

Theses of a Doctoral Dissertation

Sebestyén Kiss

APULEIUS CHRISTIANUS?
(Arnobius: *Adversus nationes*)

Supervisor: Dr. László Havas, full professor

University of Debrecen
Faculty of Arts
2006

I. Aim of the dissertation, outlining the theme

This paper studies the elder Arnobius' work entitled *Adversus natione*, which is left to us in two manuscripts only. Minucius Felix's apology entitled *Octavius* is left to us as the eighth book of the works consisting of seven books which was considered as Arnobius' work (1593) also by Faustus SABAEUS, publisher of *editio princeps*. Only Franciscus BALDUINUS clarified the question in his publication (1560), and that was the first time when the *Octavius* was published as Minucius Felix's work.

The researches so far have already pointed out that Arnobius' apology has a spatial place in the Christian Literature of Latin language. On the basis of Hieronymus' report, Arnobius, acquiring reputation originally as a rhetor and known as an enemy of Christianity, was converted due to the influence of a dream then he prepared his apology.¹ It is evident from his work that the pagan rhetor being a new convert has a little knowledge of the Christianity, on the other hand he strongly defends it, however, he excellently knows and shows to his readers the religions of paganism and myths constituting the basis of them in details.

The paper studied two question related to each other. On one hand it would like to provide contributions to the intermediate situation, into which apology is placed between paganism and Christianity; on the other hand it finds an answer if there can be proved the connection between the *Adversus nationes* and the works of Apuleius, known so far as the only and consistent representative of Latin language of the second sophistic.

This question was addressed in several terms in the course of former researches, the sources of the apology by Arnobius have been already studied by several others and some of them (MORESCHINI², FONTAINE³) raised the possibility of the connection between the authors, however, no one has discussed the question summarized so far.

G. GIERLICH was last to prepare comments to the apology and he categorically rejected the possibility of the connection between Apuleius and Arnobius when discussing the sources.⁴ Before his conversion, Arnobius were a recognized rhetorician in Sicca Verenia, and deriving his knowledge from many kinds of sources therefore I don't agree with GIERLICH'S refusal opinion. There is just one century between Arnobius and Apuleius to whom a statue was erected in his life in Carthago (*Florida* 16). Augustinus living almost two hundred years later than Apuleius refers to him the most frequently from the African authors therefore I consider it as impossible that Arnobius, teaching rhetoric himself, would not have had any connections with Apuleius' works in some way, known as a wandering sophist. In this correlation, an opportunity presents itself to study Arnobius' work monographically, which is completed by this dissertation.

II. Outlining the methods applied (methods of the research)

¹ Hieronymus, *Chronica* ad 327 post Christum natum: *Arnobius rhetor in Africa clarus habetur. Qui cum ad declamandum iuvenes erudiret et adhuc ethnicus ad credulitatem somniis compelleretur neque ab episcopo impetraret fidem, quam semper inpugnaverat, elucubravat adversum pristinam religionem luculentissimos libros et tandem velut quibusdam obsidibus pietatis foedus impetravit.*

² C. MORESCHINI, *Apuleio e il platonismo*, Firenze 1978, *Apuleio e Arnobio*, 228-240

³ J. FONTAINE – P. LANGLOIS – A. MANDOUZE, *Africa II (literaturgeschichte)*, RAC, Suppl. 1, 134-227, Stuttgart 1983, ²2001

⁴ G. GIERLICH, *Arnobius von Sicca. Kommentar zu den ersten beiden Büchern seines Werkes Adversus nationes*, Mainz 1985, XXXI.: Arnobius und Apuleius

Following the introduction, I describe the intellectual environment in main points that what characterizes North Africa in the 2nd and 3rd century AD. Then I look over the development of the apologetic literature pointing out the place of the *Adversus nationes* in the series of ancient Christian apologies, and I describe Arnobius' life, work and its content, structure and the circumstances of its origin. This part is followed by a research-historical overview according to the viewpoints below: text traditions (codices, text editions), general works on Arnobius, modern translations of the work, commentaries to the apology, works studying Arnobius' style, than works discussing the follow-up to and the reception of the *Adversus nationes*. Arnobius' individual work method, the use of sources and their arrangement in accordance with new considerations explain that only following this I come to the works studying the sources of the apology because according to my hypothesis, the connection between Apuleius' and Arnobius' works can be rendered probable.

