

**A commentary on selected sections
of the
Octavius of Minucius Felix**

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Table of Contents

Introduction		1-3
Chapter 5	Caecilius' arguments	3-8
Chapters 16-20.1	Octavius' replies	9-21
16		9-11
17		11-13
18		13-18
19		18-21
20.1		21
Chapters 9-10	Caecilius' arguments	21-29
9		21-27
10		27-29
Chapters 28-33	Octavius' replies	30-49
28		30-33
29		33-37
30		37-40
31		
32		43-48
33		48-49
Bibliography		50-52

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The purpose of this study is to consider, in lemmatic commentary form, some of the objections to Christian belief raised by the pagan, Caecilius and the corresponding responses and counter-arguments adduced by Octavius, the Christian, in the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix. *Octavius* is couched in the form of a philosophical dialogue, at the end of which Caecilius, somewhat improbably, declares himself convinced of the truth of the Christian faith and requests more instruction (40. 1-2). The setting is that of the three protagonists, all lawyers, availing themselves of time in the break from court duties, relaxing on the seashore in the port of Ostia. It is noticeable that the replies of Octavius are given more than twice as much space as the objections of Caecilius. Whether the work is based upon a genuine occasion, using real characters, as in Cicero's *de Natura Deorum*, or whether Minucius is using this form as a fictional device for putting forward a type of apologetic, is not clear. It should be noted that, in that *Octavius* is clearly representing the views of the author, the names Minucius and Octavius are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

The *Octavius* of Minucius Felix is a defence of Christianity demonstrating that the faith is reasonable for and relevant to cultured and educated Romans. It is couched in the form of a dialogue with two protagonists, Caecilius, the pagan, and Octavius, the Christian, with the author, Minucius Felix, as an impartial arbiter. Whilst Minucius deliberately adopts the dialogue form, following fairly closely the pattern of *de Natura Deorum*, the shape it takes, with Octavius' reply to Caecilius in defence of Christianity taking up nearly two-thirds of the whole, leads it away from philosophical discussion towards apologetic. The uniqueness of *Octavius* lies in its comparatively conciliatory character, since the purpose is to appeal to traditional educated pagans, well versed in the philosophical tradition, with no interest in, or regard for, such Christian apologetic as had been produced at this time (e.g. Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, Tertullian, *Apologeticus*). The work is derivative, owing much both in content and form to Cicero's *de Natura Deorum* and also to the Christian Apologists, particularly Tertullian's *Apologeticus*. However, the tone of the *Octavius* is throughout far less strident than that of Tertullian, as will be demonstrated in the commentary.

Minucius Felix is mentioned by Lactantius (*Div. Inst.*, 1.11.55 and 5.1.31) and, following him, Jerome (*de viris illust.* 58, *Ep.*, 49.13, 60.10, 70.5,) who both identify him as a lawyer, a *causidicus*. Considered as a work of Christian apologetic, Minucius' text is remarkable for its almost total lack of mention of Christian doctrine, and the name of Christ is mentioned only by implication (9.4, 39.2). Whilst to one familiar with Scripture there are distinct echoes of the New Testament, particularly of Paul's epistles (cf below pp. 14, 42, 43), these do not form a major part of the text.

On the other hand, however, in addition to *de Natura Deorum* there are manifold other classical references, indicating a writer who is well acquainted with classical literature, Greek as well as Latin. As will be noted, Minucius writes in a fluent and elegant style, as befits one who has received the thorough grounding of a traditional philosophical and oratorical education. Minucius himself says that he was practising in Rome (2.2), a fact also attested by Lactantius who may, however, himself be referring to the text just mentioned. The background of this work cannot be established for certain. Juvenal describes Roman Africa as *nutricula caesidicorum* (vii. 148) and most writers on Minuciana suggest that there is a North African connection. Although this is based particularly on the references, *Cirtensis nostri* (9.6) and *tuus Fronto* (31.2) to M. Cornelius Fronto, the eminent rhetorician and tutor to Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus,¹ who was born at Cirta in Numidia, the familiarity with the writings of Tertullian and the fact that this work is in Latin would add verisimilitude to this assertion since it was in North Africa that Latin Christianity, as distinct from Greek, developed in the second and third centuries A.D.²

The first extant copy of *Octavius* was discovered in an edition of Arnobius' *Adversus Nationes*, acquired by the Vatican Library in the 16th century and now in Paris, probably originating from the ninth century, where it appeared as the final and eighth book of Arnobius, the title clearly having been mistaken for *octavus*. In 1560 the French scholar Francis Bauduin (Franciscus Baldinus) published in Heidelberg an edition of *Octavius* with its true authorship ascription. This edition is preceded by a dissertation³ in which Bauduin proved that the so-called eighth book was in fact the work of Minucius Felix. The only other manuscript is an eleventh century copy, now in Brussels.⁴

There have been many attempts at a precise dating, none of them conclusive. The few possible allusions in the text to contemporary events, such as Caecilius' veneration of Serapis (2.5) the references to Fronto, and to *societas regni* (8.6) give rise to speculation, but nothing more. The predominantly pacific tone of *Octavius*, couched as it is in the terms of classical philosophical dialogue, would seem to confirm a time of comparative freedom from persecution of Christians. The question of dating has focussed upon the relationship of *Octavius* to Tertullian, particularly to the *Apologeticus*, for which the generally accepted date is around 197 A.D., though no precise evidence for this can be adduced.⁵ Whilst some, particularly 19th century, scholars,⁶ have argued that Minucius preceded Tertullian and that the striking similarities between the two authors at many

¹ Haines, 1955, x, 2ff

² Lane Fox, 1986, 291; Raven, 1993, 150 ff.

³ Reprinted in Holden, 1853

⁴ Holden, 1853, xxxvi

⁵ Beaujeu, 1964, LIV; Clarke, 1974, 9-10

⁶ e.g. Behr 1870, and list in Holden, 1853, 24

points in *Octavius* are the result of Tertullian following Minucius, the general consensus, followed in this study, is that Minucius is dependent upon Tertullian. This is the position of such commentators as Holden,⁷ Beaujeu,⁸ and Clarke.⁹ Since the tone of *Octavius* is derivative Minucius uses Tertullian in a very similar way to that in which he uses Cicero, in that, whilst he sometimes summaries material from these sources, he also frequently quotes almost verbatim (cf, e.g. 17.3, p.13 and 30.3, p. 39 etc). Given, then, the premise referred to above, that *Octavius* is later than Tertullian, and taking into account the other sparse allusions mentioned above, a reasonable surmise would be that this work originates from the early part of the second century.

I propose to commentate upon two sections of *Octavius*, discussing first Caecilius' arguments in that section, followed by Octavius' replies, as follows: ch. 5 + 16 - 20.1 and 9-10 + 28-33. The Latin text used for *Octavius* is that of the J. P. Waltzing edition for the Teubner series, 1911, reproduced in the edition by G.H. Rendall.¹⁰ Textual variants are noted and commented upon. Unless otherwise stated all references are to *Octavius*.

Chapter 5. Caecilius

2. ... *omnia in rebus humanis* Caecilius starts his argument in the middle of a sentence, still concerned as to whether Minucius will be neutral. The implication is that, because he is a Christian, he will find this difficult. Hence *Proinde si mihi quasi novus aliqui ... considas*. This is somewhat ironic, the implication being that, if Minucius can get rid of his preconceptions and keep quiet, then normal philosophical argument can take place. The suggestion that he will not keep quiet has some force, since, at the end of Caecilius' speech, Minucius does indeed appear to take sides (14. 4-7). Caecilius asserts that *omnia in rebus humanis dubia, incerta, suspensa*. Note the use of asyndeton here. The view Caecilius takes up represents the Academic position of universal scepticism. This is the position, ἐποχή, the act of suspension of judgement, since nothing can be proved, which is set out by Cicero at the beginning of *de Natura Deorum*, ... *non enim sumuset adsentiendi nota* (1.12) and stated more clearly in the *Academica* ... *nihil posse percepi* (2.9.28). Minucius leans heavily upon *de Natura Deorum* in presenting the arguments against belief put forward by Caecilius and shows him taking up the sceptic position, represented in *de Natura Deorum* by Cotta. In presenting the arguments of both Caecilius and Octavius, Minucius is at pains

⁷ Holden, 1853, xxiii-xxiv

⁸ Beaujeu, 1964,

⁹ Clarke, 1974

¹⁰ Rendall, 1966

to demonstrate the relevance of traditional philosophical concepts to the discussion of Christian beliefs.

Clarke¹¹ makes what I consider to be a very valid point that the genre of *Octavius* is broadly apologetic. Although much of this work is couched in philosophical terms and its tone is non-polemical, its reliance upon works such as the *Apologeticus* of Tertullian puts it broadly in the tradition of Christian apologetic writing from St Paul, through Justin Martyr to Tertullian, Origen, St Augustine and beyond. It could be held, therefore, that Minucius has a motive for presenting Caecilius' 'case for the prosecution', as it were, as a comparatively weak one in order to enable the 'case for the defence' of Octavius, which is, in any case, twice the length of Caecilius' speech, to stand the more strongly.

3. *quo magis mirum est* ... After the argument that nothing is certain, Caecilius' second argument is that, since humans cannot know the truth, many will easily be seduced by any old idea which comes along. *cuilibet opinioni* - a 'dig' at Christians, amongst others. This will lead to his thesis, that, in order not to be led astray by any old doctrine, it is right that trust should be put in the old tried and tested veneration of the traditional pantheon, a topic dealt with in chapter 6.

4. *studiorum rudes, litterarum profanos ... expertes artium etiam sordidarum*. The oblique attack on Christians continues with the common objection that the ignorant should presume to have knowledge of the universe. Roman society had a problem with the fact that Christianity spread primarily amongst the lower classes. The apostles Peter and John are described as ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοί εἰσιν καὶ ἰδιῶται (Acts 4,14.) and even amongst converts the corollary of faith that all are one in Christ was a difficult concept to accept, as Paul's epistles make clear, for instance οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνας, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ: πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. (Gal. 3.28). Beaujeu¹² remarks, 'les métiers manuels étaient généralement méprisés a Rome, depuis la fin du 11e siècle av. J-C'. *Opificesque omnes in sordida arte versantur: nec enim quicumque ingenuum habere potest officium*(Cic. *de Off.* 32, 50). Clarke¹³ points out the polemical tone of this passage, an attack to which Christians were accustomed, and which was often referred to by Christian apologists, e.g. Origen (*C. Cels* 1.27, 1.29, 3.18, 3.44), and Justin Martyr, (*Apol.* 1.60).

¹¹ Clarke, 1974, 183

¹² Beaujeu, 1964, 76

¹³ Clarke, 1974, 183

De qua tot omnibus saeculisdeliberat. A feature of *Octavius* is the use made by both protagonists, of the main philosophical schools. Caecilius is represented primarily as a proponent of the sceptic position of the Academics, represented by Cotta in *Cicero, de Natura Deorum*, whilst Octavius, in his refutation of Caecilius, represents the Stoic viewpoint, taken by Balbus in *de Natura Deorum*. Elements of the third, Epicurean, position, that of Velleius, are used by both Caecilius and Octavius. Reference to the many instances of Minucius' indebtedness to Cicero's work will be commented on at the relevant points in the commentary. However, whilst Minucius is at pains to demonstrate that Christianity has much in common with traditional philosophy, this point could, as Clarke¹⁴ observes, also be turned against itself. The fact that no one philosophical system has succeeded in producing convincing arguments about the nature of the universe is also taken up by Origen (*C.Cels.* 3.12). as a defence against the accusation that Christianity, too, had many sects.

cum tantum ... religiosum The mention here of the temerity of man's attempts to fathom the secrets of the universe has other parallels, which serve to demonstrate the breadth and depth of Minucius' reading. Beaujeu sees parallels in Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 2.3 and 87) and Horace *caelum ipsum petimus stultitia* (*Carm.* 3.38).

aut scire sit datum aut ruspari religiosum This is the text of the Waltzing edition of 1903.¹⁵ However, the text used by both Holden (1853) and Beaujeu (1964) follows the Paris manuscript and has *aut scire sit datum aut scrutare permissum, aut stuprari religiosum*. As Rendall, in his introduction to the Waltzing text in the Loeb edition points out, the text 'is based on a single manuscript transcribed by a very illiterate copyist'.¹⁶ Holden mentions that *scrutare* is a later form of the deponent *scrutari*, and is common in North African writing¹⁷. *Stuprare* has the sense 'to lay violent hands on' in a sexual context¹⁸. Beaujeu¹⁹ translates it as 'violer' and Holden, with reason, points out that such alternatives as *ruspari*, as in the Waltzing text, are, therefore, unsuitable. Beaujeu adds that in *Octavius*, *scire* applies to heaven and the earth, *scrutare* is used specifically for 'heaven', and *stuprare* only for earth. It would therefore seem right to take the harder reading of *stuprari*, rather than *ruspari*.

... secundum illud vetus sapientis oraculum ... A reference to the well-known γνῶθι σεαυτόν inscription on the temple at Delphi, usually attributed to Thales.

¹⁴ Clarke, 1974, 184

¹⁵ Rendall, 1966 313

¹⁶ Rendall, 1966, 313

¹⁷ Holden, 1853, p. 55

¹⁸ s.v.stuprare, OLD 1996

¹⁹ Beaujeu, 1964, p. 77

6. *indulgentes insano atque inepto labori ...* An echo of Vergil *insano iuvat indulgere laboro* (A. 6. 135), one of many examples of the wide-ranging use the well-educated and well-read Minucius makes of classical texts. In support of his aim of presenting Christianity as a reasonable system of belief for cultured professionals in Roman society, Minucius utilises many opportunities of expounding the tenets of faith in terms of familiar classical texts, a technique which would become familiar amongst the apologists who followed.

caelum ipsum ... audaci cupiditate transcendimus Another echo of the Horace quotation (Carm. 3.38) mentioned earlier (see note on *cum tantum* p. 6).

.. *formidulosus opinionibus* Clarke²⁰ notes that Aulus Gellius, in discussing *-osus* epithets (*Noctes Atticae* 9.12) comments on the uncommon usage of *formidulosus* in the passive sense here 'caused by fear' *in eam partem quae minus usitata est* and illustrates this from Sallust (*Cat.* 7.5.). Holden²¹ reinforces the passive sense of *formidulosus*, citing examples from Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.62) and Terence (*Eun.* 4. 6.19). As Clarke remarks, this type of usage would appeal to Minucius' literary-minded audience and would serve to reinforce his purpose of demonstrating the academic nature of the dialogue in *Octavius*.

7. Caecilius here posits interrogatively two, or possibly three hypotheses of the origin of matter without divine origin, in a summary of Atomist and Epicurean philosophy which owes much to Cicero in *de Natura Deorum*, as will often be seen in *Octavius*, firstly, the Orphic theory, the spontaneous generation of matter, secondly, the Atomist, Epicurean, (Velleius *N.D.* I. 20, 54 and II. 37, 93), and, thirdly, the 'four-element theory' proposed by the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles and referred to in Lucretius (1.712). It is suggested by Beaujeu²² that Minucius has somewhat confused particularly the first two, since *omnium semina* also appears in the atomists (Lucr. I. 59).

fortuitis concursioibus A reference to the Epicurean so-called 'swerve' which attempted to explain the randomness of downward-falling atoms. Without it, and without this arbitrariness, the result would be mechanistic and fatalistic.

