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An Age of Saints?
*Power, Conflict and Dissent in
Early Medieval Christianity*

EDITED BY

Peter Sarris, Matthew Dal Santo & Phil Booth

BRILL

An Age of Saints?

Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages

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2011

Cover illustration: 'The disbelief of St Thomas', Mosaic Panel, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (Sixth Century). Image courtesy of the Diocese of Ravenna-Cervia.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

An age of saints? : power, conflict, and dissent in early medieval Christianity / edited by Peter Sarris, Matthew Dal Santo, Phil Booth.

p. cm. — (Brill's series on the early Middle Ages, ISSN 1878-4879; v. 20)

Based on a symposium held at Trinity College, Cambridge.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-20660-1 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Christian sociology—History—Early church, ca. 30–600—Congresses. 2. Church history—Primitive and early church, ca. 30–600—Congresses. 3. Christian sociology—History—Middle Ages, 600–1500—Congresses. 4. Church history—Middle Ages, 600–1500—Congresses. I. Sarris, Peter. II. Dal Santo, Matthew. III. Booth, Phil (Philip) IV. Title. V. Series.

BR163.A35 2011

274'.03—dc22

2011010613

ISSN 1878-4879

ISBN 978 90 04 20660 1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original graduate symposium on which this volume is based, and which many of our contributors attended, would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the Faculties of History and Classics in the University of Cambridge, and the editors thank them here for their generosity. We are also indebted to Trinity College, Cambridge, who allowed us to meet amidst their grounds, and to the established scholars – Rosamond McKitterick, Erica Hunter, Kate Cooper and Conrad Leyser – who chaired sessions and participated in questions and discussion. Last of all we would like to offer our thanks to the anonymous reviewers who commented on an earlier version of this volume, and to Marcella Mulder and Debbie de Wit at Brill for their patience in guiding the project to completion.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASS	<i>Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto urbe coluntur</i> (Antwerp-Brussels, 1643–1902)
BHL	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis</i> (Brussels, 1898–1899)
CPG	<i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum</i> (Turnhout, 1974–)
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
CCSG	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca</i> (Turnhout, 1977–)
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i> (Turnhout, 1953–)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> (Vienna, 1866–)
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> (Hannover, 1826–)
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (1857–)
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (Paris, 1844–64)
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> (Paris, 1907–)
RIS	<i>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</i> (Città di Castello, 1900–)

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PREFACE

At some point perhaps in the final decades of the seventh century, the monk and priest Anastasius of Sinai penned a little-known sermon *On the Holy Synaxis*.¹ Therein Anastasius lambasted the sinfulness of his audience, and chided their failure to approach their attendance in church with the proper reverence. ‘We spend the entire day in the theatre,’ Anastasius proclaims, ‘in swearing and in other works of the devil... But in the church of God, in prayer and reading, we do not want to be near God even for an hour.’ His Christian congregation ‘hasten to leave the church as from a fire’; it is irritated if the priest reads a long passage from the Gospel; and ‘if when he makes the prayers he stretches these things out a little, we glower’. Even the sacred host cannot inspire the expected respect: ‘And when he brings the bloodless sacrifice, if he does it slowly, we are bored. We are propelled by the devil to set these things aside as vain’.²

Some Christians, Anastasius continues, ask ‘What is the point of communion?’ and then burst into the church ‘like dogs’, seize the bread and leave. Still more do not keep silence, but chatter to their neighbours and ‘are practised more in prater than in prayer (φλυαρία μᾶλλον, ἢ προσευχᾷ συγκροτούμενοι).’ Certain members of the congregation leave in the middle of the service to engage in the pleasures of the flesh; others spend their time lusting after women in the church; and others, ‘speak about their affairs and business, and turn that place appointed for the most awesome hour into a market-place’. Certain women, Anastasius claims, attend church more to be seen than to offer supplications. Worst of all, perhaps, some spend their time slandering the officiating priest.³

¹ The text is available at PG 89 825A–849C but still lacks a critical edition. For the various manuscripts, see A. Sakkos, *Περὶ Ἀναστασίου Σιναϊτῶν* (Thessaloniki, 1964) 241f.; and the note of M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, III (Turnhout, 1979), 456 no. 7750.

² Anastasius Sinaita, *On the Holy Synaxis* 3 [PG 89.829AB].

³ Ibid. 4 [PG 829C–832A]. This concern for the unavailability of the officiating priest is reflected later in the sermon (esp. at *ibid.* 20–21), but also in Anastasius’s other surviving works, in particular the *Tales* B1, B7, C17. For the *Tales* of Anastasius see Geerard, CPG III: 458–62 no. 7758, which divides them into three collections: for collection A (1–40), see F. Nau, ‘Le texte grec des récits utiles à l’âme d’Anastase

This vivid introduction to Anastasius's sermon is salient for several reasons. On the one hand, it presents us with a powerful ecclesiastical figure intoning from the pulpit, chastising his congregation and attempting to impose upon them 'proper' practices and beliefs. At the same time, however, it serves as a welcome antidote to the comparable treatises of such eastern contemporaries as Maximus the Confessor and Germanus of Constantinople, whose liturgical commentaries present the eucharistic rite as a solemn, undisturbed drama of cosmic proportions.⁴ Anastasius's sermon focuses our attention not only on the articulation of that vision but also on its *reception* (or lack thereof).⁵ It reminds us that the problems that formed the interest and the horizon of the Christian texts that have come down to us were not the sole, or even primary, concern of the inhabitants of the early medieval world, and that behind such texts were societies which were far more complex, creative and (perhaps) impious than the glittering facade of grand Christian culture for the most part allows us to perceive. To be sure, Anastasius remains able to gather around him the local congregation, and from the pulpit to control a significant form of public speech. But, as he himself reminds us here, some within his congregation did not care to listen; others even turned to slander.

The papers collected in this volume attempt to explore both sides of this coin: on the one hand, the construction of social power through person, text and space; but, on the other, the reception of that same

(le Sinaïte), *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902) 58–89; for collection B (1–9) *ibid.* 3 (1903) 56–75. An edition of the C collection (along with A and B) is under preparation by André Binggeli at the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes at the CNRS. A useful precis of the collection is however available in B. Flusin, 'Démons et Sarrasins: l'auteur et le propos des Diègêmata stèriktika d'Anastase le Sinaïte', *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) 380–409. For further correspondences between the sermon and Anastasius's broader corpus, see *On the Holy Synaxis* 22; cf. *idem*, *Questions and Answers* 88 in *Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones*, ed. M. Richard and J.A. Munitiz CCSG 59 (Turnhout, 2006), 140–143. For these parallels and for Anastasius's work more generally see also J. Haldon, 'The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief', in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad, *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 107–147 at 133f.

⁴ See Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy* ed. C. Soteropoulos, *Ἡ Μυσταγωγία τοῦ ἁγίου Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ* (Athens, 1978); Germanus of Constantinople, *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation*, in *St Germanus of Constantinople: On the Divine Liturgy*, ed. P. Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY, 1984).

⁵ For this approach to the liturgy, compare the wonderful R. Taft, *Through their own eyes: The liturgy as Byzantines saw it* (Berkeley, CA, 2006).

process, and with it indifference, re-appropriation and resistance. Because Christian sacred sites and persons became so significant as foci for the construction of Christian social and cultural dominance (and, in particular, *episcopal* dominance), those same sites and persons were also the arenas around which these forms of dissent might be effectively deployed. In their attempts to realise that dominance, therefore, Christian leaders were confronted with challengers at the heart of their power: most obviously, of course, with rival impresarios of Christian culture (opposition theologians, heteroprax monks, etc.); but also, this volume emphasises, with less obvious figures whose significance can sometimes go unobserved: powerful Christian aristocrats, unofficial cultic authorities, or secularising intellectuals.

At the same time, we suggest here, the congregations whom Christian authorities confronted were both more creative and less credulous than those same authorities would like us to believe. Doctrinal boundaries and identities, for example, were far more fluid than the polemic of invested theologians implies, and some (if not all) Christians could put on or shed their doctrinal colours as and when it suited. Moreover there persisted in all social classes ingrained patterns of explanation which remained sceptical of, resistant to, or unenthused by the claims of Christian culture: the truth of miracles, for example, was not assumed but had to be established; the intervention of deceased saints within the world of the living required proper proof. Christian authorities were confronted, therefore, with a constant need both to reassert their own positions against rival impresarios, and to re-establish the truth of the claims on which their power rested, in the face of congregations who were perhaps, in Anastasius's memorable phrase, 'practised more in prater than in prayer'. This volume holds the modest aspiration of attempting to recapture something of this complex, diverse, and raucous Christian world.

RESTLESS PEASANTS AND SCORNFUL LORDS:
LAY HOSTILITY TO HOLY MEN AND THE CHURCH IN LATE
ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Peter Sarris

In 1961, in his justly famous essay *What Is History?*, E.H. Carr wrote of the problems caused to the medievalist by an over-reliance on ecclesiastical sources: 'When I read in a modern history of the Middle Ages that the people of the Middle Ages were deeply concerned with religion', Carr declared, 'I wonder how we know this, and whether it is true. What we know of the facts of medieval history have almost all been selected for us by generations of chroniclers who were professionally occupied in the theory and practice of religion, and who therefore thought it supremely important, and recorded everything relating to it, and not much else. The picture of the Russian peasant as devoutly religious was destroyed by the revolution of 1917.'¹

The Russian analogy that Carr draws is a highly appropriate one, especially for the Byzantinist, for in many respects the myth of 'Holy Russia' (*Sviataia Rus'*) drew upon the ideal of a Holy Byzantium to which Moscow was heir.² In Muscovy, as in Byzantium, the concept of the Tsar/Emperor as God's vice-gerent on earth, and of the empire as a bulwark of true religion, did much to legitimise and sanctify the state in the person of the ruler.³ But how deep in society did such claims penetrate? To what extent did they impact upon the minds and imaginations of the Tsar/Emperor's overwhelmingly rural subjects? For Byzantium, we will never know, but the Russian evidence is highly suggestive. As Orlando Figes has put it, 'the religiosity of the Russian peasant has been one of the most enduring myths – along with the depth of the Russian soul – in the history of Russia. But in reality the Russian peasant had never been more than semi-detached

¹ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, 1961), 13–14. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Geoffrey de Ste Croix.

² See, for example, discussion in O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924* (London, 1996), 62–63.

³ *Ibid.*, 61–63. For Byzantium, see G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le 'césaropapisme' byzantin* (Paris, 1996).

with the Orthodox religion. Only a thin coat of Christianity had been painted over his ancient pagan folk-culture'.⁴ Moreover, as the events of the Revolution were to reveal, a great deal of animosity and hostility had built up towards the personnel of the Church on the part of many Russian peasants. This was largely due to social tensions resulting from the reality of economic relations between peasant and priest on the ground: 'the clergy relied heavily on collecting peasant fees for their services: two roubles for a wedding; a hen for the blessing of the crops; a few bottles of vodka for a funeral; and so on. The crippling poverty of the peasants and the proverbial greed of the priests often made this bargaining process long and heated [...] "Everywhere", wrote a nineteenth-century parish priest, "from the most resplendent drawing rooms to smoky peasant huts, people disparage the clergy with the most vicious mockery, with words of the most profound scorn and infinite disgust".'⁵

It has long been noted how, in the aftermath of the Constantinian institutionalisation of the Christian Church and clergy, and as bishops in particular came to play an ever more significant role in public life, the representatives of the Church found themselves increasingly caught up in political struggles and machinations. This was not always to the Church's advantage: in Merovingian Gaul, for example, the growing involvement of bishops in court and factional politics was to lead to a strikingly high rate of episcopal murder and assassination.⁶ What has received far less attention, however, are the implications of the process whereby the Church emerged as an increasingly significant landowner from the fourth to the sixth centuries, and the role played by the Church's ever more pronounced involvement in exploitative, and potentially highly antagonistic, economic and social relations, in

⁴ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 66. For the relationship between religious folk-culture and Christianity in the early Byzantine Empire, see F.R. Trombley, 'Paganism in the Greek World at the End of Antiquity', *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985) 327–352, discussing the *Life of Nicholas of Sion*.

⁵ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 67–68.

⁶ For the ongoing process of institutionalization from the fourth to the sixth centuries, see C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in An Age of Transition* (Berkeley, 2005). For episcopal murder, see P. Fouracre, 'Why were so many bishops killed in Merovingian Francia?', in *Bischofsmord im Mittelalter – Murder of Bishops*, ed. N. Fryde and D. Reitz (Göttingen, 2003), 13–36.

informing and shaping peasant attitudes to the Church, its representatives, and perhaps even its doctrines.⁷

The growth of the church as a landowning institution from the fourth century onwards was, on one level, one of the most significant economic developments of late antiquity. Through imperial grant, pious donation, and straightforward opportunism, bishops and, ultimately, monasteries came to acquire extensive estates across the Mediterranean world and its northwestern appendages.⁸ As Rapp has noted, 'real estate and the income it generated, church buildings, liturgical vessels, and adornments made of gold and silver were liberally given to the Church. The *Liber Pontificalis*... gives a detailed inventory of Constantine's gifts to the churches in Rome and elsewhere in Italy. These amounted to hundreds of pounds of gold and silver in chalices, patens, candlesticks, and other adornments, in addition to income from estates and commercial enterprises worth thousands of *solidi*'.⁹ This process continued apace in Italy across the fifth and sixth centuries, such that, as Robert Markus has put it, 'by the end of the sixth century [churches] were the largest landowners in Italy. In Gregory [the Great's] time the Roman Church must have been by far the richest'.¹⁰ As Philip Booth has noted, by Gregory's day 'papal estates stretched from Gaul to North Africa, and included vast holdings within Campania'.¹¹ Nor was it simply the great patriarchal Sees that built up extensive property portfolios: in his classic study of 1931, *The Large Estates of Byzantine Egypt*, E.R. Hardy speculated that, by the sixth century, the Church may have owned even more land around the Middle Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus than the regionally predominant aristocratic household of the Flavii Apiones, members of which held high office in Constantinople and dominated local politics.¹²

The expansion of ecclesiastical estates necessarily involved the Church and its representatives in what Chris Wickham has described

⁷ For peasant hostility to secular landowners and the imperial authorities themselves, see P. Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2006), 222–227.

⁸ See discussion in Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, 215–219.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁰ R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, 1997), 112.

¹¹ P. Booth, 'John Moschus, Sophronius Sophista, and Maximus Confessor Between East and West', Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2007, 128.

¹² E.R. Hardy, *The Large Estates of Byzantine Egypt* (New York, 1931), 44. For the Apion family, see Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 17–24.

as ‘the politics of the land’, and would appear to have elicited a certain degree of suspicion and hostility on the part of those more traditionally-minded elements of senatorial and curial society that were perhaps ill-at-ease with imperial programmes of Christianisation, and who increasingly found themselves in competition with the Church for prime agricultural real estate. As the sixth-century Greek historian Procopius complained in his *Secret History*, the Emperor Justinian ‘seemed to be a convinced believer in Christ, but this too meant ruin for his subjects; for he allowed the priests to use violence against their neighbours almost with impunity, and when they looted estates next to their own he wished them joy, thinking that in so doing he was honouring the Divinity. When he judged such cases he thought that he was showing his piety if anyone for allegedly religious purposes grabbed something that did not belong to him and, after winning his case, went scot-free. For in his view justice consisted in the priests getting the better of their opponents.’¹³

From the perspective of the peasantry and agricultural labourers who worked such estates, however, this concentration of landownership in the hands of the Church is likely to have carried few tangible consequences. All it meant for them was a change of master. There is no evidence that ecclesiastical estates in late antiquity were organised or administered on terms any different to those of the lay aristocracy: both the Church and lay aristocrats made use of agricultural slaves; both the Church and the lay aristocracy made extensive use of the obligatory services of tied agricultural labourers (*coloni adscripticii*) and their families, bound in perpetuity to their estates; and the administrators of both Church and lay estates geared production towards the market, so as to maximise cash incomes, intensifying the exploitation of their labourers accordingly.¹⁴ Importantly, the documentary record

¹³ Procopius, *The Secret History*, trans. G.A. Williamson and P. Sarris (London, 2007), 54–55 (*Anecdota* 3.15–17.).

