

# *Religion*

## **Attis and Jesus: An Examination of the Parallel Claims of Crucifixion and Resurrection**

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It has become a common refutation of the validity of Christianity to label the story of Jesus Christ as wholly unoriginal. Authors such as Kersey Graves and D. M. Murdock, along with filmmakers such as Peter Joseph, have written extensively on this topic with the purpose of illuminating aspects of the Jesus story present in pre-Christian mythology. These writers proceed by introducing an overwhelming amount of information to their audience by listing deity after deity, all of whom supposedly exhibit parallels to Jesus. After presenting their gathered evidence, the authors conclude that the biblical account of Jesus Christ arose from an amalgamation of preexisting myths. These conclusions prove to be inaccurate and unfounded.

Every so often, these claims of parallelism reemerge to destroy the faith of a number of Christians before returning to a state of hibernation. These arguments in comparative mythology tend to be highly convincing for a few different reasons. First of all, the sheer volume of parallel claims can create an immediate sense of defeat within the Christian reader. The claims cover aspects of the story of Jesus beginning with his birth all the way up to his ascension. It is not only a couple of deities, but dozens that are referenced in works such as those of Joseph and Murdock.<sup>1</sup> Second, while retelling these ancient myths, authors freely interject Christian terminology as though it were present in the original writings. Terminology such as 'atonement,' 'crucifixion,' and even 'resurrection' is attributed to the myths of these ancient pagan gods whether or not it actually resembles the Christian understanding of the term. Lastly, the number of sources that these authors reference can be particularly convincing. However, in many cases, newer authors are simply citing and referencing each other's works instead of those in antiquity. Upon tracing the development of the actual myths, it becomes clear that the Christian parallels were often adaptations made to original myths after the rise of Christianity.

To truly evaluate the claims of parallelism, these three aspects mentioned above must be closely examined. Therefore, the discussion will be limited to one

pagan god represented in nearly every work of comparative mythology, Attis. Only the claims of Attis' death and resurrection will be considered. Using these boundaries, the terminology will be evaluated and the sources will be investigated. In the end, this thesis will clearly demonstrate that the parallel claims between Attis and the death and resurrection of Jesus are unfair and unsupported.

Before proceeding, it would be beneficial to examine just a few of the authors' claims in order to gain an understanding of their views. Kersey Graves, author of *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, references Godfrey Higgin's *Anaclypsis* and argues "that several histories are given of [Attis], but all concur in representing him as having been an atoning offering for sin."<sup>2</sup> Graves also writes, "He was suspended on a tree, crucified, buried and rose again."<sup>3</sup> Next, D. M. Murdock, author of *The Christ Conspiracy*, lists Attis as the first "major player" of influences used in the creation of the Christ myth.<sup>4</sup> Referencing John Jackson's *Christianity Before Christ* and T.W. Doane's *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions*, Murdock claims that Attis "was crucified on a tree, from which his holy blood ran down to redeem the earth...descended into the underworld...[and] after three days, [he] was resurrected on March 25<sup>th</sup>."<sup>5</sup> One last example comes from Peter Joseph, producer of the *Zeitgeist* films. Through sources such as Doane, Murdock, Higgins, and an assortment of professors, Joseph states that Attis was "crucified, placed in a tomb and after three days, was resurrected."<sup>6</sup> Joseph also clarifies that, by "crucified," he simply means "being hung on a tree" since antiquity reveals that these two concepts were "similar enough to be interchangeable in understanding."<sup>7</sup> It is evident that these authors see significantly similar occurrences between the stories of Attis and Jesus to the point where they nearly seem identical.

The myth of Attis surely predates Christianity. However, it is important to determine exactly which aspects of the myth can be accounted for before Christian literature became widespread. In order to accomplish this task, pre-Christian literary references to the myth of Attis must be examined for content related to his death and aftermath. For the sake of simplicity, the various sources concerning Attis will be classified into two broad categories, the Lydian version and the Phrygian version. Even though Lancellotti believes these "rigid" categories to be guilty of lumping together sources that deserve independent classification, the two-part system will serve the purposes of this discussion well.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning with the Phrygian version of the myth, the authors to consider are Ovid, Pausanias, and Arnobius. In the *Fasti*, the book of poems published at the beginning of the first century CE, Ovid describes Attis as an attractive Phrygian boy that catches the eye of "the tower-bearing goddess," Cybele, and promises himself to her eternally.<sup>9</sup> However, upon meeting the tree nymph Sagaritis, Attis betrays his covenant. The Mother of the gods seeks revenge by cutting down the tree and thus killing Attis' beloved nymph. Upon learning of this, Attis enters into a deranged state and emasculates himself saying, "Ah, perish the parts that were my ruin!"<sup>10</sup>