It seems to me that, as Beaujeu suggests, Minucius is not so much concerned with presenting exact details of the various cosmologies as in using them, in the mouth of Caecilius, as examples of

²⁰ Clarke, 1974, 185

²¹ Holden, 1853, p. 55

²² Beaujeu, 1964, p. 77

atheistic views of creation, precisely to provide targets which can later be used in the apologetic of Octavius. This is made clear by the, unnecessary if not for polemical purposes, insertion of ... *quis hic auctor deus? ... quis deus machinator? ... unde haec religio, unde formido, quae superstitio est?* (all from 7).

8,9. The summary of cosmologies in these sections, particularly the four element theory, owes much to *de Natura Deorum* (3. 30, 31, 34). Minucius continues to present Caecilius as making anti-theist remarks ... *nullo artifice nec iudice nec auctore* (8), ... *homines noxios feriunt et saepe religiosos* (9).

10-12. Having up to this point been dealing purely with natural phenomena, Caecilius here changes topic and begins to speak of the problem of good and evil, a common argument through the ages for the rejection of the idea of the existence of God. Caecilius begins by citing examples from natural disasters *in naufragiis bonorum malorumque fata mixta deperire* but then *et cum belli ... occumbere* proceeds to apply the same objection to man-made misfortune. The Loeb edition gives an unreferenced Greek parallel here, οὐ γὰρ Ἄρης ἀγαῶν φείδεται ἀλλὰ κακῶν. Parallels are also found in Epicurus, quoted by Lactantius *in bellis meliores potius et vinci et perire* (*Div. Inst.* 3.17.8) and Philo (*De prov.* 1.37 and 59).

*quod si mundus divina providentia The standard objection to the Stoic position discussed in de Natura Deorum 2.73. If there is a divine providence, why do the wicked prosper? Caecilius' observations here, with the several examples of tyrants, culled from de Natura Deorum III.80, all of them doubtless familiar to Minucius' readers, are reasonable examples. Phalaris, tyrant of Agrigentum 570-554 BC, is said to have burned his victims alive in a brazen bull; Dionysius the Elder was tyrant of Syracuse 405-367 BC; P Rutilius Rufus, consul 105 BC., exposed the extortions of the *publicani* in Asia and was sent into exile in 92 BC; M Furius Camillus, conqueror of Veii 396 B.C., was accused of misappropriation of the spoils and went into voluntary exile; Socrates was convicted by an Athenian jury on a charge of corruption excuted by drinking hemlock in 399 BC (Plato, *Phaedo* 115a-118a).*

Whilst the extract from Ennius' *Telamon, nam si curent, bene bonis sit, male malis: quod nunc abest.* quoted by Cicero in *de Natura Deorum* 3.32, in which Telamon is bewailing the death of Ajax, is not specifically cited by Minucius, it may well have been familiar to his audience. Octavius will later (37.7) counter Caecilius' objections. However, the point is valid and the age-old

cry of injustice, found for instance in Psalm 73, is a problem Christians, and other believers, have had to counter throughout the ages.

Ecce arbusta frugiferacaeditur Caecilius returns to his argument from nature but does not here clarify the point he is making about the randomness of nature. In the passage which provides the source of this observation, *de Natura Deorum* 2.167, Balbus, the Stoic, somewhat inconsistently, as Clarke²³ observes, argues *nec verodeo aut neglectum a deo iudicemus*. As so often in Octavius, Minucius appears to use his sources in a deliberately opaque manner, carefully guarding against any accusation of being dogmatic. Octavius' reply in ch. 18.3 is deliberately general (see later comments on ch. 18, p.14 ff).

We may briefly summarise Caecilius' arguments against Christian belief in this chapter as follows:

- nothing can be known with certainty (the Sceptic, Academic position)
- man is limited, he cannot know the mind of God
- therefore various cosmological arguments need to be considered, such as Orphic, atomist, 4 elements
- the randomness of natural phenomena
- moral arguments - why do the righteous suffer?
- chance rules over all

In the following section I shall consider Octavius' reply to these points in chapters 16. 5-6, 17, 18, 19, and 20. 1.

Much more space is given to Octavius than to Caecilius, which could be said to be another example of the 'quasi-apologetic' nature of this work. To this end the argument of Octavius is solely monotheistic and although the word 'Christian' appears several times there is no mention of the name of Jesus Christ, nor of specifically Christian, as distinct from monotheistic, doctrines. The question of whether Tertullian's *Apologeticus* preceded or followed Octavius, and which writer was indebted to whom, has been briefly discussed in the introduction. As mentioned there, and as will become clear in what follows, I take the view that Minucius knew Tertullian's work and has abbreviated and adapted it to fit the rather less polemical and apologetic tone of *Octavius*.

²³ Clarke, 1974, 188

Chapters 16-20.1 Octavius

16.

1-4 As Clarke²⁴ points out, it was standard practice for Christian apologists to emphasise the contradictions of a pagan protagonist's case. However, whilst Octavius rightly points out the inconsistencies of Caecilius' sceptical viewpoint, that nothing is certain, being combined with a belief in the ancient gods, this position was, in any case, a very common one. It is found frequently in *de Natura Deorum* as part of the Academic argument, for example ...*velut in hac quaestione plerique (quod maxime veri simile est et quo omnes duce natura venimus) deos esse dixerunt.* (1.2)

Octavius, broadly speaking, takes each of Caecilius's points in order but does not answer here the philosophical argument that, since nothing is certain (5. 2) it is therefore part of human nature to be seduced in the search for truth by any idea *cui libet opinioni* (5. 3). He first takes up Caecilius' objection that *hoc studium rudes, litterarum profanos, expertes artium etiam sordidarum* (5. 4) should presume to understand the workings of the universe .

5. *Meus frater* An ironic reference to the custom, common amongst Christians from earliest times, of using such a greeting, as attested in the New Testament Epistles (1.Cor. 8.13, Eph. 6.21, Philemon 1.20, etc). Octavius has already used this in 3.1 *Marce frater* in commenting to Minucius about Caecilius' reverencing of the statue of Seraphis, which gives rise to the whole work. The same mode of address is repeated by Caecilius at the beginning of 5. However, this was not unknown in classical literature, for example Horace '*frater,*' '*pater*' *adde: ut cuique est aetas, ita quemque facetus adopta.* (Ep. 1.6.54-5) and, particularly ironically, in Cicero *volo, mi frater, fraterculo tuo credas. consorti quidem in lucris atque furtis, gemino et simillimo nequitia, improbitate, audacia* (Ver.2.3.155).

stomachari, indignari, dolere are neatly balanced with the three objects of Caecilius's feelings *inlitteratos, pauperes, imperitos*, which also parallel his three descriptions of such persons (quoted above) and each in turn is countered by Octavius:

inlitteratos All are by nature able to reason and understand, *natura insitos esse sapientiam*. This is rather a strange expression, as one would have expected *insitam*. Holden says 'the construction,

²⁴ Clarke, 1974, 147 (examples in Pellegrino, 1947).

though harsh, may stand'.²⁵ Holden also says, without reference, that *indeptos* has been suggested as a correction but observes that *insitam iis esse* 'would perhaps be more suitable'.²⁶ Certainly *indeptos* would introduce the idea of acquiring, rather than having been implanted. *Insitos* links back to *procreatos* and *nanctos*, thus emphasising humans, created and endowed with qualities, rather than focusing on *sapientiam*. Beaujeu explains it as a type of zeugma, with *sapientiam* as the complement of the direct object of *nanctos*. Patrologia Latina,²⁷ in the *variorum notae*, says *puto legendum esse: insitam habere*, giving, as support for this, quotations from Cicero, (*de Fin.* 4.2) and *Pro Font.* 231). He adds that Vopkenius gives *indutos* in place of *insitos*. This, whilst not a major lexicographical point, is nevertheless significant, dealing as it does with the question of whether *sapientia* is innate or acquired. Clearly *insitos* lends weight to Octavius' argument, a favoured Stoic concept, for example in Seneca *omnibus insita de dis opinio est* (*Ep.* 117. 6). Whilst no definitive answer can be given here, I would support *insitos* which appears in most editions, since the implication of nature rather than nurture appears to be the argument put forward here.

The idea of nature not nurture was a favourite Stoic concept, e.g. *bona mens omnibus patet, omnes ad hoc sumus nobiles* (Seneca, *Ep.* 90.1 f., 44.3). Beaujeu²⁸ notes that Minucius employs the philosophical idea of innate reason, in contrast to the Christian apologists' idea of revelation

'cette réplique s'appuie uniquement sur l'idée que la sagesse naît et grandit dans l'homme avec l'âme elle-même, et non pas sur le dogme de la revelation transcendante, comme chez la plupart des apologistes (cf. Justin *II Apol.* 10.8 or Tatian 32.1 etc.)'.

adeo divites ... nostrates pauperes ... disciplinam Wisdom comes from nature not from riches, and, since the rich are more engrossed in seeking money than the things of heaven, it is left to the poor to ponder wisdom and pass on the teachings. There are distinct Biblical echoes here, particularly of Matthew chapters 5-6 where similar ideas are expressed; Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. (5.3) Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, (6.19). It is interesting to reflect upon the extent to which Minucius would have been familiar with what became the New Testament. Whilst the earliest extant codices date from the fourth century, various written versions of the Gospels were circulating from at least the beginning of the second century, as attested by the existence of the 'Rylands Fragment', the scrap of St John's gospel dated 125-150 A.D. Further exploration of this interesting topic is outside the scope of the present study. It seems

²⁵ Holden, 1953, 92

²⁶ Holden, 1853, 92

²⁷ PL 003, 283

²⁸ Beaujeu, 1964, 98

reasonable, however, in view of the many Biblical echoes, though slight, in *Octavius*, to conclude that Minucius was familiar with the main elements of the Gospels and Paul's epistles and also had some knowledge of the Old Testament.

plebeios, indoctos, seminudos A deliberate reference to Caecilius's derision in 8. 4 *honores et purpuras despiciunt, ipsi seminudi*, that Christians did not wear the toga. To be *togatus* was to demonstrate one's part in civilised public life. Tertullian, however, said Christians were not outwardly distinguishable from non-Christians, *Quo pacto homines vobiscum degentes, eiusdem victus, habitus, instructus ... (Apol.42.1)*. The purpose of *Octavius* was to demonstrate to those belonging to the upper echelons of Roman society the reasonableness and legitimacy of Christian belief. It was therefore important for Minucius to counter the objections, voiced by Caecilius, that Christian belief was confined to the lower classes. The question as to what extent the faith was practised amongst prominent members of society has been much discussed and Clarke²⁹ summarises several possible instances. For more complete information see Lampe,³⁰ who discusses in detail the social stratification of Christians in Rome at and before the time of the writing of *Octavius*. However, Minucius does not dwell much upon Tertullian's point of the Christians mingling with normal society but is concerned rather to emphasise the point that it is the truth rather than its provenance that is important *cum non disputantis auctoritas, sed disputationis ipsius veritas requiratur*.(17.6). The source here is clearly Cicero *non enim tam auctoritatis in disputando quam rationis momenta quaerenda sunt (N.D.1.10)*, but the same sentiment is also expressed elsewhere, for instance, Plato (*Charm.* 161C) and Cyprian, (*Ad Donatus* 2). *Octavius* supports this position and counters Caecilius's objections even more emphatically by rejecting the *pompa facundiae et gratiae*, (16.6), the oratorical tricks and devices familiar to his fellow orators, such as Caecilius, in his assertion that reasoning is shown more clearly through unskilled utterances, *quo imperitior sermo, hoc inlustrior ratio est* (16.6).

17.

...*hominem nosse se*..... A reference back to Caecilius' use of the Delphic γνῶθι σεαυτόν in ch. 5. Clement makes the same point ἦν ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικε, πάντων μέγιστον μαθημάτων, τὰ γνῶναι αὐτόν. ἑαυτὸν γὰρ τις ἐὰν γνῶη, Θεὸν εἴσεται. θεὸν δὲ εἰδὼς ἐξομοιωθησέται θεῷ (*Paedag.* 3. 1).

²⁹ Clark, 1974, 35 ff

³⁰ Lampe, London 2003

an potius a deo factus, formatus, animatus The use of *potius* and asyndeton underline and emphasise Octavius's intention to demonstrate a divine source for the origin of man.

Octavius here uses the common device of appearing to agree with what his opponent has said before interpreting it in a different way. He does this by referring to the cosmological ideas proposed by Caecilius in 5. 7,8,9 to explain the origin of man *sint principio omnium semina natura in se coeunte densata ...* (5.7) where Minucius puts into the mouth of Caecilius a somewhat confused summary of the various current cosmological theories. As mentioned earlier, Minucius appears to be somewhat confused about the exact details of these cosmologies (see comments on ch. 5, p. 7). Without examining these in detail he turns them around to approach them from the other direction, namely, that the world has a divine origin which it is necessary to investigate in order to understand man *...ut nisi divinitatis rationem diligenter excusseris, nescias humanitatis* (17. 2). Octavius adduces a further example, that of the necessity of understanding the nature of society in order to understand the state, *nec possis imitamur* (17.2). Octavius further emphasises the divine nature of man, in contradistinction from the animal kingdom, countering Caecilius' *... cum tantum absit ab exploratione divina humana mediocritas, ut ...* (5.2). This particular proposition, that of man's divine nature and his ability to be in the image of God, is emphasised by the repetition of *vultus erectus* at the end of the chapter. The opposite of this is expressed by Caecilius later in his speech *.. desinate caeli plagas et mundi fata et secreta rimari* (12.7). Minucius constructs his dialogue carefully, allowing for argument and counter-argument, as exemplified in *de Natura Deorum*, which he takes as his model. However, the most obvious departure from this classic form is that, in contrast to *de Natura Deorum*, where Cicero accords the three protagonists roughly the same length of speech, Minucius devotes a much larger proportion of *Octavius* to the rebuttals and expositions of Octavius than that afforded to the objections and accusations of Caecilius. It is this aspect of the work which places it on the margins of the Apologetic genre. It is significant that, whilst *de Natura Deorum* features strongly in the speech of Caecilius and is also the source of much of Octavius' argument, much of Octavius' reply is drawn from the *Apologeticus* of Tertullian, references to which will be discussed in due course.

3. A brief exposition of the argument from design. The parallels are many in both Biblical and philosophical works, for instance, Psalm 19.2 'the heavens declare the glory of God' . An interesting Biblical reference is found in Acts, where Paul, like Minucius, is expressing Christian beliefs in Greek philosophical terms ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ (Acts 17.24). In the present work, as so often, Minucius puts into the mouth of Octavius words culled almost literally from

Cicero, voiced by the Stoic Balbus *quid enim potest esse tam apertum tamque perspicuum, cum caelum suspeximus caelestiaque contemplate sumus, quam esse aliquod numen praestantissimae mentis quo haec regantur?* (N.D. 2. 4).

5-11 Octavius continues to draw very heavily on Cicero *de Natura Deorum* thus using a familiar, Stoic, argument to demonstrate monotheistic belief. Octavius takes Caecilius' somewhat negative cosmological views in 5. 9 and 10 and expands them, using examples of the stars, the seasons, the sea, and the crops, most of which relies heavily on *de Natura Deorum*.