¹⁴ For slaves on aristocratic estates, see K. Harper, ‘The Greek Census Inscriptions of Late Antiquity’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 98 (2008) 83–119; Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 39–40; *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3960; *P.Princ.* II 96; *PSI VIII* 953; *P.Oxy.* XVI 1913. For slaves on papal estates, see *Greg. Ep.* III.18, and T.S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy AD 554–800* (Rome, 1984), 202–204. For *adscripticii* on papal estates, see, for example, *Greg. Ep.* IX.129. For the gearing of production to the market and the drive for cash incomes, see J. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 2007); that the Church operated in the same way is indicated by the background and terms of resolution of the land dispute recorded on *P.Oxy.* LXIII 4397. For the Church as landowner, see also Sarris,

from Egypt even attests to the employment of clergy as estate supervisors and stewards by members of the lay aristocracy.¹⁵

The growing involvement of the Church and its personnel in exploitative agrarian social relations is likely to have had marked implications for how elements of the peasantry viewed their ecclesiastical masters, or those priests and deacons who associated themselves with their secular ones.¹⁶ That life labouring on the estates of the Church was regarded as far from entirely eligible is strongly suggested by a letter of Gregory the Great, in which he complains of the flight of tied agricultural labourers (*coloni adscripticii*) from Papal estates in Sicily. Gregory fulminates that these peasants, though bound by their legal status (*ex condicione ligati*) to work the estates, had the temerity to behave 'as if they are in control of their own lives and are free' (*quasi sui arbitrii [sunt] ac liberi*).¹⁷

Exploitation stood at the heart of relations between landowners and peasants in late antique and early medieval society. Whether the landowner in question was a secular magnate, the Church, or the Crown, such exploitation is likely both to have bred animosity and generated resistance.¹⁸ Accordingly, it should come as little surprise that our sources record numerous examples of peasants pointedly and violently contesting the demands of the Church as a landowning institution, or the activities of its agents.

Indeed, peasant resistance to the economic demands of the Church is described in one of our earliest, and most fully formed *Saints' Lives*, the *Life of Porphyrius Bishop of Gaza* by Mark the Deacon.¹⁹ Dating from the late fourth century, this work describes the problems and challenges faced by the text's eponymous hero in his attempts to establish

Economy and Society, 221; M. Annick, *Athanase d'Alexandrie et l'église d'Égypte au IV^e siècle (328–373)* (Rome, 1996); E. Wipszycka, *Les ressources et les activités économiques des églises en Égypte du IV^e au VIII^e siècle* (Brussels, 1972).

¹⁵ See, for example, *P.Oxy.* I 136 – a contract of employment agreed between the Apion household and a certain Serenos, 'deacon of the Holy Church of Oxyrhynchus'.

¹⁶ For further Oxyrhynchite evidence of the symbiosis and synergy between Church and lay landowner, see the otherwise problematic G. Ruffini, *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt* (Cambridge, 2008), 81–83.

¹⁷ *Greg. Ep.* IX.129. The evidence of this letter seemingly contradicts the argument of A. Serfass, 'Slavery and Pope Gregory the Great', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006) 77–103.

¹⁸ See discussion in Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 222–234.

¹⁹ *Marc le Diacre: Vie de Porphyre Evêque de Gaza*, ed. H. Grégoire and M.-A. Kugener (Paris, 1930).

Christianity amidst an obdurately pagan population during the reign of the Emperor Arcadius. In one episode, the hagiographer relates how Porphyrius' deacon, Barochas, 'went one day to a village not far from the city [of Gaza] to collect a sum of revenue due to the Church.' 'However', the *Life* continues, 'the person who owed the sum was a worshipper of idols. When asked for the money, the debtor sought to draw out the repayment, a request that the pious Barochas refused. As a result, they fell into argument, and the misguided wretch called upon the other agricultural labourers of his village, who were similarly inclined, and they set about beating the blessed Barochas with clubs. Then they carried him off half-dead and dumped him in wasteland outside the village, where he lay voiceless and unconscious.'²⁰

Although, for obvious reasons, the hagiographer was keen to emphasise the religious identity of the deacon's assailants, the cause of the dispute described was a purely economic one: namely, what were perceived to be the unreasonable demands of the bishop's agent. That supposedly Christian villagers were regarded as capable of responding to the stewards and administrators of ecclesiastical estates in precisely the same way, is indicated by the seventh-century *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, written by the Galatian bishop's disciple, the monk George (a hagiographer, interestingly, of peasant stock).²¹ As George admits: 'Theodore used to entrust the administration and the governance of the properties belonging to the Church to men of the city and injustice was done to the peasants; in one case, for instance, he had entrusted them to a leading citizen (*protikor*) of Anastasioupolis, Theodosius, by name; and he continually acted unjustly and defrauded the peasants. So they came to the servant of Christ and met him in tears, and he, moved with sympathy, grieved over them, for his holy and sensitive soul could not bear to see any one in trouble. He summoned Theodosius and with many admonitions besought him to cease his acts of injustice against the peasants. But Theodosius again invented some pretexts against the villagers and continued in his unjust treatment, whereupon in one of the villages, called Eukraous, when he was proceeding to his usual acts of injustice, the peasants of the village were roused to uncontrollable anger; they all gathered together with a com-

²⁰ Ibid. c.22.

²¹ *La vie de Théodore de Sykéôn*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Paris, 1930). For the social background of the hagiographer, George, see C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), 324 and 406.

mon purpose, armed themselves with various weapons and swords and catapults, and took up their stand outside the village to meet him, and threatened him with death if he did not turn back and leave them'.²²

Again, the episode has been filtered through the literary demands of the genre of hagiography, in this instance with a view to establishing the wisdom and *philanthropia* of Theodore. But that the Church was deeply implicated in the brutal realities of provincial social relations, and was viewed with rather less than unquestioning devotion on the part of elements of peasantry, is also evident from the non-hagiographic sources. In a law of 548, for example, Justinian decreed that that the governor or *moderator* of the Pontus was to restrain the hand of all malefactors 'be they priests, holders of imperial office, landowners, or private citizens'.²³ Likewise, as noted elsewhere, in the fifth- or sixth-century papyrus *P.Oxy.* XVI 1832, we possess a highly suggestive letter probably written from one estate official to another: 'the author of the letter informs his correspondent that a woman from Kegethis in the Oxyrhynchite had stolen "the holy treasures of the Church of Aspidas" and that "the headman of the villagers" was refusing "either to surrender the holy treasures or hand over the woman"'.²⁴ There was no surfeit of piety here.

Nor is our evidence for peasant hostility to the Church or its agents limited to the late antique and early Byzantine East. The *Chronicle of Hydatius*, for example, records how in 449 a band of peasant rebels or *bacaudae*, under the leadership of a certain Basilius, entered the Iberian city of Turiasso and 'killed the bishop Leo in his church'.²⁵ A still more revealing episode is recorded for sometime in the early eighth century in the Frankish marchlands. According to the *Passio Thrudperti*, the holy man Thrutpert was granted an estate in the region of the Sornegau by a sympathetic lord. Thrutpert proceeded, however, to work his serfs so hard that ultimately they could bear no more, and one of them

²² Ibid. c. 76: the translation is taken from E. Dawes and N.H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford, 1948), 139.

²³ *J. Edict* 8 (*proemium*).

²⁴ Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 221–222.

²⁵ E.A. Thompson, 'Peasant Revolts in Late Roman Gaul and Spain', *Past and Present* 2 (1952) 11–23 at 16; Hydatius *Chron.* Sub anno 449: *Basilius ob testimonium egregium sui congregatis Bacaudis in ecclesia Tyriassone foederatos occidit. Ubi et Leo eiusdem ecclesiae episcopus ab isdem, qui cum Basilio aderant, in eo loco obiit vulneratus.*

crept up to him as he dozed one afternoon and stabbed him to death.²⁶ On other occasions, issues of status and self-worth appear to have been at the forefront of peasants' minds: as Fouracre notes, *The Lives of the Fathers of Merida* record the murder of a certain Abbot Nanctus, 'whose unkempt and lowly appearance horrified the people who were to serve him. Seeing that he was all alone, they broke his neck.'²⁷

The Nanctus episode aside, at the heart of the acts of violence depicted in the *Life of Porphyrius of Gaza*, the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, or the *Passio Thrudperti* were clearly economic issues and complaints. Peasant hostility to the Church and its representatives in late antiquity and early middle ages was also, however, clearly further fuelled by resentment at the introduction of a new religion that was, for the most part, imposed from above.²⁸ The most vivid sense of this is conveyed by Bede in his *Life of Cuthbert*. In the third chapter of this work, Bede describes how a body of monks from a monastery near the mouth of the River Tyne, who had set off by raft to collect some timber, found themselves being pulled out to sea. 'On the other bank of the river', Bede records, 'stood no small crowd of the common people, and he [Cuthbert] was standing among them. These were watching the rafts on which the monks [in the monastery] were sadly gazing, being carried so far out to sea that they looked like five tiny birds riding on the waves, for there were five rafts. Thereupon they began to jeer at the monks' manner of life, as if they were deservedly suffering, seeing that they despised the common laws of mortals and put forth new and unknown rules of life. Cuthbert stopped the insults of the blasphemers, saying, "Brethren, what are you doing, cursing those whom you see even now being carried away to destruction? Would it not be better and more kindly to pray to the Lord for their safety rather than to rejoice over their dangers?" But they fumed against him with boorish minds and boorish words and said: "Let no man pray for them, and may God have no mercy on any one of them, for they have robbed men of their old ways of worship, and how the new worship is to be conducted, nobody knows".'²⁹

²⁶ *Passio Thrudperti*, ed. B. Krusch, *M.G.H. S.R.M.* IV: 352–363, c. 4–5, 358–360. I was alerted to this episode by a seminar paper given by Professor Paul Fouracre in Oxford many years ago.

²⁷ Fouracre, 'Bishops', 26.

²⁸ See B. Dumézil, *Conversion et liberté dans les royaumes barbares d'Occident* (Paris, 2005).

²⁹ B. Colgrave, ed., *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge, 1940), 163–165.

In the early medieval West, moreover, animosity towards holy men, monks, and clergy was given added piquancy by broader processes of cultural change and, in particular, by the militarisation of elite culture resulting from the chronic military insecurity and ‘barbarian invasions’ of the fifth century.³⁰ The extrovert, military culture of the emergent elites of the Romano-Germanic successor kingdoms of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, with its emphasis on martial prowess, boastful and exuberant virility, sumptuous feasting and general excess, was in many ways the precise antithesis of the concept of the ideal man embodied in the ascetic self-denial, restraint, and humility of the model Christian holy man, bishop, or monk.³¹ The dissonance between such markedly divergent models of masculinity and such contrasting visions of the ideal man inevitably led to tension and, at times, conflict. The celibate bishop, in the company, perhaps, of monastic attendants, must have seemed a strange and alien sight to the eyes of many an early medieval warlord: Gregory of Tours, for example, in the late sixth century, records how a certain Palladius, Count of Javols, barracked the Bishop Parthenius at the court of the Frankish King Sigibert: ‘Palladius accused the bishop of being camp and effeminate. “Where are all your little husbands”, he declared, “with whom you live in such filthy debauchery?”’³² As Jinty Nelson has noted, tensions between the martial vocation and spiritual aspirations of young male aristocrats are a noteworthy feature of the Frankish sources down to the ninth and tenth centuries.³³ In one episode, the father-less Rigranus, a noble Frankish boy from Le Mans, revealed to his uncle his wish to become a monk. His uncle responded furiously: ‘How could you prefer the life of pigs in a vegetable-garden? What about the joy

³⁰ C.P. Wormald, ‘The Decline of the Western Empire and the Survival of its Aristocracy’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 66 (1976) 217–226.

³¹ For the ascetic ideal, see Rapp, *Holy Bishops*. For the *mores* of the warrior aristocracy, see M. Rouche ‘Violence and Death’, in *A History of Private Life From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. P. Veyne (Harvard, 1992), 485–518; and C.P. Wormald, ‘Kings and Kingship’, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History I: c. 500–c. 700*, ed. P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 2005), 571–604, 590–603.

³² Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 4.39: *mollem episcopum, effeminatum Palladius vocitaret: ‘Ubi sunt mariti tui, cum quibus stuprose et turpiter vivis?’* See discussion in J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1980), 184.

³³ J.L. Nelson, ‘Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900’, in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley (Harlow, 1999), 121–142.

of hunting? What about the voluptuous touch of a woman?'.³⁴ Only with the emergence of Crusading warfare and the cult of Chivalry in the eleventh and twelfth centuries would such tensions ultimately be resolved.³⁵

Resistance or hostility to the Church, its teachings, and representatives in late antiquity and the early middle ages was not limited, therefore, to the ranks of dissident theologians or conservative intellectuals.³⁶ Rather, the more the Church found itself politically institutionalised and economically embedded, the more the realities of social and economic relations on the ground are likely to have generated tension, animosity and conflict, focused on the Church and its agents. As a result, the 'Christianisation' of the peasantry is likely to have been a far more haphazard, piecemeal, and gradual process than is commonly supposed. Rather, there are long likely to have been many who, like Bede's Northumbrians, would have been quite content to see their neighbourhood monks, and probably bishops and clergy too, drift slowly out to sea.

³⁴ Ibid., 133.

³⁵ See M.H. Keen, *Chivalry* (London, 1984).

³⁶ On which see M.J. Dal Santo 'Gregory the Great and Debate concerning the Cult of the Saints in the early Byzantine Mediterranean and its Hinterland during the later Sixth and Seventh Centuries', Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2008; and, in this volume, id. 'The God-protected empire? Scepticism towards the cult of saints in early Byzantium'.

METHODOLOGY, AUTHORITY, AND SPONTANEITY:
SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL TRUTHFULNESS IN LATE ANTIQUE
TEXTS AND LIFE

Peter Turner

*Introduction: Literal Truthfulness in Religious Writing*¹

Late antiquity was traditionally regarded as a period of widespread superstition and excessive religiosity. Edward Gibbon famously attributed a portion of the Western Empire's collapse to the rise of Christianity and, in particular, to the otherworldliness of its monastic elite.² E.R. Dodds described the late Roman world as an 'Age of Anxiety' in which a metaphysical transcendentalism flourished and the phenomenal world ceased to seem entirely real.³ It can hardly be denied that the intellectual culture of the period embraced religious concerns to a great and unprecedented extent. In hagiography – a genre of historiography notorious amongst modern scholars for its miracles and idealized religious content – the period made its most distinctive contribution to literary history.

This image of late antiquity has been challenged over the last four decades by a revisionism whose most prominent exponent is Peter Brown. In a celebrated article published in 1971 Brown deployed the tools of anthropology and sociology to remove holy men from the distortions of a heroic literary lens, and to reveal instead their proximity to, and continuity with, the quotidian concerns of ordinary people.⁴ In Brown's account, the holy man remained sacred, and embodied an idea of the Christian God, but he was also a powerful patron in a world where mundane social, economic, and judicial responsibilities

¹ I would like to thank Matthew Dal Santo and Phil Booth for the valuable observations and comments they offered on earlier versions of this paper.

² E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in *The Portable Gibbon*, ed. D.A. Saunders (New York, 1977) 622–624.

³ E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christianity in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965) 7.

⁴ P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 80–101, repr. in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (1982), 103–152.

constituted the main sphere of his activity.⁵ Only by recognizing this broader context could the holy man reveal himself; without it, the temptation is always to see in hagiography only evidence of widespread popular credulity.⁶

The importance of Brown's work in advancing our understanding of the religious life of late antiquity cannot be overstated.⁷ Nonetheless, Brown's initial foray into the world of holy men contained a number of problems, many of which were later highlighted by the author himself. To cite just one example, Brown declared that he had examined sanctity from a purely third person perspective, and overlooked the equally important question of how holy men pursued their own quest for sanctity;⁸ to extend the point somewhat, it is not entirely clear how stories about holy men relate to the religious lives of people of the same period. This springs, in my view, from a question at the heart of Brown's analysis which is never completely resolved: how literally should we interpret hagiographies? How literally were they read and/or meant to be read at the time? Brown is certainly right to point to the dual role of holy men as both representatives of a divine ideal and agents in a complex social world, but he leaves ambiguous the point at which symbol and practice met. In stating that holy men revealed 'the nature of the average man's expectations and hopes for himself',⁹ is he referring to career choices or to latent psychological fantasies? When he claims that 'the occasional *coup de théâtre*... (was) rather like the cashing of a big cheque on a reputation', are we supposed to imagine such events (which, presumably, include miracles) as the closing episodes of genuine social processes, or rather as symbolic episodes which somehow encapsulate those processes only textually?¹⁰ When he high-

⁵ Ibid., 105–106.