A dual situation represented by the apology was used as the starting-point of the research, which can be caught mostly in Arnobius' Christology. Arnobius' opinions propagated as a Christian doctrine are not the same as the opinion of the Great Church therefore many other questions result from his Christology. For instance, his relationship with the other apologists mainly relating to the nature of soul and the other gods. Because of this, using the results of scientific literatures so far, mainly BURGER's⁵, it was needed to describe the concept of god by Arnobius. I compared the character of the pagan Chief God, Jupiter with the character of the Christian God. The issue of soul is also closely related to the question of gods since according to Arnobius' interpretation, the soul attaining the knowledge of the God become god itself. The relationship between the Christian God and the other gods is interesting by Arnobius because differently from other Christian authors, he doesn't see demons in pagan gods but kinds of gods of subordinate whose deities come from the Supreme God.

It was noted by several others (MORESCHINI, GIERLICH) that Arnobius rather agrees with the Greek than Latin Fathers of the Christian Church for example in connection with the human soul. In his opinion, the most important aim of Christian people is to find the salvation of soul. Stipulations are made to the salvation of soul because if it doesn't recognize the God, it will suffer eternal damnation. Anobius' opinions on the salvation of soul are related to the issue of the hierarchy of spiritual beings. Arnobius discloses nothing about the further life of the soul who found salvation, that is attained the knowledge of the God and thus became a god. The possibility of a relationship between human soul of medium quality (*media qualitas*) and demons by Arnobius known as *mediae potestates* was also raised (FONTAINE), therefore in connection with this I studied Arnobius' demonologic system. Without exception, the middle Platonists were strongly concerned about this problem, consequently I involved the reflections by Pyltarchos and Maximos of Tyros relating to demons into the research.

In terms of the nature of soul, the former research already tried to find connection between Arnobius and the territories of Greek language of the empire, studying the Greek origin of Arnobius' name and at the same time considering the possibility that the rhetor would have been a son of an immigrant family of Greek origin.⁶ When discussing the demonology, the Maximos' character of Tyros, which can be connected to the second sophistic, and also be emphasized in whose philosophy we can talk about several other parts beyond Platonic bases. The philosophy by him was combined with many other parts as well such as by Arnobius, the rhetor. At the beginning of examinations it already became probable that the *Adversus nationes* shows the influences of the second sophistic therefore I studied the question taking the most typical details as a starting-point.

⁵ CH. BURGER, *Die theologische Position des älteren Arnobius*, Heidelberg 1970

⁶ U. MORICA, *Storia della letteratura latina cristiana*, Turin 1923, 607. o., H. LE BONNIEC, *Arnobe, Contre les Gentils*, Livre I, Texte établi, traduit et commenté, Paris 1982, 7.. o., FONTAINE, i. m. 172

As it is about a work written with Christian aim, a question is raised whether the sophisticated marks can be caught in the apology relating to Christian doctrines and Christ.

In term of the research, it is worth paying spatial attention to the seventh book attacking pagan cults and sacrificial ceremonies. The research so far now has recognized⁷ that the work in its present state is incomplete, the finishing touches are lacking, edition for arrangement of things into proper order was not implemented probably because of the death of the author. The doublets that can be found in the last book also support this and we can find here the presentation of involvement of Aesculapius- and Magna Mater-cult. FONTAINE emphasizes that there can be deeper results for Aesculapius' detailed description than only the expression of the critique on imperial ideology. Aesculapius enjoyed a great respect in the period North Africa, and it can refer to Arnobius' former respect to Aesculapius that he informs of the arrival of the deity to Tiberis island in a most important part of the seventh book.

Two characters of Aesculapius appear in the *Adversus nations*. One is the god of the classic pagan cult whom Arnobius compares with Christ following the apologetic tradition. The other Aesculapius is the god of Hermetism who appears as Hermes Trismegistos by Arnobius (*Adv. nat.* II 13). Maybe this circumstance highlights it the most strongly that how considerably Aesculapius' character assumed syncretic feature.

