

Hooking up the Competition: Casting Christian Conversion in a New Light
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By the first years of the third-century CE, the quite visible cult of Christianity had much in common with other mystery cults active in Roman Carthage. Since the cults of Isis and Christianity both featured comparable narratives and soteriologies, it is useful to examine the composition of the narratives to demonstrate what these cults have in common and how the dialog between the two at this specific place is manifested. Several of the more common themes of both cults include the idea of ritual cleansing in the form of an initiation rite, a time of trial and persecution, and a notion of resurrection and eternal life. It is my contention that there were a number of missionary ‘hooks’ embedded in Late Roman Christian doctrine and ritual, proselytizing tools designed to appeal and convert members of surrounding cults. These hooks would not be inserted in a “visible” manner, but instead in a way in which the one cult (Christianity) “shadowed” the other (Isis). This paper will address this “shadowing” technique by considering several Late Ancient texts from the area including the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, writings by the Church father Tertullian, and the third-century North African writer and devotee of the Isis cult, Apuleius’s famous transformational tale, *The Golden Ass*. This paper will not reveal “real” explanations for ritual acts but will instead use methodology based on the theories of Elizabeth Castelli and Patricia Cox Miller, in which one examines the texts using an exegetical technique which combines social history with exegetical analysis in an effort to unpack meaning.