⁶ 'Faced with so many accounts of the miraculous, the historian of Late Antiquity usually relieves the strain placed on his own credulity by vastly inflating the credulity of his subjects... To be content with such a judgement is of no help to the historian whatsoever': Brown, 'Rise and Function', repr. in *Society and the Holy*, 141–142.

⁷ For excellent (if now somewhat dated) reviews, see M. Vessey, 'The Demise of the Christian Writer and the Remaking of "Late Antiquity"': from H-I. Marrou's *Saint Augustin* (1938) to Peter Brown's *Holy Man* (1983)', *J ECS* 6 (1998) 377–411; and P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity: 1971–1997', *ibid.*, 353–376.

⁸ Ibid., 368.

⁹ P. Brown, 'Rise and Function', in *idem*, *Society and the Holy*, 104.

¹⁰ 'The occasional *coup de théâtre*... (was) rather like the cashing of a big cheque on a reputation' seems to suggest the former: *ibid.*, 105–106. His analysis of curses and exorcisms (122–124) suggests the latter. A certain ambiguity also prevails in his

lights the tendency of the cult of saints to locate sanctity in a world which was geographically and temporally close to the reader's own,¹¹ does it mean that ordinary people were actually likely to encounter holy men, or was this local, recent emphasis a fiction which ensured they had an uncanny habit of slipping just beyond the horizon of anyone's direct experience?

It is with these questions in mind that the current paper addresses the literal truthfulness of late antique hagiographies. It must be stated at the outset that, since the vast bulk of the information contained within such hagiographies is unverifiable even when it is not incredible, the question is impossible to answer directly, and this explains the tendency of many modern scholars to circumvent the issue entirely. However, it is important to recognize several reasons why it remains important. Firstly, the question was clearly a major concern of hagiographers themselves as is shown by the various guarantees of truthfulness their works contain. In the absence of testable information, the analysis of such guarantees yields a vital insight if not into the historicity of specific incidents, then at least into the forms and structures of belief which underpinned statements about holy men. By examining a wide range of late antique authors – not just Christian hagiographers, but also their pagan counterparts – this paper will consider three very different types of guarantee.¹² Furthermore, it will compare third person hagiographies with descriptions of spiritual experience in the first person, a project intended to go some way to addressing Brown's desideratum that the concept of sanctity should be considered

later essay, 'Arbiters of the holy: the Christian holy man in late antiquity', in P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred* (Cambridge, 1995), 55–78. The essay begins by discussing the rôle of holy persons in the late antique Christian imagination (58) before moving onto their practices (60ff). But how the imaginative and historical aspects related to one another is never made entirely clear.

¹¹ Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, 57–58.

¹² Throughout this paper 'hagiography' is used as a convenient term for religious/philosophical *Lives* generally, i.e. pagan as well as Christian works. This convenience follows the welcome trend amongst some modern scholars of comparing works on either side of this religious divide: e.g., P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, 1983); M. Edwards, 'Birth, Death, and Divinity in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*', in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (Berkeley, 2000) 65. For Plotinus and Proclus as 'Saints', see *Neoplatonic Saints: the Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students*, trans. M. Edwards (Liverpool, 2000); S. Pricoco, *Monaci, Filosofi, e Santi: Saggi di storia della cultura tardoantica* (Messina, 1992).

not just in terms of the reputation for it that some men acquired, but also in terms of the personal quest it entailed.

Secondly, it is very striking that the sorts of belief hagiographies contain may well have been contested at the time. However sympathetically the religious life of the period is treated, the overwhelming quantity of its religious literary output has led to an implicit assumption that it was at least representative of most people; but guarantees of the type mentioned above can equally be seen as evidence of quite concrete, corresponding doubts. This is, of course, one of the recurrent themes of the present volume, and a similar case has also been made by Gilbert Dagron. Focusing on the slightly later early and middle Byzantine periods, Dagron identifies 'des doutes, des réticences, des résistances' about the cult of saints, often of a very subtle and sophisticated nature.¹³ If this is an accurate observation of a Byzantine society which had already accepted the broad outline of Christian monotheism, we may perhaps expect it to have been still truer in the immediately preceding late Roman period which underwent such massive religious change from being a world of many different cults at the end of the third century, to one dominated by various strands of Christianity (both sanctioned and unsanctioned) by the early sixth. This period furnished, in other words, a highly competitive religious landscape in which various cults were, by turns, revered, doubted and ridiculed; a world containing not just different religions but also different extents of commitment towards religion. We only have to think of how Ammianus Marcellinus, whose own persuasions are moderate to the point of ambiguity, criticizes the superstition of the otherwise heroic emperor Julian, to recognize how personal a matter religious conviction could still be.¹⁴

A final reason for addressing the question of literal truthfulness in hagiographies is that, as Brown recognized, the historian's own convictions are bound to be affected by that of his subjects.¹⁵ This is the case whether we see hagiographies first and foremost as intellectual documents or, in a more positivist spirit, scrutinize them for hard facts: the

¹³ Gilbert Dagron, 'L'ombre d'un doute: l'hagiographie en question VI^e-XI^e siècle', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992) 59.

¹⁴ Julian was a 'superstitiosus magis quam sacrorum legitimus observator': Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 25.4.17, ed. W. Seyfarth, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1978). For Ammianus' religious position, see J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), 427-451.

¹⁵ See n. 6.

status of information is a vital theoretical and epistemic question in the first case; in the second, our ability to judge its historicity depends partly on the original intention behind it. The question of literal truthfulness, therefore, goes to the very heart of the problem which lurks behind any discussion of hagiography: is it more akin to theology or to historiography? Does it (as Claire Stancliffe puts it) refer more to an ideal or a person?¹⁶ The question is, of course, eternally vexed, and both the genre as a whole and particular instances of it will evoke very diverse responses. Nonetheless, we may legitimately draw a basic distinction between what we might call an internal, systemic logic i.e. a logic which demonstrates a certain consistency as long as a series of premises are accepted and, on the other hand, a more familiar realism, accessible to the commonsense and to the personal experience of those who read it. Were these two forms of truthfulness entirely distinct? If not, how did they relate to one another? To examine these questions is not the same thing as explaining the structure of religious texts; nor is it simply to establish with greater precision the boundary between historical fact and literary idealization. Rather, it is to ask in what way the idealized, literary aspects of religious texts – i.e. all those things most characteristic of hagiography – were themselves continuous with the religious and spiritual habits, experiences, and attitudes of late antique people. This paper will thus begin by discussing third-person religious writing before comparing it to first-person religious writing. Since the questions with which this paper is concerned could potentially be brought to many religious texts from the period, the answers it gives will necessarily be incomplete and sporadic. But by investigating truthfulness as a concept, the aim is to open up a new perspective from which historians may reflect on the relationship between text and life.

Methodology and Authority: Theodoret's Religious History

Around 440 A.D. Theodoret of Cyrus wrote a *Religious History* dedicated to the most prominent monks that had lived in his homeland of

¹⁶ C. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford, 1983), 315.

northern Syria over the preceding century.¹⁷ Theodoret prefaced his work with a substantial prologue which introduced his subject matter, himself as author, his motivation for writing and his literary strategy. Like many hagiographers, he used his prologue to guarantee that an absolute commitment to truthfulness pervaded the entire work.

Theodoret's bold assertion had several subtle strands. At its heart was the extraordinary nature of his inspiration – 'excellent men, the athletes of virtue'.¹⁸ Such spiritual excellence demanded to be recorded for posterity, even if narration could only be a substitute for the lives themselves. Theodoret also sought to win the reader's trust by explaining his meticulous research methods: he had recorded only events to which he was eye-witness, or which he had heard about from trustworthy associates of the monks themselves. He could maintain with confidence, therefore, that the events he described demanded belief no less urgently than those of the Bible. It was by the measure of Scripture that readers should judge the monks rather than by their own abilities and by the standards of the familiar world around them.

Theodoret's prologue is clearly much more than a bland assertion of truthfulness. Rather, the guarantees it contains are precise, systematic and sophisticated, and imply, amongst other things, confrontation of quite specific forms of doubt that could potentially be raised against them. On the most basic level, there was the concern about factual accuracy: hearing, like the other senses, is designed to distinguish the true from the false. The desirability of a critical attitude towards what we hear, the necessary possibility of doubt, is therefore both recognized and encouraged. Presumably, he has in mind the criticism voiced not least by many modern scholars that tales about holy men get exaggerated with each telling. He responds to this by highlighting his research methods which are designed to ensure that his account relies ultimately, and more or less directly, on the version of events validated by the holy men themselves.

In various ways, assurances of this sort are common in late antique spiritual biographies. Sulpicius Severus goes even further than Theodoret: he claims not to have recorded information to which he alone was witness, unless it came from Martin's own mouth.¹⁹ In a way

¹⁷ Here I follow R.M. Price's calculation in his translation of Theodoret: *History of the Monks of the Syria* (London/Kalamazoo, 1985), xv.

¹⁸ 'ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀθλητῶν': Theodoret, *History*, Prologue 1.

¹⁹ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 1.7–9; 24.8 ed. K. Halm, CSEL 1 (Vienna, 1866).

which could be said to anticipate the Islamic *isnad* system through which the prophet Mohammed's sayings were transmitted, Eunapius of Sardis places himself in an educational chain, and therefore a chain of information, which stretches back to Plotinus, the first subject of his collective biography;²⁰ he claims that the sacred task of recording the truth was imposed on him by his master Chrysanthius.²¹ All of these statements acknowledge the form of scepticism that derives from a suspicion of falsely transmitted information. In the introduction to *On the Pythagorean Life*, Iamblichus provides a picturesque characterization of the process of Chinese Whispers by which information about holy men and their teachings undergo distortion from generation to generation.²²

For hagiographers, however, literal truthfulness, whilst an essential value, was not enough. The stories about holy men they recorded also had to be truthful in a second sense, namely that they pointed to eternal realities about the nature of God, his universe, and his relationship with humankind. For Christians, Scripture served as an absolutely authoritative guide to all these questions, both a record of historical fact and container of inexhaustible spiritual meaning, an eternally relevant guide to the present. Thus when Theodoret invokes the Bible as the appropriate yardstick with which to judge his holy men, he is making a statement of truthfulness of a different and subtler kind. Throughout the work he emphasizes his holy men's place in sacred history by drawing many comparisons between the behaviour and achievements of his monks and those of their biblical predecessors. To cite just one example, Marcianus is classed with Elijah and John the Baptist because of his habit of wandering through the wilderness in

²⁰ Eunapius was the pupil of Chrysanthius, who had studied with Aedesius (*Vitae Philosophorum ac Sophistarum*, 500 in *Philostratus and Eunapius: Lives of the Sophists*, ed. and trans. W.C. Wright (London/New York, 1921, repr. 1968). Aedesius was Iamblichus' leading student (ibid., 458), himself a close associate of Porphyry (ibid. 457), Plotinus' student (ibid., 455). The link is almost made explicit at ibid. 458. For Eunapius, communitarian aspect, see R. Goulet, *Études sur les vies des philosophes* (Paris, 2001) 20; D.F. Buck, 'Eunapius' *Lives of the Sophists: A Literary Study*, *Byzantion* 62 (1992) 150; P. Cox Miller, 'Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy', in *Greek Biography and Panegyric*, ed. Hägg and Rousseau, 238–239; T. Watts, 'Orality and Communal Identity in Eunapius' *Lives of the Sophists and Philosophers*, *Byzantion* 75 (2005) 336ff.

²¹ Eunapius, *Lives* 499.

²² Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica Liber* 1 (2), ed. L. Deubner (Leipzig, 1937).

animal skins.²³ Analogies of this sort are common in many late antique spiritual biographies. Hilarius, for example, compares Honoratus to Moses,²⁴ just as Eugippius does in the case of Severinus.²⁵ Sulpicius declares Martin to be not just a saint but ‘in very truth an apostle’.²⁶ Nor is this type of device exclusively Christian. In Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*, Eunapius’ *Lives*, and Damascius’ *Philosophical History*, the heroic intellectual figures of Pythagoras and Socrates – themselves figures of an alternative sacred history – are invoked as yardsticks for the qualities of contemporary philosophers.²⁷

It is important not to assume that such analogies are merely decorative or inflationary. Instead, we should see them as precise and measured arguments for establishing the grade and nature of a holy man’s sanctity. What made such validations necessary was not so much the risk of accusations from overt religious opponents (who, after all, would reject the entire tradition) than the highly controversial nature of particular expressions of asceticism within one’s own religious community. A number of monastic texts, such as the *Rule of the Master*, not only describe appropriate ascetic practice, they also warn against monks who practice it in the wrong way, or from the wrong motivations.²⁸ Clearly, people in late antiquity could be sensitive not just to religious opponents but to freaks and phoneyes within their own religion. The potential threat of such accusations can be gauged by Theodoret’s defence of Symeon Stylites. The hagiographer was aware of the criticism that could be levelled against a saint who spent his entire later life standing on top of a pillar since this bizarre form of asceticism apparently lacked any clear biblical precedent and, as Bernard Flusin rightly observes, such a precedent was for Theodoret the only absolutely reliable measure of spiritual significance.²⁹ But Theodoret argues that many inexplicable biblical incidents carried out at God’s

²³ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Religious History* 3.1, ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, 2 vols. (Paris, 1977–9).

²⁴ Hilarius Arelatensis, *Vita Honorati* 3.17 in *Vita Hilarii in Vitae Sanctorum Honorati et Hilarii, Episcoporum Arelatensium*, ed. S. Cavallin (Lund, 1952).

²⁵ Eugippius, *Vita Severini* 44.5 in *Eugippe: Vie de Saint Séverin*, ed. and trans. P. Régerat (Paris, 1991).

²⁶ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 7.7.

²⁷ Porphyry, *De Vita Plotini et Ordine Librorum Eius* 23, ed. A.H. Armstrong, in *Plotinus* vol. 1 (7 vols., London/New York, 1966, repr. 1995); Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica Liber, passim*; Eunapius, *Lives* 462, 498, 501; Damascius, *Vitae Isidori Reliquiae* 116e, ed. P. Athanassiadi (Athens, 1999).

²⁸ *Regula Magistri* 1.13–74 ed. A. de Vogüé, 3 vols. (Paris, 1964).

²⁹ ‘Il n’y a pas de miracle sans un précédent biblique... ce que Dieu a accompli, il

command – for example, Ezekiel lying on his right side for forty days and on his left for one hundred – also necessarily lacked a precedent when they were first performed. Ingeniously, the very originality of Symeon's habit is thus presented as the basis of its legitimacy.³⁰

In his study of religious doubters in the Byzantine period, Dagron is careful to delineate the precise scope of the objections they raised: in a society in which atheism was almost inconceivable, Dagron found, scepticism was directed not 'aux fondements de la foi mais aux tricheries et excès de l'imagination'; each doubt concerned 'un problème spécifique, qui n'était pas celui de la vérité de la religion.'³¹ The distinction is extremely important and equally valid in the late antique context. It shows that belief and doubt concerning the cult of saints was not a crude opposition, nor did it necessarily follow the contours of a modern historical scepticism. A person in the fourth century might believe in principle that saints existed, led extraordinary lives and continued to intervene after death in the affairs of the living; however, he might also doubt a particular report of a recent miracle or post-mortem healing, and doubt for any number of reasons: because there were too many such stories floating around, because the reputation of the saint concerned was controversial, because he had never seen such an event himself. (In this sense, the situation differs from the more theologically sophisticated, and politically pregnant debates about the cult of saints in late sixth-century Byzantium described by Matt Dal Santo in his contribution to this volume). Although all these cognitive stances were possible, we must not imagine that the border between core beliefs and specific doubts was entirely self-evident and uncontroversial; indeed, one of the most effective ways a hagiographer could guarantee the truthfulness of his own claims was by challenging the legitimacy of such a distinction. Theodoret's answer to doubters does precisely this: it promotes a strongly hierarchical structure of belief based on various appeals to authority. The possibility of narrative exaggeration is answered by showing the holy man himself to be the source of stories about him; the Bible is invoked as evidence of the reality of human sanctity and of the miracles that result from it. Theodoret clearly feels able to take his audience's most basic religious

l'accomplit encore': B. Flusin, *Miracles et Histoire dans l'œuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis* (Paris, 1983), 157.