Since emasculation does not qualify as a form of crucifixion, it is impossible to support parallel claims of crucifixion using Ovid's version of Attis' death. Furthermore, before any theories can arise as to the implications, Ovid enlightens the reader to the effects of the myth on the devotees of Attis. "His madness set an example, and still his unmanly ministers cut their vile members while they toss their hair."<sup>11</sup> Ovid references this ritual again in his book *Ibis* where he writes of how Phrygian priests, like Attis, became "became neither man nor woman."<sup>12</sup> It is clear in Ovid's writing that the actions of Attis inspired a lasting ritual of self-mutilation. However, Ovid makes no indication as to why the devotees of Attis perform this task. Lancellotti proposes that the removal of one's manhood ensured faithfulness to Cybele by avoiding the mistake that Attis made.<sup>13</sup> This, however, should not be seen as a manner of atonement, but rather an extreme measure of devotion. The only mention of Attis' state of being after death comes not from Ovid's *Fasti*, but rather from his *Metamorphoses*. After mentioning a "bare-trunked pine."<sup>14</sup> Ovid recalls how Attis "exchanged for this [form] his human form and stiffened in its trunk."<sup>15</sup> Obviously this form of quasi-existence bears no resemblance to the Christian notion of resurrection; therefore, Ovid's accounts cannot be cited to support parallel claims between Jesus and Attis.

Pausanias, writing in the mid second century CE, cites two different versions of the Attis myth. The first version comes from a poem authored by Hermesianax, who writes of a man named Attis, son of the Phrygian Calaus.<sup>16</sup> This Attis, born a eunuch, moved to Lydia and began participating in the ceremonies honoring the Mother of the Lydians. He gained favor with the Mother so much so that Zeus grew jealous and sent a boar to kill some of the Lydians along with Attis.

Pausanias then goes on to refer to the "popular belief" that the locals adhere to regarding Attis.<sup>17</sup> In this particular myth version, a formerly androgynous Agdistis interrupts Attis' wedding, sending him into a frenzy ending with his self-emasculation. Again, Pausanias uses no language resembling that of crucifixion. Agdistis is repentant of his actions, and in return Zeus grants that "no part of Attis' body should moulder or decay."<sup>18</sup> Here appears the first acknowledgment of Attis' state of being after his death. Nonetheless, there is no indication of anything beyond a glorified corpse.

Arnobius' version of the Attis myth derives from the mythologist Timotheus, "a man not unknown among theologians."<sup>19</sup> According to Arnobius, Timotheus' sources include "obscure books of antiquities and...the most esoteric mysteries."<sup>20</sup> Lancellotti notes how scholarship remains divided as to whether or not the Timotheus referenced here is Timotheus the Eumplid. If this were the case, it would place Arnobius' source around the third century BCE, making it one of the earliest references available.<sup>21</sup> If not, the source must remain in the early third century CE during Arnobius' lifetime.

His detailed account begins with the Great Mother lying on a notorious rock known as Agdus. Nearby, Jupiter unsuccessfully lusts after her and ejaculates

onto the rock. The rock conceives and the untamed, androgynous figure Accestis is born. The gods are troubled by Accestis' destructive nature, so Liber devises a plan to bridle the beast. Liber fills an often-visited spring with wine, and, parched from hunting, Accestis comes to drink. After he has fallen asleep, Liber fastens one end of a halter to Accestis' foot and the other to his genitals. Upon waking, Accestis returns to his usual furious state. In doing so, "he robs himself of that by which he had been (a man)."<sup>22</sup> The earth absorbs the blood from Accestis' wound and sprouts a pomegranate tree. While picking the fruit of this particular tree, Nana, the daughter of the king Sangarius, places the some of the fruit in her bosom and becomes pregnant. Nana's embarrassed father attempts to starve her to death, but the Mother Goddess saves her child. After the delivery, in order to avoid another attack from Sangarius, the child is taken and nourished by goat milk. Arnobius mentions that the child's name, Attis, could either be from the Phrygian word for goats, *attagi*, or from the Lydian word for handsome people. While "[Attis] the Mother of the Gods loved as none other", Accestis, the androgynous figure loved him as well.<sup>23</sup> The king of Pessinus wishes Attis to marry his daughter, which greatly angers Accestis. In order to retaliate, Accestis shows up on the day of their marriage ceremony and provokes the crowd into madness. Throughout this madness, Attis' bride cuts off her breasts, and Attis "hurls himself down at last, and under a pine tree mutilates himself."<sup>24</sup> Yet again, the death of Attis occurs without a hint of resemblance to crucifixion.

