Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era

Judith Perkins

ROUTLEDGE MONOGRAPHS IN CLASSICAL STUDIES

ROMAN IMPERIAL IDENTITIES IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA

Through the close study of texts, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* examines the overlapping emphases and themes of two cosmopolitan and multiethnic cultural identities emerging in the early centuries of the Common Era – a trans-empire alliance of the Elite and the "Christians." Exploring the cultural representations of these social identities, Judith Perkins shows that they converge around an array of shared themes: violence, the body, prisons, courts, and time.

Locating Christian representations within their historical context and in dialogue with other contemporary representations, it asks why do Christian representations share certain emphases? To what do they respond, and to whom might they appeal? For example, does the increasing Christian emphasis on a fully material human resurrection in the early centuries respond to the evolution of a harsher and more status based judicial system?

Judith Perkins argues that Christians were so successful in suppressing their social identity as inhabitants of the Roman Empire, that historical documents and testimony have been sequestered as "Christian," rather than recognized as evidence for the social dynamics enacted during the period. Her discussion offers a stimulating survey of interest to students of ancient narrative, cultural studies and gender.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2009
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave., New York, NY 100016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Perkins, Judith, 1944–
Roman imperial identities in the early Christian era / Judith Perkins.
p. cm.
1. Church history–Primitive and early church, ca. 30–600.
2. Rome–History–Empire, 30 B.C.–476 A.D. 3. Romans–Ethnic identity.
4. Rome–Ethnic relations. 5. Christians–Italy–Rome–History.
6. Identification (Religion) I. Title.
BR170.P47 2009
937'.07–dc22 2008007757

ISBN 0-203-89236-4 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 10: 0-415-39744-8 (hbk)
ISBN 10: 0-203-89236-4 (ebk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-39744-5 (hbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-203-89236-7 (ebk)

RIMA L. BRAUER M.D.

PRO QUO PRIUS HABEAM GRATIAS?

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements viii
Permissions ix

Introduction 1

1 Cosmopolitan identities 17

2 False deaths and new bodies 45

3 Constructing a patriarchal elite 62

4 Resurrection and judicial bodies 90

5 Place, space and voice 107

6 Trimalchio: Transformations and possibilities 127

7 Resurrection and social perspectives 144

8 The rhetoric of the maternal body 159

9 Competing chronologies 172

Works cited 182
Index 205

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank the people and institutions that helped me in this project. I am fortunate to belong to several communities of scholars who have supported, challenged, and enriched my work. For the past fifteen years, the Society for Biblical Literature's Ancient Fiction and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative Group has provided an ideal forum for critique and stimulus. I am especially indebted to Richard Pervo, Jo-Ann Brant, Dennis MacDonald, Charles Hedrick, Ron Hock, and Christine Thomas for their ideas and perspectives, which continue to inform my writings. I also thank Gerhard van den Heever for inviting me to join the Redescribing Graeco-Roman Antiquity Project. The members of this project provide another energetic and enlivening community, and I am grateful to them. Also, special thanks to my colleagues at Saint Joseph College, Dennis Barone, Kerry Driscoll, Shyamala Raman, and Julius Rubin, whose collegiality has been an ongoing support. I also thank Saint Joseph College for granting me a sabbatical leave to work on this study.

I have also benefited from opportunities to present my work. I thank the Pontificio Comitato di Scienze Storiche for the invitation to speak at the conference, Il contributo delle Scienze Storiche allo studio del Nuovo Testamento. I am also grateful to Professors Michael Paschalis and Stavros A. Frangoulidis, University of Crete, for their hospitality when I participated in the 2003 Rethymno International Conference on the Ancient Novel. Thanks also to Ross Kramer for inviting me to the Culture and Religion of the Ancient Mediterranean (CRAM) seminar at Brown University and to the seminar participants for their valuable criticisms and suggestions. I owe a special debt of gratitude to those willing to read and comment on portions of my manuscript. I thank Dennis Barone, Richard Pervo, Kent Rigsby, Gerhard van den Heever. I am of course responsible for the errors and omissions that remain. I also thank Karen Schenkenfelder for her keen insight and editorial acumen. My student assistant, Praisely MacNamara, provided valuable assistance.

I also thank the persons who buoyed me along the way: Dee Bailey, Louise Bailey, Sheila and Peter Gillin, Barbara Kennelly, Karen and Tim Largay, Bland Maloney, Edward Swain, Cathy and Greg Oneglia. My deepest debt of gratitude belongs to my sons, Alexander and Austin, my daughter, Laela, and most especially to my husband, Brewster, for their good will and encouragement when I was too often too busy.