³⁰ Theodoret, *Religious History* 36.12.

³¹ Gilbert Dagron, 'L'ombre d'un doute', 60. See also *ibid.*, 68.

commitments, which include the absolute truthfulness and authority of Scripture, for granted; lesser objections are not contested piecemeal but by exposing their incompatibility to the belief system *in toto*: to doubt the miracle would be to doubt the holy man; to doubt the holy man would be to doubt the Bible.

It may seem surprising at first glance that, in a genre so insistent on the truthfulness of its own content, we should consistently find repeated and indeed encouraged one very specific form of doubt, namely that the author had fallen short of his intended aim:

I, too, am aware than no words can attain to their virtue... We shall not try to transmit to history the way of life of all the saints who have been prominent everywhere, for neither do we know those who have been prominent everywhere, nor is it possible for them all to be written down by one man.³²

Far from going against the grain of truthfulness, expressions of this sort are an important aspect of it, and not merely by tempering unrealistic expectations in some general sense. In a transcendental world view, sanctity is a condition of the invisible soul; it both demands a stance of truthfulness and also renders absolute truthfulness impossible. As Theodoret says, there are too many saints and words cannot do them justice. His claim is entirely in keeping with those of many late antique hagiographers – both Christian and pagan – who highlight the impossibility of depicting accurately a holy man as great as their own.³³ The effect of such claims is to rebut the suspicion of exaggeration; the only type of distortion they leave possible is understatement. Scepticism is deflected away from the saint himself and towards the medium – whether that is the biographical genre specifically or, more generally, human language – through which his life is recorded. The truth of the holy man and of the God he represents, i.e. the broader, systemic truth, is thus left intact, as something capable of explaining everything and washing away all doubts if only we could perceive it clearly. Although this recognizes a certain incompleteness and indeterminacy at the heart of its analysis, nothing could be further from the post-Structuralist ethic of openness to alternative readings. Instead, in a way we might regard as somewhat paradoxical, the humility of hagi-

³² Ibid., Prologue 7.9, trans. Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 7.

³³ E.g. Eunapius, *Lives* 454–455; Marinus, *Vita Procli* 3; Hilarius, *Vita Honorati* Prologue.

ographers supports a spirit of dogmatism: by so insistently confessing its own limitations, it adopts a stance entirely closed to competing views.

Marinus' Life of Proclus and the 'Spontaneity Principle'

A guarantee of thorough methodology on the one hand; an appeal to the integrity of the faith on the other: these elements correspond closely to the distinction drawn earlier between two alternative sources of truthfulness, one outward-looking and experiential, the other internal and systemic. But whilst both these things appeal to the reader in different ways, we have so far demonstrated only their role as literary strategies. It is not yet clear if, and how, these sources of truthfulness applied beyond a purely textual realm to a broader world of spiritual experience beyond it.

To consider this further question, we must turn to a passage in the *Life of Proclus* by the Neoplatonic biographer Marinus, a close contemporary of Theodoret:

He set off for Athens, escorted as it were by all the gods and good daemons who are custodians of the oracles of philosophy... This was proved conspicuously even by the events prior to his residence, and the truly god-sent omens... For when he arrived at the Piraeus and those in the city were informed of this, Nicolaus... went down to the harbour as though to an acquaintance. He led him therefore toward the city, but Proclus, feeling fatigue on the road because of the walk, and being close to the Socrateum – *though he had not yet learned of nor heard that honours were being paid to Socrates anywhere* (οὐτῶ εἰδὼς οὐδὲ ἀκηκοὼς ὅτι Σωκράτους αὐτοῦ που ἐγίνοντο τιμᾶι) – begged Nicolaus to stop there awhile and sit, and at the same time also, if he could obtain water from anywhere, to bring it to him. For he was possessed, as he said, by a great thirst... Nicolaus noted the omen, which he now perceived for the first time, that he was sitting in the Socrateum, and first drank the Attic water from this place. Proclus for his part rose, made a sign of obeisance, and went on to the city. And as he was climbing to the top, he was met at the entrance by the doorman, who was already about to insert the keys – so much so that he said to him (*I shall repeat the fellow's very words* – ἐπ' αὐτῶν δὲ ἐρῶ τῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ῥημάτων), 'Honestly, if you had not come, I was about to close up.' What omen, now, could have been more clear that this...?³⁴

³⁴ Marinus, *Vita Procli* 10, ed. R. Masullo (Naples, 1985) and trans. Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints*, 70–72.

It is not in the extent of their dogmatism that the claims Marinus advances about his hero differ from equivalent passages in Theodoret's *Religious History*. Marinus is no less demanding of his readers in terms of the interpretation of events he records: Proclus' physical thirst near Socrates' statue reveals the authenticity of his thirst for truth; the gate, which is about to close, symbolises the decline of philosophy in a Christian empire – a common theme in pagan biography;³⁵ nor are his claims any less grandiose: Proclus' destiny is to defend this sacred tradition.³⁶ What is distinctive, however, is the rationale he includes for considering these things as miracles: only because their occurrence is absolutely spontaneous and unaffected can these events be accorded the status of omens; conversely any suspicion of human interference would be legitimate grounds for doubt and must therefore be refuted. The relevant type of human interference in this case, however, is not only the suspicion of a retrospective exaggeration, but that of affectation on the holy man's part. One could easily imagine how a man as religious as Proclus might desire signs and seek them out, might deliberately take a route to the city which led past a spiritually significant spot and, displaying the appropriate reaction, might arrive at the city gates at an ostentatiously symbolic time. Rather than simply appealing to authority, therefore, Marinus defends his interpretation using a criterion posited as objective – namely Proclus' own ignorance of the event's significance and the fact that only his companion Nicolaus is (unexpectedly) struck by it. Similarly, Marinus clearly recognizes how the words of the doorkeeper might be misremembered to fit the desired interpretation. But these doubts too are headed off at the pass, and we are assured that the doorman's words are quoted *verbatim*. By referring to the doorman with the familiar term *anthropos*, Marinus also emphasises the incident's spontaneous, unaffected quality: here was an ordinary man just doing a regular job, and he was therefore completely ignorant of his words' deeper meaning.

The truthfulness of this incident does not depend on an appeal to the reader to believe in extraordinary events and people. Indeed, in themselves none of the episode's constituent details – Proclus' tiredness, the water break, the gatekeeper's irreverence – challenge natural

³⁵ Goulet, *Études*, 20.

³⁶ Further confirmation of this symbolism is found in the penultimate chapter of the work, where the darkness of an eclipse portends the eclipse of philosophy: Marinus, *Vita Procli* 37.

laws; rather they imply a realism rooted in the world of the familiar, and we are surely here very close to what Roland Barthes termed the *petits faits vrais*, which bestow on a narrative *l'effet de réel*.³⁷ But in combination, they constitute much more than this: not just an effect of reality, but what we might term a 'principle of spontaneity',³⁸ a criterion of sacred significance established only once all human factors – desire, forethought, and affectation – have been discounted and which may subsequently serve as the measure of the episode's sacred significance.

Is this third form of guarantee entirely different or is it related to the other two? In a sense, it combines them. On the one hand, it is a focused instance of the guarantee of literal truthfulness: precision, plausibility, and an insistence on the absolute accuracy of literal reportage. The reader is asked to believe that, had he been present at the events described, he too would have witnessed precisely the same details. But he is also assured, and no less directly, that he would have attributed to it the same significance, namely that of an omen. In this sense, the episode is accorded a place within a broader system of truth. The fact that the events could not possibly have been contrived by humans is not the end of the story; the reader is not asked merely to gawp at a coincidence; rather, the elimination of all other possibilities leaves only one explanation possible, that of a deeper, spiritual significance, of divine intervention.

Of course, it would be foolish to imagine that the invocation of the spontaneity principle eliminates all subjectivity on the part of the viewer: that the events in question should underline Proclus' special destiny would seem far more reasonable to a pagan Neoplatonist than to a militant Christian; such a comparison would rarely be tested, however, since we may safely assume that hagiographers, whatever their religious persuasion, preached mainly to the choir. Nonetheless, the idea of spontaneity as an objective category of significance remains important. This is not because it explains why particular stories about holy men were believed (although we cannot discount the possibility that the spontaneity principle sometimes persuaded the genuinely undecided). Rather, and more significantly, it is because it may cast some light on the much murkier problem of how the miraculous

³⁷ Roland Barthes, 'L'Effet de réel', *Communications* 11 (1968) 84–89.

³⁸ I am grateful to Matt Dal Santo for suggesting this expression.

stories so characteristic of hagiography first came into being, that is, before there was an authority who had identified them as such. Generally, their origins seem so remote that modern historians tend either to dismiss their historicity entirely or, in attempting to empathize with the beliefs of their subjects, suspend the question of historicity indefinitely. Whilst it certainly does not provide a direct lens into the objective truth about such episodes, the spontaneity principle at least suggests a third possibility: namely that people did attribute spiritual significance to coincidences they found genuinely extraordinary and that many hagiographical miracles reflect processes of this type rather than merely a more or less willing retrospective fabrication. What made at least some events miracles, in other words, was not only a particular ontological threshold but a certain epistemic stance – to use Erich Auerbach's phrase, an *Interpretationswille*.³⁹ The case of Marinus clearly supports this view by exposing the rather meagre nature of the phenomena capable of achieving such spiritual significance.

First-Person Writing and Religious Experience: Julian and Augustine

To consider further the significance of this form of truthfulness our discussion must turn away from hagiography to first-person writing. Literature of this sort in late antiquity is rather diverse in character; it is often said with justice that, in contrast to hagiography, no genuine genre of autobiography emerged in late antiquity. Nonetheless, important accounts of spiritual experience, including miraculous events, are contained within first-person works, and it is somewhat surprising that these have generally not been systematically compared with their equivalents in third-person writing. The motivation for such a comparison is not the expectation that first-person writing will automatically yield a more direct access to an objective historical truth; indeed, autobiography's innate and profound subjectivity is a dictum of modern philosophy observed by countless thinkers from Sartre to Derrida.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it presents writers with a different challenge, namely one in which no external authority can validate their claims, and where,

³⁹ E. Auerbach, 'Figura', *Archivum Romanicum: Nuova Rivista di Filologia Romanza* 22 (1938) 451.

⁴⁰ M. Schramm, 'Augustinus' *Confessiones* und die (Un-)Möglichkeit der Autobiographie', *Antike und Abendland* 54 (2008) 173–192.

therefore, potential sources of doubt are more likely to be countered with criteria they present as objective.

The emperor Julian leaves us one of the most substantial bodies of first-person writing in late antiquity. It is also apparent, both from his own writings and from other sources such as Ammianus Marcellinus,⁴¹ that he was guided throughout the course of his life by a sense of divine destiny and by many religious omens. Although on several occasions Julian reports these only in passing,⁴² he goes into more depth when recounting some of his life's most crucial moments, such as in the *Letter to the Athenians* when describing his elevation to the purple:

For one day, they (the legions) halted, and till that time *I knew nothing whatever of what they had determined* (ἄχρις ἧς οὐδὲν ἦδειν ἐγὼ τῶν βεβουλευμένων αὐτοῖς); I call to witness Zeus, Helios, Ares, Athene, and all the other gods that no such suspicion even my entered my mind until that very evening... suddenly the palace was surrounded and they all began to shout aloud, while I was still considering what I ought to do and feeling by no means confident... through an opening in the wall *I prayed to Zeus* (προσεκύνησα τὸν Δία). And when the shouting grew louder still... *I entreated the god to give me a sign* (ἠτέομεν τὸν θεὸν δοῦναι τέρας) and thereupon he showed me a sign and bade me yield and not oppose myself to the will of the army. Nevertheless even after these tokens had been vouchsafed to me *I did not yield without reluctance but resisted as long as I could* (οὐκ εἶξα ἐτοίμως, ἀλλ' ἀντέσχον εἰς ὅσον ἠδυνάμην), and would not accept the salutation or the diadem.⁴³

No one would deny that this passage is highly idealized and self-justificatory: Julian declares his political mission on earth to be decreed by Zeus himself. What is significant for our purposes, however, is the nature of the arguments he advances in defence of this radical claim. It is not difficult to imagine the sorts of criticism people might have levelled against Julian upon learning that the Caesar in Gaul had become emperor: was Julian not just another usurper who had abused his legitimate military authority? Was he really as pious as he claimed, and as loyal to his cousin Constantius? Was the whole coronation in fact a piece of theatre cooked up by him and his lieutenants? As in

⁴¹ See n. 14.

⁴² A useful introduction is provided by A. Monique, 'Fragments autobiographiques dans l'œuvre de Julien', in *L'invention de l'autobiographie d'Hésiode à Saint Augustin*, ed. J.-C. Fredouille (Paris, 1993), 285–303.

⁴³ Julian, *Letter to the Athenians* 284 b–d in *Fragmentum Epistulae, Iuliani Imperatoris quae supersunt*, ed. F.C. Hertlein, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1876) and trans. W.C. Wright, *Julian: Works*, II (London/New York 1913, repr. 1969), 281–283.

the case of Proclus, his defence rests on a principle of spontaneity: the proof of Zeus' hand in events, Julian asks us to believe, is his genuine unwillingness to accept the diadem, indeed his ignorance of the very possibility.

Just like Julian's contemporaries, the modern reader may, of course, choose to believe or disbelieve his account of events and of the state of mind in which he experienced them. Did he speak truthfully? Did he idealize his past in retrospect? There are any number of ways in which either, or both of these possibilities may be true, and we have no way of testing them. What we may observe, however, is the relative frequency with which Julian evokes the spontaneity principle as a measure of spiritual significance when describing his own life. For example, he begins the *Hymn to King Helios* autobiographically, and describes how, even as a youth he felt an extraordinary attraction to the sun and the other heavenly bodies, and somehow experienced an accurate intuition of their workings long before he read any books on the subject, or met scholars versed in that field: his kinship to Helios is, by these details, authenticated.⁴⁴ That this may have included an element of wishful thinking is of only secondary importance; more relevant to our present discussion is the probability that anyone able to give an idealized personal account of this type was also very likely to be highly alert towards the possibility of spiritual significance in the present. Indeed, it is a short step from such alertness to a more or less conscious provocation. Julian ends his *Hymn to King Helios* by telling its dedicatee Sallust that he wrote it over only three nights and, as far as possible, from memory. Far from being an expression of humility, this fact achieves a great spiritual significance: the period of composition reflected the threefold power of Helios.⁴⁵ In the same way, he concludes the *Hymn to the Mother of Gods* with the claim that he had written the piece in a single night, and had no conception of its form until the very moment he asked for writing tablets.⁴⁶ Thus it is by imposing on himself artificial strictures that Julian achieves a sense of proximity to the gods.

⁴⁴ Ibid., *Hymn to King Helios Dedicated to Sallust* 130b–131b.

⁴⁵ Ταῦτά σοι, ὦ φίλε Σαλούστιε, κατὰ τὴν τριπλῆν τοῦ θεοῦ δημιουργίαν ἐν τρισὶ μάλιστα νυξὶν ὡς οἶόν τε ἦν ἐπελθόντα μοι τῇ μνήμῃ καὶ γράψαι πρὸς σὲ ἐτόλμησα: ibid., 157c.

⁴⁶ Ibid., *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 178d–179a.

It is informative to compare Julian's account with the most famous description of personal spiritual experience from late antique literature, namely Augustine's dramatic conversion in the garden at Milan which he recounts in book eight of the *Confessions*:

Behold, suddenly I heard a voice from the house next door; the sound, as it might be, of a boy or a girl, repeating in a sing-song voice a refrain unknown to me: 'Pick it up and read it, pick it up and read it.' Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began to ponder most intensely (*statimque...intentissimus cogitare coepi*) whether children were in the habit of singing a chant of this sort as part of a game of some kind, but I had no recollection of having heard it anywhere (*nec occurrebat omnino audisse me uspiam*). I checked my outburst of tears and arose, taking this to be nothing other than a God-sent command that I should open the Bible and read the first chapter I found, whatever it might be.⁴⁷

Like Julian, Augustine not only recounts a set of phenomena with a particular symbolic potential; rather, he insists on their absolute spontaneity and this serves as the principle by which their authenticity can be asserted in the face of possible doubts concerning over-enthusiasm or over-interpretation. Indeed, both Julian and Augustine effectively place themselves on the side of a sceptical reader, claiming to have countenanced, then overcome, those very doubts which were capable of undermining each episode's religious significance.