Here Arnobius writes that "with the stream of blood his life flits away."<sup>25</sup> The stream of blood causes a violet to grow, which wraps around the pine tree. Upon arriving to the scene, Attis' bride takes her own life as well. Her blood also sprouts violets. The Mother of the Gods uproots the pine tree and takes it back to her cave where she and Accestis lament Attis' death. Accestis makes the request that Attis be brought back to life, but Jupiter denies it. Instead, Jupiter grants "that his body should not decay, that his hair should ever grow, that the very smallest of his fingers should live and alone react by continued motion."<sup>26</sup>

The component of retrieving the pine tree seems to correspond with Ovid's account in his *Metamorphoses*. If Attis' body did transform into a tree, it would explain the reasoning behind its careful retrieval. However, this theory does not coincide with the rest of the myth. After a denied request to bring him back to life, Attis' body is yet again placed in a state of preservation with the perpetual motion of his smallest finger. Since trees are generally accepted as fingerless, it seems logical to conclude that Attis' lifeless body has not mutated into a tree, but rather that the tree holds some type of significance that requires further investigation. Either way, Attis is specifically denied resurrection. Jupiter's response to Accestis nullifies any argument for Attis' constant motion as a parallel to Jesus' resurrection. Just as in Ovid's *Fasti*, Arnobius reveals a custom originated from the Attis myth. "[From Attis' fate] was derived and arose the custom that even now the sacred pines are veiled and garlanded."<sup>27</sup> Also like Ovid, Arnobius does not offer a suggestion as to

the significance of the ritual.

Thus ends the Phrygian versions of the Attis myth and leads into the Lydian versions. As mentioned earlier, Pausanias referenced an account authored by Hermesianax that concluded with Zeus sending a boar to kill Attis. The boar becomes the trademark of the Lydian version. The earliest and most complete Lydian version of the myth comes from the writings of Herodotus in the fifth century CE. In his account, the Greek historian tells the story of Atys, the son of King Croesus. The King receives a vision in a dream that his son Atys “should be smitten and killed by a spear of iron.”<sup>28</sup> Distraught from the dream, Croesus sought to protect his son by arranging for him to be married and removing all the spears that Atys could potentially come in contact with.

Around this same time, a man named Adrastus arrives seeking to be purified of an evil deed. After purifying him, the King learns that Adrastus has been excommunicated from his household for unintentionally slaying his brother. Croesus shows sympathy for Adrastus’ misfortune and offers him a place to live in his home. “A great monster of a boar” appears in the nearby fields and Atys, afraid that his wife will think him a coward, pleads with his father to be released from his protective grasp in order to join the boar hunt. King Croesus reveals his dream to Atys, who then convinces his father to allow him to participate in the boar hunt by saying, “Has a boar hands? Has it that iron spear which you dread?”<sup>29</sup> Before the hunters depart, King Croesus asks Adrastus to repay his kindness of cleansing him by protecting Atys during the hunt. Adrastus, of course, agrees. During the hunt, the men eventually come upon the beast and throw their spears, aiming to kill it. Adrastus’ spear misses the boar and strikes Atys, killing him in the same way the dream prophesied. The men return Atys’ body to Croesus and have him buried in an honorable way. Afterwards, Adrastus kills himself in response to his horrible luck.

In Herodotus’ account, Atys is not actually killed by the boar, but as a result of the boar’s presence. The spear thrown by Adrastus ultimately claims Atys’ life. This spear serves as the only possible parallel claim to the death of Jesus.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the spear is not significant enough in Jesus’ story to be considered a central theme of crucifixion. Therefore, since the aspect of crucifixion is missing along with any mention of Atys’ post-mortem state, Herodotus’ account could not be claimed to be an influential source of Jesus’ death and resurrection. There remain several other brief mentions of Attis in the Lydian version. In the first century BCE while writing on Sertorius, Plutarch mentions two men named Attis, “one a Syrian and the other an Arcadian,” both who were killed by a wild boar.<sup>31</sup> Lancellotti mentions another source described as “the scholiast who commented on the Alexipharmacoon of Nicander.”<sup>32</sup> In this version, the Mother of the gods shows affection towards Attis, which inspires a jealous Zeus to send an angry boar to kill him. Neither of these two versions sustains the arguments for Attis’ crucifixion or resurrection.