5. *caelum ipse vide* From N.D. 2.95 in which Cicero is quoting from Aristotle's lost dialogue, *de Philosophia*

The rest of 17 is also a virtual paraphrase of passages from *de Natura Deorum* (2.98 and elsewhere).

Octavius finishes this section of argument from design with his emphasis on the human upright stance, in words used earlier *status rigidus, vultus erectus*, all part of *ipsa praecipue formae nostrae pulchritudo deum fatetur artificem* (17.2).

18.

1-4. These sections belong thematically with the preceding chapter, with a continuation of the argument from design.

1-2. *..quod magis ... deflexa* Although this concept, too, owes something to *de Natura Deorum* 1.47 and 1.92, Minucius presents it in a somewhat different way. In *de Natura Deorum* the discussion is about the beauty of the human form (1.47) or whether the gods have human form (1. 92) but here the emphasis is upon the infinite variety of humanity which yet shares a common form. Yet this does not go so far as the concept of 'man made in the image of God' found in Genesis (1.26) and Colossians (1.15). As a work aiming to explain and present Christian belief *Octavius* is strangely lacking in the theological and Biblical imagery which would normally be expected in a work of apologetic. However, this passage is moving on from a traditional Stoic concept to one which would be recognised as Christian.

2. *quid nascendi ratio... ?* Procreation as an example of divine origin is found elsewhere, not only in *de Natura Deorum*, (2.128) but also in Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.4.7) and Josephus (*Contra Ap.* 2.192) amongst others. Although Octavius does not here specifically refer to human procreation, its close

proximity to the preceding section would suggest that this is what is intended. Clarke³¹ observes that *fetus* 'is used more frequently of human beings than Lewis and Short suggest' yet translates it as 'offspring'. Rendall, however,³² renders *fetus* as 'babe'. The references in TLL support almost equally both human and non-human reproduction.³³

3. *Aegypti siccitatem temperare Nilus amnis solet* Whilst this is obviously derived from *de Natura Deorum* 2. 130 it is interesting to note that Minucius has updated the familiar examples of the Nile, Euphrates and Indus by adding Britain ...*Britannia sole deficitur, sed circumfluentis maris tepore recreator*. Whatever the original date of Octavius, Britannia would be known by his readers, albeit only by name. He even adds it first, before the familiar examples, though quite what proof of divine origin is being made is not, perhaps, very clear. Nor is it obvious what Minucius understood by *circumfluentis maris tepore recreator*. All ancient references emphasise the deficiency of sunshine in Britannia, e.g. Strabo, who asserts that the sun is only visible for three or four hours at a time. (*Geog.* 1. 4. 200). Tacitus says *caelum eius crebris imbris et nebulis foedum: at asperitatem frigorum abesse* (*Ag.* 12).

4. *quod si ingressus aliquam domum* ... This example, which brings contemplation of the universe down to the parallel of the ordering of a human home, is also derived from *de Natura Deorum* (2.1), a slight refinement on the part of Octavius being that the *aliqua mente* of Cicero is here given a qualitative nature *universitatis dominum parentumque ipsis sideribus et totius mundi partibus pulchriorem*.

5-6. ... *quoniam de providentia nulla dubitatio est, quibus exempla utique de caelo*. An important passage which raises many questions about the nature of rule. As Clarke³⁴ mentions, *providentia* was a word very popular with Roman writers, loaded with political meaning. To compare earthly rule with the divine, or heavenly, realm is a very common device, in both ancient and modern times and leads, and has led, to a myriad theories about the relationship between a heavenly or divine kingdom, and to various understandings of earthly rule and government. A discussion of this topic lies outside the scope of the present study. It is interesting, however that Beaujeu remarks,

³¹ Clarke, 1974, 256

³² Rendall, 1966, 361

³³ TLL s.v.fetus, 639.50-641.10

³⁴ Clarke, 1974, 258

'Pellegrino rappelle avec raison que Minucius est le premier des apologistes à rapprocher le monothéisme du principat monarchique'³⁵

For once, Octavius is not drawing on *de Natura Deorum* but is expressing views typical of his time. Whilst the general tone of Octavius would suggest it to have been written in a time of relative calm for those professing the new, Christian, faith, possibly in Severan Rome, grounds for persecution had already arisen and would later arise again from the refusal of Christians to acknowledge the idea of divine Emperors. It is perhaps rather surprising, then, that, in a work which is intended as an apologia for the Christian view, Octavius could be said to be embracing this idea. *Quibus exempla utique de caelo of imperia terrena* seems to be imputing a greater value to earthly rule than would be expected of one who would regard earthly rule as subject to, rather than an example of, divine rule, for example, Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὗσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν: (Romans 13.1)

6. *quando umquam regni societas....* A probable reference here to Lucan, *nulla fides regni sociis* (*Phars.* 1.92). This line has been seized upon by the many attempts made at dating *Octavius*. Clarke³⁶ enumerates, for instance, suggestions that the work must either have been written before the peaceful joint rule of Marcus Aurelius and Verus in 161-69, or later, after the murder of Geta by his brother Caracalla in 212 A.D. or following the murder of Elagabalus in 222 A.D., both of the latter two being examples of disastrous attempts at joint rule. Baylis,³⁷ and Dennis³⁸ amongst others, favour an early dating whilst the general inclination amongst later Minucian scholarship is to a later date. Clarke submits that this remark by Octavius and the illustrations which follow are examples of the standard argument that 'monarchy is best' and that it is therefore not possible to draw any firm chronological conclusions from this passage.

omitto Persas In support of his thesis that joint rule is disastrous Minucius gives four examples which would be well-known to his readers: firstly, the probably apocryphal story related by Herodotus (3.84) of the decision that he whose horse was the first to neigh would be the monarch, secondly *...Thebanorum par*, the alternating rule of Eteocles and Polynices in Thebes which led to the war of the 'Seven against Thebes' and the death of both brothers, thirdly, *... de geminis ..* Romulus and Remus, and, fourthly, *generi et soceri bella toto urbe diffusa sunt*, the wars between Julius Caesar and Pompey, who married Caesar's daughter Julia in 59 BC.

³⁵ Beaujeu, 1964, 104, citing Pellegrino, 1947

³⁶ Clarke, 1974, p. 238

³⁷ Baylis, 1928, 234 ff.

³⁸ Dennis, AJP 50, 1929

duos fortuna non cepit A probable reference to Lucan (*Phars.* 1.11), with altered word order. Lucan has *non cepit fortuna duos*.

7. *rex unus apibus, dux unus in gregibus, in armentis rector unus!* Three, typically Stoic, examples from nature. *rex ... dux*. In classical antiquity it was mistakenly supposed that the head of the beehive was masculine, cf. Vergil *nam saepe duobus regibus incessit magno discordia motu*. (*G.* 4.68)

tu in caelo summam potestatem dividi credas ... Minucius returns to the argument of 18.5, that single rule is best. However, he then, illogically, continues, in the same sentence, to move to the proposition of the eternity of God. The link seems forced here, as Beaujeu,³⁹ rightly, in my opinion, says, 'transition illogique, qui montre bien la faiblesse du raisonnement chez Minucius.' It must be said that this is one amongst many references which demonstrate that Minucius, although obviously well-read, well-educated and well-versed in classical literature and philosophy, often demonstrates a somewhat confused or, as here, illogical, use of this knowledge. Another example has already been mentioned, that of Minucius' muddled understanding of the various cosmological theories of his day. However, it must be accepted that Minucius is tolerably successful in using his academic background to convince those with a similar background and training of the rightness of his ideas.

qui nativitatem virtute consummat This passage is clearly a paraphrase of Tertullian (*Apol.* 17.1), though the concepts expressed are those frequently met with in early apologetic. The same can be said of the following section, 8, which also owe much to Tertullian (*Apol.* 17.2). Similar reasoning is also present in classical authors, for example in Pythagoras (*Sent.* 35) and Plato (*Tim.* 28).

10. *nec nomen deo quaeras: deus nomen est ...* A common Stoic concept, for example in Dio Chrys. (*O.r* XII 75 ff), Seneca (*Nat.* 2. 45), also found in Christian apologetic, e.g. Justin (*Apol.* 10. 1; 61. 11). To anyone familiar with the Old Testament there is clearly an echo here of Exodus 3. 13-15 'I am who I am'. However, even if Minucius were familiar with this, which, as a non-Jewish Christian he may well not have been, it is unlikely he would refer explicitly to biblical sources, since the whole point and tone of Octavius is to present a theist, rather than specifically Christian, view as being implicit in traditional Greek-derived philosophy. The Christian, or Jewish, Scriptures, even if known to his target audience, represented by Caecilius, were considered badly written and not worthy of attention compared with traditional literature, for example Caecilius

³⁹ Beaujeu, 1964, 105

Iudaeorum sola et misera gentilitas unum et ipsi deum, sed palam 5 at etiam Christiani quanta monstra, quae portenta confingunt! (10.4).

Si dominum, intelleges utique mortalem. Interestingly, *dominus* is used here only in passing, with no mention of the controversy over the word *dominus*, and likewise κύριος, a matter of contention between pagans and Christians, who declared *dominus* to be a term applied to God alone and who refused to use it as an appellation of the Emperor. This word was particularly associated with Domitian's declaration, attested to by Suetonius (*Dom.* 13), that he was to be addressed as *dominus et deus*. Tertullian deals with the *deus* and *dominus* question in *Apol.* 33 and 34, for instance, *Augustus, imperii formator, ne dominum quidem dici se volebat; et hoc enim dei est cognomen (Apol. 34)* but Minucius is content to let Octavius pass briefly over the issue. This is probably because, as has been mentioned earlier, his target audience is different from Tertullian's. Minucius' purpose is to appeal on their own terms to educated pagans versed in traditional philosophy. The whole of 10. and 11. reflect many aspects of the contemporary apologetic, lending support to the view that Minucius knew and used Tertullian's *Apologeticus*. As already mentioned, these sections pattern fairly closely the argument of ch. 17 of that work, yet we note that Minucius carefully avoids using too much specifically apologetic language as this would detract from his aim of emphasising the reasonableness of Christian belief to those with a traditional pagan background.

However, *carnales* (10) is an example of a specifically 'Christian' vocabulary,⁴⁰ which, as Clarke⁴¹ remarks, Minucius usually avoids, since such specific references to the Christianity despised by the intellectuals, represented by Caecilius, would weaken rather than support his argument. However, *carnalis* is used again at 32.6, *deum oculis carnalibus vis videre*, in a passage which, like 18, is more apologetic in tone than much of Octavius.

11. *quid quod omnium de isto habeo consensum?* Somewhat sardonically, Octavius here refers back to Caecilius's argument, *itaque cum omnium gentium de dis immortalibus, quamvis incerta sit vel ratio vel origo, (8.1)* and proceeds to turn this familiar *consensus omnium* against him by using it to support a proposition of the uniqueness of God, rather than an uncertainty of the nature of 'gods'. It was a standard procedure in rhetoric and, as Clarke⁴² reminds us, in *de natura Deorum* both Velleius (1.43) and Balbus (2.4) begin with this type of argument, whilst even Cotta the academic is prepared to acknowledge divine existence (1.62). Tertullian uses a similar argument but deals in much more detail with the singular *deus*, justifying the universalist use *vultis ex animae*

⁴⁰ Palmer, 1954, 183 ff.

⁴¹ Clarke, 1974, 261

⁴² Clarke, 1974, 261

ipsius testimonion conprobemus? quae licet carcere corporis pressadeum nominat, hoc solo, quia proprie verus hic unus (17.5). Once again, Minucius is content to gloss over the question, merely using it as an argument that a theistic belief is inherent in the *vulgus* and is not just the *Christiani confitentis oratio*. The use of the word *Christiani* is worth noting. As has been mentioned, specific Christian references are carefully avoided in *Octavius*, so the use of *Christiani* here and also, twice, at the beginning of 20, carries some force in a section where Octavius is referring to the faith more specifically than is usually the case.

19.

In contrast to Tertullian in the *Apologeticus*, Minucius proceeds to develop the argument using the example of the poets and philosophers, once again employing parallels and imagery designed to appeal to his educated pagan hearers.

audio poetas quoque unum patrem divum atque hominum praedicantes. This phrase, originally from Homer πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε (Il. 1.544) is frequently quoted in Latin, for instance, by Ennius, *patrem divumque hominumque* (Ann.175, 580), quoted by Cicero (*N.D. II.4*), and Vergil *namque tibi divum pater atque hominum rex* (A. 1.65). It was therefore a very familiar citation for Octavius to use yet one which, because of its very familiarity, would have had limited value in supporting his thesis of the universal acknowledgement of one deity. Vergil, referred to here as *Mantuanus Maro*, is quoted directly in the following lines, in a passage from *G.* 4.221 combined with *A.* 1.723 ff. There are other echoes or paraphrases of Vergil in *Octavius* and the relationship between Minucius and Vergil has been explored by, amongst others, P. Courcelle⁴³ and D. S. Wiesen,⁴⁴ both cited by Clarke.⁴⁵

mens et ratio et spiritus The quotations cited have mentioned *mens* and *spiritus* but not *ratio*. I tend to agree with Clarke⁴⁶ in taking this threefold ascription as a rhetorical device rather than it being an oblique reference to the Trinity, as Beutler⁴⁷ suggests.

recensiamus, si placet, disciplinam philosophorum Octavius then proceeds to cite a compilation of philosophers which borrows largely from the Epicurean Velleius (*N.D.* 1.25-41). However, whilst Velleius uses these examples to point out the shortcomings of non-Epicurean philosophers,

⁴³ Courcelle, 1955

⁴⁴ Wiesen, 1971, 70 ff

⁴⁵ Clarke, 1974, 265

⁴⁶ Clarke, 1974, 265

⁴⁷ Beutler, cited in Clarke, 265

Octavius' purpose is to support his monotheistic thesis. I do not intend to review the whole list of philosophers in detail, but merely to note one or two interesting or difficult points.

6. *Anaxagorae vero descriptio et motus infinitae mentis deus dicitur.* Once more, the somewhat capricious nature of Minucius is demonstrated in that he summarises or misquotes, either to suit his purpose or because he has not sufficiently understood his source or, as may well be the case here, has a variant reading for his source. The mention of Anaxagoras is derived from *de Natura Deorum* 1.26 where, however, the best texts give *modum mentis infinitae*. Beaujeu⁴⁸ cites *motum* as a variant reading, the error being due probably to the use of *motum sensui* in the following line, and submits that Minucius probably had access to a text with this variant. Whether this is the case, or whether, as in so much Apologetic writing of the time, the lack of availability of texts meant that Minucius was quoting from memory, we have here an instance of, in my opinion, the somewhat arbitrary way in which Minucius uses his sources.