It is particularly interesting to consider these guarantees in relation to the wider problem of the historicity of Augustine's conversion and of the *Confessions* more generally. It is not possible here to review this vast and very old debate in depth. Broadly, however, Augustinian scholars have tended either towards a reading of the text as essentially fictional on the one hand, or towards a historicist reading on the other. The principal obstacle facing the first group has been to reconcile Augustine's dogged insistence on the literal truthfulness of Scripture with his apparent willingness to fabricate, or at least to embellish, his own life story. The challenge for the second group is to account for the uncannily fortuitous constellation of symbols present in the garden in terms other than pure chance. Various middle positions, such as Courcelle's argument that Augustine recounted an inner experience

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Confessiones* 8.12.29, ed. J.J. O'Donnell (Oxford, 1992) and trans. P. Burton, *Augustine: Confessions* (London, 2001), 182–183.

in a consciously allegorical way, do not satisfactorily resolve this fundamental dilemma.⁴⁸

Augustine's subtle invocation of the spontaneity principle provides a new argument for supporting the historicist position. To date, controversy about the historicity of the incident has focussed on Augustine's retrospective view: how willing and able was he to tell the truth about the detail of his conversion some ten years later? But if we recognize the spontaneity principle not just as a textual device designed to persuade others, but as a test of reality applicable to one's immediate situation, then we can consider the possibility that the doubts he recorded and overcame were not at all decorative, but in fact a definitive element of the episode and precisely what allowed him to treat it as an epiphany. This is consistent with Crosson's astute observation that the episode posits no challenge to natural laws: Augustine does not question the existence of a real child in the next-door garden any more, we may add, than Marinus questioned the physical existence of the statue and the doorman.⁴⁹ Once the essence of the miracle is recognized to be Augustine's epistemic stance, then the onus of explanation no longer falls on the phenomena themselves, whose heavy symbolism might otherwise prove suspect. Whilst no-one would dispute that the accuracy of Augustine's memory is an entirely unknown quantity, this reading at least removes the idea of a necessary conflict between the author's commitment to truthfulness and the episode's symbolic content. Augustine is no longer just the recorder of a text over which he assumes ownership, but can legitimately be seen as something much closer to what he claimed to be: the interpreter of events whose author was felt to be God.

⁴⁸ 'Il est difficile de parler des choses de l'au-delà sans images ni affabulation': P. Courcelle, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1963) 181. Works broadly in this tradition include J.J. O'Meara, 'Elements of Fiction in Augustine's *Confessions*', in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. J. McWilliam (Waterloo, Ontario, 1992), 77–95. O'Meara emphasises the inevitability of fictitiousness in any description (p. 78). See also P. Frederiksen, 'Paul and Augustine Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions and the Retrospective Self', *Journal of Theological Studies* 37.1 (1986) 3–34; L. Ferrari, 'Saint Augustine's Conversion Scene: the End of a Modern Debate?' *Studia Patristica* 22 (1989) 235–250; A. Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden, 2004), 67. G. Bonner, by contrast, defends the incident's historicity: 'Augustine's Conversion: Historical Fact or Literary Device?' in *Augustinus: Charisteria Augustiniana*, ed. P. Merino and J.M. Torrecilla (Madrid, 1993), 112–114.

⁴⁹ F.J. Crosson, 'Structure and meaning in St. Augustine's *Confessions*', in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. G.B. Matthews (Berkeley, 1999), 32.

It is crucial to recognize that this reading in no way suggests a perspective which is somehow more neutral or more objectively reliable. Whilst it shifts the explanatory emphasis from the motives and capacities of his retrospective position ten years after the conversion towards his epistemic stance at the time, there is no reason to regard this as any less psychologically complex or ideologically susceptible. The incident did not, in other words, simply come out of the blue, but bore the heavy imprint of expectation. As shown by his profound response to Cicero's *Hortensius*⁵⁰ and the *libri Platonici*,⁵¹ Augustine was no stranger to dramatic moments of philosophical inspiration. By the time of his conversion, he had long been, by his own admission, impatient for a clear sign capable of guiding his spiritual search;⁵² he even confessed the continuing temptation of asking God for signs at time of writing.⁵³ It is often remarked that book eight of the *Confessions*, which closes with Augustine's own conversion, also concerns those of several other people: Marius Victorinus, Ponticianus and Saint Anthony. It is crucial to recognize why these models had such a deep and direct impact on Augustine. Firstly, as Michael Williams rightly stresses, Augustine had no doubt about the historicity of these conversions; in fact, he regarded this as one of the most striking aspects of the Anthony story.⁵⁴ Secondly, the sources of these stories – Simplicianus on Marius Victorinus, Ponticianus on himself and Anthony – had related them with the specific intention that Augustine should follow their example.⁵⁵ His acceptance of them, therefore, constituted a belief both in the nature of God's intervention in the world, even in a post-biblical age, and also of what he could reasonably one day expect for himself.

It is a short step from recognizing the importance of such models to regarding the conversion episode itself as an instantiation of his own expectations: precisely the relationship between stories of holy men and the personal hopes of individuals that Brown regarded as the fundamental appeal of hagiographies to contemporary readers.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, this step must be explained in as much detail as possible.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* 3.4.7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.9.13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.14.25; 8.7.18.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10.35.56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.6.14; M.S. Williams, *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine* (Cambridge, 2008), 164.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *Confessiones* 8.5.10; 8.6.14.

⁵⁶ See n. 9.

Whilst we may theoretically accept that the conversion was the product of a certain epistemic stance, the argument will remain limited as long as we can show how this stance manifested itself only on a single day and in one particular place. Are we, as in the case of hagiographical miracles, forced merely to imagine the fertile soil which bore this single, spectacular fruit?

A Spiritual Lifestyle? Augustine at Cassiciacum and Beyond

Apart from the relative detail they contain, one thing that makes Augustine's *Confessions* so valuable as an example of autobiography is the opportunity to compare them to his so-called Cassiciacum dialogues. Written in 387, apparently shortly after the dramatic conversion recorded in the *Confessions*, three of the four dialogues (the exception being the *Soliloquia*), describe the events and conversations that took place amongst Augustine's companions during a spiritual and intellectual retreat in the Italian countryside and therefore offer autobiographical statements of a somewhat different kind. Indeed, some obvious differences between the two accounts – most famously, the dialogues make no mention of the conversion in the Milanese garden and attribute Augustine's academic retirement more obliquely to *pectoris dolor*⁵⁷ – have been exploited by those attempting to challenge the historicity of one or other account.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the dialogues at least purport to be more or less precise transcriptions of real conversations recorded by a secretary (*notarius*), and whilst we may certainly assume some form of redaction, their historicity has been convincingly defended by Madec who argues that the *notarius* should be seen not as an affectation of a literary nature but as the no less self-conscious expression of celebrated social practice.⁵⁹

In the present context, the dialogues are significant because they offer an insight into a spiritually charged atmosphere very close in time to Augustine's conversion. One striking feature of the prevailing

⁵⁷ *Contra Academicos*, ed. P. Knöll, CSEL 63 (Vienna/Leipzig, 1922) 2.2.2.

⁵⁸ See note 48 for question of the historicity of the *Confessions*. J.J. O'Meara dismisses all assurances of truthfulness in the Cassiciacum dialogues as 'worthless': 'The Historicity of Augustine's early Dialogues', in idem, *Studies in Augustine and Eriugena* (Washington, D.C., 1992), 316 n. 7.

⁵⁹ G. Madec, 'L'historicité des *Dialogues de Cassiciacum*', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 32 (1986) 207–231.

social atmosphere is how religiously symbolic the world becomes; how many events potentially evoke spiritual interpretation. The sound of running water on stones in the night becomes an opportunity to reflect on God's hidden ordering of the universe;⁶⁰ a visit to the toilet is symbolic of the physical depths from which god rescues mankind.⁶¹ A certain metaphorical or symbolic significance is detected in a great diversity of phenomena. What is striking is not only their plausibility, but also how consistent their identification and interpretation is with normal conversational habits. At the most minimal level, there were mere humorous comparisons: don't think you can get away with a Tuscan argument just because you're on a farm!⁶² Other analogies were more ambiguous: when the rich birthday meal is compared to a rich spiritual feast,⁶³ when the bright weather inspires the group to brighten up their minds,⁶⁴ are these mere pleasantries or do they have a genuine spiritual meaning? The difficulty in answering this question is precisely the point: Augustine's perception and discourse, like those of most people, are full of metaphors of many different kinds; what marked Augustine and his companions out was their relative willingness at least to consider deeper truths in these parallels.

Nor are these habits of scrutiny limited only to observable phenomena. Against the backdrop of a beautiful dawn, Augustine's disciple Licentius, who confessed to an excessive interest in secular verse, claims to have been suddenly and reluctantly (*tam aegre*) overcome by a feeling of disinterest in poetry, and by a corresponding enthusiasm for the greater beauty of Philosophy. 'In very truth', he asks, 'is not this a conversion to God?'⁶⁵ The content of this spiritual moment – a sudden change in mood – is not phenomenal at all but purely internal. Nonetheless, the significance Licentius attributes to it still depends on a principle of spontaneity, the firm conviction that it was against his will. And Licentius is not the only companion of Augustine to locate such significance in introspection. According to the *Confessions*, Monica often felt herself able 'as if by a taste not explicable in words' to distinguish between the word of God and the musings of her own

⁶⁰ Augustine, *De Ordine* 1.3.6, ed. J. Doignon (Paris, 1997).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1.8.22.

⁶² *Ibid.*, *Contra Academicos* 3.4.9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, *De Beata Vita* 2.9, ed. P. Knöll in CSEL 63 (Vienna/Leipzig, 1922).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, *Contra Academicos* 2.4.10.

⁶⁵ 'Non hoc est vere in deum converti?' *ibid.*, *De Ordine* 1.8.23 and trans. R.P. Russell, *On Order* (London, 1939), 260.

mind⁶⁶ – a capacity fully in keeping with the *inflammatio* attributed to her at Cassiciacum.⁶⁷

Against this backdrop, it becomes clear that Augustine's conversion was much more than an isolated incident; indeed, it was more than the product of his own particular epistemic stance. Rather, it sprang from something more substantial and normative, something we should perhaps term a way of life both in the sense that it was sustained over extended periods of time and that it was shared and encouraged by companions. But whilst this reading reveals the continuity of Augustine's conversion with much broader spiritual habits, it is also crucial to recognize what made it exceptional and the methods behind such a judgement. Augustine's reaction to Licentius' putative conversion is highly revealing in this respect: he may treat it benignly but, in complete contrast to his own conversion, he reserves judgement on the episode's authenticity and the moment seems to pass. We may suspect the reasons why: Licentius' youthful enthusiasm, and the heady atmosphere of intellectual and religious companionship were an intoxicating mixture; the mere sense that the change in mood had happened reluctantly was not sufficient to dispel these lingering doubts. In a life capable of producing so many signs, not every passing sentiment could legitimately be treated as epiphanic. A certain discernment was vital, and the same spontaneity principle which could identify phenomena as truly exceptional necessarily had to be capable of identifying the far greater number of incidents which fell short of this threshold.

It is instructive to imagine the nature of this lifestyle, the consequences of these beliefs on one's daily experience of the world. Essentially, what animated it was the tension between two poles: on the one hand, an extremely open system of signification, the extraordinary ubiquity of possible spiritual meaning, rooted in a concealed and all-embracing order. Of the authors we have considered in this paper, only Augustine, and to a lesser extent Julian, allows us to glimpse anything more than the outline of this atmosphere, although I strongly suspect that, if the sources existed, something similar could be said of many spiritually-minded people in late antiquity. But spiritual interpretation required another pole: namely a genuine sense of certainty, a

⁶⁶ 'dicebat enim discernere se nescio quo sapore, quem verbis explicare non poterat, quid interesset inter revelantem te et animam suam somniantem': *ibid.*, *Confessiones* 6.13.23.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, *De ordine* 2.1.1; *De beata vita* 4.35.

measure of which was the spontaneity principle. Such certainty could only take the form of a sense of a externality to oneself, even if that meant nothing more concrete than an unfamiliar 'taste' or a surprising and unwilling thought.

Scholars of Augustine have long debated both the historicity and the relative importance of the conversion in the garden. In the scheme of things, how much did the events of that day count, and how much did they represent – whether symbolically or psychologically – much longer processes? A consideration of Augustine's spiritual lifestyle in the round suggests a nuanced answer to this question. On the one hand it was a life of intense and long-term attentiveness, a life of prolonged trial and error; on the other, it was a life inevitably shaped by its intellectual prejudices. As long as Augustine believed in the historical reality of conversion as a human possibility, then his own dramatic conversion was, in a certain sense, inevitable. It is true that the events of the garden, which were pregnant with symbolism and the necessary spontaneity did verify the possibility of true conversion. But to focus on these events alone conceals a still more fundamental truth: namely that no number of less dramatic events could ever, to borrow Karl Popper's words,⁶⁸ falsify the hypothesis that God did communicate through moments such as these, and to people like Augustine. Because the system of trial and error was ultimately geared towards achieving a single definite conclusion, all these lesser moments indicated was the temporary unreadiness of his soul, and therefore served merely as a motivation for renewed patience. However much they appealed to purportedly objective criteria, the doubts that kept Augustine waiting, like those of a basically sympathetic audience addressed by hagiographers did not in themselves threaten the whole edifice of belief from its foundations.

Conclusion: Text and Life

Our enquiry began by asking whether hagiographies and other spiritual writings from late antiquity were more akin to theology or to historiography, whether they contained only an internal logic or whether they were open to the world of familiar experience – questions of great

⁶⁸ K. Popper, *Science: Conjectures and Refutations in Philosophy of Science: the Central Issues*, ed. M. Curd and J.A. Cover (New York, 1988) 3–10.

importance both for the intellectual contents of such works and also for any modern use of them. In doing so, we compared three different kinds of guarantee such works contain: the first, a commonsense guarantee that the method of composition was thorough and honest; the second, an appeal to authority based on an accepted core of belief; the third, a principle of spontaneity which in a sense combined the others and purported to be an objective criterion. Our answer is necessarily a complex one. On the one hand, this third source of truthfulness, for all its aspirations to objectivity, is likely to have been equally imbued with the same ideological assumptions which were basic to the first two. On the other hand, the logic which informed it, far from being enclosed within a purely textual realm had a great applicability to the phenomenal world, even to the extent of forming the basis of a spiritually-focused lifestyle.

Our analysis would be incomplete without two final points. Although we have referred many times to religious doubt throughout this paper, it may seem that, by equating the guarantees of truthfulness offered in religious texts with a certain spiritual lifestyle we have ultimately reaffirmed late antiquity's outmoded reputation for excessive superstition. But at least in one very important respect, this characterization would be erroneous. Ever since Malinowski, scholars have argued that the essential motive for superstitious behaviour is the attempt by humans to assert control over unpredictability and uncertainty by mastering the hidden mechanisms of reality.⁶⁹ The techniques of spiritual scrutiny described above aimed, in a sense, at precisely the opposite of this: the discovery of, and submission to, a reality entirely and demonstrably independent and distinct from the chaos of the phenomenal world and from human influence. Since, within this intellectual context, the object of submission was the only reality which could be regarded as absolutely objective, such a quest can hardly be regarded as superstitious or, for that matter, irrational.

This is, of course, a point of great significance for intellectual historians who wish to understand the nature of hagiographies and other spiritual texts. But if such texts were products of intellectual processes which preceded the act of writing, processes which were geared towards phenomenal reality, then it also has important lessons for scholars of a more positivist bent. By following a definition of reality rooted in

⁶⁹ B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (New York, 1948, repr. 1978), 139–140.

contingency and suspicious of textuality, historians of this type can underestimate the concrete effects of an alternative definition of reality contained within the sources: namely one rooted in eternity and transcendence, and of which a complete and perfect textuality, embodied for Christians not only in the Biblical text but also in the events of sacred history, was the only definitive earthly expression. The challenge this poses goes beyond empathy; rather it invites us to recognize that the mere human expectation of a reality communicated in this form can act as a means of ordering the very phenomena which constitute the historian's subject matter. By sifting through hagiographies for information which is, in Ferdinand Lotter's phrase, *tendenzneutral*,⁷⁰ we can overlook how deeply events were already infused with textual influence long before anyone put pen to paper.

