle also made use of similar charges against other followers of Jesus. The second-century *Gospel of Judas* is a case in point. This is among the documents often labelled “gnostic,” and it shares in common with other writings of this type the notion that the Judean god of the Bible who created this world (the demiurge, named “Saklas” in this writing) is not the same

57. Trans. Glover and Rendall 1931 (LCL).

58. Nilsson 1957 is among those who tend to adopt the moralistic critique of ancient authors. See Harland 2003a, 55–87; Dennis E. Smith 2003.

59. See Dölger 1934, 217–23. On the Montanists’ sacrifice of children, see, for instance, Philastrius *Diversarum 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 cent. CE]; Adam 1969).

60. Now see Frankfurter 2006, 104–8.

61. Trans. Williams 1997, 84.

benevolent God who sent Christ. In this document, the author criticizes other Christian groups by way of the image of the eleven disciples of Jesus. These disciples are portrayed as fatally misunderstanding Jesus and the God who sent Jesus, and they are portrayed as devoted instead to the demiurge, the malevolent creator of the world. In this setting, there is an episode where Jesus interprets a dream that Jesus' disciples had about twelve priests making sacrifices in the temple:

Jesus said, "What are [the priests] like?" They [said, "Some] were. . . [for] two weeks. [Others] were sacrificing their own children. Others were sacrificing their wives as a gift [and] they were humiliating each other. Some were sleeping with men. Some were [committing murder]. Yet others were committing a number of sins and lawless acts. And the men standing [beside] the altar [were] calling upon your [Name]. (*Gos. Judas* 39.12–23)⁶²

Jesus then interprets the dream as referring to these very disciples who claim to follow Jesus but are, in fact, far from him: "Jesus said to them, 'You are those you saw who presented the offerings upon the altar . . .'" (*Gos. Judas* 39.18–20). Here the author is accusing Christians who do not hold his own particular views regarding the distinction between the demiurge (God of the Judeans) and the God who sent Christ. He draws on ethnographic discourses that characterize their activities as the equivalent of ritual murder of women and children and of what the author of the *Gospel of Judas* considers sexual perversity.

Conclusions

This trio of ritual atrocity (human sacrifice, cannibalism, and sexual perversion) has a long history in discourses of the other, in negative social categorizations, and in processes of identity negotiation. 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.⁶³

Frankfurter notes how even academic scholarship has sometimes bought into the rhetoric of such charges, including the ancient cases we have been discussing. Thus, scholars might (in less blatant terms) join with Franz Cumont in speaking of the "return to savagery" characteristic of mystery cults, or that, with the "adoption of the Oriental mysteries, barbarous, cruel and obscene practices were undoubtedly spread."⁶⁴ Essentially, this reflects 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

62. Trans. DeConick 2007, 71–72.

63. Frankfurter 2001, 352–81, now discussed more fully in Frankfurter 2006.

64. Cumont 1956, 6; see Frankfurter 2001, 363–65.

the uniform pattern in the various rumors of ritual murder points to *concrete rites* that were celebrated by ethnic or tribal minorities.”⁶⁵ Henrichs does seem to back away from accepting such descriptions as realistic in a later publication that deals with human sacrifice, however.⁶⁶ Stephen Benko gives credence to accounts of wild sexual and commensal activities, even the most extreme ones described in Epiphanius’s critique of the Phibionites.⁶⁷ In this problematic view, such accounts refer to actual rituals that were practiced in some fringe groups. It should be noted that these scholars did not necessarily have available the important sociological and anthropological work that has been done on processes of external categorization and group definition, which have informed my own approach.

The approach here has been to emphasize the manner in which charges of wild transgression are part of more encompassing discourses that reflect the methods and rhetoric of ancient ethnography in order to describe and distance the foreign “other” from one’s own cultural or ethnic group. In the process of defining one’s own group, the activities of others are defined as dangerous inversions of good order. The anti-banquet idea is part of this overall strategy. These ancient discourses are best understood within the framework of intergroup rivalries, identity construction, and group-boundary negotiation.

In light of this understanding of the charges in terms of identity theory and discourses of the other, it is important to reiterate some meanings of these discourses. Douglas’s anthropological work 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.⁶⁸ 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 antisocietal actions, cannibalism as 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, small groups of outlaws or associations of foreigners specifically can play a noteworthy role in representing the alien or criminal threat within society.

Banqueting practices played an important role in discourses of identity, in which certain authors, representative in some ways of their ethnic or cultural group, engaged in the process of defining their own groups as civilized by alienating another as barbarous. These authors of both fiction and history played on what was commonly expected or pious 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 associa-

65. Henrichs 1970, 33.

66. Do see Henrichs’s (1978, 121–60) more cautious approach to maenads and the supposed eating of raw flesh, however.

67. Benko 1980, 1087–89.

68. Douglas 1973.

tions and groups, namely, the intimately related goals of appropriately honouring the gods (through sacrifice) and feasting with friends.

Sometimes, both Judean synagogues and Christian congregations were targets of this technique of defining oneself over against the other, primarily because of the foreignness of their nonparticipation in honouring, or sacrificing to, the Greek or Roman gods, because of their attention to just one, foreign god (their monotheism or monolatry). In part, it was this failure to acknowledge the gods of others or to honour any gods beyond the Judean God that set Judeans and followers of Jesus apart as cultural minority groups.

Sometimes, though not always, these differences in cultural practice drew the attention of specific outsiders more than the similarities that led to the view that Judean gatherings and Christians congregations were associations of the usual type. This study has shown that Judeans and Christians were very much a part of intergroup relations in the ancient Mediterranean context, relations that facilitated the construction and reformulation of identities among various associations and communities.