PERMISSIONS

Portions of the book have been previously published and I thank those who gave permission for me to use them:

A version of Chapter 2 was published in *Religion and Theology* 13 (2006) "Fictive *Scheintod* and Resurrection Discourse", 396–418. (Copyright Brill, reprinted with permission).

Material from Chapter 5 was published in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Early Christian Literature*, ed. Dennis MacDonald, Trinity International Press (2001), 87–106. (Copyright Continuum Press, reprinted with permission); *in Space in the Ancient Novel: Ancient Narrative:* Supplementum 1, eds. Michael Pachalis Stavros Frangoulidis (2002), 118–131; in *A People's History of Christianity*, Vol. 2, The Early Centuries (2005) eds. Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman, Fortress Press, 47–69. (Copyright Fortress Press, reprinted with permission).

A version of Chapter 6 was published in *Metaphor and the Ancient Novel: Ancient Narrative*: Supplementum 4, eds. Stephen Harrison, Michael Pachalis and Stavros Frangoulidis (2005), 132–168.

Chapter 7 was published in *Il Contributo Delle Scienze Storiche Allo Studio Del Nuovo Testamento* (2005) eds. E. Dal Covolo, E., and R. Fusco. (Copyright Atti E Documenti Pontificio Comitato Di Scienze Storiche; 19. Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana reprinted with permission) and in *Ancient Novel, Jewish and Christian Fiction*, eds. Jo-Ann Brant *et al*. (SBL 2005), 217–238. (Copyright the Society for Biblical Literatures, reprinted with permission).

Chapter 8 was published in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, eds. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Brill 2007), 313–332. (Copyright Brill, reprinted with permission).

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Oxford University Press for: *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (1972), ed. Herbert Murusillo; The *Apocryphal New Testament In English translation* (1993), ed. J.K. Elliott.

University of California Press for *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (1989), ed. B.P. Reardon.

Thanks are due to Brigitte Egger, Saundra Schwartz and Akihiko Watanabe for permission to quote from their unpublished Ph.D. dissertations.

INTRODUCTION

Marc Angenot, an architect of contemporary discourse studies, calls himself “a memorialist, not a historian” (Barsky and Angenot 2004: 190). He prefers the title memorialist because, he explains, historiography tends to generate narratives that point toward a meaningful future. Angenot declines a role that suggests an intention to project answers for the future, but as a memorialist, he can look back on moments in history when groups of people “have been in the same position we are now, trying to make sense of a world” (Barsky and Angenot 2004: 190). In this study of the early Roman imperial period, I too consider myself a memorialist, looking back at a historical moment with similarities to our own. For all the many differences, the early centuries CE seem to offer a moment comparable to our contemporary situation. As we find ourselves attempting to adjust to new universalizing schemes of culture and power, to “globalization,” we share the position of Roman subjects as they learned to accommodate themselves to a new, larger world of empire. They also had to adjust to larger frames of reference and more extensive networks of relationships, and hone new identities and self-understandings suitable for a more expansive social, cultural, and political world.

In an insightful exegesis, Sheldon Pollock reminds us that our modern, accustomed, local ways of making culture – what he calls the practices of our “vernacular millennium” – themselves replaced the cosmopolitan practices of the Roman Empire. Pollock suggests the relevance of remembering earlier transitions to cosmopolitanism:[1]

> These great transformations in the course of the last two millennia – from the old cosmopolitan to the vernacular, and from the vernacular to the new and disquieting cosmopolitan of today – resulted from choices made by people at different times and places, for very complex reasons. Studying the history of such choices may have something important, perhaps even urgent, to tell us about choices available to us in the future. (2002: 15)

With Angenot, I expect the future will have to sort itself out, but in this study I intend to look to the past to try to glimpse how different social constituencies reacted to the experience of moving from, in Pollock's terms, the "smaller place" to the "larger world" of empire culture. Remembering their experiences and strategies in dealing with their new cosmopolitanism just might have some use for us as we reconceptualize ourselves and our polities in the wider frame of a global cosmopolitanism.

My discussion will focus on two cosmopolitan trans-empire social entities that evolved synchronically with the consolidation of the Roman Empire and within the same geographical frame: a trans-empire coalition of elite joined by shared privilege and status and newly refined cultural and educational pursuits, and Christians connected by shared religious and moral beliefs and practices. In retrospect the emergence of Christianity looks more significant for the course of future history, but in the opening moments of the new cosmopolitanism, this significance was not apparent. In their early stages, in the opening moments of the new cosmopolitanism of empire, these cosmopolitan unities comprising elites and Christians were both evolving social configurations taking shape in the same cultural and social world and in the same time frame. And at this point, the elite alliance would have appeared to have much the edge.