10 *Cleanthes enim mentem modo naturae atque animum* According to Rendall,⁴⁹ the two highlighted words are 'restored' from *N.D.* I.37 *tum totius naturae menti atque animo tribuit hoc nomen.* Beaujeu has *modo <atque> animum*⁵⁰, with no *naturae* and comments

'comme d'habitude Minucius n'a retenu de ce passage que ce qui servait son dessein; le sens et le modèle cicéronien nous paraissent exiger l'addition d' *atque* entre *mentem* et *animum*'.⁵¹

Holden's text has *mentem, modo animum*, as have both Migne and the 18th century edition of Gronovius⁵². This particular textual problem demonstrates, as Beaujeu says, that Minucius, maybe by accident but probably from design, is selective in his edited quotes from *de Natura Deorum* in order to achieve his intention of demonstrating that the concept of a one universal and omnipotent deity is common to most of the philosophers. I would prefer Holden,⁵³ who states that he is adhering as far as possible to the Paris mss.

14. *Platoni apertior de deo et rebus ipsis et nominibus oratio est.* With Plato, Minucius reaches the climax of his philosophical list, eager to include a relevant quotation to crown his philosophical litany. His assertion *Platoni apertior de deo* is possibly meant to support his own thesis, which

⁴⁸ Beaujeu, 1964, 110

⁴⁹ Rendall, 1966, 368

⁵⁰ Beaujeu, 1964, 30

⁵¹ Beaujeu, 1964, 112

⁵² Gronovius, 1709

⁵³ Holden, 1853, vii

would appear to be contradicted by the verdict of Velleius on Plato, *iam de Platonis inconstantia longum est dicere* (N.D. 1.30). Beaujeu⁵⁴ suggests that Minucius had another, unknown, source.

nisi persuasionis civilis nonnunquam admixtione sordesceret Clarke⁵⁵ comments that this assertion 'is a little obscure'. However, Beaujeu⁵⁶ suggests, following Pellegrino⁵⁷ that this phrase is a combination of two passages from (Pseudo)-Justin (*Cohortus ad Graecos* 22-24 and 32) in which Justin reproaches Plato for hiding monotheistic convictions under conventional polytheistic language in order to avoid meeting the same fate as Socrates.

mundi parens ...impossibile A translation of *Timaeus* 28.C, a passage frequently quoted by, for instance, Justin (*Apol.* 10. 6), and Tertullian (*Apol.* 46. 9), in addition to such classical writers as Apuleius (*De Plat.* I. 5, *de deo Socr.* 3) and therefore rightly described by Clarke⁵⁸ as 'one of the most hackneyed quotations of all classical literature and it enjoyed particular popularity with the Christian apologists.'

Eadem fere et ista, quae nostra sunt... With this 'trump card' of a Platonic quotation Octavius concludes his first section of arguments answering the objections to belief voiced by Caecilius in 5.

at numquam publice nisi interrogati praedicamus In 8.4 Caecilius accused Christians of being *in publicum muta, angulis garrula*. Octavius emphasises that 'public preaching' is neither his intention nor that of his co-religionists.

20.1 A final and fit summing up of Octavius' thesis, owing somewhat to Velleius' summing up in *de Natura Deorum* I.16. 42 yet managing to express a somewhat different opinion from Velleius' description of *non philosophorum indicia sed delirantium somnia* in the claim that monotheistic belief is prefigured in all the philosophers *ut nunc Christianos philosophus esse aut philosophos fuisse iam tunc Christianos*. Yet we find here the somewhat strange equation of monotheism with Christianity. This was, presumably, the first step in attempting to convince an educated and well-read pagan of the truth of Christian belief. καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (Jn 1.14) would be a step too far.

Chapters 9-10. Caecilius

⁵⁴ Beaujeu, 1964, 113

⁵⁵ Clarke, 1974, 272

⁵⁶ Beaujeu, 1964, 113

⁵⁷ Pellegrino, 1947, cited in Beaujeu 113

⁵⁸ Clarke, 1974, 272

9.

I return to Caecilius' objections to Christianity. In ch. 9, leaving the former philosophical arguments of ch. 5 discussed earlier, Minucius now puts into the mouth of Caecilius the well-worn calumnies and rumours concerning Christian conduct and worship to which many of the early apologists allude, for instance, Tertullian (*Apol* 7-8 and 16). Since it is improbable that an educated jurist, as represented by Caecilius, would give credence to such ideas it would seem that Minucius, whilst continuing the dialogue format, is once again reverting to apologetic style, in that these, obviously spurious, calumnies are here adduced in order for them to be refuted later by Octavius (see chs. 28-32, p.31 ff).

1. *ac iam adolescent* Strong language, where the use of the comparatives *fecundius nequiora* emphasise the rapid and continuous growth of the *impiae coitionis*. Holden⁵⁹ comments 'the word *coire* is peculiarly applied to factious and unlawful combinations', a comment which is supported by the references in TLL⁶⁰. Tertullian explains (*Apol.* 39.2) *coimus in coetum et congregationem, ut ad deum* In addition, the somewhat agricultural metaphor hinted at in this and the following sentence with the use of *adolescent* and *eruenta* is telling. However, most comment and discussion here focusses on the precise meaning of *sacraria*. The normal use of *sacrarium* is for a place where sacred articles are kept, *sacrarium est locus in quo sacra reponuntur: quod etiam in aedificio privato esse potest* (*Digesta Iustiniani* 1.8.9). The second half of this definition accords with the early Christian practice of meeting in private houses, attested in the New Testament (e.g. *Philemon* 2, *Romans* 16. 23) and elsewhere (e.g. *Justin Acta* 2) . Mention of totally separate buildings for Christian gatherings only appear in the third century, for example in Lactantius (*de mort. pers.* 12.3) and so, unless a date as late as mid third century is accepted for *Octavius*, the reference here is to 'house church' congregations. Certainly, to a pagan accustomed to a clear distinction between private expressions of devotion such as offerings to the *Lares* and *Penates* and pious veneration of departed family members, and public religion, temple sacrifices, taking of auspices and so on, the idea of informal gatherings of believers, who were not related, in a private house, would indeed appear strange and this no doubt contributed in no small measure to the rumours of strange, immoral and impious practices referred to in this chapter.

⁵⁹ Holden, 1853, 69

⁶⁰ s.v. coitio, 1566 35, 40

2. *Occultis se notis et insignibus noscunt* Whilst it has been suggested that *notis* could refer to physical marks or tattoos of some sort, as was the practice in the Mithraic cult⁶¹, *occultis* would seem to contradict this. *Notis* could well refer to the making of the sign of the cross and also to the use of recognisably Christian symbols such as the ἰχθύς sign. It is also possible that the reference is to circumcision, even though this was a Jewish, not Christian, practice. In his reply in 31.8, Caecilius specifically says *sic nos denique non notaculo corporis, ut putatis, ...* whilst Tertullian makes the same point *...neque de ipso signaculo corporis ...cum Iudaeis agimus ...*(*Apol.* 21. 2). Octavius' reply to this point in 31.8 makes clear that any suggestion of *notis* and *insignibus* having physical connotations is false.

et amant mutuo ... sacri nominis fiat incestum A common accusation levelled against Christians, similar practices being features of many of the more esoteric mystery cults. The Christian concept of ἀγάπη, ... ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους (John 13. 34), was either misunderstood or deliberately distorted,⁶² and accusations of sexual abuse were frequently levelled at Christian gatherings. Several references attest to the awareness of such dangers on the part of Christian leaders, e.g. Ignatius 'it is not permitted without authorization from the bishop to hold an agape' (*Smyrna* 8.2), quoted in translation by Clarke,⁶³ and Paul's directives about conduct in 1. Cor 11. The practice of greeting with a kiss and the ceremonial 'Kiss of Peace' mentioned, for instance, in Justin (*Apol.* 1.65) and Paul (1. Cor. 16.20), also led to the type of charge mentioned here by Caecilius. Octavius will later (33) refute these accusations, which will be discussed in further detail at that point.

ac se promisce appellant fratres et sorores Octavius has already addressed Minucius as *Marce frater* (3.1), which greeting is repeated by Caecilius in 5.1, possibly ironically, though this is far from clear. This type of greeting, though not common, was not unknown in general usage, particularly between friends, e.g. *Apul. Met* 1.17, 8.9, 9.7; *Hor. Ep.* 1.6.54; *Cic. Verr.* 2.3.66.155.

Tertullian refers to this accusation against Christians (*Apol.* 39.8-10). However, he does not make any reference to the concomitant of fraternal greetings, that this leads *ut etiam non insolens stuprum intercessione sacri nominis fiat incestum*. It appears rather strange that both here and in the following sections of 9, Minucius should present an ostensibly educated and cultured figure such as Caecilius as giving credence to such obvious calumnies. Here we have one of several instances in this work of the fictitious nature of the *Octavius*. Minucius is clearly at pains to include here as

⁶¹ Cumont, 1899, 319, cited in Clarke, 214

⁶² Clarke, 1974, p. 215

⁶³ Clarke, 1974, p. 215

many as possible of the *famae* current at the time in order to be able to include refutations on the part of Octavius.

3. ... *ita eorum vana et demens superstitio sceleribus gloriatur* The references to *superstitio* are many and varied in classical literature but, as Janssen argues, all demonstrate its use as a term denoting a cult or sect at variance with, and being inconsistent with, such Roman virtues as *religio*, *humanitas*, *pietas*.⁶⁴ *Superstitio* is, as here, frequently qualified by negative adjectives; Tacitus describes *superstitio* as *exitiabilis*, (*Ann.* 15.44.4) Suetonius refers to Christianity as a *superstitio nova ac malefica* (*Nero* 16,2). Horace goes further *quisquis luxuria tristive superstitio aut alio mentis morbo calet* (*Sat.* 2.3, 79/80). Cicero says of *superstitio*, *fusa per gentis oppressit omnium fere animos atque hominum imbecillitatem occupavit* (*Div.* 15.4.4). The same theme is frequently found both in this work and in *de Natura Deorum* (2.71). The reference in the *Aeneid*, *non haec sollemnia nobis ... vana superstitio veterumque ignara deorum imposuit* (*A.* 8. 187) should also be mentioned here. Janssen defines the term thus:

'*Pietas* as the sincere expression of *religio*, the unshakable belief in the aid of the Roman gods; *religio* as opposed to *superstitio*, that only sought for the rescue of the individual, who tried to break away from the community of the *nomen Romanum* so as to ensure for himself and his kindred an improper salvation.'⁶⁵

It is not surprising, then, that Christian belief was consistently referred to as *superstitio*. This is exemplified by Pliny in his letter to Trajan, who said he found no *flagitia* amongst Christians but a *superstitionem pravam, immodicam* (*Ep. Tra.* 10.96,8).

... *sagax fama loqueretur* *Fama* is a common expression conveying the sense not just of 'news' but 'slander, rumour'⁶⁶. Minucius' use of it here by Caecilius recalls the attack of Tertullian against *fama* (*Apol.* 7. 8ff; *Ad Nat.* 1.7.1 ff), where Tertullian introduces his objections by quoting the beginning of Vergil's well-known passage about *fama* in *Aeneid* 4, *fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullum*, (*A.* 4.174), a quotation which would also be familiar to Minucius' readers. In his reply to this passage Octavius will describe *fama* as *negotium daemonum* (28. 6). Here *fama* is qualified by *sagax*, a word that would be familiar to the educated reader, in its derivation from *sentire*, described thus by Cicero *sagire enim sentire acute est; ex quo sagae anus, quia multa scire volunt, et sagaces dicti canes* (*Div.* 1.65). Caecilius therefore, as is frequently the case in *Octavius*,

⁶⁴ Janssen, 1979, 131-159

⁶⁵ Janssen, 1979, 142

⁶⁶ s.v. fama

is presented as using a sophisticated literary phrase, possibly slightly ironically, to impute veracity and respectability to his attacks. One cannot but feel that such attacks are not worthy of someone presented as a cultured and learned person. However, as has been mentioned before, the introduction of such material serves all the more to underline the nature of *Octavius* as a defence of Christian belief and practice.

By using the single word *audio* Caecilius makes some attempt to distance himself from what is to follow but then proceeds to enumerate many current calumnies.

caput asini consecratum inepta nescio qua persuasione venerari. This accusation had originally been levelled against the Jews and thence transferred to Christians (Tert. *Apol.* 16.1, *Ad. Nat.* 1.11, 1.14ff.). Its origin would appear to be derived from the story found in Tacitus of how a herd of wild asses led Moses and the Israelites to water in the desert, following which *effigiem animalis ... penetrati sacravere* (*Hist.* 5. 3ff). Mention should also be made of the so-called Alexamenos graffito, probably dating from the first century, discovered in a building on the Palatine Hill in 1857, now to be found at the Palatine Antiquarium in Rome, which depicts a figure looking up at a crucified figure bearing an ass's head with, underneath, the inscription ΑΛΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΣΕΒΕΤΕ ΘΕΟΝ. Whilst its exact provenance and date cannot be established, it would seem to demonstrate a mocking view of Christianity and to give credence to the idea that Christians practised onolatry. Clarke, suggesting a connection between the idea of ass-worship and Egyptian animal gods, refers to the large letter Y to the left of the crucified figure as both an Egyptian and a Pythagorean symbol.⁶⁷ Clarke also points out that Epiphanius (*Adv. haer.* 39.1 ff.) relates that the Gnostic sect of the Sethians identified Christ with the Egyptian God Seth, whose symbol was an ass, and suggests therefore that the Alexamenos graffito might have derived from that sect. More detailed treatment of this calumny as applied to Christians is found in Tertullian (*Apol.* 16. 1-5), who, referring to the connection with Tacitus, describes him as *sane ille mendaciorum loquacissimus*. Octavius draws on this passage of Tertullian in his reply (28. 7).

4. *Alii ferunt.....nescio an falsa* Once again, a disavowal by Caecilius of any personal conviction, yet he is prepared to attempt to use such material to try to give support to his arguments against Christian belief. *...ipsius antistitis ... naturam.* Clarke comments, 'this bizarre story is not found elsewhere among the charges reported against the Christians',⁶⁸ and certainly such an accusation would appear to weaken rather than strengthen Caecilius' case. Octavius, in his refutation, gives

⁶⁷ Clarke, 1974, 218

⁶⁸ Clarke, 1974, 218

this suggestion short shrift *etiam ille, qui de adoratis sacerdotis virilibus adversum nos fabulatur, temptat in nos conferre quae sua sunt* (28. 10). Holden, however, suggests that 'this contemptible scandal took its rise most probably from the posture in which penitents were wont to kneel before the bishop',⁶⁹ giving as one of his sources Tertullian, ... *presbyteris advolvi, et caris Dei adgeniculari omnibus fratribus legationis deprecationis suae injungere* (*de Poeit.* 9). This seems a possible, if rather far-fetched, suggestion as to the origin of this strange calumny.

hominem ... punitum et cruces ligna feralia A notable feature of the *Octavius* is its almost total omission of specific Christian or scriptural references, due to Minucius' avowed purpose of setting before his peers, well-versed in philosophy and literature, the reasonableness and veracity of Christian belief when expressed in recognisably philosophical terms, an approach followed later by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*. The mention here of the crucifixion of Jesus is one of only two such allusions, the second being in Octavius' later refutation of Caecilius (39.2). Two objections are here raised by Caecilius, both reflecting current ideas and impressions of Christian belief and worship, but objections far more reasonable than the aberrations and deviations previously and subsequently mentioned. First is the charge of worshipping one put to death in a manner reserved for the basest of criminals and the second, allied to it, was the charge of stauology, refuted by Tertullian, (*Apol.* 16.6; *Ad Nat.* 1.12.1 ff). The problems are acknowledged by Paul, ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν ... Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίοις μὲν σκάνδαλον, ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν ... (1. Cor. 1. 18, 23), as the scandal or stumbling-block it appeared to contemporary society, both Jewish and Gentile.

