

ARNOBIUS (7.16) AND MINUCIUS FELIX (28.9): AN ALLUSION*

Abstract: In this study, I argue that a phrase in Arnobius' *Adversus nationes* 7.16 is an allusion to Minucius Felix's *Octavius* 28.9. More specifically, verbal and contextual correspondences suggest that in 7.16 Arnobius alludes to Minucius Felix 28.9, an allusion facilitated by its compatibility with the most frequent scheme of Arnobius' prose rhythm. The allusion is further corroborated by the fact that out of a large variety of apparent possibilities, Arnobius opts for Minucius Felix's phraseology. This study contributes to the 'Quellenforschung' of Arnobius and elucidates how early Christian apologists could interact with their predecessors.

Keywords: Arnobius, Minucius Felix, allusion, *clausulae*, prose rhythm, *cursus mixtus*

In this study, I argue that a phrase in Arnobius' *Adversus nationes* 7.16 is an allusion to Minucius Felix's *Octavius* 28.9. In so doing, I wish to shed new light on the question of whether Arnobius had used Minucius Felix for the composition of the *Adversus nationes*.

Minucius Felix wrote his apologetic work *Octavius* in the form of a dialogue. The date of composition is subject to much debate ranging from around mid-second to mid-third century or even later.¹ Arnobius wrote his apologetic treatise *Adversus nationes* in seven books at the beginning of the first decade of the fourth century (ca. 302–305).² The earliest copy of Minucius Felix's *Octavius* survives in a ninth-century manuscript (Parisinus Latinus 1661) transmitting Arnobius' work. In this manuscript *Octavius* is erroneously transmitted as the eighth book of the *Adversus nationes* (*octavus*).

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1) G. W. Clarke, *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix* (New York, N. Y. / Ramsey, N. J. 1974) 5–12; M. Pellegrino / P. Siniscalco / M. Rizzi, *Marco Minucio Felice: Ottavio* (Turin 2000) 33–51; C. Schubert, *Minucius Felix: Octavius* (Freiburg 2014) 19–26.

2) For the date, see M. B. Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca: Religious Conflict and Competition in the Age of Diocletian* (Oxford 1995) 47–93; M. B. Simmons, *Universal Salvation in Late Antiquity: Porphyry of Tyre and the Pagan-Christian Debate* (Oxford 2015) 53–63.

Scholars have identified a series of parallels between Arnobius and Minucius Felix which might reveal dependence of the former on the latter.³ However, given that Christian apologists of this era repeat the same arguments in attacking pagan worship, it is often difficult to determine their sources. That said, there is evidence suggesting that an expression in Arnobius 7.16 is indebted to Minucius Felix 28.9.

In Octavius 28.9, Minucius Felix defends the unjust accusations against Christians among which is that Christians worship monsters. To illustrate the absurdity and the contradiction inherent in this accusation, Minucius Felix turns against the pagans and Egyptians who have deified animals and consider onions as deities:⁴

*idem Aegyptii cum plerisque vestrum non magis Isidem quam ceparum acrimonias metuunt, nec Serapidem magis quam strepitus per pudenda corporis expressos contremescunt.*⁵

(Min. Fel. Oct. 28.9)⁶

In *Adversus nationes* 7.16, after doubting the logic of sacrifices to pagan gods and mentioning some of the animals used in these sacrifices (7.15), Arnobius wonders whether other sorts of animals or even plants and vegetables can be used in their stead:

Quid ergo cessatis altaribus et haec (sc. pungent vegetables mentioned in the previous sentence, see below) dare rebusque his omnibus conilam superspergere bubulam et acrimonias intermiscere ceparum?

(Arn. Adv. nat. 7.16)

The phrase *acrimonias ceparum* occurs in both passages (with reverse word order in each author), where the sense of the substantive *acrimonias* is equated to that of an adjective with the noun it mod-

3) G. E. McCracken, *Arnobius of Sicca: The Case against the Pagans* (Westminster, Md. 1949) 44–45; H. Le Bonniec, *Arnobius: Contre les Gentils Livre I* (Paris 1982) 55–56; B. Fragu, *Arnobius: Contre les Gentils Livres VI–VII* (2010 Paris) xxvi.

4) The adoration of onion by the Egyptians is mentioned and often satirised in secular and Christian authors alike: see e.g. *Juv.* 15.9–11; *Plut. De Is. et Os.* 353F; *Arist. Apol.* 12; *M. Apollon.* 20; *Hier. Adv. Iovin.* 2.7; *In Is.* 13.46; *Prud. Perist.* 10.259–265; *C. Symm.* 2.865–868.