However, we know that respecting Aesculapius was determinative during Apuleius' life. In connection with this, the issue of *Asclepius* is also raised, the hermetic tract of Latin language, which is classified among the works of Apuleius but originated later. This work shows content sameness with the *Adversus nations* in some places. This also has importance in terms of the connection assumed between Apuleius and Arnobius

III. Results of the research

The beginnings of my research are related to the sources of the apology by Arnobius. At least two factors support the possibility of the connection between Apuleius and Arnobius. One is the common origin: Arnobius was an Africian similarly to Apuleius. The other evident fact was that Apuleius interpreted himself as *philosophus Platonicus* while Arnobius' primary source was also Platon.

Regulations of the Milanese Edict no. 313 had influences on apologetic literature as well. The Christian authors gave up their defensive attitudes, and the defensive behaviour is followed by a kind of offensive. One should not be afraid of pagan religions, its truths appear as unbelievable before Christian authors. In the turn of the century 3rd and 4th AD the new-Platonism like an opponent and a rivalling intellectual trend was a new challenge. This philosophical trend provides a field for spiritualized religiousness, the most various theories for immortality and the respect for the Supreme God. The most varies theories for redemption and mystery religions were prospered in its surroundings, which theory was given Platonian appearance gradually. In addition to followers of pagan religions, the pagan philosophers, *novi quidam viri* (*Adv. nat.* II 15), are also the opponent of the Christianity with whom Arnobius debates in the second book of the apology. The research so far clearly saw that the *viri novi* Platonists were the representatives of a Platonistic trend deriving from various parts and they are not followers of the classic Platonism. Gnostic, Hermetic, Pythagoreaus and Chaldaean features are also involved in this trend.

⁷ W. KROLL, *Die Zeit des Cornelius Labeo*, RhM 71, 1916, 309-357 és UÖ, *Arnobiusstudien*, RhM 72, 1917, 62-112, WLOSOK, *Arnobius*, Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike, München 1989, 365-375, VON ALBRECHT, *A római irodalom története I-II*, Budapest 2003-2004, 1283-1291

1. Taking Arnobius' Christology as a starting-point I came to studying the concept of god by rhetor. Taking the existing results into consideration, (mainly BURGER's research) I followed Jupiter's character, the pagan Chief God, in the apology. Already at the beginning of the work Arnobius, although indirectly, drew a comparison between the Christian God and the pagan Chief God, and deprived Jupiter from its rank of god as a periodical reflection. He proved why Jupiter could not be the Supreme God, and at the same time opponents defending pagan religions lose ground. It is clear that there are no words about the Christian religion from the beginning of the third book, in the second big unit of the apology, and thus the *princeps Deus* became Jupiter again. His character runs through the apology, and it is highlighted from different point of view, using ingenious solutions as it is worthy of a scholarly rhetor. I concluded from this that the presence of the pagan Chief God as a permanent target can be interpreted as a consistent critique on imperial ideology.

2. The soul is of central importance for Arnobius. This was also strongly emphasized by researches so far. The human soul of medium quality can attain the knowledge of the Supreme God accepting Christ's teaching and as a result of its virtuous lifestyle and this becoming acquainted itself means immortality. Arnobius tends to regard any kind of being as god who was granted the gift of immortality from the Supreme God. This determines the relationship between the Supreme God and other pagan gods and who are not the same as demons for Arnobius. Therefore, the issue of soul is closely related to the question of gods and the concept of god by Arnobius. MORESCHINI formulated the opinion that ARNOBIUS's psychology, the thesis of the medium quality of souls is the personal interpretation of Apuleius' demonology.

FONTAINE raised the possibility of the connection between the human soul of medium quality (*media qualitas*) and demons known as *mediae potestates* by Apuleius. Taking this hypothesis as a starting-point I came to the description of Arnobius' demonology. Here, I argue for that that Arnobius could know the demonology system of Apuleius without a doubt. On the basis of facts known so far, the hierarchy of spiritual beings can be modified in a way that Christ itself mediating between the Supreme God and humans is a *media potestas* as well, and in accordance with the dynamic interpretation that demons are capable of taking the possession of the different grade in the hierarchy, the saved soul is graded higher along this spiritual ladder. According my interpretation this solution tries to combine the pagan and Christian explanations on demons. The human itself contributes to its immortality accepting Christ's teaching and as a result of its virtuous lifestyle.