One final myth version is that of Diodorus Siculus.<sup>33</sup> His account, written during the first century BCE, differs from all others previously mentioned. In this version, the king of Phrygia and Lydia marries Dindyme, and she becomes pregnant with a daughter. The king attempts to kill the child by exposing her on the mountain Cybelus (the mountain from which the name Cybele was derived), but “divine providence” allowed the child to survive.<sup>34</sup> When Cybele grows into a woman, she falls in love with a native named Attis. The two lovers lie together, and Cybele becomes pregnant. Around this same time, Cybele’s father claims her as his own child and welcomes her into the palace. After she has moved in, the king learns of Cybele’s pregnancy and kills Attis along with all who took care of his daughter. He “cast their bodies forth to lie unburied.”<sup>35</sup> When Cybele’s mourning causes the land to stop producing, a god advises the people to bury Attis and honor Cybele as a goddess. Diodorus describes their course of action and the prevailing custom that arose from this instance:

...since the body had disappeared in the course of time, made an image of the youth, before which they sang dirges and by means of honours in keeping with his suffering propitiated the wrath of him who had been wronged; and these rites they continue to perform down to our own lifetime.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, Attis remains deceased. Even further, his body has deteriorated. Diodorus’ version of the myth lends no support towards the parallel claims surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. On the other hand, the phrase “propitiated the wrath” does evoke the Christian doctrine of atonement. But, using the context of the myth, one can see that the townspeople are attempting to subdue the wrath of Attis, brought on by his wrongful murder, so that the earth will return to a more fruitful state. Propitiation within the myth does not connote soteriological benefits as it does in the Christian tradition.

Thus concludes the investigation of the myth in ancient texts. As clearly demonstrated, no single text or combination of texts makes any reference to Attis’ crucifixion, resurrection, or atonement comparable to the biblical account of Christ. Even though this is true, many proponents of the Attis-Jesus connection find support in other areas such as the ancient rituals of the cultic members and descriptions of their practices. As mentioned by several authors, Attis’ fate inspired a number of rituals that continued over a significant amount of time. These rituals and practices can reveal what the followers of Attis believed to be true about his death and post-mortem state.

The Romans celebrated a cycle of festivals in honor of Attis and Cybele, the Great Mother. One of these rituals, *arbor intrat*, or “entry of the tree,” took place on March 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>37</sup> *Arbor intrat*, mentioned by Arnobius’ account, entailed devotees fixing “an effigy of Attis” to a pine-tree (representing the pine tree under which he was emasculated), decorating it with purple ribbons (representing the

violets that sprang up from his blood), and carrying the tree into a temple where they would mourn him for the next day, March 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>38</sup> This ritual has provided comparative religion writers with enough evidence to connect Attis with the act of crucifixion, thereby proving a parallel claim between Attis and Jesus. However, the action of attaching a representation of Attis to a pine-tree must be interpreted through the myth. In Arnobius' account, the Mother of the Gods and Accestis carry the tree back to her cave where they ask Jupiter to revive Attis. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid writes of how Attis stiffened into the trunk of a tree. Knowing this, one can see that the act of fixing an effigy of Attis onto a pine-tree represented the belief that Attis transformed into a pine-tree, not that he was crucified on one. In the Gospels, the followers of Christ transport his body to the tomb, not his cross.<sup>39</sup> In the same way, followers of Attis transport the pine-tree to the temple because they believe it to be Attis body, not the instrument upon which he was killed.

After the arbor intrat festival came the *sanguem*, the day set aside for "libations of blood and self-emasculation."<sup>40</sup> The introduction of this particular day into the March festivals finds its background in the actions of the Galli, the priesthood of Attis devotees who emasculated themselves as a way of honoring Attis and the Great Mother. Since sources mentioning the castration of the Galli date as far back as the third century BCE from writers such as Callimachus, the significance of this ritual must be understood to refute the arguments of authors such as Graves and Murdock, both of whom perceive Attis' self-inflicted wound and resulting blood flow as evidence of a sin-atoning sacrifice that "redeemed the earth."<sup>41</sup> The origins of this ritual are clearly associated with the Attis myth, but not necessarily connected solely to Attis. In the *Fasti*, Ovid mentions how Attis' actions inspired his devotees to "cut their vile members."<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, Arnobius' account specifically mentions a man named Gallus who emasculates himself but does not die as Attis does.<sup>43</sup> Lancellotti argues that Attis' self-emasculation founded the funeral cult of Attis while Gallus' actions inspired the ritual of the Galli.<sup>44</sup> This idea is reinforced by other sources that show, in Pessinous, "not all of the Galli are [called] Attis. Only one is, the one who from time to time takes on the role of 'king'."<sup>45</sup> While it is clear that Attis is revered in the ritual of the Galli, his actions are not uniquely celebrated as Jesus' actions are in the New Testament writings.