5) For a discussion for the variant *cum plerisque vestrum* over the variant *cum plerisque vobiscum*, see Schubert (n. 1 above) 541 n. 550.

6) It is possible that in this section Minucius Felix draws on a Jewish apology which also served as a source for the Pseudo-Clementine *Homiliae* as argued in G. Quispel, *A Jewish Source of Minucius Felix*, in: J. van Oort (ed.), *Gnostica, Judaica, Catholica: Collected Essays of Gilles Quispel* (Leiden / Boston 2008) 529–38.

ifies put in the genitive (= *acres cepas*).⁷ The correlation of the two passages has been pointed out by means of a ‘cf.’ or ‘see’.⁸ ‘Cf.’ invites comparison between the two passages, but its significance can range from accidental confluence of words to conscious allusion. The evidence presented in this study support the latter option.

Firstly, there is a lexical similarity. What is more, the similarity becomes all the more striking if we take into account that the phrase *acrimonias cepearum* occurs only in Minucius Felix in the literature prior to Arnobius.⁹

A second factor is the context. Unsurprisingly, in both cases we have a satirical treatment of pagan religion. Furthermore, in both cases the absurdity of pagan sacrifices is highlighted and the phrase *acrimonias cepearum* appears after the enumeration of various animals whose mention also serves towards the same end, the parody of pagan worship.¹⁰ Many of the animal-gods referred to in Minucius Felix become animals destined for sacrifice in Arnobius.¹¹

7) For this construction, see R. Kühner / C. Stegmann, *Ausführliche Grammatik der Lateinischen Sprache*. Vol. II.1 (Hannover 1912) 241–242. For examples from Arnobius, see F. Gabarrou, *Le latin d’Arnobé* (Paris 1921) 185–186.

8) Quispel (n. 6 above) 534; Clarke (n. 1 above) 325; M. Pellegrino / P. Sini-scalco / M. Rizzi (n. 1 above) 390.

9) For this statement I rely on a search of the electronic database of the Library of Latin Texts <<http://apps.brepolis.net/BrepolisPortal/default.aspx>> and TLL s. v. *acrimonia* and *cepa*. The closest and only example where we have a combination of the words *acrimonia* and *cepa* in the extant literature prior to Arnobius comes from Columella 9.14: *abstineatque ... itemque foetentibus acrimoniis alii vel cepearum ceterarumque verum similium*. In fact, the phrase or the combination of the two words is not found even after Arnobius, except for much later in Peter Damian Ep. 96. For references to the pungency of onions regardless of the phraseology, see Stadler s. v. Lauch RE XII.1 (1924) 990–991. For statistics about the frequency of words as well as the combination of words in Arnobius, see P. Tombeur, *Thesaurus Arnobii Maioris* (Turnhout 2002).

10) Of course in Arnobius sacrifice is the subject of the whole section. For Minucius Felix, see Octavius 28.7: *item boum capita et capita vervecum et immolatis et colitis*.

11) For correspondences between the two authors, see:

Arnobius, Adv. nat. 7.16

Minucius Felix, Oct. 28

agnorum
asinus
canes
leones
volucres

vervecum
asinus, asinos
canum
leonum
avibus

The involvement of animals in the pagan religion looms large in both passages and evokes satire.

The allusion to *ceparum acrimonias* in Arnobius' text was facilitated by the fact that the phrase fitted into the most frequent scheme of the latter's prose rhythm. Arnobius appears to have used the *cursus mixtus* for his *clausulae*, a combination of metrical and accentual rhythm, where ictus and accent coincide.¹² There are three different metrical types of *clausulae* mainly used in Arnobius, each of which foreshadow their accentual equivalents:¹³

- Type 1 – ◡ – – × foreshadowing the Planus ◡◡◡◡◡ (where ◡ represents the accented and ◡ the non-accented syllable)
 Type 2 – ◡ – – ◡ × foreshadowing the Tardus ◡◡◡◡◡◡
 Type 3 × × × – ◡ × foreshadowing the Velox ◡◡◡◡◡◡◡

The most frequently employed clausula in Arnobius is Type 1 (38 %, consisting of 668 instances out of 1760) and more specifically the subgroup within Type 1 where we have a three-syllable paroxytone preceded by a paroxytone (74,3 %, e. g. *sōrtě vēr̄sāri*, consisting of 496 instances out of 668).¹⁴ The phrase *acrimonias intermiscere ceparum* belongs to this subgroup (*intermiscērě cēpārūm*). As in the previous accusative and infinitive construction of the same sentence (*conīlam superspergere bubulam*), the infinitive separates the adjective from the noun it qualifies. Arnobius does the same with the *acrimonias intermiscere ceparum*, since, as pointed out above, *acrimonias* has an adjectival sense (*acres cepas*). On the other hand, the wording *acres intermiscērě cēpas* (Type 3) would create a prose rhythm that is extremely rare in the *Adversus nationes*.¹⁵