In choosing to examine the emergence of these two cosmopolitan cultural identities, I do not intend to imply that cultural identities are static and stable. Contemporary cultural theorists have persuasively demonstrated that "identities are not fixed *a priori*," but emerge within the context of an individual's multiple overlapping social relationships and locations (Hoy 2004: 203).[2] A particular identity is always only a partial articulation of the many possible identity positions a subject holds in his or her ongoing social life. Gillian Rose explains that any notion of a unitary essential identity will be undercut by recognizing the "mobile, fusing axes of identity within which individuals are complexly, contingently, multiply and contradictorily positioned" in the course of their many and various social interactions (1997: 185). These commentators call attention to the inherent heterogeneity of subjects as part of their project to subvert and destabilize the binary logic that traditionally has been utilized in conceptualizing identity, such as male/female, barbarian/Greek, Christians/Romans, elite/non-elite.

Such dualisms, based on a simple dichotomy of same/other, are perceived as belonging to the machinery of cultural domination. They police boundaries between artificially fixed identities and thereby structure power relations. This language of difference typically works as a language of power, as one side of the binary seeks to establish its right to privilege over the "other." For dominance to be established through an us/them dichotomy, the inherently variegated and fragmented nature of human identity must be obscured and subordinated to power aspirations. In this context, then, to define someone as a "Christian" or an "elite Greek Roman" is to elide and occlude the many other components (sexual, ethnic, economic, political, religious) that contribute to and complicate the subject's identity. I recognize that this is the case, and my discussion does not intend to reauthorize binary thinking, but rather to observe its effects. My discussion seeks to investigate the discursive processes used by conglomerates of people to fashion for themselves a cultural identity and thereby make for themselves a claim to social power and authority in the new times of empire. These identities do not denote a reality but are the product of a group of persons' conviction that they share essential qualities that consolidate them as a community and distinguish them from non-members of that community.

I understand that the group identities some groups were so assiduously working to construct misrepresent and cover over the reality of persons' multidimensional and complex plurality of identity positions. Indeed, "Christians" were so successful in their project to suppress their multiple identities that even today their social identity as inhabitants of the Roman Empire is underplayed. In my discussion, I hope to destabilize this polarity between Christians and non-Christians, which has proved so enormously influential in structuring discussions of the early imperial period. It has allowed the interconnections between Christians and people contemporaneous with them in their social world to be obscured, with the result that historical testimony that could prove useful for understanding the social dynamics of the early imperial period has been sequestered as "Christian" rather than recognized and utilized as evidence for understanding the social and political negotiations being enacted during the period.

As the Carthaginian Tertullian insists in his late-second-century *Apology*, Christians share in the life of their communities. They enjoy the same food, visit the same markets and baths, and engage in the same trades. Tertullian writes, perhaps ironically, "We are not Brahmins nor Indian gymnosophists, dwellers in the forests, and exiles from ordinary life" (1931: 42). A basic defining characteristic of the Christians surveyed in this study, one that is too often disregarded, is that they are inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Their writings need to be recognized as productions of that empire and as being in dialogue with other writings of this period adjusting to the enlarged perspective of cosmopolitanism.

While not asserting the reality of the dichotomizing identities under construction in the period, my analysis does seek to examine how the emergence of these cultural identities refigured and realigned the period's social and political power grid. As Jean Paul Nancy suggests, every myth of community is premised upon a claim for "essence," a claim that is, in fact, a will for power, a will to acquire for that community a share in or realignment of power relations (1991: xi).[3] The Christians and the imperial elite shared a social world at a time of social and political restructuring. With their group identities and community self-representations, they made a claim for their presence and position in their evolving social and political world. Their cultural representations sometimes will be seen to converge around an array of shared themes: status change, death, the body, courts, and time. By observing how these social constituencies manipulated these themes, I hope to achieve a clearer perspective on the dialectical connections contributing to the cultural forms and identities that were taking shape in the period.