5. *Infans farre contectus ... pignerantur* Accusations of infanticide and Thyestean meals, particularly, as here, as part of a supposed initiation rite, were frequently levelled at Christian communities, and many of the Apologists mention and refute them. These owed their origin both to a misunderstanding of the nature of the Christian Eucharist and also to the fact that these, or similar, practices were not unknown in some pagan and Gnostic sects (Sallust, *Cat.* 22; Epiph. *Adv. haer.* 26.5). Tertullian deals with these issues both in *Ad Nationes* (I.7,23) and in *Apologeticus* (7 and 9). Other mentions are found in Justin (*Apol.* 1.26) and Origen (*c.Celsus* 6.27). There is no mention of dough, other than here in *Octavius*, though Tertullian (*Apol.* 8.7) mentions *panis* in this connection. The *farre/panis* association could possibly stem from stories and calumnies concerned with a misunderstanding of the Eucharist.

⁶⁹ Holden, 1853, 71

ad silentium mutuuum Blood pacts and vows of silence were a feature of secret societies. Holden⁷⁰ refers to the description by Sallust of Catiline and his associates, *pugnis coniurationis, quo inter se fidi magis forent, alius alii tanti facinoris conscii* (*Cat.* 22), and points out that many of the practices attributed to Christians were products of the very pagan culture which condemned them.

6. *id etiam Cirtensis nostri testator oratio* Marcus Cornelius Fronto, born a Roman citizen around 95 in Cirta, capital of Numidia, was educated in Rome, where he became known as an outstanding orator, amassed a considerable fortune, was consul for a short time in 143 and attracted the favour of the emperor Antoninus Pius, who appointed him tutor to his adopted sons, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.⁷¹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that he would have been known to Minucius Felix. He also appears in 31.2 where Octavius, addressing Caecilius, refers to him as *tuus Fronto*. Whilst some of his letters to his pupils have survived,⁷² there is no trace of an attack on Christians, which is obviously the source of some of the remarks here. Beaujeu⁷³ discusses the case made for such a document by Frassinetti⁷⁴ and suggests that much of what follows in 9. is taken from this hypothetical document. This may be the case but, whilst it is possible that such a document existed, there is no trace or mention of it other than here. As is pointed out below, the sources, if any, for what follows in this chapter are clearly, firstly, Tertullian's *Apologetus* and, to a lesser extent, various other texts with which Minucius' readers would probably be familiar.

Ad epulas sollemni die coeunt An obvious misunderstanding of the Christian ἀγάπη, explained by Tertullian (*Apol.* 39 16). Even amongst Christian communities there were obviously difficulties about this, and its relationship to, and eventual distinction from, the Eucharist, as attested by Paul, Ὡστε, ἀδελφοί μου, συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε. εἴ τις πεινᾷ, ἐν οἴκῳ ἐσθιέτω (I Cor. 11.33).

... *canis qui candelabro nexus est* ... This strange account of dogs extinguishing lights is familiar to many of the apologists, being mentioned by Tertullian (*Apol.* 7.1, 8. 3 and 7); Justin Εἰ δὲ καὶ τὰ δύσφημα ἐκεῖνα μυθολογούμενα ἔργα πράττουσι, λυχνίας μὲν ἀνατροπὴν καὶ τὰς ἀνέδην μίξεις καὶ ἀνθρωπείων σαρκῶν βοράς, οὐ γινώσκομεν ἀλλ' ὅτι μὴ διώκονται μηδὲ ψονεύονται ὑφ' ὑμῶν κἄν

⁷⁰ Holden, 1853, 73

⁷¹ Haines, 1955, x, 2ff.

⁷² Haines, 1919, reprinted 1928, 1955

⁷³ Beaujeu, 1964, 88

⁷⁴ Frassinetti, 1949 238 ff.

διὰ τὰ δόγματα, ἐπιστάμεθα. (*Apol.* I. 26). Clarke surmises that the association may have arisen from the use of lights as part of Christian, as also in Jewish, worship.⁷⁵

sic everso et extincto conscio lumine.... Conscius, in the sense of secret or shameful knowledge, is found in several secular texts, for instance, Seneca *lucem videre tot consciam scelerum*, (*Ep.* 101.15) and Vergil, *fulsere ignes et conscius aether conubiis* (*A.* 4.167). Even when presenting calumnies Minucius makes use of classical texts to support the legitimacy of his thesis for his intended educated readership.

10.

Caecilius continues his objections to Christianity with the contention that everything is done in secret, that there is no cult as such, and that Christians worship a deity *unicus, solitarius, destitutus*, who is presented as *molestum ... inquietum, impudenter etiam curiosum*.

Cur etenim occultare et abscondere...? A reasonable objection, to which, it must be said, Minucius, in the person of Octavius, does not provide an answer. If, as is generally held (see pp. 3 and 15 for brief discussion of dating) , this work was written at a time of comparative freedom from persecution for Christians, perhaps under Alexander Severus, the observation *cum honesta semper publico gaudeant, scelera secreta sint*, has force, and it is therefore strange that the accusation of secrecy is not countered. However, given the uncertainty surrounding dating, it is possible that Christianity was, at the time, still a *religio illicita*.

cur nullas aras habent There is a distinction here between *ara* and *altare*. *Ara* was used for the altar or shrine for sacrifice to the major pagan gods, whereas *altare*, in a pagan setting usually used in the plural *altaria*, referred to smaller shrines, often portable, for burnt offerings.⁷⁶ Christians always use *altare*, or, in Greek, θυσιαστήριον, as distinct from βωμός. Cyprian explains this *quasi post aras diaboli accede ad altare Dei fas sit* (*Ep.* 65.12). The subject of Christian altars, and their early forms, is discussed by Dölger.⁷⁷ The point Minucius is making, expounded in 32. 2, is that Christians have no need for any equivalent of pagan sacrifices and, indeed, will have no part in such ceremonies, the refusal to sacrifice being one of the main reasons for both earlier and later persecutions.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Clarke, 1974, 225

⁷⁶ OLD, 1996, q.v. altare

⁷⁷ Dölger, 1930, 161 ff.

⁷⁸ Lane Fox, 1986, 255

temple nulla, nulla nota simulacra It would be understandable for a cultured pagan to object to a cult which appeared to be completely lacking in the art, sculpture and decoration which formed a feature of pagan temples and other buildings. *Templa* here probably refers to a place of public sacrifice. Certainly, if the date is taken to be around the beginning of the third century, church buildings as such were only just beginning to develop out of the ἐκκλήσια of the house-church. Octavius will answer these objections in 32.1.

numquam palam loqui, numquam libere congregari Caecilius has raised the same objections in an even more strident manner in 8.4, where he describes Christians as *in publicum muta, in angulis garrula, temple ut busta despiciunt* ... As mentioned above, it seems understandable that, at a time of the existence of mystery cults, secret gatherings should appear suspect, and Minucius nowhere rebuts this accusation.

3. *Unde autem vel quis ille aut ubi deus unicus, solitaries, destitutus* ...? Clearly Minucius is concerned to raise all the usual and possible objections to the Christian case and the pagan incomprehension of the concept of an invisible, monotheistic god is only partially answered by Octavius in 18.7-10 (see above pp. 18-19). However, this idea is not totally absent from philosophical concepts, and one might here trace an echo of Cicero, where the Academic Cotta is refuting the Epicurean argument of Velleius: *concede esse deos: doce me igitur unde sint, ubi sint, quales sint* (N.D. 1.65). Minucius is, as always, careful to link the arguments of both Caecilius and Octavius into traditional concepts, familiar to his readers, to strengthen his purpose of demonstrating that Christian beliefs stem from respectable and familiar origins. Here the argument is that theistic beliefs are also found in Epicurean thought.

non saltem Romana superstitio noverint. See the earlier note (p. 24) on the pejorative inference of *superstitio*. Minucius is here perhaps rather overstating the case for Christianity being hidden, and not even one of the acknowledged religious aberrations familiar to Romans, for he himself is an example of a cultured and educated class of person who has acquired a knowledge of this faith and has become one of its adherents. Moreover, if a rough dating of Octavius is taken to be around the beginning of the third century, Christianity has moved a long way from being a small secret sect, as Peter Lampe's detailed study makes clear.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Lampe, 2003

One cannot but be aware of a distinct 'lowering of the tone' in 9 and 10 compared with the philosophical tone of Caecilius' earlier objections to Christianity expressed in 5 to 8.

Iudaeorumsed palam, sed templis, aris, victimis caerimoniisque coluerunt Perfect tense *coluerunt* as, even if Jewish Temple sacrifices continued after the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and there is some evidence that these may have continued until as late as 135,⁸⁰ this practice had totally ceased by the time of the writing of Octavius, (see pp.3 and 15-16). It is significant that, in comparing Jewish and Christian practice (vide supra *temple nulla ...*), *simulacra* are not mentioned, since even non-Jews were aware that 'graven images' were forbidden. Tacitus, for example, notes *igitur nulla simulacra urbibus suis, nedum templis sistunt; non regibus haec adulatio, non Caesaribus honor. (H.5.5)*. However, by the time Christianity had made the leap from being regarded as a Jewish sect, Christians would want to distinguish their worship from Jewish practices, as, for instance, Tertullian argues in *Adversus Iudeos* 5.

Romanis hominibus There appear to be variant readings here. The Paris mss. has *nomibus*, which some editions, for instance Woweren (1603), Rigaltius (1643) and Migne (1844), render as *numibus*. Holden⁸¹ points out that in the mss. there are several instances in Arnobius of the copyist erroneously writing *nomen* for *numen*. However, other editions, notably the 16th century *Editio Princeps*, or *Editio Romana*, have *hominibus*, which reading is followed by most modern editions, including that of Holden. I am inclined to agree with Holden, who says of this reading, 'but *hominibus* gives more point to the sentence, being more sarcastical and insulting'.⁸²

5. *At etiam Christiani...* As Beaujeu⁸³ observes, it is clear that this chapter derives much more from *de Natura Deorum*, where Velleius the Epicurean is attacking the Stoics (*de Natura Deorum* 1.20, 52 and 54), than from the Apologists. Certainly, the description of *deum illum suum* adduced here by Caecilius demonstrates a familiarity with philosophical modes of expression rather than with Christian.

⁸⁰ Clark, in *JNTS* 1960, 121 n. 3, cited by Clarke, 1974. 227

⁸¹ Holden, 1853, 76

⁸² Holden, 1853, 76

⁸³ Beaujeu, 1964, 90

Chapters 28-33. Octavius

28.

Octavius replies to the objections to Christianity put forward by Caecilius in 9 and 10. As before, much more space is devoted to this than to Caecilius' original objections, in line with the broadly apologetic nature of *Octavius*.

1. *quam autem iniquum sit* Octavius' main objection to Caecilius is that his accusations have been made *incognitis et inexploratis*.

2. *et nos enim idem fuimuspaeniteret*. It may or may not have been the case that Minucius was converted to Christianity as a result of undertaking the defence of those accused of this faith. However, an account of conversion is a common feature of apologetic (e.g. Justin, *Apol.* 1.25 ff, Tatian, *Oratio.* 29), and whether or not there is a personal element here, there is clearly a reference to Tertullian, *Haec et nos risimus aliquando. De vestris sumus. Fiunt, non nascuntur Christiani.* (*Apol.* 18.4). Holden⁸⁴ would prefer *facimus* to *fuimus* because of the preceding *facitis* but I think *fuimus* has more force here, as part of Octavius' declaration of a change of viewpoint.

... quasi Christiani ... miscerent A summary of Caecilius' accusations in 9, 5-7, discussed earlier (pp. 26-7).

..ab his ... In chapter 26 Caecilius has discussed the concept of *daemones*, δαίμονες, ... *eos spiritus daemonas esse poetae sciunt, philosophi disserunt, Socrates novit*(26.9). Justin cites in this connection Empedocles, Pythagoras, Plato and Socrates, (*Apol.* 1.18) the latter two probably referring to the Socratic δαιμόνιον γίγνεται φωνή (Plato, *Apol.* 31d). Here Octavius refers to δαίμονες as the source of the calumnies which are circulating without due and necessary investigation and evidence.

nec ...aliquem existere qui proderet ... Derived from Tertullian (*Apol.* 7.5) and Athenagoras (*Leg.* 35). It was common practice for evidence from slaves to be obtained under torture, *quotiens de dominio mancipiorum tractatur. si aliis probationibus veritas illuminari non possit, de se ipsa cum tormentis interroganda iuris auctores probant* (Ulpian, *de officio proconsularis* lib. 8) and it is probably that Christians were thus betrayed by their slaves, as reported by Eusebius (*H.E.* 5.1.14) and Justin (*Apol.* 2.12).

⁸⁴ Holden, 1853, 148

Christianus reus nec ...paeniteret A close parallel to, and conflation of, two passages from Tertullian *in publico aut timet....* (*Apol.* 1.1) and *neminem pudet fuisse* (*Apol.* 1.12). I would submit that this is yet one more example of the derivative nature of the *Octavius* and the priority of Tertullian (see brief discussion of dating on p. 3 and also p. 15). It is not possible to establish to what extent Minucius had access to written texts.

3. ... *sacrilegos aliquos et incestos, parricidas etiam* All these charges were levelled at Christians by Caecilius in 9 (see p. 23, 25-6) referred to earlier in the chapter by Octavius ...*monstra colerent, infantes vorarent, convivium incesta miscerent* (2), and will be mentioned again in 28.5 *de incestis stupris, de impietatis sacris, de infantibus immolatis*. In the passage in 3 *parricidium*, or *parricida*, though frequently connected with murder of a father (cf. Cicero *Pro Roscio*) can mean the murder of any close relative,⁸⁵ and here clearly refers to the infanticide mentioned by Caecilius in 9.5.

exercentescogeret It is a strange anomaly in that, whilst other criminals, having pleaded not guilty, are tortured in order to obtain a confession, Christians, having confessed, are tortured in order to make them deny and this is regarded with approval *et si ... se negasset, favebamus ei* (5). As Clarke⁸⁶ points out, there are many instances in the *Acta* of the early martyrs, such as those of Justin and Pionius, of those accused not giving direct answers to their accusers but of taking the opportunity of 'witnessing' at length, to Christian belief. This gave the impression that there had not been a fair trial, leading to the reluctance of the judge to pass sentence. Tertullian makes the same point about the torture anomaly concerning Christians even more forcibly (*Apol.* 2.6, 10), where he criticises the reply of Trajan to Pliny (Pliny, *Ep.*10. 96 and 97), with a telling wordplay *negat inquirendos ut innocentes, et mandat puniendos ut nocentes* (*Apol.* 2.8). Minucius summarises this argument, providing another instance of his indebtedness to Tertullian.