12) H. Hagendahl, *La prose métrique d'Arnobé* (Gothenburg 1937). Cf. also M. Winterbottom, *On Ancient Prose Rhythm: The Story of the Dichoreus*, in: D. Obbink / R. Rutherford (eds.), *Culture In Pieces: Essays on Ancient Texts in Honour of Peter Parsons* (Oxford 2011), 262–76, who compares a sample of Cicero's *Pro Sulla* clausulae with Arnobius'.

13) These three types account for 80,8 % of Arnobius' text: see Hagendahl (n. 12 above) 19.

14) For the statistics, see Hagendahl (n. 12 above) 18–19, 27.

15) It occurs only five times out of 458 instances where the majority (383) end in a four-syllable word (4.21: *retinuisse vitam*; 5.10: *conceptionibus tamque miris*; 5.21: *obstructae sunt dolentis aures*; 5.26: *vulneribus atque cauisis*; 5.43: *Veneris atque Martis*). Out of these five examples only two (4.21 and 5.21) are certainly taken as ending in a two-syllable word as *intermiscere cepas* would be. In the remaining three examples, *atque* and *tamquam* must have been or were likely to be grouped together with the next substantive: see Hagendahl (n. 12 above) 33–47.

Although, the prose rhythm could also bear out why Arnobius could have come up with the same phrase independently of Minucius Felix, there is a good reason why it should not. Unlike Minucius Felix, Arnobius is not restricted by the theme he describes. Minucius Felix parodies the practice of the Egyptians who deify onion. Arnobius does not talk about such practices being worthy of derision within the context of Egyptian religion alone but about sacrifice in general. Sacrifices have already been presented as absurd (7.15), but Arnobius goes a step further by suggesting a pleiad of different vegetables as potential sacrificial victims. Arnobius could have referred to any vegetable and not necessarily to onions. In the immediately preceding sentence, Arnobius offers a list of vegetables, some of which are known for their pungency (*Sed et cuminum nasturcium rapa bulbos apium carduos radices cucurbitas rutam mentam ocimum puleium porrumque sectivum idem tribuere dii vobis esseque in usibus vestris alimoniarum in parte iusserunt*).¹⁶ Although, some of the items mentioned in this sentence also fit into Arnobius' prose rhythm of Type 1 either as accusatives (e.g. *acres ... rādīces*) or genitives (e.g. *acrimonias ... pōrrōrum*), Arnobius favours Minucius Felix's formula. The phrase which offers an extra edge in Minucius Felix's scathing treatment of pagan absurdities is appropriated by Arnobius in order to serve the same purpose in his text. All the above suggest that Arnobius alludes to a distinct passage in a fellow-Christian apologist rather than that Arnobius came up with the same phraseology independently of Minucius Felix.

Finally, it is worth noting that the exotic animals mentioned in Arnobius 7.16 including camels and elephants allude to Egypt (and North Africa in general, part of which is Egypt). It seems, therefore, probable that in writing this section Arnobius resorted to or bore in mind descriptions of Egyptian religion, and Minucius Felix being one of them, left its mark on his text.

In conclusion, verbal and contextual correspondences suggest that in 7.16 Arnobius alludes to Minucius Felix 28.9, an allusion

16) Cf. Celsus 2.22, who, going through pungent vegetables, often overlaps with Arnobius' list: *Acria sunt omnia nimis austera, omnia acida, omnia salsa, mel, et quidem quo melius est, eo magis: item allium, cepa, eruca, ruta, nasturcium, cucumis, beta, brassica, asparagus, sinapi, radricula, intubus, ocimum, lactuca, maximaque holerum pars.*

facilitated by its compatibility with the most frequent scheme of Arnobius' prose rhythm. The allusion is further corroborated by the fact that out of a large variety of apparent possibilities, Arnobius opts for Minucius Felix's phraseology. Hence, the relationship between the two passages which in previous scholarship had been signalled with a vague 'cf.' or 'see' (see above), appears to be an allusion to a fellow-apologist. This study contributes to the 'Quellenforschung' of Arnobius and elucidates how early Christian apologists could interact with their predecessors. The same bullet could be used in different guns in order to shoot at the same target.

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