In my discussion, the term *Christian* will be used to refer to all those people who would have applied this self-designation to themselves. In the early imperial centuries, various versions of Christianity were circulating with diverging beliefs and practices. Some of these versions would later be rejected for doctrinal reasons, but this rejection does not affect the historical importance of their cultural texts for disclosing the positions and attitudes of Christians of the earlier period. My methodology takes its direction from Frederic Jameson's dictum for the study of cultural representation: "Always historicize" (1981: 9). That is, cultural representations must be located in the specificity of their historical moment and its material conditions; there are no autonomous cultural productions. My examination will locate Christian representations within the historical circumstances of the first two and a half centuries CE and in dialogue with other contemporary representations. To this end, social and historical issues will be highlighted and transcendent concerns deemphasized.[4] My questions will be these: Why do Christian representations share certain emphases? To whom do they respond, and to whom might they appeal? Whose interests are being served or interrupted by Christian representations? To a certain extent, these questions are obviously political, but to have acquired a place in history attests that a group has acted politically, has obtained and manipulated power. In its historical emergence, Christianity was not only a religious entity, but a political and social one as well. In the contemporary milieu, the interrelation of these aspects was taken for granted; the fact that these connections have since been disassociated testifies to the success of Christian categorizing. Within this historical paradigm, "Christians" will be used to connote all the people who claimed this self-understanding, notwithstanding doctrinal differences that would be seen as significant at a later period.

At the same time as I attempt to dismantle the polarity between Christian and non-Christian inhabitants of the early empire, I may appear to create another between the elite and the non-elite. Commentators warn that dualistic terms like *elite* and *non-elite* help to reify these polarities as natural and fixed (Law 1997: 109). Recognizing that these are not natural categories, I shall nevertheless use the term *elite* to designate a group identity evolving across the empire that united persons from different geographical locations and ethnic backgrounds, with "power, status and wealth" (Garnsey 1970: 258). During the Late Hellenistic and early Roman period in the Greek east, a number of elite families had acquired immense wealth and power and as Otto van Nijf describes, "re-invented themselves as a separate status group, as an (ideally) hereditary *ordo* of *honoratiores* claiming to be the repositories in the community of *genos*, *arete* and *chremata* (pedigree, virtue and money)" (1997: 134).[5]

An increasing differentiation between the elite and the others in their social world was occurring in this period, and this dichotomy was in the process of being fixed in the Roman legal code through the juridical dichotomy between the *humiliores* and *honestiores*, the "more humble" and the "more honorable."[6] The latter designation encompassed Roman senators, knights, and municipal decurions from the provinces, as well as military veterans. Thus, with the possible exception of veterans, it was reserved for empire's wealthy and prominent individuals. *Humiliores* was used to designate all those other free persons not included among the *honestiores*. In 212 CE, Caracalla extended Roman citizenship across the empire through the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, thereby increasing the numbers of people falling within these categories. However, long before this change, Roman legal procedures had been influencing provincial legal practices (Carrié 2005: 274).[7]

Walter Scheidel points out that the *humiliores*/*honestiores* binary did not strictly correlate with economic worth. Wealth could not have been completely monopolized by the *honestiores*, who, he argues, would have accounted for only about 1 percent of the imperial population. In Scheidel's words, "In the eyes of the government, the other 99 percent of the population may have been 'humble,' but they can hardly all have been of modest means" (2006: 42). Scheidel proposes that a larger group must have occupied the economic midrange than is usually envisioned in historical discussions.[8] He states, "It is perfectly possible to reconcile the dominance of a disproportionately affluent elite with the presence of a substantial 'middle"' (2006: 54). Scheidel makes a persuasive case for envisioning a substantial group of people with economic means who were not *honestiores*. As all dichotomizing binaries are, the *humiliores/honestiores* division would have been porous, and its primary use was in the sphere of criminal law.

Nevertheless, I will argue that the polarity *humiliores/honestiores* discloses an ideological endeavor to institute a hierarchy dividing the most privileged people in terms of wealth and status from those below them[9] – as Scheidel calculated, setting off the 1 percent of the population from the other 99 percent. Scheidel offers a definition that underscores the connection between the *honestiores* and the mechanics of empire: "*Honestior* was perhaps not so much a legal as a functional category that lumped together the (free-born) agents of the imperial center" (2006: 43). Scheidel's point that it is "absurd" to classify all *humiliores* among the lower classes is important, but perhaps it is even more important to note that the state was categorizing all persons who were not its "agents," usually its wealthy, even "disproportionately affluent" agents (senators, knights, municipal leaders), as *humiliores,* as "humble," as *tenuores,* persons having less presence in society.