..*nomine* From a Christian point of view the concept of *nomen*, ὄνομα, as applied to Christ, is central, derived originally from Jewish roots, and features frequently in Christian writings, not least in the New Testament, for instance, ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πάντων γόνων κάμψη ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων (Phil. 2. 10). To deny the Name, was, for a Christian, the ultimate apostasy, (cf. Tertullian *Apol.* 2.18,) but this would appear to pagans a somewhat strange concept.

5. ... *non instigatio daemonis iudicaret....* Octavius returns here, and in paragraph 6, to the concept of *daemones* mentioned above and which he discussed fully in ch. 26. Octavius submits that the

⁸⁵ OLD s.v. parricidium, parricida

⁸⁶ Clarke, 1974, 322

accusations levelled at Christians by Caecilius are not the product of *ratio* but rather scurrilous rumours which *horrorem imperitorum auresreferserunt*. The use of *imperiti* here is significant. Octavius used the term in connection once again with *daemones*, at the end of ch. 27 *....inserti mentibus imperitorum ...* and Caecilius' veneration of the statue of Serapis, which gives rise to the whole discourse, has been described by Octavius as *imperitia* (3.1). I see here also an oblique reference to Caecilius' jibes at Christians as *... hoc studiorum rudes ...expertes artium etiam sordidarum ...* (5.4).

6. *... cum omnium fama ...* Octavius once again picks up and counters another of Caecilius's use of the emotive term *fama* describing it as *negotium daemonum*. (see notes on ch.9 p. 21 ff).

7. *..... caput asini* The reference here is to the story in Tacitus, referred to by Tertullian (*Apol.* 16. 1-5), (see note on 9, p. 24). Octavius here draws upon it in his demonstration of the absurdity of the idea of worship of an asses head. He also follows Tertullian in the reference to *Epona*, the horse-goddess mentioned in Juvenal (*Sat.* 8.156) and Apuleius (*Met.* 3.17).

8. *... et eosdem asinos cum Isidepunitur* The Egyptian cults had always had a following in Roman circles, the connection being that Isis was the daughter of Jupiter by Juno, and Osiris his son and the husband of Isis. The story of the murder and dismemberment of Osiris by his brother Tryphon and Isis' search for his limbs, narrated by Plutarch (*de Iside et Osiride*, 18), would be well known to Minucius' audience. There was good reason for Octavius to dwell upon this connection since it was the act of reverence paid by Caecilius to Serapis, popularly identified with Osiris, which had given rise to the whole discourse. Serapis, in common with other deities, was a 'universal' deity, who was also from time to time, in the tolerant and syncretistic ambience of Roman paganism, identified with other deities. Octavius has also referred to these deities in ch. 22 and here he exploits both syncretism and the Egyptian pantheon of animal deities in his rebuttal of the accusation of Christian worship of an ass. This type of attack was not confined to Christian apologetic. Clarke⁸⁷ notes 'criticism of Egyptian theriolatry was a common theological topic; it formed part (especially in the Academic-Sceptic tradition) of the standard polemic against traditional religion.' He rightly cites in support of this Cicero, *de Nat. Deorum* I.43, 82 and 101, echoes of which, particularly 1.82, are clearly present in Octavius' discourse.

9. *...Idem Aegyptiicontremescent* Octavius uses oratorical effect further to mock Caecilius' devotion to Serapis. There are many references to Egyptians' dislike of onions, (cf Pliny, *N.H.*

⁸⁷ Clarke, 1974, 324

2.16, 19.101, Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 20.8.7). Plutarch recounts the story of Dictys, the nurseling of Isis, falling into the river and drowning as a result of reaching for a bunch of onions. (*De Iside et Osiride*, 8.353).

10-29.1 *etiam ille, ... probaretis* A reference to the charge of Caecilius in 9.4 (see p. 25-6). Since, to be fair, Caecilius prefaced this accusation with *alii eos ferunt* Octavius appears to be using this mention to his own advantage, and thus making much more of the accusation than was originally levelled. Whilst Caecilius' accusations of sexual abuse require answering, it appears that the references by Octavius here to various forms of sexual deviation and depravity, extending into ch. 29 are rather more than is required to refute the one sentence *alii suspicio* (9.4). In this genre such polemic was usual and expected.

29.2 ff.

Octavius devotes the rest of this chapter to answering Caecilius' objection to Christian veneration of the crucified Christ in 9.4 (see above p. 24).

2. *nam quod ...finitur* Criticism has frequently been levelled against Octavius that, in a work which purports to defend and declare Christian belief, there is no specific reference to Christ other than in this passage and in ch. 9. Indeed, Octavius' reply to Caecilius in section 2 of this chapter appears very weak and somewhat curious, and totally lacking in any Christological content. Various reasons have been adduced as to why this should be, from the suggestion of Kühn,⁸⁸ that Minucius was a recent convert, without any real understanding of Christian doctrine, or that of Dessau⁸⁹ that he was a member of the heretical Docetist sect, who believed that Christ was not truly human (from δόκησις) or even that, improbably, in my view, *Octavius* was intended not as apologetic but as a document to comfort the Christian relatives and friends of the deceased Octavius (1.1-3).⁹⁰

Whilst Christological discussion is not within the remit of this study, Minucius would probably be aware of contemporary debate concerning the nature of the Godhead, such as whether Jesus was really divine, and the relationship of Father and Son, and, later the Holy Spirit, which preoccupied the Church well up to and beyond the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.⁹¹ Since he seeks to

⁸⁸ Kühn, 1882

⁸⁹ Dessau, 1905, 373-386

⁹⁰ Elter, 1909

⁹¹ Chadwick, 1993, 203-4

explain Christianity in terms of Greek philosophy, why does Minucius not here take the opportunity of discussing the relevance of the 'Logos of the Stoa'? The Stoic concepts of λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικός were used by many of the early apologists to help define the relationship of God Father and God Son (e.g. Tertullian *Apol.* 21.11). The most probable explanation for Octavius' somewhat lame reply here, it seems to me, is that, as discussed by Max Mühl,⁹² firstly, Minucius would be giving ground to the polytheistic Caecilius, should he admit that Christians themselves are struggling with the concept of one god or two and secondly, it would require someone already familiar with Christian beliefs and doubts to understand the problems. Therefore, probably wisely, Minucius avoids entering into any controversy. Mühl sums this up thus:

39.2 kann nicht anders verstanden werden denn als ein bewußtes Ausweichen vor einer hic et nunc völlig unfruchtbaren christologischen Disputation.⁹³

4. *Aegyptii sane ...caedunt* This is a rather obscure reference and several suggestions have been made as to what is referred to here. Beaujeu's opinion⁹⁴ is that this refers to the long dead cult of the Pharaohs as if it were still in existence, though even he describes this as a 'chose étonnante'. Clarke, following a reference by Porphyry (*de Abst.* 4.9), suggests that the reference is to an apparently contemporary cult in the Egyptian village of Anabis.⁹⁵ Clement also mentions this, though, like Minucius, as a generalisation, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρ' Αἰγυπτίους ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἄνθρωπος ὡς θεὸς πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου προσκυνεῖται (*Hom.* 6.23).

5. *etiam principibus et regibus , ...praebeatur* This is difficult ground. The charge of refusing to reverence the deified emperors⁹⁶ was the main cause of persecution of Christians and Minucius must tread carefully if he is to avoid attracting this accusation. Tertullian is much more outspoken (*Apol.* 28-35), and, although, as usual, there are hints of indebtedness to Tertullian, Minucius here, as also in ch. 24, is circumspect. In any case the aim of *Octavius* is to present the Christian faith in a non-polemical way and in terms acceptable to Minucius' peers. Jean Daniélou observes,

Minucius Felix represents Roman Christians of the ruling classes. People of this sort are anxious to be loyal to the Latin literary tradition and seek to preserve good relations with those who wield political power.'⁹⁷

⁹² Mühl 1968, 69-78

⁹³ Mühl, 1968, 75

⁹⁴ Beaujeu, 1964, 139

⁹⁵ Clarke, 1974, 328

⁹⁶ Chadwick, 1993, 25-6

⁹⁷ Daniélou, 1969, 70

5. *Sic eorum numen ...Genium id est daemonemquam regis.* Octavius has discussed the concept of a personal *daemon* (τύχη) in chapters 26-27. Tertullian argues that to invoke the emperor's *genius* amounts to devil worship, *sed et iuramus, sicut non per genios Caesarum ita per salute eorum, quae est augustior omnibus geniis. Nescitis genios daemones dici et inde diminutive voce daemonia?* (*Apol.* 32.2). Such oaths, used in such everyday proceedings as tax affairs, presented a difficulty for Christians (e.g. Polycarp, referred to in Eusebius *H.E.* 4.15, 18). Euctemon, an associate of Pionius, marked his apostasy by such an oath - 'So he became an object of ridicule through his false oath, because he had sworn by the Fortune of the emperor and by the goddess Nemeseis, crown on his head, that he was not a Christian, and, unlike the rest, he neglected nothing by way of denial' (*Acta Pionii* 18).⁹⁸

Sic eorum numen vocant ...quam regis Another echo here of Tertullian, *citius denique apud vos per omnes deos quam per unum genium Caesaris pejoratur* (*Apol.* 28.4.) Whilst *pejoratio per genium Caesaris* was punishable in law, *pejoratio per deos* was not, as it was considered that the gods would wreak their own punishment, *deorum iniurias dis curae* (*Tac. Ann.* 1.73.5).

6-8. Caecilius has earlier (9.4, see p. 25) asserted that Christians worship both a crucified criminal and the cross upon which he was executed, pointing out *id colant quod meretur*. This reference by Caecilius, together with the present passage, provides the only mention in Octavius of the crucifixion and even here it is not explicit, and the name Jesus is never mentioned. Octavius' rebuttal appears far from convincing, resulting, presumably, from Minucius' careful avoidance of specifically Christian terminology in his avowed aim of making the faith appear reasonable to his peers in the more academic strata of Roman society.

6. *cruces etiamadoratis* Minucius is here following Tertullian (*Apol.* 6.6) in producing examples of the secular use of the cruciform shape. As apologetic this does not appear to be very convincing. Sir David Dalrymple, an 18th century Scottish advocate, in the Translator's Preface to his edition of 'Octavius'⁹⁹ says

'...the observations on the sign of the cross which Minucius imprudently borrowed from other Apologists, are puerile and trifling',

⁹⁸ quoted in translation in Lee, 2000, 59

⁹⁹ Dalrymple, 1781, 12

an opinion which appears to have some force, as Octavius' attempts here to assert the ubiquitousness of the cross shape do not seem to add any weight to his argument. Indeed, there would appear to be a total lack of argument here, since Minucius avoids any specific reference to Christianity.

7. *Nam et signavexilla castrorum ornatae* Minucius is once more indebted to Tertullian (*Ad. nat.* 1. 12, 14-16). Here are perhaps examples of 'apposite illustrations, as they were objects of military veneration' as Clarke¹⁰⁰ puts it. The concept of military standards, *vexillae*, and their function as a focus point for troops, and also as an object by which oaths might be sworn, was a familiar one, (e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 1.39.7 and 2.17.2) and one which became a potent Christian symbol for the triumph of the Cross (e.g. the hymn *Vexilla Regis prodeunt, fulget cruces mysterium*, written by Bishop Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers, 569 A.D.)

tropaea..... imitantur The idea of the cross bearing 'trophies' is once again borrowed from Tertullian, both in the *Apologeticus*, as mentioned above and in *Ad nationes* (12). The analogy with crucifixion *adfixis hominis imitantur* refers to the displaying on the standard of the helmet, armour and weapons of a captured enemy, as classically described by Vergil *ingentem quercum collo suspendit eburnum* (A. 12. 5-11).

8. *signum sanelabitur* Rendall,¹⁰¹ in a note to his translation, observes that this is a far-fetched analogy but one which 'maybe introduced as a touch of local colour' which recalls the ostensible setting on this discourse on the seafront at Ostia. However, as pointed out by Clarke,¹⁰² there are many examples of the use of this imagery of the ship (e.g. Justin, *Apol.* I.55) and images of a boat with ship and oars are found in the catacombs.¹⁰³

et cum erigitur iugum There is some doubt as to what exactly Minucius means here but Justin, in the passage referred to above, following the 'ship' imagery, says γῆ δὲ οὐκ ἀροῦται ἄνευ αὐτοῦ and also ἄροτρα καὶ ζυγά διὰ τούτων καὶ τὰ τῆς δικαιοσύνης σύμβολα διδάσκων καὶ ἔωεργῆ βίον (*Dial.cum Tryphone*, 88).

et cum homo porrectis ...veneratur Early Christians, following Jewish practice, would stand for prayer with hands outstretched in the *orans* position (often found illustrated in the catacombs) and

¹⁰⁰ Clarke, 1974, 330

¹⁰¹ Rendall, 1966, 406

¹⁰² Clarke, 1974, 331

¹⁰³ de Rossi, 1867 39-40 fig. 27, 49-50 fig. 26

referred to in I Tim. 2.8 βούλομαι οὖν προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἐπαίροντας ὁσίους χεῖρας χωρὶς ὀργῆς καὶ διαλογισμοῦ . The typology of Moses with outstretched arms during the battle against the Amalekites (Exod. 17.10ff) influenced this and Justin (as above, *Apol.* I.55) and Tertullian, *si statueris hominem manibus expansis, signum crucis feceris* (*Ad nat.* 1.12.7) present this position as representing the cross.¹⁰⁴

Ita signo crucis ... formatur Octavius concludes by making the point that, since the cross was a familiar feature both of nature and of religion, there were no grounds for claiming that Christians worshipped it.

30.

This chapter forms Octavius' reply to the assertions of Caecilius in 18.5-6 (see pp. 15-6). Here and in 31 Octavius follows the argument of Tertullian in *Apol.* 8-9, adducing further examples and parallels from pagan practices. This was a common feature in forensic practice, as Cicero mentions ... *cum in foro diceres quam plurimis posses argumentis onerare iudicem, si modo eam facultatem tibi daret causa* (*de N.D.* 3.8).

As has been previously discussed (see pp 2 and 14) the priority of Tertullian's *Apologeticus* would seem to me to be self-evident, particularly in the chapters under discussion. In 30 and 31 Tertullian's arguments in *Apol.* 8-9 are reworked in a much less polemical manner, as befits Minucius' aim of presenting Christian belief to his contemporaries in the legal and other public professions in a reasoned and non-aggressive manner. One or two examples in support of this may suffice. Compare Tertullian *de hoc enim quaero, an et qui credideris tanti habeas ad eam tali conscientia pervenire.* (*Apol.* 8.1) with its use of the second person, with Octavius, ... *Illum iam vellim convenire, qui initiari nos dicit aut credit* (30.1), where the subjunctive *vellim* and the use of the third person serve to introduce the topic in an unemotional way. Similarly, Tertullian's direct and aggressive *veni, demerge ferrum in infantem ...* (8.2) with Octavius *Putas posse fieri...?* (30.1) where, in spite of the use of the second person, *posse fieri* takes the 'sting' out of the phrase as it were. This is not to dismiss Tertullian's direct and polemical style. He is writing apologetic and whilst, on the whole, I think Tertullian's arguments have more force, Minucius has a different aim.