While interpreting the actions of the Galli, it is interesting to note Vermaseren's observation that "the common thread that runs through the various stories [of Attis] is that of Dramatic Love."<sup>46</sup> In Ovid's account, Attis breaks his vow of fidelity and removes the body part that caused his unfaithfulness. Other versions, such as those of Pausanias, Arnobius, and Diodorus Siculus, have the element of Attis' wedding, sometimes even to Cybele herself. In this light, Attis' action of self-emasculation should be perceived as an act of loyalty, not as an act of atoning-sacrifice. Vermaseren translates the actions of the Galli as following the example of Attis by "dedicat[ing] themselves entirely to the Goddess."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, even if

Attis' actions reaped soteriological benefits for himself, they were not passed on to his followers, as was the case in Jesus' crucifixion. Vermaseren writes,

The divine occurrence repeats itself time and again, serving as an example to the faithful: bow to the power and majesty of the Goddess; if one enters into her cult one is initiated as a sacred slave without any hope of freedom. In exchange the Goddess will stretch out her hands protectingly over her slaves.<sup>48</sup>

In order to receive the same supposed benefits of Attis' sacrifice, devotees would have to make the same sacrifice, which many did on the sanguem during the March festivals.

Many comparative religion authors point to the taurobolium, the sacrifice of a bull, as an influence for the importance of blood in Jesus' atoning sacrifice.<sup>49</sup> Some authors even refer to the taurobolium as a ritual specifically dedicated to the Mother Goddess while the criobolium, the sacrifice of a ram, is a ritual specifically dedicated to Attis. However, Duthoy believes this to be inaccurate since there are inscriptions to Attis with no mention of the criobolium as well as inscriptions of a criobolium clearly dedicated to the Mother Goddess.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Vermaseren reveals that the dates on the inscriptions span across the entire calendar year, proving that the taurobolium or criobolium were not directly connected to March festivals.<sup>51</sup>

Authors have associated the taurobolium with Attis since archaeologists discovered altar tables commemorating the taurobolium inscribed with the names of Attis and Cybele. In his poem *Peristephanon*, the Christian poet Prudentius describes the process of the taurobolium.<sup>52</sup> A priest descends into a pit wearing decorated garments. Boards are used to cover the opening, and holes are cut into the boards. The bull is led onto the boards and then killed. The blood runs down through the holes and covers the priest entirely. The priest honorably emerges from the pit, and the "profane blood and a dead have washed him."<sup>53</sup> James G. Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*, cites Prudentius' poem when explaining why this ancient sacrifice should be seen as a "baptism of blood" similar to that of Jesus.<sup>54</sup> Even though Prudentius' bias towards Christianity clearly shows, one can easily identify a similarity between the ritual and that of Jesus' sacrifice. The fourth century Christian writer Firmicus Maternus also sees a similarity between the taurobolium and Jesus' sacrifice, so much so that he feels compelled to discredit the ability of the blood of bulls and rams to cleanse a person. He writes that "the blood pollutes, it does not redeem."<sup>55</sup> However, the problem does not arise from the similarities between the implications of Jesus' sacrifice and the taurobolium, but rather from the dating of literary and archeological sources regarding the taurobolium.

The practice of the taurobolium occurred centuries before Christianity, but the use of the taurobolium for spiritual cleansing does not appear until



around the time of Prudentius' writings during the start of the fourth century CE.<sup>56</sup> Before this time, records indicate that the taurobolium was not considered an act of purification, but instead "was made for the well-being of the emperor, the Imperial House the family, the Senate, the city, the army and the navy."<sup>57</sup> In fact, it is not until 160 CE that the taurobolium even appears to be used within the cult of the Great Mother.<sup>58</sup> In addition, inscriptions on the altar tables used in the taurobolium lack Attis' name until around the year 228 CE, and do not appear again until around 295 CE.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, it is not until after Christianity is well established that the taurobolium develops a connotation of spiritual cleansing. Vermaseren even notes an altar from 376 CE with the words "reborn for eternity," which he suggests alludes to the "the incorporation into the Cybele rites of the eternity concept as it is found in other mysteries and in Christianity."<sup>60</sup> Instead of Attis' affiliation with the taurobolium influencing Christianity, it seems more likely that Christianity influenced the rites of the taurobolium involving Attis.