⁷⁰ F. Lotter, *Severinus von Noricum: Legende und historische Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart, 1976), 2, 79.

THE CULT OF THE SAINTS AND RELIGIOUS PROCESSIONS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Peter Kritzinger

*Introduction*¹

Political representations are a general phenomenon which we encounter in our daily lives, and this was as true in the past as it is now.² A close connection exists between power and representation, in particular in the context of institutions, hierarchies or rituals.³ Indeed, the establishment of power, whether of an individual or a group, is often connected with the elaboration of public, ritualised forms of display.

¹ I am grateful to Prof. Walter Ameling, Peter Turner, Prof. Klaus Zimmermann and Phil Booth for the assistance they offered during the preparation of this paper. The following literature will be quoted in abbreviated form: O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der Antiken Welt* (Darmstadt, 42000); R. Palanque, *Saint Ambroise et l'empire Romain* (Paris, 1933); F. Homes-Dudden, *The life and time of St. Ambrose* (Oxford, 1935); J.H. van Haeringen, 'De Valentiniano II et Ambrosio. Illustrantur et dirigitur anno 386 gestae', *Mnemosyne* 5 (1937) 28–33, 152–158, 229–240; A. Paredi, *S. Ambrogio e la sua età* (Mailand, 1960); A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche* (Darmstadt, 31980); P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 1981); G. Nauroy, 'Le fouet et le miel: le combat d'Ambroise en 386 contre l'arianisme Milanais', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 23 (1988) 3–86; S. Mazzarino, *Storia sociale del vescovo Ambrogio* (Rome, 1989); N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley, CA, 1994); D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflict* (Oxford, 1995); J. San Bernardino, 'Sub imperio discordiae: l'uomo che voleva essere Eliseo (giugno 386)', in *Nec timeo mori*, ed. L.F. Pizzolato and M. Rizzi (Milan, 1998), 709–737; T.D. Barnes, 'Ambrose and the Basilicas of Milan in 385 and 386: The Primary Documents and their Implications', *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 4 (2000) 282–299; N. Dörner, 'Ambrosius in Trier', *Historia* 50 (2001), 217–243.

² See, for example, W. Mitchell, 'Representation', in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin (Chicago, IL, 1990), 66–79 at 69: 'Representation describes the signs that stand in for and take the place of something else'. Another important aspect of the term describes the manner in which political power is publicly acknowledged to lie in the hands of an individual or a small group: cf. G. Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale* (Darmstadt, 2003), esp. 10–14. It is in these senses that we shall use the term in this paper.

³ Cf. Alföldi, 'Repräsentation', xf; O. Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee* (Darmstadt, 1956), 1ff.

When, at the beginning of the fourth century, the Christian religion was *de iure* accepted by the *Imperium Romanum*, the influence and significance of Christianity within late antique society increased, with a corresponding accumulation of power in the hands of its leaders. The new religion had, however, not yet developed an adequate form of presenting its power in public. In the words of Peter Brown, ‘The leaders of the Christian community found themselves in a difficult position. They had all the means of social dominance, and none of the means of showing it in an acceptable form.’⁴ Brown’s statement refers to the fourth and early fifth century, but by the sixth century the situation had changed. Now the Church – above all its highest representatives – had no further difficulties in displaying its social dominance. The following vivid account, for instance, taken from the *Liber Pontificalis*, describes Pope John’s arrival in Constantinople in 524/25 AD: ‘While they were travelling with pope John, the whole city came out to meet the blessed John at the fifteenth mile with torches and crosses in honour of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul [...]. Then the Emperor Justin gave honour to God, abased himself on the ground and prostrated himself before the blessed Pope John.’⁵ Thus, by the sixth century, the episcopal office had found a way to express its very public and powerful position in society. But while it is commonly known that in the Middle Ages bishops were received as described here in the *Liber Pontificalis*, no conclusive answers exist to the questions when, why and how the episcopate developed or adopted such ritualised forms of representation.⁶

Within this formative period we shall look at an event which not only has been said to ‘marque un tournant décisif dans l’histoire du culte des saints et leurs reliques’,⁷ but which also testifies to the efforts of a bishop, Ambrose of Milan, in articulating his dominant position in late antique society. In the end, as a consequence of his remarkable success, Ambrose’s efforts crystallised into ritualised procedures which are still used today by the western episcopate.

⁴ P. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 40.

⁵ *Le Liber pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris, 1955) 1.275; trans. R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs* (Liverpool, 2000), 51.

⁶ Cf. M. Heinzlmann, ‘Translation’, *Lexikon des Mittelalters* VIII: 947ff.

⁷ A. Rimoldi, ‘Gervais et Protais’, *Dictionnaire d’Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique* XX: 1074.

Previous History

Our first aim is to demonstrate how power accumulated in Ambrose's hands. The so-called 'fight for the basilicas' in Milan has been seen as crucial in that process, and has been the subject of an impressive amount of scholarly work. Unfortunately, this is not the place for a full examination of the question, and for the present purpose a brief overview will suffice.

The conflict between Ambrose and the emperor started in the first half of AD 385. The bone of contention was the emperor's request that the Arians too should have access to the Milanese basilica Portiana.⁸ Ambrose simply refused. Accordingly, the bishop was called to the consistory, and during the subsequent disputation an angry crowd appeared in front of the palace. Although Ambrose does not mention any explicit connections between the crowd and himself, it is hard to believe that he had in no way been involved in this impromptu rebellion.

This was not the first time that a bishop had used the mob to undermine imperial orders. A few years earlier Dionysius – an important influence upon, and predecessor of, Ambrose – had agitated the people of Milan with his homilies which pronounced that a synod needed to be evacuated from the basilica into the imperial palace.⁹ Ambrose knew this episode all too well, and we can deduce from his own words that it served him as an example.¹⁰

However, the emperor begged Ambrose to appease his people. The bishop accepted, although not before he had received the promise that *basilicam ecclesiae nullus invaderet*.¹¹ With this promise the bishop

⁸ We can assume from Ambr. *Ep.* 75a(21a), 29, that the emperor wanted only one church (*basilicam*). In the years 380/81 a number of decrees were promulgated which forbade Arians assemblies in the cities: *Codex Theodosianus* 16, 1, 2, 1 (28. Feb. 380); 16, 5, 6 (10. Jan. 381); 16, 10, 7 (21. Dec. 381). Even the emperor had to act according to the law: Ambr. *Ep.* 75a(21a), 7: *leges enim imperator fert, quas primus ipse custodiat*. This legal situation allowed the Arians to claim only the basilica Portiana which stood outside the walls. Cf. Seeck, *Geschichte*, V: 201; H. Campenhausen, *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1929), 57 ff.

⁹ For the events, see Athan. *Hist. Arian.* 6, 31; Hil. *Syn.* 1223 seq; Soz. *H.E.* 4, 9, 1–9; Sulp. *Sev. Chron.* 2, 39, 3–7; *V. Mart.* 7.

¹⁰ Ambr. *Ep.ex.Coll.* 14(63), 68: *Itaque memorabiles viri [Eusebius and Dionysius] circumdati armis, vallati exercitu cum raperentur de ecclesia triumphabant de imperio [...]*. Cf. also Ambr. *Ep.ex.Coll.* 7, 4f; 74(40), 6.

¹¹ The fact that the promise referred to a single basilica (i.e. Portiana) becomes important a year later.

insured that the basilica Portiana could not in future be claimed by the Arians.

After this debacle Valentinian II left Milan and returned only at the end of 385. The court seems to have utilised the time in Aquileia to elaborate a new plan. The first step was the promulgation of a law on 23rd January 386,¹² a law which contemporaries argued was directed against Ambrose.¹³ It would enable the court to require access to a basilica without reneging on the promise given to Ambrose almost a year earlier.¹⁴ This new law also allowed Arians to congregate within the city walls. Thus, the court could, from now on, claim access not only to the basilica Portiana, which the emperor promised not to do, but any other basilica in Milan within or outside the city's walls.

The conflict started again when the court sent Ambrose the demand for access to the basilica Nova.¹⁵ Once again the bishop was invited to the consistory, but Ambrose had substantial arguments which he deployed to undermine the emperor's proposal.¹⁶ His answer is not without irony (*Ep.* 75(21), 9):

Ubi illud constituimus, imperator, quod ipse tuum iudicium declarasti, immo etiam dedisti leges, ne cui esset liberum aliud iudicare? [...] Visne igitur experiar, ut incipiant hi qui iudices eliguntur aut adversus tuam

¹² CT 16, 1, 4. Engl. translation: Pharr C., *The Theodosian Code*, 82007, 440.

¹³ E.g. Soz. *H.E.* 7, 13, 5. As Santo Mazzarino has pointed out: 'Ovviamente la legge era diretta, pur non faccendone nome, soprattutto contro Ambrogio': *Storia sociale*, 25.

¹⁴ CT 16, 1, 4.

¹⁵ Although Timothy Barnes ultimately presented arguments which support the old Maurist dating of *Ep.* 76(20), there exist serious counter arguments. Barnes ('Ambrose and the Basilicas', 290) says: 'the letter to Marcellina nowhere mentions or alludes to the law of 23 January 386 allowing homoeans to assembly for worship.' It is true that Ambrose mentioned the new law repeatedly both in the letter to Valentinian and in the *sermo contra Auxentium*. See e.g. *Ambr. Ep.* 75(21), 1; 9; 20; 75(a), 7; cf. also Soz. *H.E.* 7, 13, 5 seq. It is also true that CT 16, 1, 4 is not mentioned directly in *Ep.* 76(20). But the fact that the Arians called for the basilica Nova must be cited as an indirect reference to the new law. As the basilica Nova was situated inside the city walls, the law CT 16, 1, 4 has to be assumed, for it is a *conditio sine qua non*. And another strong argument is obviously *Ambr. Ep.* 75a(21a), 29: *quasi vero superiore anno quando ad palatium sum petitus* – written in 386! The events described in epistle 76(20) therefore took place in 386.

¹⁶ In one of the last chapters Ambrose mentions a reason: *Ep.* 75a(21a), 19: *Atque utinam liquido mihi pateret quod Arrianis ecclesia minime traderetur*. From the whole epistle it can be deduced that this was the main but not the only reason for the fight. Cf. *Ambr. Ep.* 75(21), 4; 7; 8; 14; 15.

*venire sententiam aut certe excusare quod imperatoris tam severo et tam districto imperio non potuerint obviare?*¹⁷

Yet again Ambrose demonstrated his skill as a jurist. He had turned the tables and played on the very law which had been promulgated to overcome his resistance.

On Sunday 29th March Ambrose was occupied in the basilica Maior with arrangements for baptism.¹⁸ At that moment he heard that magistrates had set up *vela* for the emperor in the basilica Portiana.¹⁹ Just as a year earlier, a violent mob was set in motion – this time centred upon the basilica Portiana and, once again of course, through no fault of Ambrose's own. At this point the crowd's behaviour must be called, in every sense, a revolt against the emperor and the law, a fact which Ambrose avoided acknowledging *expressis verbis*. An Arian presbyter, Castulus, was captured by the rebellion and only Ambrose's intervention saved his life. The mob was carried away to an extreme and the only possible catalyst was the bishop himself. What else than the famous *sermones* of Ambrose could have excited the crowd to such violent action?²⁰

The basilica Portiana was now occupied by the mob, and even Ambrose speaks of revolt: *seditio!* For the last time the emperor commanded the bishop to appease the mob, but for all those who could remember the events of the year 385 Ambrose's answer must have sounded like a bad joke (*Ep.* 76(20), 10):

Exigebatur a me ut compescerem populum; referebam in meo iure esse ut non excitarem, in dei manu uti mitigaret; postremo si me incentorem putaret, iam in me vindicari oportere vel abduci me in quas vellet terrarum solitudines.

In the course of the next day three basilicas were occupied by the Catholic community and besieged by imperial troops.²¹ It is by no means a coincidence that Ambrose at this point introduced the use of singing

¹⁷ Cf. also *Ambr. Ep.* 75(21), 9–12.

¹⁸ G. Banterle, *Sant Ambrogio. Discorsi et Lettere II/III* (Milan, 1988), 107, note 1. Cf. D. Kinney, 'Le chiese paleocristiane di Mediolanum', in *Milano, una capitale da Ambrogio ai Carolingi*, ed. C. Bertelli (Milan, 1987), 53–57.

¹⁹ *Ambr. Ep.* 76(20), 4f.

²⁰ Already at the beginning of the conflict a *comes* of the emperor had challenged Ambrose to resign the basilica peacefully. They knew very well what was going to happen. *Ambr. Ep.* 76(20), 2: *ne quid populus turbarum movere.*

²¹ *Ambr. Ep.* 76(20), 11f.

to the western liturgy, a fact recognised already by contemporaries.²² *Hymnorum quoque meorum carminibus deceptum populum ferunt.*²³ It is hard for moderns to imagine how much singing could impress a community,²⁴ but in fact Ambrose was not the first to use the power of music to strengthen the cohesion of his community,²⁵ for as Paulinus of Milan correctly said, the practice had been imported from the east.²⁶ Such measures were used by the Catholic bishop to bind the crowd closer to his person. The external pressure imposed by the court in fact even strengthened the cohesive power in his community.

Meanwhile in the basilica Portiana the *vela* were removed by the crowd.²⁷ In other words, the mob attacked imperial symbols and therefore the emperor in person. 'It was a children's joke!' Ambrose said, showing that he knew that this was a crime against the throne.²⁸ In an unexpected move, however, some of the imperial troops switched sides.²⁹ It is most probable that Ambrose's good connections to the court were the main cause, for some of the highest magistrates also

²² Chron.Gall. CCCCLII, 14: *Hymni Ambrosii compositi, qui / numquam ante in aecclesiis Latinis modulibus canebantur.* See also R. Burgess, 'The Gallic Chronicle of 452', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul. Revisiting the Sources*, ed. R.W. Mathisen and D. Shanzer (Aldershot, 2001), 52–84, esp. 68. Cf. Aug. Conf. 9, 7, 16; Paul.Med. V.Ambr. 13, 3. See also U. Volp, *Tod und Ritual in den christlichen Gemeinden der Antike* (Leiden, 2002), 137–148.

²³ Ambr. Ep. 75a(21a), 23.

²⁴ Augustine describes the effect of a hymn (Conf. 9, 6, 14): *Quantum fleui in hymnis et canticis tuis suave sonantis ecclesiae tuae vocibus conmotus acriter! Voces illae influebant auribus meis et eliquabatur veritas in cor meum et exaestuabat inde affectus pietatis, et currebant lacrimae, et bene mihi erat cum eis.* Idem, *Enarr. in Ps.* 32, 1, 8 (CCSL 38, 254).

²⁵ P. Hanroncourt, 'Die religiöse Bedeutung von Musik und Gesang', in *Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft* 3, ed. H.B. Meyer et al. (Regensburg, 1987), 138–143 at 139: 'Allen verschiedenen Arten kultischen Musizierens ist die Tendenz gemeinsam, die Kulturteilnehmer mit Hilfe von Musik in möglichst vollständige emotionale Übereinstimmung zu bringen und ihnen diesselben Impulse zu geben.'

²⁶ When Saint Babylas had to be transferred from Daphne to Antioch a great number of people accompanied the saint, singing all the way against the emperor. As far as I am aware this is the first example testifying an instrumentalisation of music's power for political aims by Christians. See Chrys. Hom.Bab. 2ff; Greg.Naz. c.Jul. 1, 25; Soz. H.E. 5, 19, 17–19. Cf. K. Rosen, *Kaiser, Gott und Christenhasser* (Stuttgart, 2006), 293ff.

²⁷ Ambr. Ep. 76(20), 22: *Haec ego dicebam miratus imperatoris animum studio militum, obsecratione comitum, precatu populi posse mitescere. Interea nuntiatur mihi missum notarium qui mandata deferret.*

²⁸ Ambr. Ep. 76(20), 24. Cf. Nauroy, 'Le fouet', 77–79.