2. ...*video procreatos filios antequam pariant.* Exposure or strangulation was known and practised, though probably not, at the time, widely. In the *Oxyrhynchus papyrii* is found 'if you

¹⁰⁴ Clarke, 1974, 332

are delivered of a male child, let it live; if of a female, expose it' (*Oxy. Pap.* 4.744.9f). Seneca (*Dial.* 3.15.2) advises the drowning of deformed children. Such practices, together with abortion, were condemned by both Jews and Christians. The Jewish writers Josephus (*contra Ap.* 2.202) and Philo (*De Spec. leg.* 3.108 ff) condemn these practices, as do Christian writers. For example, in the *Didache*, οὐ φονεύσεις τέκνον ἔν φθορᾷ οὐδὲ γεννηθὲν ἀποκτενεῖς (*Did.* 2.2.) and in Justin Martyr ἐκτιθέναί καὶ τὰ γεννώμενα πονηρῶν εἶναι δεδιγάμεθα (*Apol.* 1.27), these customs were forbidden. Tertullian *nobis vero semel homicidio interdicto etiam conceptum utero... an nascentem disturbet* (*Apol.* 9.8) is very clear about the sinfulness of abortion, whilst Octavius is careful merely to record, *sunt quae in ipsis visceribus pariant* without expressing an opinion or comment.

3. *nam Saturnus filios suosvoravit* Roman mythology identified Saturnus with the Greek god Cronos who was said to have devoured his sons, Hades and Poseidon, and to have attempted the same fate for his third son, Zeus, who was saved from this fate by his mother, Rhea, (*Apollodorus* 1.1.7).

Merito....immolabantur This section, as is the case with much of this chapter, and chapter 31, follows and summarises Tertullian in *Apol.* 9. Saturn was also identified with the Phoenician god Moloch, as well as Ba'al Hamman of Carthage.¹⁰⁵ The practice of human, and particularly infant, sacrifice is well attested and Octavius will return to this topic in the following section with various other examples. Here an example from Plato refers to the sacrifice of children to Cronos ἐπεὶ αὐτίκα ἡμῖν μὲν οὐ νόμος ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπους θύειν ἀλλ' ἀνόσιον, Καρχηδόνιοι δὲ θύουσιν ὡς ὄσιον ὄν καὶ νόμιμον αὐτοῖς, καὶ ταῦτα ἔνιοι αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς αὐτῶν ὑεῖς τῷ Κρόνῳ, ὡς ἴσως καὶ σὺ ἀκήκοας. (*Minos* 315b-c) By the time Minucius is writing this practice had apparently ceased, as the use of *immolabantur* implies. However, Tertullian, whilst using *immolabantur*, also asserts *sed et nunc in occulto perseveratur* (*Apol.* 9.3).

blanditiis... immolaretur It was considered a bad omen for the victim to be weeping *si hostia quae ad aras duceretur fuisset vehementius reluctata ostendissetque se invitam altaribus admoveri, amoveretur, quia invito deo offerri eam putabant.* (Macrobius *Saturnalia* 3.5).

4. *Tauris etiam ...saginat.* All these examples, which are also found in Tertullian *Apol.* 9, are well-known and attested elsewhere (e.g. Cicero, *de Rep.* 3.9.15). They would probably be part of the common knowledge of Minucius' target readers. A linguistic point to note here is the effective

¹⁰⁵ Beaujeu, 1964, 141

use of the infinitives *immolare*, *caedere*, *obruere*, making the return to a main verb after *hodie*, have force. Once again, Minucius is employing standard forensic techniques, (e.g. Cicero, *de Oratore*).

Romani Graecumobruere A reference to the dark and desperate expedient resorted to during the Second Punic War after the Roman rout at Cannae in 216 B.C. *Gallus et Galla, Graecus et Graeca in foro bovario sub terram vivi demissi sunt in locum saxo consaeptum iam ante hostiis humanis, minime Romano sacro, imbutum.* (Liv. 22.57).

hodieque colitur see linguistic note above for the force of this example. It is probably a reference to the annual sacrifices offered to Jupiter Latiaris, on the occasion of the *Feriae Latinae*, which Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 21.3) refers to as continuing *etiannunc*, and Porphyry (*de Abst.* 2.56) likewise as ἔτι καὶ νῦν.

5. *IpsumCatalinam* Sallust reports this story *fuere ea tempestate qui dicerent Catilinam humani corporis sanguinem vino permixtum in pateris circumtulisse:* (*Cat.* 22.1), though there is no suggestion that this is the result of a human sacrifice.

Bellonum imbuere The adherents of the goddess Bellona, originating in Cappadocia and associated with that of Cybele, slashed their limbs with knives to aid the induction of a trance-like state. This practice, as described by Tibullus (Tibullus, 1.6.43ff), is also found elsewhere, for instance, in the description of the priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18. 28.

...et comitalem ...sanare The disease is epilepsy, referred to as *morbus comitialis* since an attack in public assemblies *comitiales* would lead to suspension. Tertullian mentions this remedy (*Apol.* 9. 10) and Pliny refers to the practice, thought to be especially efficacious when the blood was that of a gladiator, with abhorrence, *sanguinem quoque gladiatorum bibunt, ut viventibus poculis, comitiales morbi, quod spectare facientes in eadem harena feras quoque horror est.* (*N.H.* 28.2.4)

6 *non dissimilesaudire* Christians tended to avoid gladiatorial shows and the theatre. Tertullian deals with this at length in *De Spectaculis* 19 and 20. However, as Clarke¹⁰⁶ mentions, such displays were often regarded with horror also by educated Romans and Greeks.

tantumque noverimus It is not clear to what extent Jewish dietary regulations were also observed by Christians at this period. Originally this had been part of the question of the extent to which a

¹⁰⁶ Clarke, 1974, 337

Gentile Christian adherent was required to follow the Jewish Law, which formed the main point of contention between Paul and the 'Jerusalem Christians' (Acts 15, 2 ff.). Allied to this was, on the other side, the problem of how a Christian should deal with the pagan practice of partaking in animal sacrifice, discussed in I Corinthians 8. Tertullian (*Apol.* 9. 14) relates how Christians were tested by being offered blood sausages. Here, however, it seems that Minucius is not concerned in detail with Christian dietary practices but is using the example as a conclusion to the accusations of cannibalism levelled by Caecilius.

31.

1. *et de incesto ... adpersit* The reply to Caecilius' accusations in 9.6.

2. For the reference to Fronto, see notes on ch. 9 (p. 27). As was said there, no record exists of the writings of Fronto to which Minucius alludes but this attack on Christianity by the tutor of Marcus Aurelius must have been well known.

convicium ut orator adpersit A reference to the oratorical licence to exaggerate and even lie, which would have been familiar to Minucius' fellow lawyers. Aulus Gellius quotes Titus Castricius as saying *rheteri concessum est, sentiis uti falsis, audacibus, versutis, subdolis, captiosis, si veri modo similes sint et possint movendos hominum animos qualicunque astu inreperere* (*Gel.* 1.6.4) and Cicero comments *orator autem omnia haec quae putantur in communi vitae consuetudine mala ac molesta et fugienda, multo maiora et acerbiora verbis facit.* (*de Orat.* 1.221).

3. *Ius est apud Persas ...* The examples of incestuous relationships cited here are, as is so much of this section, borrowed from Tertullian, *Persas cum suis matribus misceri Ctesias refert.* (*Apol.* 9.16). Ctesias, a Greek historian and physician of the 5th century BC, wrote the *Persica*, a history of Persia and Assyria.¹⁰⁷

Aegyptiis et Athenis In Egypt the marriage of siblings had been well-known since Pharaonic times. Diodorus Siculus (I.27.1) attributes this to the precedent of Isis and Osiris, whilst pointing out that it was *παρὰ τὸ κοινὸν ἔθος τῶν ἀνθρώπων*. The practice in Athens of the marriage of half-brothers and sisters is attested by Plutarch (*Cimon* 4 ff.), and Seneca comments, '*Quare*' *inquit* '*quaero enim, sororem suam?*' *Stulte, stude: Athenis dimidium licet, Alexandriae totum* (*Apoc.* 8.2)

¹⁰⁷ Bigwood, 1978, 19-41

memoriae ...coniunctos The references here are to the Oedipus legend and to the many examples from pagan mythology, particularly with reference to Jupiter, in his relationship with Rhea, Juno, Proserpine, amongst others, mentioned by many sources. Tertullian comments *proinde incesti qui magis quam quos ipse Iuppiter docuit?* (*Apol.* 9.16). However, readers would no doubt be aware of historical examples nearer home, such as those of Agrippina, both with her uncle and husband, the emperor Claudius (*Tac. Ann.* 12.5) and her son, Nero (*Tac. Ann.* 14.2), also Domitian and his niece Julia (*Suet. Dom.* 22).

4 *etiam nescientesnon habetis* In a passage which summarises Tertullian in *Apol.* 9.17 Minucius refers to the practice of exposed infants and foundlings being used for prostitution. This is also referred to and condemned by Justin, ὅτι τοὺς πάντας σχεδὸν ὀπῶμεν ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ προάγοντας οὐ μόνον τὰς κόρας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἄρσενας ... (*Apol.* 1.27).

sichabetis Minucius points out that in the practices outlined above, pagans are replaying the classic legends such as Oedipus.

5 *at nos inhaerimus.* There were clearly differing views in the early Church about marriage. The implication here is that Minucius himself counsels single marriage. In St Matthew's gospel divorce is condemned (5.32 and 19.5). Paul's view (1 Corinthians 7. 8ff) is that, whilst celibacy is counselled, marriage is preferred to immorality, κρεῖττον γὰρ ἐστὶν γαμεῖν ἢ πυροῦσθαι (7.9), and divorce, at any rate on the part of the husband, forbidden (7.11). Widows may remarry, provided their husband shares their faith (7.39) though continued widowhood is preferred (7.40). 1 Corinthians was written against a background of the expectation of the imminence of the παροῦσα, the Second Coming, (1.7-8) and it is likely that, by the beginning of the second century these views had been somewhat modified. The ideal of the *univira*, a term applied both to married women and to widows who did not remarry, was common in Roman society. This is frequently referred to in memorial inscriptions (e.g. ILCV 4318 A.5 and ILCV 1003), and see also *in lapide hoc uni nupta fuisse legar* (*Prop.* 4.11.36) and Plutarch, (*Quaes. Rom.* 105. 289). Certainly, this view was supported by the early Christian writers, such as Justin (*Apol.* 1.15), Athenagoras (*Leg.* 33) and Tertullian (*de monog.*).

cupiditate ...nullam The sources mentioned above support Minucius' view that procreation was the prime purpose of marriage. This was also an inheritance of the Jewish tradition.

corpore coniunctio The emphasis of Minucius on the desirability of chastity likewise reflects the prevailing view in Christian circles, which is commended by, amongst others, Justin (*Apol.* 1.15), Athenagoras (*Leg.* 33) and Origen (*C. Cels.* 1.26, 7.48).

In ch. 9 Caecilius adduced calumnies about incestuous relationships, sexual depravation and paedophagy but did not refer specifically to Christian marriage practices. Minucius is here carefully restrained, ignoring Caecilius' wilder accusations and merely expounding briefly current Christian practice in personal relationships.

6-7 *nec de ultima alienus* Whilst rebutting Caecilius' accusations in 9, Octavius here refers back to 8, a passage not considered in this study, where Caecilius objects that Christians do not engage in public life and gather to celebrate secret rites *in publicum muta, in angulis garrula* (8.4). In answer to the objection of Caecilius that Christians *honores et purpuras despiciunt, ipsi seminudi* (8.4), a reference to the fact that a Roman citizen would normally go around *togatus*, Octavius, strangely, appears to contradict Tertullian, who says that a Christian is not distinguishable in outward appearance from anyone else *homines vobiscum degentes, eiusdem victus, habitus, instructus ...* (*Apol.* 42.1). This accusation was also countered by Octavius in 16.5 (see p. 12).

In 8.3 Caecilius has charged Christian groups as being *inlicitae ac desperatae factionis*. As Clarke¹⁰⁸ points out in a detailed note on this point, the precise reasons in law for the prosecution of Christians have been much debated. An analysis of this can be found, for example, in W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the early Church* (Oxford 1965) 165 ff, amongst others. Words such as *factio*, and particularly the accusation of such a *factio* as *inlicita*, were terms used negatively in this context. Tertullian argues that Christian groups should be regarded differently *hac coitio Christianorum merito sane inlicita, si inlicitis par cum casti congregantur non est factio dicenda, sed curia*. (*Apol.* 39.20-21). Here Octavius pacifically observes *nec factiosi sumus, si omnes unum bonum sapimus ...* a phrase which appears to echo the τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν (*idipsum sapere*) of Romans 15. 5 and τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε (*idipsum sentientes*) of Philipians 2.2.

si audire nos publice aut erubescitis aut timetis Octavius here recalls his words in 28.2 *ut christianus reus nec erubesceret nec timeret*. This repetition is obviously deliberate and could be said to suggest that a public hearing is envisaged. The reliance on Tertullian is, once again, clear. At the beginning of the *Apologeticus* Tertullian challenges the authorities to examine the Christian case as in a court of law, *Si non licet vobis, Romani imperii antistites* (*Apol.* 1.1)

¹⁰⁸ Clarke, 1974, 205

7 *et quod...numerus augetur* A refutation of Caecilius' accusation in 9.1 comparing the spread of Christianity to weeds (see p. 22). Octavius reasonably observes that *in pulchro genere vivendi et perseverat suus et ad crescit alienus*. Origen makes frequent use of this 'argument from expansion' for example in *C.Cels.* 1.47, and *de Princip.* 4.1.

8 *Sic nos denique ...ut spei coheredes* Octavius responds to Caecilius' mention of *occultis se notis et insignibus noscunt* and *appellant fratres et sorores* (9.2). (See the discussion of these points on page 22). Minucius is once again drawing upon Tertullian (39.7) and there are echoes of Scripture κληρονόμοι γεννηθῶμεν κατ' ἐλπίδα ζωῆς αἰωνίου (Titus 3.7), κληρονόμοι μὲν θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ, (Rom. 8.17), συγκληρονόμοις χάριτος ζωῆς (1.Peter 3.7). Once again, however, Minucius carefully avoids any mention of the name of Christ.

Vos enimad parricidium recognoscitis It is not clear to what, if anything, Minucius is referring here, though he is obviously paraphrasing Tertullian (*Apol.* 39.10). Clarke¹⁰⁹ suggests that this might be legendary, Romulus and Remus, or mythological, Eteocles and Polynices. He also mentions that some see here a reference to the murder by Caracalla of his brother Geta in 212 but makes the point that, in spite of many attempts to establish a dating of *Octavius* from the sparse allusions to be found in it, Minucius appears deliberately to avoid any contemporary references.

32.

In this, by far the most theological chapter of *Octavius*, Minucius answers the objections of Caecilius in ch. 10.