The perspective embedded in the *humiliores/honestiores* polarity indicates that a new differential status-based identity system was taking shape during the period. Neither a rich freed man nor a wealthy trader nor a poor free citizen (except a poor veteran) would qualify among the *honestiores*. I will use "elite" to designate the trans-empire group identity evolving in the early empire of persons bound together by ties of privilege, education, culture, and connections with the imperial center and by the shared self-identity these ties constituted. It is the creation and dissemination of this ideological identity that I will focus on in my discussion of the elite. In the early imperial period across the empire ties of privilege were uniting persons from various geographical locations into a social unity with shared perspectives and goals. Some Christians may have qualified for inclusion. Martyr acts from the second and third centuries already describe individual martyrs as being of high status. And Eusebius describes whole cities in Asia Minor in the early fourth century as Christian. This would indicate that their magistrates were Christians and thus members of the *honestiores* (Euseb, *Hist. eccl.* 8.11; Rapp 2005: 183). Before Constantine, however, the number of Christians was still quite small, and it is likely that few of this number were elite (Hopkins 1998: 185–226).[10]

My examination proceeds on the premise that in the social and political environment of the early empire, both trans-empire collectivities, comprising on the one hand Christians and on the other the Greek imperial elite, should be recognized as affected by the same event: the move from the smaller world to the larger world of empire. What particularly interests me about this earlier historical moment of a transition to cosmopolitanism is the discursive transformation that accompanied it. Michel Foucault employs the terms *discourse* and *discursive practices* to refer to the historically situated frames of reference that in every historical epoch function to legitimate what counts as knowledge, as the "sayable" and "thinkable." He uses *discourse* rather than *ideology* to differentiate his understanding from that offered, for example, in Althusser's definition of ideology, as "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1972: 145). Foucault resists the implications that a "real" exists separable from the networks of power/knowledge operating through a historically situated set of discourses. Discursive networks may empower "different" conceptions for human existence in different historical moments, but no "real" conditions exist outside or beyond such discursive instantiations (Hoy 2004: 196–7). Individuals come to understand themselves and their worlds within the frames provided by their culture's discursive paradigm, its cultural and social productions. Subjects do not exist apart from these discourses; rather, they come into being through them.

In his studies of madness, prisons, and sexuality, Foucault practiced what he calls historical genealogy. He traced out the places where discursive regimes had changed and how these shifts affected notions of human identity and legitimate knowledge. By showing these transformations, Foucault intended to open up possibilities for "thinking otherwise."[11] He hoped that by showing the contingencies of previous human norms, his work would function to unsettle conceptions that there is any natural norm for human being – any single answer to the question of what it means to be a human (Hoy 2004: 90).

In his genealogies, Foucault traced out the discursive disjunctions between historical moments. He points to moments when what had previously been unthinkable or unsayable became instead self-evident, universal, necessary, the natural way the world works. And this new knowledge produces new formations of knowledge and power, as one discursive frame replaces another. Foucault refused to speak of the "origins" of discursive formations, for this term might imply causes, and he held the beginnings of discursive transformations to be too volatile, diffuse, and multiform to be contained by causal language. Causal language is inadequate "to render apparent the polymorphous interweaving of correlations" that initiate discursive change (Foucault *et al.* 1991: 58).[12] No person or single social formation is responsible for a discursive rupture or a new discursive emergence. As Foucault notes, “No one can glory in it [the emergence], since it always occurs in the interstice” (1984: 85), “Nothing is fundamental …. There are only reciprocal relations …” (1984: 247). Social power occurs in micropoints across the whole social system, and so does its shifts.

Foucault’s conception of the ineluctable cycle of power’s reformulations has met with both skepticism and dejection, but it also has been recognized as a “source of optimism” (Khan 2004: para. 17). By showing how past discursive formations have changed, altered, been transformed, Foucault’s genealogies assert the potentiality for social change and reformed power relations. This recognition assuages the sense of inevitability and permanence that accompanies discursive formations while they are in operation. The good news of Foucauldian analysis is that every power formation can be interrupted and restyled. A discursive rupture, an epistemic break, accompanied the Roman Empire’s transition to cosmopolitanism. In this study, I shall try to glimpse in the interstices of the period’s cultural representations, some of the correlations, connections, and encounters that may have helped to shape this earlier discursive transformation and its restyled paradigms for human being.

My examination has no pretensions of being comprehensive. Marc Angenot’s discursive analysis of a single year in French history, eighteen hundred and eighty-nine, exceeded eleven hundred pages.[13] In the dense web of interwoven correlations and connections that constitute the discursive world of the early imperial period, I hope only to indicate some of the alignments and realignments, the associations and disconnections that hint at a cultural contestation and that “a different way of dividing true and false” was in the process of being constructed (Foucault 2000: 233). The traditional partitioning of Christian sources from imperial history has allowed even some of the most acute historical examinations of the early empire to underplay its discursive transformation. Seeing Christianity as one thing and imperial society as another misconstrues the dynamic of this period that experienced far-reaching discursive rearrangements. To better appreciate this dynamic, it will be necessary to re-weave the social and political fabric of the Roman imperial period to include Christianity more seamlessly within that fabric.