According to my observation this individual contribution to the own salvation in terms of another point supports the fact that Arnobius really could know Apuleius' demonology system. It is known that Apuleius doesn't separate the demon and soul markedly. He encourages that we should respect the personal demon and should take care of our own soul. The care of the demon looking after us is the due religious respect. Consequently, the Apuleius' demon is rather similar to conscience. Thus, on one hand the religious respect of demon is the care of soul, on the other hand it is the respect of the transcendent but also the individual God through its manifestation. When Arnobius asks his opponents: "Have you laughed at us because we took care of the salvation of our soul that is ourselves?" (II 13), then in this correlation the virtuous lifestyle and acceptance of Christ's teaching can not be interpreted in a different way than the particular Arnobius' interpretation of the respect of the transcendent God, Apuleius' demonology system. Therefore we should agree with MORESCHINI's opinion: the Arnobius' psychology, the thesis of souls of medium quality is the individual interpretation of Apuleius' demonology.

3. Considering their ranks, demons are the same as gods and angels that is medium beings of god nature, however, who are not involved in immortality from the beginnings. I proved that demons appear only in a negative function in the apology. This approaches the Christian interpretation. This is obvious when reading that Christ drives out them of the possessed people but demons are also the beings who forge saint documents. On the other hand, on the basis of debate with his opponents (*virī novi*) it is clear that Arnobius took that spiritual beings into account, *qui se deos fingunt* (*Adv. nat.* I 53 and IV 12) and they are present when sacrificing. These demons are the demons of paganism.

GIERLICH points out several times that Arnobius doesn't attribute a great importance to the issue of demons because according to his opinion these are subordinated to the Supreme God such as the pagan gods and only one thing is important for him: to find salvation of the soul. The soul can attain this in different way, by means of the Philosophy and other magic and the *disciplina Etrusca*.

Accepting and completing the findings of the German researcher I managed to prove additional features of the apology. It was proved that Arnobius has two views on demons but he didn't harmonize the Christian (negative from the first) and pagan interpretation (negative and positive). The author of the *Adversus nationes*, representing a dual situation from several points of view, can't represent only one opinion in terms of the psychology regarded as of central importance either. The Christian viewpoint is clear: the guarantee for the salvation of the soul (that is human) is Christ.

The other, the medium-Platonic viewpoint is the individual thinking of the salvation of the soul that guarantees the immortality of soul with the acceptance of Christ's teaching. Arnobius doesn't think about spiritual beings in accordance with the Christian teaching, which proves that he also takes the magic into account when finding the salvation, in the course of which pagan demons also appears.

It can be concluded from the above mentioned that considering also the demonology, Arnobius' own ideas are placed in the centre between the pagan, that is medium Platonic and the Christian interpretation as the soul that can find the salvation when attaining to the God or in the case of the lack of this it can be the prey of eternal death.

4. In addition to the common origin and the Platonism as an intellectual trend, the common field of activity is the third viewpoint on the basis of which I hypothesize the relationship between Apuleius and Arnobius. Apuleius and before his conversion, Arnobius also acted as a rhetor. The apologist makes statements twice about the sophistic fashionable at the time (*Adv. nat.* I 58-59 and V 33). We can have the theoretical approaches of the rhetoric in these places where the author runs against the pagan sophistic practise, however, he himself also follows this practise.

Taking the most typical parts, showing the influences of the second sophistic, as a starting-point, I looked over the whole apology. Text parts containing fictitious speeches, monologues, dialogues often start with the expressions: *ecce, fingite, libet in hoc loco... unam facere contionem*. This indicates that there are several fictitious speeches in the apology and giving evidence of the influence of the second sophistic. In addition, the ecphrasis-like descriptions are those that the apologist found to be suitable for supporting his message, obviously, to make his presentation more clearly described. It is marked to find phrases introducing the fictitious speeches (*fingite, libet in hoc loco unam facere contionem*), when discussing the Christian themes, and when the apologist polemized with the opponent on coming to the character of Christ (I 38), we can think of sophistic practise: the rhetor involves the audience in his presentation.