After the festival periods of mourning and sacrifice, the Romans celebrated the Hilaria, which, as the name suggests, carried a much more joyous, cheerful tone than the previous few days. Lancellotti correctly identifies how "the presence of these celebrations leads to reflections on the possible evolution of the mythical and ritual traditions in respect of his 'resurrection' and, as a consequence, the possible opening to his followers of a soteriological perspective."<sup>61</sup> Most of the authors who support the claim of Attis' triumph over death utilize the Hilaria festival as evidence that the followers of the cult believed in his resurrection. In order to validate or dispute these claims, the implications of the celebration must be determined, along with the date that the festival first appears.

Vermaseren notes a calendar dated in the year 354 CE that lists seven different events of the March festivals celebrated in Rome.<sup>62</sup> The calendar reveals that the Hilaria took place on March 25<sup>th</sup>. However, he also notes of another calendar from 50 CE "inscribed on an altar" that only mentions one of the seven events, the lavatio.<sup>63</sup> Somewhere in between these two dates, the other six events were added as official celebrations. Vermaseren gives a detailed account of the earliest references to the Roman March festivals by authors such as Suetonius (69 CE), Valerius Flaccus (80 CE), Arrian (136-137 CE), and Herodian (187 CE), all of whom never mention the Hilaria.<sup>64</sup> Herodian reveals that the March festivals, held to "honor the mother of the gods," entailed the Romans parading around in different disguises while offering "imperial treasures...[and] marvelous objects" to the goddess.<sup>65</sup> Some argue that Herodian's account provides the earliest reference of the Hilaria. However, there is no direct mention of the Hilaria, resurrection/rebirth, or even the name of Attis. Furthermore, even if Herodian's writing references the Hilaria, it remains in the late second century, reducing its credibility as an influence of early Christianity.

The first appearance of a concrete reference of the Hilaria comes from the calendar of Philocalus dated in 354 CE.<sup>66</sup> From this point on, there are several

literary references to the festival that prove the celebration to be well established. One of the most commonly referred to passages on the Hilaria is that of the Christian author Firmicus Maternus. While he never directly mentions the Hilaria, his description of the annual rites of Attis devotees seem to correspond to the newly added festival. In his book, *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, Firmicus provides an euhemeristic explanation of the Attis myth. According to Firmicus, the Mother Goddess sought revenge on Attis after a “haughty snub,” but afterwards regrets her actions.<sup>67</sup> In order to console her, her devotees “advance the claim that he whom they had buried a little while earlier had come to life again.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, in their annual rites, the devotees believe they are worshiping the earth when they are actually “venerating an unhappy death and funeral.”<sup>69</sup>

When writing of Attis’ return to life, Firmicus uses the verb “revivere,” which Gasparro argues “appears to have been borrowed by Firmicus from Christian terminology.”<sup>70</sup> Even though the term ‘resurrection’ is used in his account, the preceding explanation bears no resemblance to the Christian understanding of resurrection. The lack of similarity is further supported when Maternus reveals the vegetal symbolism that has been attached to the Cybele and Attis ritual:

The earth [Mother Goddess]...loves the crops, Attis is the very thing that grows from the crops, and the punishment which he suffered is what a harvester with his sickle does to the ripened crops. His death they interpret as the storing away of the collected seeds, his resurrection as the sprouting of the scattered seeds in the annual turn of the seasons.<sup>71</sup>

Even this interpretation cannot be concluded as comparable to Christian resurrection. As Gasparro argues, Christian resurrection “implies a definitive victory over death through the reconstitution of the psycho-physical integrity of the individual resurrected,” not merely “an alternating rhythm of presence and absence.”<sup>72</sup>

Simply from examining the literary sources, one could easily conclude that the Hilaria did not exist until the fourth century. However, Vermaseren reveals how many scholars could dispute this evidence:

The most striking result of this examination is that practically all the literary data about the Hilaria in Rome date from the late period, the majority even from the very latest period of the Imperial Age, while the archaeological data that can be connected with this festival and its meaning are all of an earlier date.<sup>73</sup>