²⁹ Ambr. Ep. 76(20), 11; 13; 21; Paul.Med., V.Ambr. 13, 2.

took his side.³⁰ At this point the fight between emperor and bishop was decided, for Valentinian's most important support was lost and the young emperor was totally isolated. Valentinian however sent a messenger who accused Ambrose of usurpation: 'I want to know if you are an usurper, so that I know how to proceed against you.'³¹ But the truth was that the emperor was not in the position to 'proceed' against Ambrose at all; his threat was empty and the bishop called his bluff. The following day (Holy Thursday) the troops were removed.³² The emperor's defeat was definitive and visible to all.

It remains to note that the conflict over the basilicas was not limited to Milan, but had far wider dimensions.³³ Timothy D. Barnes has convincingly demonstrated that Ambrose of Milan was also able to rally Magnus Maximus *and* Theodosius to his cause,³⁴ and in fact it is precisely in this period that a convergence between the usurper Maximus and the Emperor Theodosius can be observed.³⁵ Ambrose was thus able to isolate the young and inexperienced Valentinian II at the highest political level.³⁶ His victory was complete.³⁷ The world had never witnessed a more powerful Christian bishop.

³⁰ See Ambr. *Ep.* 76(20), 7; 12; 16; 20; 21; 27. See also Barnes, 'Ambrose and the Basilicas', 292ff.

³¹ Ambr. *Ep.* 76(20), 22. According to another accusation, Ambrose wanted to be more powerful than the emperor (*Ep.* 75a(21a), 30; 76(20), 18). Although these accusations are not identical, both of them nonetheless point in the same direction. The term *tyrannus* is well interpreted by G. Coppa, *Opere di Sant'Ambrogio* (Torino, 1969), 931, note 31.

³² Ambr. *Ep.* 76(20), 26: *Erat autem dies quo sese dominus pro nobis tradidit.*

³³ Barnes, 'Ambrose and the Basilicas', 298: 'the conflict over the basilicas of Milan was relevant to imperial politics at the highest level'. Cf. San Bernardino, 'Sub imperio', 718 f.

³⁴ Theod. *H.E.* 5, 13–14; Barnes, 'Ambrose and the Basilicas', 295ff.

³⁵ Zos. *H.E.* 4, 37, 4; RIC 9, 1933, 233, 83d; H. Baldus, 'Theodosius der Große und die Revolte des Magnus Maximus: das Zeugnis der Münzen', *Chiron* 14 (1984) 175–192.

³⁶ Coll. Av. 39, 7 (CSEL 34, 88–90; here 90): *Puto enim recognoscas, quod nemo hoc suaderet inimicus. Haec amabiliter a nobis dicta esse opto ut intellegas. Spero quod credas.* Theodoret (*H.E.* 5, 14) mentions an admonition written by Theodosius to Valentinian, which unfortunately is not preserved.

³⁷ San Bernardino, 'Sub Imperio', 719: 'Godeva [i.e. the battle between Catholics and Arians] di una estesa storia che rimontava a più di quaranta anni prima e che adesso era arrivata al suo culmine.' In fact, it was not the climax but the definite end of this conflict. See Nauroy, 'Le fouet', 69: 'En réalité, l'affaire des basiliques était bel et bien close.'

Relic Translation and Triumph Parade

After Easter Ambrose found himself in a situation where (to use Brown's words again) he 'had all the means of social dominance, and none of the means of showing it in acceptable form.' Jesús San Bernardino was right to insist on a connection between the conflict over the basilicas and the relic translation of Gervasius and Protasius.³⁸ San Bernardino arrives at the conclusion that 'la protezione offerta da Gervasio e Protasio aveva oggetto la chiesa di Milano e non la città: si trattava di un vincolo ecclesiale, non cittadino.'³⁹ This was *la grande festa finale* after a long and hard fight.

Shortly after his fabulous victory on 19th June 386, Bishop Ambrose translated the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius to the newly erected basilica Ambrosiana.⁴⁰ Ambrose described the events in a letter to his sister Marcellina.⁴¹ On 17th June, two days before the translation, the bishop was inspired by a vision of the two saints. They told him how their bodies were lying near the *cancelli* of the *memoria* of Nabor and Felix and asked the bishop that he relocate them. Immediately, therefore, they were saved and their relics were displayed to the public.⁴² With this action, however, the bishop had broken more than one imperial edict.⁴³ We have already seen Ambrose's magisterial command of the law,⁴⁴ and we therefore may conclude that he violated these decrees in full knowledge. Why should Ambrose risk so much upon an illegal translation? What exactly did he expect from the *translatio reliquiae*?

³⁸ There can be no doubt that these events were linked. Ambrose himself said (*Ep. 77(22)*, 10): *Gratia tibi, domine Iesu, quod hoc tempore tales nobis sanctorum martyrum spiritus excitasti, quo ecclesia tua praesidia maiora desiderat*. Cf. *Aug. Conf. 9*, 7, 16: *Tunc memorato antistiti tuo per visum aperuisti quo loco laterent martyrum corpora Protasii et Gervasii, [...] unde opportune promeres ad coerendam rabiem femineam sed regiam*; *Paul. Med., V. Ambr. 14*, 3: *Sed his beneficiis martyrum in quantum crescebat fides ecclesiae Catholicae, in tantum Arrianorum perfidia minuebatur*.

³⁹ San Bernardino, 'Sub imperio', 734.

⁴⁰ The day of the *inventio* of the bodies was celebrated at Carthage. Therefore it is possible to reconstruct the exact date of the *inventio*. See *Aug. Serm. 286*, 5, 4.

⁴¹ *Ambr. Ep. 77(22)*.

⁴² *Aug. Conf. 9*, 7, 15f; *Civ. Dei 22*, 8, 2; *Ambr. Ep. 77(22)*, 10; *Paul. Med. V. Ambr. 32*, 2f. Cf. Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 37: 'What was new was the speed and the certainty of touch with which Ambrose appropriated the relics.'

⁴³ See *CJ 9*, 19, 4, 8 (365/57); *CT 9*, 17, 7 (386); cf. *Nov. Val. 3*, 22; *Dig. 47*, 12, 7. Ambrose's behaviour set a precedent. It changed the behaviour of the episcopate towards the state. For the aftermath, see N. Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints. Formation coutumière d'un droit* (Paris, 1975), 26–41.

⁴⁴ Indeed, *CT 9*, 17, 7 was promulgated only a few months before.

To find an answer we must reconstruct the procedure for relic translation at that time. The main problem, however, is that no written source from the fourth century describes such an event. Only from the so-called *Trierer Elfenbeinplatte*, a half-relief ivory tablet, are we able to reconstruct a contemporary relic translation.⁴⁵ Several unusual details on the tablet indicate that the artist was referring to one specific translation. Despite repeated attempts, however, it has proven impossible to connect the event as illustrated with a relic translation known from the literary sources.⁴⁶

The miniature carving – the tablet is about 15cm long – shows a procession led by the emperor.⁴⁷ He is followed by the magistrates, recognisable by their clothes. All the participants of the pageant and even the emperor are walking, and all hold a torch or candle in their hands. A woman welcomes the procession. Judging from her clothes and jewellery she must be the mother, sister or wife of the emperor. The procession passes in front of a great number of observers standing under the arcades of a huge building, on top of which are stood some clerics. They swing censers with one hand, while the other is close to their ear. This pictorial illustration has been plausibly explained as a gesture of singing.⁴⁸ The clerics knew the text of their hymns by heart, and so could lead the crowd in the refrains.⁴⁹ On the extreme left of the ivory tablet we see a four-wheeled wagon pulled by mules. Two

⁴⁵ N. Irsch, *Der Dom zu Trier* (Düsseldorf, 1931); B. Fischer, 'Die Elfenbeintafel des Trierer Domschatzes. Zu ihrer jüngsten Deutung durch Stylianos Pelikades 1952', *Kurtrierisches Jahrbuch* 9 (1969) 5–19; W.F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz 31976), 95f, n. 143; K.G. Holum and G. Vikan, 'The Trier Ivory, *Adventus* Ceremonial, and the Relics of St. Stephen', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33 (1979) 114–133; *Gallien in der Spätantike. Von Kaiser Constantin zu Frankenkönig Childerich*, ed. G. Waurick (Mainz, 1980), 238ff, n. 384; *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, ed. H. Beck and P.C. Bol (Frankfurt, 1983), 675ff; W. Weber, 'Die Reliquienprozession auf der Elfenbeintafel des Trierer Domschatzes und das kaiserliche Hofzeremoniell', *Trierer Zeitschrift* 42 (1979) 135–153.

⁴⁶ The latest attempt to ascribe the picture to a concrete event presented by Edina Bozoky (*La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint Louis protection collective et légitimation du pouvoir* (Paris, 2006), esp. 89–91) is still unconvincing. Probably the most curious description of the *Trierer Elfenbeinplatte* can be found: H. Röckelein, 'Translatio', *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 35 (2007) 221.

⁴⁷ The pictorial language (diadem, imperial brooch, *palludamentum*, ornated shoes, belt etc.) leaves no doubt: the leading figure is the emperor.

⁴⁸ A. Hermann, 'Mit der Hand singen. Ein Beitrag zur Erklärung der Trierer Elfenbeintafel', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 1 (1958) 105–108.

⁴⁹ *Soz. H.E.* 5, 19, 19: Ἐξήρχον δὲ τῶν ψαλμῶν τοῖς ἄλλοις οἱ τούτοις ἀκριβοῦντες, καὶ ζυνεπήχει τὸ πλῆθος ἐν συμφωνίᾳ καὶ αὐτήν τὴν ῥῆσιν ἐπῆδεν ἡσχύνθησαν πάντες οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τοῖς γλυπτοῖς καὶ οἱ πεποιθότες τοῖς εἰδώλοις. Cf. A. Franz, *Tageslauf und Heilsgeschichte* (Ottilien, 1994) 15–19; 27f.

bishops are sitting on the top of the *carrus* – they can be easily recognized by their *pallia*. It would however be unthinkable in any other situation that an emperor walk while a subject be driven in a carriage.⁵⁰ The bishops are holding a relic-case between them.

The form of this procession is practically identical with the *adventus Augusti*,⁵¹ which in turn derived directly from the triumph-parade.⁵² The commonalities between the emperor's *adventus* and the relic translation are indeed striking: emperors were received with alternating chorus;⁵³ the *honoratiori* walked in front of the emperor in order of their dignity;⁵⁴ the participants held torches in their hands.⁵⁵ There can be no doubt, in fact, that the appearance of the relic translation, which the *Trierer Elfenbeinplatte* shows, derives from the *adventus Augusti*. At first, the close affinity between *adventus*, triumph procession and relic-translation might seem surprising, for the former ceremonial forms – *adventus* and triumph – were strictly reserved for the emperor.⁵⁶ For the relics of saints, however, only the highest worldly honour was sufficient. Yet once relics were involved, the ceremony

⁵⁰ Ammianus claims, for instance, that Diocletian penalised Caesar Galerius precisely in that way. Amm.Marc. 14, 11, 10; cf. also 22, 7, 1; Hier. *Chron.* ad Ann. 301; Johannes Lyd. *de Mag.* 1, 18. Cf. Alföldi, 'Repräsentation', 44f.

⁵¹ *Adventus Augusti*: K. Fittschen, 'Das Bildprogramm des Trajansbogen zu Benevent', *Archäologische Anzeiger* (1972) 742–788; H.P. Laubscher, *Der Reliefschmuck des Galeriusbogen in Thessaloniki* (Berlin, 1975), esp. 217f; S.G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 1981), esp. 39–44; 62–66; P. Dufraigne, *Adventus Augusti, Adventus Christi* (Paris, 1994), esp. 78f; 83–94; 249–325.

⁵² In the case of the *adventus principum*, the highest magistrates, strictly subdivided according to rank, marched in front of the procession into the city. All of the dignitaries were holding torches. The people on the roadside made acclamations and the court's assistants tried to affect and lead them. The parade was closed by the emperor himself sitting on a (four-) wheeled wagon. Cf. Amm.Marc. 15, 8, 21f; 21, 10, 1; J.Chrys. *Phoc.* 1. Cf. W. Hartke, *Römische Kinderkaiser. Eine strukturanalyse römischen Denkens und Daseins* (Berlin, 1951), 309; 312; H. Castritius, 'Zum höfischen Protokoll in der Tetrarchie. Introitus (adventus) Augusti et Caesaris', *Chiron* 1 (1971) 365–376; J. Lehnen, *Adventus principis: Untersuchungen zu Sinngehalt und Zeremoniell der Kaiserankunft in den Städten des Imperium Romanum* (Frankfurt, 1997).

⁵³ Pacat. *Pan.Theod.* 37, 3: 'Here a chorus sang a hymn of triumph to you, there, on the other hand, one sang mournful dirges and a funeral song for the tyrant.' Trans. taken from C.E.V. Nixon and B. Saylor Roger, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley, 1994), 504. More examples: Alföldi, 'Repräsentation', 82f.

⁵⁴ Cf. Amm.Marc. 15, 8, 21f. See Castritius, 'Höfischen Protokoll'.

⁵⁵ See Plut. *Pomp.* 57; *Genth. Maxim.* 10, 4f; Amm.Marc. 21, 10, 1. See also H.P. Laubscher, *Der Reliefschmuck des Galeriusbogen in Thessaloniki* (Berlin, 1975), 215ff. Cf. Alföldi, 'Repräsentation', 88f.

⁵⁶ T. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht* (Berlin, 31887), I: 135f; 465f. On 30th January 386 a law was promulgated which permitted 'all dignitaries of high civil and military rank' to use a *biga* in the city of Constantinople: *CT* 14, 12, 1; cf. *CJ* 11, 20.

became liturgical and it was therefore both organised and led by ecclesiastical authorities. For that reason it was easy and even natural that the bishop occupied the place of the victorious emperor in the new ceremony.

As no scholar has yet been able to date confidently the *Trierer Elfenbeinplatte*, we cannot know if the relic translation which Ambrose organised for Gervasius and Protasius had the same appearance as that depicted on the ivory tablet. Nevertheless, contemporary evidence confirms that the bishop of Milan used his own relic translation as a metaphorical triumph parade. The first testimony is a hymn, written by Ambrose himself, which first of all shows that the form of relic translation which Ambrose employed was the same as demonstrated on the *Trierer Elfenbeinplatte*; and second that Ambrose knew the symbolic value of the *adventus reliquiae* all too well. Within the hymn he describes the heroic deaths of saints Felix, Nabor and Victor, who probably died at Milan in AD 304. About a dozen years later Bishop Maternus brought the hidden bodies of the saints back to the city. But since it is impossible that Ambrose could have seen this ceremony, since it most likely took place in 316, his description of the *adventus reliquiarum* must derive from his own experience. The key words read thus: *Plaustri triumphalis modo!*⁵⁷ These three words alone are enough to evoke in the mind's eye precisely that picture on the carved ivory tablet.

Ambrose not only recognised the similarity between the appearance of the relic translation and the triumph parade, but also presented himself as *episcopus triumphans*. The study of the carved wooden door from the basilica Ambrosiana led Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro to the cautious diagnosis that, 'L'interesse del presule per il giovane combattente che sfidò non solo Golia, ma anche le insidie di re Saul è un trasparente riferimento alla concezione della legge divina e del suo ruolo preminente nei confronti del potere civile, anche imperiale, di cui Ambrogio fu autorevole, strenuo e vittorioso assertore.'⁵⁸ But

⁵⁷ Ambr. *Hymn.* 12 (I. Biffi, Inni, iscrizioni, frammenti, (*Opera Omnia di San Ambrogio* 22), Milano, 1994, 76–79; 78): *Sed reddiderunt hostias / rapti quadrigis, corpora, / revecti in ora principum / plaustri triumphalis modo.*

⁵⁸ A. Melucco Vaccaro, 'Le porte lignee di S. Ambrogio alla luce dei nuovi restauri', in *Felix Temporis reparatio*, ed. G.S. Chiesa and E.A. Arslan (Milan, 1992), 117–137, esp. 121. See also M. Trinci Cecchelli, 'La Porta di S. Ambrogio in Milano', *Rivista cultura classica e medioevale* 9 (1967) 66–77; R. Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals*

already Paulinus of Milan had noted, *Sed Dominus, qui de adversariis suis ecclesiae suae triumphos donare consuevit*.⁵⁹

Besides Milan's collective celebration of the incredible victory of its bishop against the emperor, there was at least one further benefit which Ambrose had in mind when he organised the relic translation: the unifying power of praying, singing and celebrating together. Ambrose recognised the power of this celebration and used it to unite all those who joined the relic translation to his party. Besides celebrating his personal victory over the emperor, the relic translation had also the collateral effect of strengthening the community.