As hypothesized, I managed to prove that the apologist uses consistently the tools of the second sophistic and applies it according to well thought-out viewpoints.

On the basis of these it can be said about the connection between Arnobius and the second sophistic that the *Adversus nationes* is the string of the sophisticated small genres (encomium, diatribe, ephrasis, fictitious speech) which is considerably true in the case of the pagan books but it can be also noticed in the first two books of Christian content. The second book itself contains an evasive and a kind of debate of moral content and therefore it can be compared to the genre of diatribe. On the other hand, the apologist attacks the pagan-sophistic practise in the first book that can be regarded as Christian, of the restriction of which he can't be released and it seems that he doesn't even want to be independent from that. The theoretical approach of rhetoric in the first book and its critique appears in the fifth book of pagan content as well in connection with the allegoric interpretation of myth, which also supports that Arnobius has an intermediate place between the pagan and Christian world.

Considering the starting hypothesis, Apuleius' scholarly activities can be compared to Arnobius' work so far as he himself was an outstanding writer of the second sophistic. Text-like connections can't be proved, however, it is true that both of them are interested in various philosophical trends. It is known that Apuleius goes to the very last of possibilities to satisfy his *curiositas*. In connection with this it can be said about Arnobius that he also enjoys if he can write the different and even contradictory opinions on certain issues, especially in connection with some parts of mythology.

5. It was needed to include a digression in connection with the seventh book which completes the observations of the research so far (KROLL, WLOSOK, VON ALBRECHT). According to this the work is incomplete in its present state, the finishing touches are lacking, edition for the arrangement of things into proper order was not implemented. Accepting the existing results, my opinion is that we should attribute a great importance to the finish of the work by all means as Arnobius could have planned. In addition, the apology shifts their own accusations back to accusers, its other main characteristic is that criticizing the pagan religion, it selects the imperial ideology to be a target. We can find the cruellest critique in the chapter closing the apology: Rome is not different from *civitas...in humani generis perniciem nata* (VII 51). The apology suggesting incompleteness is finished with the critique on Roman religious, imperial ideology, which seems to be well-thought. On the basis of this, the work can be considered as complete from Christian point of view. This kind of finish can't be compared to at all, because, it is exactly opposite to the following conception that the framework of empire was needed so that the Saviour can be born.

6. Aesculapius also was emphasized in connection with the finish of the apology whose two characters appear in the *Adversus nationes*. One is the god of the classic pagan cult whom Arnobius compares with Christ following the apologetic tradition. An additional feature of this comparison by Arnobius has been outlined which has not been registered so far. It became clear from the comparison of relating text places (*Adv. nat.* I 60 and VII 45; 47) that the apologist calls Aesculapius' appearance to account using the same logic as in the case of Christ's *incarnation* but in a reversed way. The two deities are in harmony considering only one thing: the *numen* is the same. I concluded from this that before his conversion Aesculapius' power of God was as of determinative importance for Arnobius as the deity of Christ was after his conversion.

By this means a spatial emphasis is laid on that that the character of the doctor god unfold itself in the most detailed way at the end of the apology. There is no doubt about the fact of incompleteness but in contrast with KROLL's opinion I find that solution to be reasonable that this circumstance could not be the proof of the incompleteness but rather the evidence of a well-thought-out apologetic intention. FONTAINE thinks that the period African paganism

could stimulate Arnobius to finish his works with Aesculapius' myth because this deity was especially popular in North Africa. However, according to my opinion this is not the only fact because Arnobius finishes the apology with the evocation of Aesculapius' character. I argue for that the apologist wanted to emphasize parallel to the Rome-critique that the Christian finish is well-thought-out. According to Arnobius' interpretation human is not different from the soul closed into a body therefore the apologist is only interested in the salvation of soul, the *salus*. In connection with this, it became clear that the contrast of Christ and Aesculapius was used for a determined purpose because Arnobius wanted to emphasize the *salus* which is beyond the pagan being on earth. Only Christ, the opener of the way leading to the eternal life, can give this to human soul, in contrast to Aesculapius who is considered to be (moreover *praedicant!*) the source of *sanitas*, *valetudo* and *salus* that can be experienced in this world.