In his meticulous and erudite study *Provincial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, Clifford Ando has argued that the Roman Empire managed to survive for such a long period of time, not by virtue of “Roman power alone” but by “a slowly realized consensus regarding Rome’s right to maintain social order and to establish a normative political culture” (2000: xi). Ando emphasizes how important the imperial cult was to achieving this consensus through its promulgation of the emperor’s charisma across the empire. He also delineates in compelling detail how Roman administrative practices using myriad nodes of entry insinuated Roman power into subjects’ daily lives. Through activities such as receiving judicial decisions, paying taxes, and registering for the census, individuals were continually reminded they were Roman subjects. Rome also employed multiple media to impress its presence, e.g. coins, months named for the imperial family inserted into local calendars, inscriptions of imperial proclamations, and the imperial milestones marking roads.[14]

Ando argues that all these practices accustomed individuals to recognize themselves as Roman subjects. Through such means, these "ideological state apparatuses" (using Althusser's terms; Ando 2000: 41), Rome successfully projected itself as uniquely suited and divinely destined for rule, and its subjects came to appreciate the stability, benefits, and prosperity Rome provided. Ando explains:

> To the extent that the divine order sanctioned Roman conquest, so far might one proceed – from the premises that the strong shall rule over the weak and the Romans govern well – to a belief that the Roman empire as institution of government and instrument of providence had both the right and the responsibility to maintain social order. That ultimate belief collapsed and obscured the arbitrariness of Roman domination and urged, by daily exposure and converse, the slow acceptance of the mechanisms of Roman governance as objective and institutional. The bureaucracy of Rome, its demands, its symbols, and its taxes, thus acquired "the opacity and permanence of things and escaped the grasp of individual consciousness and power." (2000: 67–8, quoting Bourdieu 1977: 184)

Ando describes this relationship holding between Rome and its provincial subjects as a "unity of self-interest" (2000: 68). I would suggest this unity more specifically was one of *elite* self-interest primarily advancing the interests of Rome and those elite provincials it supported and who in turn helped Rome manage its territories. I intend in my study to locate places where this self-interest was being both constructed and deconstructed during the period.

Ando successfully delineates the web of legitimating practices entangling Roman subjects within an imperial ideology, but ideology obscures that the interests of some groups in a society are better served than those of others. Ideology weaves its magic spell to disguise and legitimate inequalities, not only for those who suffer them, but also equally for those who benefit.[15] Ando persuasively explicates how power was naturalized in the Roman Empire, but for what end and for whose interests are not questions central to his project (Rose 2006: 124). He appreciates that Rome's self-interest was paramount; he points out, for example, that urban areas were refurbished "to promote the uninterrupted transfer of local wealth to Rome" (2000: 13). That this imperial "unity of self-interest" primarily incorporated the interests of the coalition of elite governing the empire is not a focus of his examination.

Ando makes a compelling case for the role played by the ideological state apparatuses in legitimating and maintaining Roman rule. The significance in his approach is to show how this legitimation transpired apart from what Althusser calls the "repressive state apparatuses," the courts, the armies, and civil policing activities (Althusser 1972: 142–3). When these ideological and repressive apparatuses were working in tandem, as they invariably do, their combination would impress even more strongly on Roman subjects the sheer indomitability of Rome's presence and power. During the early empire, the state was displaying its repressive might through increasingly violent enactments. As Roman emperors were using powerful media to present the public humiliation, defeat, and death of society's "others," they authorized themselves and their authority (Frilingos 2004: 22–38).

In his *Res Gestae*, for example, Augustus reports that during his rule 10,000 gladiators fought in his shows and 3,500 animals died in staged hunts (22). Hadrian is reported to have sent 300 convicts (*noxii*) to die in the arena at one time. He dressed these criminals in gold-embroidered cloaks, gifts of Pharasmanes, the king of Iberia, as an insult to the king (S.H.A. *Hadr* 17.12). Elizabeth Castelli interprets such spectacular violence as a public manifestation of imperial power: "Bloodshed in the Roman arena – implicated as it was in the judicial, military, political and religious institutions of the empire – must be read in terms of the logic of imperial interests" (2004: 111).[16] Public violence and the killing and maiming associated with it asserted the emperor's might and power.