The oldest figurines of Attis portray the Phrygian god in a mournful and sorrowful state known as *Attis tristis*.<sup>74</sup> Not only are the *Attis tristis* figurines the oldest, but they are also the most abundant. This evidence supports the myth accounts that all seem to focus on the death of Attis. Nevertheless, archaeologists have discovered a fair amount of figurines, the earliest dating back to the fourth century BCE, portraying the god in a dancing state, sometimes even with wings, known as *Attis*

hilaria. The dancing, winged figurines are in fact never inscribed with the words *Attis hilaria*. These words have simply been taken from the title of the later developed March festival and used as a description. Some believe that the presence of these figurines could attest to an earlier origin of the Hilaria festival in a less public and less established form. They argue that the Roman March festivals developed from an earlier existing celebration within the smaller *Attis* cults.

There have been several theories as to why *Attis* is sometimes portrayed in this state of *hilaria*. One of the most convincing theories is that the figurines recall the instance of *Attis*' wild frenzy immediately preceding his self-emasculatation such as in the Phrygian myth versions of Ovid, Pausanias, and Arnobius. Supporting this theory are the wild dances that the Galli perform during their emasculatation and flagellation in the springtime. As for the winged figurines, Wedderburn and Vermaseren both note that these representations of *Attis* could be explained as an "assimilation to Eros."<sup>75, 76</sup> There are a number of winged figurines that portray *Attis* as very young, which supports the theory of Eros influence.<sup>77</sup> Wedderburn correctly points out that the "older and graver" winged *Attis* figurines prove to be "more impressive evidence" of a notion of triumph.<sup>78, 79</sup>

The most commonly cited archaeological evidence of an early notion of *Attis*' triumph after death is a first century image of a "winged *Attis* escorting *Ganymede* to heaven" depicted in a Roman basilica.<sup>80</sup> While Wedderburn acknowledges that the presence of this representation of *Attis* suggests "the mourning for *Attis* was not the last word" for some first century devotees, it also does not directly suggest a resurrection of *Attis*.<sup>81</sup> This particular depiction of *Attis* merely proposes that he does not remain in an ever-present state of death as many of the myth accounts state. Furthermore, it is important to understand that the issue at hand is not whether or not *Attis* reached an eternal location after his death. The notion of life after death surely predates Christianity. Therefore, the representation of *Attis* in a heaven-like environment does not sustain the argument for *Attis*' resurrection. The purpose of exploring this evidence is to determine if the followers of *Attis* believed that he experienced a resurrection like that of Jesus. It seems that none of the archaeological evidence available would support this claim.

Most authors who attempt to discredit Jesus by comparing him to other persons of divine nature do so on a large scale. Kersey Graves authored a book entitled *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, where he argues that sixteen different figures have been crucified and offer the same type of atoning sacrifice as that of Jesus. Both Peter Joseph, in *Zeitgesit: The Movie*, and D.M. Murdock, in *The Christ Conspiracy* mention nearly fifty pagan gods throughout history that embody the same story as the Christian Jesus. It is precisely this tactic that can result in a very convincing argument. However, when these deities are closely examined on a one-by-one basis, the arguments prove to be very deceptive.

*Attis* is one of the most frequently cited gods as an influential precursor to Christian writings, commonly being referred to as a pre-Christianity christ

figure. Authors of comparative religion often attribute to Attis' myth the elements of crucifixion and resurrection. However, after examining the available sources, these claims appear substantially unsupported. Neither the literary works nor cultic practices that existed before the rise of Christianity reinforce these claims. The myth accounts make no mention of crucifixion or resurrection. The early stages of the Roman March festivals do not offer any type of validation. This evidence proves that New Testament authors could not have been influenced by the myth and cult of Attis.