7. The other Aesculapius is the god of Hermetism who appears as Hermes Trismegistos in the apology (II 13). Therefore in addition to the Platonism and the second sophistic, the Hermetism is the third intellectual trend on the basis of which I hypothesize the relationship between Apuleius and Arnobius. In connection with this, question of the Latin *Asclepius* and its authority by Apuleius has been arisen. Agreeing with HUNINK's opinion⁸ I take a stand on that this issue still can't be settled completely. The relationship between Apuleius and the Latin *Asclepius* can not be clarified in the future, the translation of hermetic tract of Greek language to Latin would fit into Apuleius' scholarly activities by all means. The role of god in Apuleius' life explains well why the Latin *Asclepius* is left to us in the group of his minor philosophical works.

The connections, assumed between Apuleius and Arnobius on the basis of the demonology and the second sophistic, provided basis to find the other relation between the *Asclepius* and Arnobius apology following the connection between Apuleius and the Latin *Asclepius*. After AMATA⁹ the connection between the two works can be precluded unambiguously. According to this, the human soul can not be derived from the Supreme God because on one hand it is *proletarius* and on the other hand it is of lower rank: *capite censetur* (II 29). The mysterious situation of human that can be noticed on the basis of *Asclepius* is completely different from Arnobius apology. In terms of this, the connection between Apuleius and Arnobius can't be proved, however, the spiritual relation, and the diversity of the religious atmosphere is marked. The desire for salvation, of which different forms are being, makes connection between the two authors.

8. It proves the encyclopaedic character of Apuleius' life-work that his high interest also includes the natural sciences. Whereas we can't talk about this kind of diverse interest in the case of Arnobius, there is no doubt on the basis of the first and second book of the apology that he was also interested in natural scientific issues. The representation of the order of the universe, description of Christ as a nature-philosopher and research of the phenomena of nature are for supporting the apologetic intention.

9. Arnobius often refers to magic, initiations in mysteries, Egyptian gods, he addresses followers of Mercurius that is Hermes Trismegistos, Platon and Pythagoras, on the basis of which it can be said that before his conversion Arnobius was an eclectic philosopher, a mysterious pagan just like Apuleius. The individuality of Arnobius' theology and anthropology is a mark of the considerable syncretism in North Africa with a kind of heterogeneous spirituality, providing fields for several religious traditions. He had a gap in his knowledge on Christian teaching considering fundamentally important issues. He knows the

⁸ V. HUNINK, *Apuleius and the „Asclepius“*, VChr 50, 1996, 288-308

⁹ B. AMATA, *Problemi di antropologia arnobiana*, Salesianum 45, 1983, 841-842

paganism better, which he attacks, than the Christianity, which he wants to prove. He hardly has better knowledge of the Christianity than pagan, and he shows the pagan world to us with a considerable interest in the spirit of followers of old religions. On the other hand he wrote his work to defend his belief therefore it is Christian. Not the creature of human being, not even the redemption is important for him, but the soul and the salvation of the soul that is the human itself, which can be provided by the knowledge of God through getting acquainted of Christ's teaching. Arnobius' aim is not different than to find the salvation of the soul therefore the apology can be mainly characterized as a specific soteriological alternative from the syncretic world of the 4th century AD.

IV. List of publications written in the subject of the dissertation

a) Studies published in periodicals read by lectors:

“Pogány” kereszténység – “keresztény” pogányság: Arnobius, egy Kr. u. IV. századi apologéta (Egy tudományos probléma jelenlegi állása), in: *Könyv és Könyvtár XXIV*. Debrecen 2002, 33-50

Arnobius és a második szofisztika, in: *Könyv és Könyvtár XXV*. Debrecen 2003, 341-351

b) Textbook:

Arnobii Adversus nationes Liber I, Bevezetés és kommentár, in: HAVAS L. – TEGYEY I. (szerk.): *Ókeresztény latin írók, ΑΓΑΘΑ X*, Debrecen 2003, 281-353

c) Presentations at scientific conferences:

Iuppiter Arnobiusnál, Ókortudományi Társaság felolvasó ülése, Budapest, 2004. 03. 19.

A Teremtő Isten és az ember viszonya Arnobiusnál, Magyar Patrisztikai Társaság V. Konferenciája, Kecskemét, 2005. 07. 01.