Roman subjects were positioned as viewers of power's violent repertoire, not only at the public games, but also in the imperial iconography (Frilingos 2004: 23–7). The Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, for example, with its rows of statues depicting subjected peoples (*ethne*), provides an early visual promotion of imperial power. Its representations utilize the traditional language of power: a male's violent subjection of a woman. A nude Claudius stands over a defeated female Britannia, and Nero over a dying Armenia (Smith 1988: 50–77).[17] This violent representational language repeats on the Column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome. Here barbarian women are portrayed being dragged by their hair and stabbed to death by Roman soldiers. Jon Coulston notes the gratuitous nature of the violence in these images: "The slaughter of barbarians is … depicted with a violence and detail bordering on relish" (2003: 410). Rome proclaimed its presence and rule not only through its insistent bureaucratic practices, but also through repeated shows of violent repressive power. The combined effect of this array of ideological and repressive mechanisms must have made imperial rule appear unassailable. What possible resistance could be mounted against such a juggernaut of power?

Under these conditions, it is all the more unexpected that an alternative site of power was able to evolve and institutionalize during this period. Even if this power site, the Christian Church, eventually aligns with imperial interests, its emergence initiates a break in the imperial elites' monopoly on power and authority and indicates a fracture in the consensus ceding sole hegemony to their interests.[18] The imperial discourse that dismissed so many imperial subjects was interrupted and to some extent redirected. The empire, as Ando posits, did last for a long time (2000: xiii),[19] but not with the same thought world. Theodosius' empire was not that of Augustus. Indeed, over the course of these imperial centuries, a seismic change occurred in the mental maps of numbers of people throughout the empire. Numerous individuals in late antiquity experienced themselves differently, had different self-understandings and life-world perceptions than people in the preceding centuries.

Ando writes, "The emperors and governing class at Rome did not have to provide their world with Scripture, but merely with a system of concepts that could shape, and in doing so slowly unite the cultural scripts of its subjects" (2000: 23). Was this process so seamless? Rome might not have needed a Scripture, but without any doubt, its subjects' cultural scripts were affected during this period by the proponents of the Christian Scripture. Averil Cameron's comment continues to resonate: "As it [Christianity] came to prevail it provided plots according to which the majority of the inhabitants of the empire, and after that of Byzantium and the medieval West, lived out their lives" (1991: 13). Foucault has described how different historical epochs have a particular discourse or regime of truth that influence how individuals come to constitute and understand themselves as subjects. Such an epoch change seems to have occurred between the early and later imperial centuries, as people began to conceive of themselves differently and ask different sorts of questions about themselves and their lives.[20]

In this study, I hope to indicate some of the nodal points that contributed to transforming the cultural scripts of imperial subjects during this earlier moment of emerging cosmopolitanism.[21] My contribution will focus on some of the details that accompany every discursive beginning. It will pay particular attention to the representational interactions and negotiations that were going on around cultural identities. It is my contention that in the interstices of the social dynamic producing these new cultural identities, one a trans-empire alliance of wealthy and high status individuals, the other mostly non-elite persons calling themselves Christians, a shift in cultural perspective was occurring that would sharply realign traditional notions for human and social being. Achieving a better understanding of this shift's content and direction requires that more attention be given to the interrelated cultural maneuverings, self-positionings and thematic correlations shaping these new identities evolving as part of the adjustment to cosmopolitanism.

This study provides a series of sketches rather than a comprehensive examination. A particular focus will be the interplay of the Christian emphases on the material body and its resurrection in the context of the period's increasing social differentiation between the elite and the non-elite and the effects of this differentiation on the justice system. Much of my discussion will be grounded in the ancient novel form. This choice to some extent limits the range of my discussion, but it is repaid by locating the investigation in a contemporary literary form that was central to the identity negotiations taking place in the period. The novel's striking chronological symmetry with the emergence of the new cosmopolitan cultural identities is one more indication of the cultural rearrangements occurring in the period. All extant examples of the novel were produced in the first three centuries CE, although fragments, as well as some Jewish examples of the genre, suggest its beginnings belong to the late Hellenistic period (Thomas 2003: 76–8).[22] The novel form seems intimately connected with the transition to cosmopolitanism. In a perceptive study, David Konstan proposes its self-valorization as a defining characteristic of the Greek novel. In his words, the Greek novels "tend to go beyond cultural referent, whether in historical memory, mythical tradition, of the local performance codes of personal poetry" (1998: 14). Konstan links the novel's cultural autonomy to the "internationalization" of the empire and the need for "global dissemination" (1998: 14–15). Konstan's case is persuasive. The novel, like the evolving cultural identities of the period, was a cosmopolitan formation designed for the larger world of empire.