1. *putatis enim includam* As has already been mentioned, (see comments on *occultare* and *aras* on p. 28), Minucius does not counter specifically the accusation of secrecy of Christian worship but concentrates on the accusations that Christians have no *simulacrum*. Clarke¹¹⁰ observes that these first lines 'do give the misleading impression that the Christian community engaged in no liturgical action at all'. Since there is much evidence of some form of early Christian liturgy, both in the New Testament (e.g. 1 Cor. 11. 20-29, Acts 2.42) and beyond (e.g. Justin, *Apol.* 1.65-67), it would seem logical here to acknowledge that Minucius, in directing this work to his

¹⁰⁹ Clarke, 1974, 342

¹¹⁰ Clarke, 1974, 342

pagan contemporaries and peers, is simply trying to explain the lack in Christian liturgical practice of the appurtenances of public pagan religious observance, such as *simulacra, delubra* and *aras*.

quod enim ...simulacrum There is clearly here an echo of Genesis 1.26-27. The concept of 'man in the image of God' was not confined to Judaism and Christianity but was also a theme in both Platonism, e.g. ἀπ' ἐκείνου τεκμαίρομενοι, ὃ δὴ καὶ Ὅμηρος ἐκάλεσεν ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐγγιγνόμενον θεοειδές τε καὶ θεοείκελον (*Rep.* 6.501b) and Stoicism, e.g. *verum sit sane ut vultis deus effigies hominis et imago; quod eius est domicilium ...* (Cic. *N.D.* I.103). Minucius, in his intention to show educated pagans that Christian belief was reasonable and had elements in common with traditional philosophical traditions, is here, as elsewhere, careful to avoid any appearance of polemic.

templum ...possit? The several Biblical echoes here, for example 1 Cor. 3.16 and 2 Cor. 6. demonstrate that Minucius appears to have a good acquaintance with the Scriptures, either directly, or through the apologists. One might mention particularly the similarity of thought of this present section to Acts 17, 24-28 where Paul's speech in Athens shows that Minucius is far from the first Christian apologist to point out the similarities of Christian thought to pagan philosophy. For example, in v. 24 Paul deliberately uses Stoic terminology ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ (Acts 17. 24). There is also an Old Testament reference here, to Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8, 27 'but will God really dwell on earth ...?' (NIV transl.) Compare also Cicero. *verum sit sane ut vultis deus effigies hominis et imago: quod eius est domicilium, quae sedes, qui locus ...?* (*N.D.* I.103). There are also, as Clarke¹¹¹ mentions, many parallels with Seneca. A detailed discussion can be found in Franz Xaver Burger.¹¹²

2-3. *Nonne melius est ille qui iustior* Octavius now defends the concept that physical sacrifices are not necessary and that spiritual offerings are the most acceptable. Strangely, although Caecilius has previously raised many objections to Christian practice, he has not specifically objected to the lack of the corporeal sacrifices common to paganism yet Octavius feels it necessary to deal with this question here. As a background to this it should be remembered that, whilst a specific dating for *Octavius* is not possible, the matter of the refusal of Christians to sacrifice was a theme common to all periods of Christian persecution.¹¹³ However, the idea of spiritual worship is far from being a concept unique to Christian belief. Once again there is here in Octavius an echo of

¹¹¹ Clarke, 1974, 343

¹¹² Burger, 1904

¹¹³ Lane Fox, 1968, 421 ff.

Cicero *Cultus autem deorum est optimus ut eos semper pura integra incorrupta et mente et voce veneremur.* (N.D.2.71). Beaujeu¹¹⁴ suggests that, amongst an extensive list of both pagan and biblical references cited in this context by Pellegrino,¹¹⁵ those which particularly inspired Minucius here are Isaiah 1.11 'the multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me, says the LordI have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats' (NIV transl.) and 1 Timothy 1, 5 τὸ δὲ τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας ἐστὶν ἀγάπη ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας καὶ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς καὶ πίστεως ἀνυποκρίτου. He also included the passage from *de Natura Deorum* cited above, together with a passage from Seneca (*frg.* 123) *vultisne vos, inquit, Deum cogitare sed mente pura, bono honestoque proposito?*. This quotation was also recalled by Minucius in 29, 8 ...*deum pura mente veneratur.*

4-9. *At enim quem colimus deum, nec ostendimus nec videmus* The rest of chapter 32 is devoted to the refutation of Caecilius' objections in 10. 3-5 to the worship of an invisible deity. In 4-5 here Octavius refers to the argument of God in nature which he has dealt with in detail in 17 and 18. There are more Biblical echoes, particularly from the Psalms, e.g. Ps. 104, and Romans 1.20, amongst others. Clarke¹¹⁶ sees, with, I think, reason, the addition of *cum serenat*, following *cum tonat, fulgurat, fulminat* as somewhat unusual but offers the suggestion that Minucius has in his mind the *parcus deorum cultor* of Horace (*Od.* 1.34), or *..inter nubem caeli in regione serena* (Vergil *A.* 8. 527). Beaujeu maintains that Minucius is making almost literal use of Xenophon ὅτι δέ γε ἀληθῆ λέγω τιμᾶν τὸ δαιμόνιον, (*Memorabilia* 4. 3. 13-14) and is sufficiently convinced of the importance of this to quote the passage, in French, in its entirety.¹¹⁷ These are certainly striking parallels but, as mentioned above, they are by no means the only ones. Many other examples could be adduced to illustrate the contrast between the presence of God in thunder and lightning, and the divine presence in calmness and quiet, for instance the experience of the prophet Elijah, described in 1 Kings 19, 11f '.. the Lord was not in the wind, ...the Lord was not in the earthquake..... the Lord was not in the fire ...after the fire came a gentle whisper' (NIV). However, to what extent any of these allusions, whether Biblical or classical, were conscious in Minucius' mind it is not possible to say.

5 *nec mireris ... vento et flatibus ... sub oculis tamen non venit ventus et flatus* The Stoic concept of πνεῦμα (ventus) as the breath of life, made up of fire and air, came to be used in Christian theology, translating the Hebrew *ruach*, as an image of the activity of the Holy Spirit. Minucius,

¹¹⁴ Beaujeu, 1964, 147

¹¹⁵ Pellegrino, 1947

¹¹⁶ Clarke, 1974, 344

¹¹⁷ Beaujeu, 1964, 147

with his philosophical as well as Christian background, would have been well aware of the use of such imagery in both contexts.

in solem adeo... As a further analogy for understanding of the nature of deity, the sun is a common theme both in non-Christian and Christian writings. See, for example, Plato τίνα οὖν ἔχεις αἰτιάσασθαι τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ θεῶν τούτου κύριον, οὗ ἡμῖν τὸ φῶς ὄψιν τε ποιεῖ ὄρᾶν ὅτι κάλλιστα καὶ τὰ ὀρώμενα ὀρᾶσθαι; ὄνπερ καὶ σύ, ἔφη, καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι: τὸν ἥλιον γὰρ δῆλον ὅτι ἐρωτᾷς (*Rep.* 8.507ff). Tertullian uses both sun and spirit analogies *nam et deus spiritus, et cum radius ex sole porrigitur, portio ex summa*: (*Apol.* 21.12) in an extended passage in which he also quotes from Vergil, (*Georg.* 4.221-224 and *A.* 6.724 ff.) in support of his argument.

6 *Deum oculis carnalibusqua vivificaris?* In a note on *carnalem* in ch. 18, Clarke¹¹⁸ makes the observation that the word *carnalis* is one of several 'Christianisms', words first found in Christian writers and usually avoided by Minucius, of which *vivificaris* is another example. He mentions that several other *-ificare* words, such as *sanctificare, beautificare, justificare, glorificare* follow the same pattern and are words mainly found in the Apologists. Words such as these demonstrate a gradual development of a specifically Christian vocabulary.¹¹⁹

7 *Sed enim deus actum hominis ignorat* Octavius returns here to Caecilius' assertion in ch. 10.5 that the omniscience of the 'unseen' God is a fiction of the Christian mind. Once again, the 'argument from nature' is invoked, an argument Octavius has already used in ch. 18 (see p. 14).

deo plena sint. There is a variant reading here. The Loeb text used in this study, based on the edition of J. P. Waltzing (1912) for the Teubner series has this phrase, without *cognita*. Rendall's translation, however, infers *cognita*, '... known of God and full of him'. Other editions of the manuscript, for instance those used by Beaujeu and Holden, have *deo cognita, plena sint*, thus forming a zeugma. I would support the more complete reading, including *cognita*, as conveying the full sense of the omniscience of God, implied elsewhere in this passage, for instance *deus auctor omnium ac speculator omnium, ...* (9). Beaujeu points out¹²⁰ that the idea that the whole world is full of God, or gods, has been adopted by Christians from the view current in pagan, particularly in Stoic, literature and cites, amongst others, Cicero *homines existimare oportere omnia quae cernerent deorum esse plena* (*De Leg.* 11 11,26) and Vergil *totamque infusa per artus mens agitat*

¹¹⁸ Clarke, 1974, 261

¹¹⁹ Palmer, 1954, 188

¹²⁰ Beaujeu, 1964, 148-9

molem (A. 6. 726). The Vergil passage, it should be noted, is the same one quoted by Tertullian in *Apol.* 21.12 mentioned above (p. 47).

Ubique ...sed infusus est Another example of the influence of Stoic thought on early Christian theology, for instance *prope est a te Deus, intus est* (Seneca *Ep.* 41.1). The use of Stoic parallels suits Minucius' purpose very well, lending credence to the main thesis of *Octavius* that Christian belief is relevant to educated and cultured people.

8 in solem ...violatur A return to the analogy of the sun, this time with a slightly different emphasis to that of section 5. God's omnipotence is compared to the sun's rays, which spread everywhere and are yet uncorrupted and undiminished by what they illuminate. Once again, Stoic influence can be found (Seneca *Ep.* 41.5) but this analogy is also present in patristic texts, e.g. Tertullian, where the quotation is from Diogenes *sol, inquit, immo ipse etiam deus de caelo spectat nec contaminatur* (*de Spect.* 20) and in Augustine *Nam radiis solis et lunae terra contingitur, nec istam contaminat lucem,* (*de Civitate Dei* 9.16).

9 speculator omnium a near quote from Tertullian *nos qui sub deo omnium speculatore dispungimur* (*Apol.* 45.7).

quanto magis ... a quo nullum potest esse secretum The concept of God's omniscience, (see note on *deo plena sunt* above) which frequently appears in scripture, for instance in Acts 1, 24; Romans 8, 27; 1 Cor. 14, 25 but is also met in pagan writings, Seneca, *sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et custos* (*Ep.* 41.2).

.. sed et cum illo... vivimus An echo here of several Biblical references, but also, as before, Stoic influence. In Acts 17.28, also referred to above (see p. 45), where Paul, for the same reasons as Minucius in this work, is deliberately and explicitly using Stoic terminology. Ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, ὡς καὶ τινες τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν, Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν (17.28) is usually attributed to the Cretan poet Epimenides.¹²¹ Other references (e.g. 1 Cor. 3.16; 6.18). express a similar thought.

33.

¹²¹ see discussion of this passage in Taylor, 2007, 137-143

1. *nec nobis* As Beaujeu¹²² and, following him, Clarke¹²³, point out this chapter is somewhat misplaced, dealing as it does with Caecilius objections in 3-5. It gives the impression that a new point is being discussed when, in fact, it is a continuation of the argument of the previous chapter that God is omnipotent and omniscient. Minucius here uses the analogy of both home and kingdom *deo una domus est mundus hic totus* and *reges tamen deo indiciis opus non est*, analogies upon which he has elaborated in 18. 5-7 (see p. 15). The same analogies are also found elsewhere, for instance in Tertullian *totus hic mundus una omnium domus est* (*De pudic.* 7.11) and Pontianus *christiano totus hic mundus una domus est* (*Vit. Cyp.* 11). However, as Beaujeu suggests,¹²⁴ Minucius probably found the original analogy in Cicero (*De leg.* 2.10,26) *deos quorum domus esset omnis hic mundus*.

2-5. *sed Iudaeis deditos*. In 10.4 Caecilius makes derisory mention of *iudaeorum sola et misera gentilitas*, (see p. 28). Octavius devotes the rest of ch. 33 to this issue. In essence, the attitude to the Jews is standard for his day. They worshipped the one and same God, and prospered as long as they kept up this worship, but *nequitia sua hanc eos meruisse fortunam* (4) since *ita prius eos deseruisse comprehendens quam esse desertos ...* (5). Much of this is a summary of Tertullian *Apol.* 21. 1-6 and 26.3.

The Waltzing/Teubner text used in the Loeb edition follows the majority of editors in inserting *dereliquerunt*. Clarke's translation inserts 'have worshipped'.¹²⁵ Beaujeu suggests that there should be a phrase beginning possibly with *quam* or *quantum* after *omnium Deus est* and suggests something like *quam omnipotens esset probauerunt* or *quantum polleret experti sunt*.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the main argument is, as Holden says,¹²⁷ that of Tertullian in *Apol.* 21, 1-6.

modici multos, inermi armatos Clarke¹²⁸ remarks that, whilst in ch. 25 Octavius has argued against any connection between religious devotion and worldly success, he here supports the opposite view. The two instances do not, however, appear to be comparable. In the present context Octavius is tracing the main thesis of the Old Testament, that God rewards and supports his people's faithfulness with success. There are various suggestions as to the reference here, such as Joshua 10.11 and Judges 7. 22 whilst Clarke,¹²⁹ following Beaujeu¹³⁰ rejects these in favour of Exodus 14,

¹²² Beaujeu, 1964, 148

¹²³ Clarke, 1974, 346

¹²⁴ Beaujeu, 1964, 148.

¹²⁵ Clarke, 1974, 113

¹²⁶ Beaujeu, 1964, 148

¹²⁷ Holden, 1853, 168

¹²⁸ Clarke, 1974, 347

¹²⁹ Clarke, 1974, 347

the crossing of the Red/reed sea, which would not appear to fit the case at all! However, this is but a small point and it is not possible to establish to what extent Minucius would have been familiar with the Old Testament.

Scripta eorum relegere One of only three, deliberately vague, references to scripture in *Octavius*, the others being in 34.5 *de divinis praedicatoribus prophetarum*, and 35.1 *de oraculis prophetorum*. Whatever Minucius' own knowledge of, and regard for, the texts of scripture, his target audience would probably hold such literature in very low regard (see p. 5). Minucius is on much surer ground when, as his usual practice, he refers to classical or contemporary writings in his aim of suggesting to his cultured and educated peers that Christian belief is reasonable and relevant.

Flavi Josephi Titus Flavius Josephus, was born in 37 A.D. into a Jewish priestly aristocratic family. He became a freedman of Vespasian and Titus and hence a Roman citizen. His main works, written in Greek in Rome, were the 'Jewish War' and 'Jewish Antiquities'. He would, however, have been more acceptable to Roman readers than would scriptural texts.

Antoni Iuliani de Iudaeis require An enigma here. Two men of the name Antonius Julianus are known, one a procurator of Judaea in A.D. 70, therefore at the time of the Jewish war, and the other a contemporary of Aulus Gellius, a rhetorician frequently mentioned in the *Noctes Atticae*. However, there is no suggestion that either ever wrote about the Jews. It has been suggested by some Minucian scholars¹³¹ that a third person of that name is being referred to here.

5. ... *ut impie loqueris* A reference to Caecilius in 10.4 *Ut sit Romanis hominibus cum sua sibi natione captivus*.

¹³⁰ Beaujeu, 1964, 149

¹³¹ *Pros.* 1933, A. 843-844, Hertlein, 1921, 174 ff.

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