## Notes

1. Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold*. (Illinois: Adventures Unlimited, 1999), 106-107.
2. Kersey Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*. 6th ed. (New York: University Books, 1971), 127.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy*, 107.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Peter Joseph, "Companion Source Guide," *Zeitgeist: The Movie*, 32.
7. *Ibid.*, 35.
8. Maria Grazia Lancellotti, *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1.
9. Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. James George Frazer, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 205.
10. Ovid, *Fasti.*, 207.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, trans. J. H. Mozley, (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 273. (*Ibis* vv. 453-455)
13. Lancellotti, *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*, 5.
14. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, vol. 2 (London: Harvard University Press, 1946), 71. (v. 103).
15. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 71. (v. 105).
16. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. James George Frazer (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913), 353. (VII 17, 9-10)
17. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 353. (VII 17, 10-12)
18. *Ibid.*
19. Arnobius of Sicca, *The Case Against the Pagans*, vol. 2, trans. George E. McCracken (Newman Press: Baltimore, 1949), 414. (Book 5, Sec. 5)
20. *Ibid.*
21. Lancellotti, *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*, 2.
22. Arnobius of Sicca, *The Case Against the Pagans*, 415. (Book Five, Sec. 6)
23. *Ibid.*
24. Arnobius of Sicca, *The Case Against the Pagans*, 416. (Book 5, Sec. 7)
25. *Ibid.*, 417. (Book 5, Sec. 7)
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Herodotus, I-II, trans. A. D. Godley (Harvard University Press: London, Orig. 1920. Reprint. 1999), 41. (Book 1, Sec. 34)
29. *Ibid.*, 47. (Book 1, Sec. 39)
30. John 19:34
31. Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (Penguin Books: England, 1965), 195. (Sertorius, Sec. 1)
32. Lancellotti, *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*, 8.
33. Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library, trans. and ed. C.H. Oldfather, London: Heinemann ; Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1935 (Book 3, 58-59)
34. *Ibid.*, 271. (Book 3, 58, v. 1)
35. *Ibid.*, 273. (Book 3, 59, v. 1)
36. *Ibid.*, 277. (Book 3, 59, v. 7)
37. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 115.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 19:38-42
40. Lancellotti, *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*, 82.
41. Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy: the greatest story ever sold*, 107.

42. Ovid, *Fasti*, 207.
43. Arnobius of Sicca, *The Case Against the Pagans*, 415. (Book 5, Sec. 7)
44. Lancellotti, *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*, 101.
45. *Ibid.*, 104.
46. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, 92.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. Heb. 9:22; Luke 22:20; 1 Pet. 1:19
50. Robert Duthoy, *The Taurobolium: Its Evolution and Terminology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 61-62.
51. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, 105.
52. C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 96-97. (Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, X. 1011-50)
53. *Ibid.*, line 33.
54. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1922), 274.
55. Firmicus Maternus, *The Error of the Pagan Religions* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), 107. (Chapter 27, Sec. 8)
56. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, 102.
57. *Ibid.*, 105.
58. Giulia Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 107.
59. Duthoy, *The Taurobolium: Its Evolution and Terminology*, 65.
60. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, 106.
61. Lancellotti, *Attis, Between Myth and History: King, Priest, and God*, 157.
62. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, 113.
63. *Ibid.*, 113.
64. *Ibid.*, 119-120.
65. C. R. Whittaker, *Herodian*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969-1970) (I. 10.5-7)
66. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vol. 1 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. C. Hensen, C. Huelsen, and T. Mommsen, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1893), 260, 313.
67. Firmicus Maternus, *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, Ch. 3, Sec. 1.
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*
70. Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis*, 47.
71. Firmicus Maternus, *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, Ch. 3, Sec. 2.
72. Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis*, 48.
73. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, 119.
74. Vermaseren, *The Legend of Attis in Greek and Roman Art*, Plate XXI, 3.
75. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology Against its Graeco-Roman Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1987), 205.
76. Vermaseren, *The Legend of Attis in Greek and Roman Art* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), 46.
77. *Ibid.*, Plate XXVI, 2.
78. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*, 205.
79. Vermaseren, *The Legend of Attis in Greek and Roman Art*, Plate XXXI, 1.
80. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*, 205.
81. *Ibid.*, 206.

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A new book examining the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from a medical perspective, by Joseph W. Bergeron. TV segment on CBN News about "The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Medical Doctor Examines the Death and Resurrection of Christ." <http://crucifixionbook.com>. St. Polycarp Publishing House. 13,011 Views. George Thomas Reporting. 19 April. Christians all know Christ died for them on the cross. So while Jesus' existence, crucifixion and alleged or rumored resurrection appears to be somewhat historical, the remaining three points fail to meet any reasonable burden or historical proof. The best statement we can agree on with any historical certainty is that it seems rumors of Jesus resurrection circulated at the time. The Apostolic Conspiracy Theory. Another claim the Apologist offers is that the Apostles had no motive to lie: They had nothing to gain from stealing the body of Christ and claiming he was resurrected. But if they were intent to rebel against oppressive Roman Rule, they had every motive to expand their cause through deception. Finally, the Apologist contention that subsequent persecution dispels this theory also fails to make logical sense on its face.