What especially interests me about this prose fiction form is that it was so short lived.[23] No extant example appears later than the fourth century. And its disappearance appears related to the discursive shift taking place in the period. Commentators suggest that the popularity of martyrologies and saints' lives displaced the novels (Reardon 1991: 167). The ancient novel thus provides an example of a cultural form deauthorized by the changed power/knowledge frames of the Christian empire. This deauthorization suggests that the novel can provide a privileged entry into some of the perspectives that lost ground in the cultural struggles for meaning going on in the period. Konstan has pointed to the relative autonomy of the prose fiction form. Unbounded by tradition or genre requirements, the novels were free to introduce new subject matter and themes. Literary works, as they attempt to produce coherent and unified representations from disparate social and cultural frames of reference, often reveal through "eloquent silences" the cultural desires or preoccupations of a period (Bender 1987). In this study I will utilize the imperial prose fictions to disclose, through both their emphases and their silences, some of the social, cultural, and political preoccupations and desires of the early empire. That Christians and Jews as well as the imperial elites employ prose fictions to construct, promote, and promulgate their cultural identities, confirms the importance of the genre for the identity-constructing activities of the new cosmopolitanism (Thomas 2003).[24]

Emphasizing the Greek novel and other productions of the Second Sophistic tilts my discussion toward the eastern Greek speaking areas of the Empire. In the early imperial centuries, however, a large proportion of Christians, even those located in different areas, had connections with the eastern portions of the empire. The letter describing the martyrs of Vienne and Lyons, written to Christian congregations in Asia and Phrygia, for example, shows not only the ties maintained between these geographically separated Christian groups, but also indicates that many of the martyrs in Gaul had come from the East (Euseb. *His*. 5.1.3–2.8). In Rome, eastern immigrants can be seen to dominate in Christian congregations in the early centuries (Lampe 2003:143).

In discursive analyses the question of intentionality is often raised. In what sense do discursive shifts indicate people's intentions or purpose? Or particularly in this study, can the cultural groups evolving in the early imperial period be understood to have "intended" the results of their actions? Did Christians, for example, intend to interrupt imperial power configurations with their articulation of the Christian message? Did the elite in the Roman east intend to form themselves into a ruling alliance through their involvement in a shared educational and cultural repertoire? Contemporary philosophical trajectories suggest that questions such as these need reframing as the Cartesian model of the human subject as a knowing mind and the Kantian conception of the rational, autonomous, thinking subject have lost ground (Hoy 2004: 165).[25] The so-called philosophies of suspicion, emanating from thinkers like Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, have eroded the ideal of a subject who acts purposely on the basis of unfettered and rational reflection (Hoy 2004: 29). It is increasingly recognized that human subjectivity is a product of forces and effects that lie outside the control or even the consciousness of individual subjects. Subjects are not disembodied free-floating minds. Rather, human minds are always located in bodies and thus always implicated in historically situated social networks.

The recognition of this embodied socialized subject provides the basis for Foucault's and Pierre Bourdieu's models of human agency that hold actions to be reasonable even if they are not the product of reasoned deliberation (Bourdieu 1990: 51; Foucault 1980: 94–5). Social groups do undertake reasonable actions, even if these actions are arrived at without specific deliberation or consultation. Bourdieu traces this ability to an inherent difference between "subjects" and "agents." Subjects are those who supposedly know what they are doing, while agents act on the basis of what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*, a set of embodied socialized dispositions that provides agents with a logic of social practices and a feel for the social game that generates reasonable behavior in a given situation (1990: 52–5). This *habitus* is not "a state of mind … but rather a state of the body" (1990: 68). The *habitus* is inscribed in the body as "motor skills," "bodily postures"; it is the complex of habitual ways of doing things and conducting oneself in a society (1990: 69–70). "The *habitus* is spontaneity without consciousness or will," according to Bourdieu (1990: 56). And the practical sense engendered by the *habitus*

> is what causes practices, in and through what makes them obscure to the eyes of their producers, to be *sensible*, that is, informed by common sense. It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know. (1990: 69)

Agents are not "subjects," because they act without being fully cognizant of the premises and grounds for their actions, and that is precisely what makes these actions "have more sense than they know." These actions are more sensible because they are not the cogitation of a single individual, but rather the product of the "whole social order" working through incorporated bodily dispositions (Bourdieu 1990: 75; Hoy 2004: 108–9). The agents' actions are a social production, imbued with social meaning, even if agents lack full comprehension of this meaning.

Foucault similarly insists on the possibility of "power relations that are both intentional and nonsubjective" (1980: 94). He writes, "There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject" (1980: 95).