It may not be too much of an exaggeration to say that Ambrose had organised his own triumph-parade.⁶⁰ He was the first to organise a relic translation in form of an *adventus* or triumph, and he had a good reason to do so.⁶¹

Conclusion

We have observed that the Catholic community under the leadership of Ambrose accrued power. After the events of 386, both bishop and community wanted to show their phenomenal victory in public. Ambrose, therefore, acted against the law by enacting a procession. He could never have claimed for himself a ritual restricted to the emperor; it was, however, easy to claim it for the relics of his saints. In the period immediately following Ambrose's actions, the number of known relic translations rises dramatically. In the following years there are attested translations in France, Africa, Spain and Italy.⁶² Ambrose himself

(Berkeley, CA/London, 1983), 79f. This interpretation is strengthened also by Paul. Med. *V.Ambr.* 8, 1.

⁵⁹ Paul. Med. *V.Ambr.* 13, 2.

⁶⁰ Cf. Ambr. *Ep. ex.Coll.* 14(63), 68. Jesús San Bernardino summarises ('Sub imperio', 736): 'Adesso, Ambrogio adottava un tono trionfalistico nella lettera con cui narrava a sua sorella la favolosa scoperta dei resti di Gervasio e Protasio.'

⁶¹ That the form of relic translations had a different appearance before Ambrose is proved by Chrys. *Hom.Bab.* 2ff; Soz. *H.E.* 5, 19, 17f.

⁶² Cf. Paul. *Nol. Ep.* 31, 1; 32, 10/17; Hier. *c.Vig.* 5; Greg. *Gr. Dial.* 3, 30; 9, 34 and 51; 10, 20 and 34; 10a, 8. For later developments in the Middle Ages, see P.J. Geary, *Furta sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1978); cf. also L. Reekmanns, 'Siedlungsbildung in spätantiken Wallfahrtsstätten', *Pietas*, E. Dassmann and K.S. Frank, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Ergbd.* 8 (Münster, 1980), 325–355. For the use of relic translations as a form of 'ecclesiastical resistance' to secular power, see also, in this volume, G. Vocino, 'Hagiography as an instrument for political claims

distributed many relics all over Italy, Africa and Gaul. With the spread of relics, the form of this ritual also dispersed across the western Roman Empire. Some generations later, at least by 530, the same ritual had become the common way for bishops to represent the 'Christian dominance in society'.⁶³ So much did it become ingrained in the episcopate that by the sixth century it was even used without relics,⁶⁴ and the imperial *adventus* no longer played the crucial role that it had played.⁶⁵ Henceforth, this was very much a bishop's ceremony.

in Carolingian Italy: the Saint Syrus dossier (BHL 7976 and 7978)'; for the disquiet which such translations could arouse, see G. Heydemann, 'Relics and texts: hagiography and authority in ninth-century Francia', also in this volume.

⁶³ Cf. Theod. *H.E.* 5, 34.

⁶⁴ But it was still in people's mind who the originator of this ritual was, at least in the western provinces. See Avit.Vien. *de Rog.* 6, 1; Greg.Tur. *de Gloria Mart.* 2, 2; Mamer. *Ep.* 4, 11; Sid.Ap. *Ep.* 7; see also Theod. *H.E.* 4, 22. Cf. B. Jussen, 'Über "Bischofsherrschaften" und die Prozeduren politisch-sozialer Umordnung in Gallien zwischen "Antike" und "Mittelalter"', *Historische Zeitschrift* 260 (1995) 708–712; and W.T. Flynn, 'Introitus', *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 208/9.

⁶⁵ MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 63.

AUGUSTINE, DONATISTS AND MARTYRDOM

Collin Garbarino

When Augustine began his preaching career as bishop of Hippo in 395, he found himself in a rather unenviable position. For decades, his church had been sporadically persecuting a schismatic sect known as 'Donatists'.¹ The Donatists viewed themselves as the true heirs to pre-Constantinian Christianity and claimed to be the 'Church of the Martyrs'. They claimed continuity with those Christians who had suffered in Diocletian's persecution, and their subsequent persecutions by Catholics strengthened this mentality. Even so, Augustine had to preach on the feast days of the martyrs, to whom the Donatists seemed to hold a superior claim. In his sermons, Augustine had to convince his hearers that the traditions of martyrdom lay with his church, not that of his rivals.

According to the Donatists, the martyrs endorsed separation from the Catholics and also provided the necessary link between past persecution and present purity.² Faced with this alternative to Catholicism, an alternative claiming the moral high ground, Augustine sought to sever the Donatists' link to the martyrs through his own sermons

¹ In spite of Brent Shaw's indictment of lazy historians who refer to the two parties as 'Donatist' and 'Catholic', I will use the traditional nomenclature. Shaw notes that both factions viewed themselves merely as Christians and refers to the Donatists as 'African Christians' to distinguish them from the 'Catholic Christians': B.D. Shaw, 'African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions, and "Donatists",' in *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent*, ed. M.R. Greenshields and T.A. Robinson (Lewiston, NY, 1992), 4–34. James O'Donnell, on the other hand, favors calling these factions 'Donatist' and 'Caecilianist' after the rival bishops who began the schism; J.J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York, NY., 2005). These novelties in labelling carry their own limitations, and the benefits derived from them do not outweigh the lack of clarity they bring about. It seems best, in most cases, to maintain the labels found in the sources even if those sources exhibit bias. W.H.C. Frend's *The Donatist Church: a Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, 1952) remains the standard work on the schism. Frend tends to overemphasize the economic and nationalistic elements of the schism, but as an introduction to the controversy, his work is indispensable. For an example of recent scholarship which emphasizes the religious aspects of the schism, see M.A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: the Donatist World* (Minneapolis, MN, 1997).

² P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new edition with epilogue (Berkeley, CA, 2000), 215.

on their lives and deaths. Augustine radically redefined the tradition of martyrdom for his North African congregants. He taught that the essence of martyrdom rested in bearing witness or testifying, and he ignored any notion that martyrdom included sacrifice. This redefinition gave Augustine three avenues by which to sever the Donatists' link to the martyrs. First, it provided the basis for an attack on the most extreme expressions of Donatist piety, which glorified voluntary martyrdom. Second, it allowed him to emphasize the cause of Christian martyrdom in order to question the Donatists' claim to represent the 'Church of the Martyrs'. And third, this redefinition allowed Augustine to offer the benefits of martyrdom to his own congregation even in times free from persecution.³

Martyrdom as Witness

In the New Testament, 'martyr' simply referred to one who bore witness or testimony.⁴ By the middle of the third century, however, Christian communities began to apply the term to those who died violently for the faith⁵ and often viewed these violent deaths as a sacrifice to God.⁶ In particular, North African traditions of martyrdom emphasized this sacrificial aspect. According to Tertullian, North Africa's most famous apologist for martyrdom, the martyrs' deaths ensured the forgiveness of their sins and their places in heaven.⁷ He even compared martyrdom to a second baptism in blood that could wash away any sins committed after the Christian's first baptism in water.⁸

³ For a comparable redefinition of the martyrial (and ascetic) tradition see also, in this volume, P. Wood, 'Excluded from power? The boundaries of orthodoxy in the works of Athanasius and John of Ephesus'.

⁴ For a brief discussion of the New Testament's use of 'martyr', see G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge, 1995), 14–15. Bowersock proposes that the Christian experience of martyrdom grew out of a Roman context. His thesis criticizes W.H.C. Frend's classic work, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: a Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (New York, 1967). Frend locates the roots of martyrdom in Second Temple Judaism. For an excellent critique of both Bowersock and Frend, see D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA, 1999).

⁵ See e.g. *Mart. Polycarp* 2.2, 14.2, 15.2, 16.2.

⁶ See e.g. Ignatius *Ad Rom.* 2.2, 4.2; *Mart. Polycarp* 14.1; *Mart. Lyons* 1.52.

⁷ Tert. *Apolog.* 50.15–16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, *De Baptismo* 16.2.

While most Christian communities in the Roman Empire enjoyed peace after Constantine became sole emperor, the Donatists in North Africa continued to experience varying levels of persecution. This persecution at the hands of imperial officials allowed the Donatists to maintain a degree of continuity with the martyr traditions of pre-Constantinian Christianity; moreover, their texts reflect the traditions of Tertullian. Though only a handful of Donatist martyrologies survive, these texts indicate that the Donatist communities embraced the sacrificial aspect of their martyrs' deaths. For example, Felix, the bishop of Thibiuca, was burned in 303, and though he died before the Donatist schism, scholars believe that the *Passion of Saint Felix* reflects the values of the North African Donatists because of its emphasis on protecting the Scriptures at the cost of one's life.⁹ Portraying Felix in a sacrificial light, the text records Felix's prayer to Jesus before his martyrdom: 'I bend my neck to you as a sacrificial victim [*victimam*].'¹⁰ The idea of the priest as sacrifice recurs in the *Passion of Marculus*, for the Donatist community viewed the priest Marculus, who was executed in 347 under the authority of the Christian emperor Constans, in the same manner. Marculus is said to have offered 'a twin sacrifice' because he performed the Eucharist on the day of his martyrdom: 'In approaching the altars of Christ to place on them offerings [*hostias*], he himself was worthy to become an offering [*hostia*] for Christ.'¹¹

Whereas many North African writings on martyrdom emphasize the martyrs' sacrifice, Augustine taught his congregation that the martyrs were witnesses, not sacrifices. Rather, he adheres to a strict New Testament interpretation of martyrdom. When preaching on a martyr's feast day, Augustine usually opened his sermon by defining the martyr as one who bears witness or testimony about Christ.¹² Usually the remainder of the sermon explores by what power the martyr witnessed and contains an exhortation to the congregation to do likewise. Augustine, however, does not explore notions of the martyr's sacrifice. This omission is all the more interesting considering that the martyrologies, which often contained explicit references to sacrifice, were

⁹ See M.A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa* (Liverpool, 1996) 8. Translations of Donatist sources are taken from Tilley's edition.

¹⁰ *Acta Felicis* 6 (PL 8: 688). Felix's martyrology has widely variant readings, but this statement is in both *Acta Felicis* and *Passio Felicis*.

¹¹ *Passio Marculi* 8 (PL 8: 763a).

¹² See e.g. Aug. *Serm.* 299F.1 (PLS 2: 788).

read immediately before the sermon. When Augustine preached, the martyr's message eclipsed the martyr's death.

Augustine believed that God himself provided this message in the martyrdom. The message was no mere testimony of the martyrs themselves; the Spirit of God inspired the verbal witness of the martyrs. In a sermon preached in 412 on the martyrdom of Vincent, Augustine says:

Christ, you see, promised even this to his witnesses in the gospel, when he was preparing them for this sort of contest. I mean, this is what he said: *Do not think beforehand about how or what you are to speak. For it is not you that are speaking, but the Spirit of my Father who is speaking in you* (Mt 10:19–20). So the flesh was suffering, and the Spirit was speaking.¹³

Augustine believed that if the martyrs spoke under their own power, as he was sure the Donatists did, then their testimony would be flawed since all humans are flawed.

If martyrdom were a sacrifice, then the sacrifice ought to be given willingly. The martyr texts frequently emphasize the willingness of the martyrs to face their own deaths. Tertullian at one point goes so far as to say that flight from martyrdom is unacceptable for Christians; they are obliged to face persecution and death.¹⁴ Augustine's emphasis on the martyrs' testimony makes their willingness to die less important. In spite of what many martyr texts claimed, Augustine taught that the martyrs did not long for death at all; rather, they longed for life. In his sermon on Peter and Paul from 418, Augustine claims, 'Death cannot be loved, it must be borne.'¹⁵ After all, Augustine continues, if death were enjoyable for the martyrs then their feats of faith would be commonplace. He says, 'If we saw them enjoying themselves in parties, we wouldn't call them great men, would we, would we call them brave men?'¹⁶

In an earlier sermon on the feast day of Peter and Paul, however, Augustine actually acknowledges sacrificial language during his discus-

¹³ Aug. *Serm.* 276.2 (PL 38: 1256). Most translations from Augustine's sermons are from Augustine, *Sermons*, trans. E. Hill, 11 vols., pt. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century* (New York, NY, 1990–97). Passages in which I have retranslated Augustine's Latin with a more literal wording are noted.

¹⁴ Tert. *Scorpiace* 8.

¹⁵ Aug. *Serm.* 299.8 (PL 38: 1373).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.8 (PL 38: 1373).

sion of a martyr's unwillingness to die. He could not avoid the sacrificial language since he was preaching from inspired Scripture instead of a martyr text. Quoting 2 Timothy 4:6 ('For I am already on the point of being sacrificed [*immolor*']'), Augustine admits, '[Paul] knew that his suffering [*passionem*] would be a sacrifice to God.' At first glance this use of sacrificial language seems out of character. Augustine makes, however, an unexpected point with this text. Emphasizing the passive voice of the verb *immolor*, Augustine claims that Paul did not willingly offer himself but was offered by someone else. He says, "Those who killed him did not offer such sacrifice to the Father, but it was that high priest who had said, "Do not fear those who slay the body".¹⁷ Augustine claims that Paul did not make a willing sacrifice; rather, Jesus willingly sacrificed Paul.

When he preaches on this text about fifteen years later, Augustine notes that though martyrdom is a sacrifice, technically the martyr sacrifices nothing since he does not have anything good to give but what God had already provided. Embracing a view of God that will make some modern readers uncomfortable, Augustine preaches, 'So he [God] made the sacrificial victims for himself, he himself devoted the sacrifices to himself, he himself filled the martyrs with the Spirit, he himself equipped the confessors with strength. Certainly it was to them he said, "For you are not the one who speaks".¹⁸ In this way, Augustine takes on the language of the martyrs' sacrifice and bends it until it is no sacrifice on the part of the martyrs at all. Instead, he turns it squarely back to martyrdom as bearing witness to the divine work of Christ in the martyrs' lives.

Augustine's reassessment of martyrdom breaks with many previous martyr traditions. Even so, this redefinition probably pleased Augustine on two levels. First, it proposed a view of martyrdom that was closer to the New Testament's usage, satisfying his exegetical concerns. Second, it proved a potent weapon in his fight against the Donatists, allowing him to reclaim a tradition, albeit a modified one, for the true church.

¹⁷ Ibid., 299A.4 (PLS 2:463). My translation.

¹⁸ Ibid., 299.3 (PL 38:1368). My translation.

Voluntary Martyrdom Condemned

Perhaps the most recognized practical application of Augustine's theology of martyrdom is his condemnation of voluntary martyrdom. He did not form this condemnation for theoretical purposes; the issue was still current in his day. The Donatists of North Africa embraced the tradition of voluntary martyrdom.¹⁹ The Donatists of North Africa embraced the tradition of voluntary martyrdom, viewing it not as repugnant but rather as a noble struggle against oppression. They had precedents for their views on voluntary martyrdom in Tertullian and many martyr texts, and in many ways, they preserved the tradition of martyrdom that had been passed down from pre-Constantinian third-century Christianity.

The sources, both Donatist and Catholic, indicate that the Donatists engaged in various kinds of voluntary martyrdom. In the Donatist *Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, Maximian instigates the events that would lead to his martyrdom:

With the speed not of feet but of a well-prepared mind, [Maximian] quickly sprang up on his own to incite this contest. He scattered the dismal little pieces [of the imperial edict] with his rapid hands just as if he were tearing the devil limb from limb. Immediately he was taken up to the tribunal.²⁰

In the Donatist literature, women also embrace martyrdom in order to protect their virginity. In the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, for example, Victoria throws herself off a cliff in order to avoid an unwanted marriage.²¹ Similarly, in *The Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla and Secunda*, Secunda jumps from her window in order to avoid marriage, electing to join some passing Christians on their way to martyrdom.²² The Circumcellions, a group of Donatist extremists, also had reputations for dying by their own hands in pursuit of martyrdom. These extremists operated outside the Donatist hierarchy, but Donatist bishops

¹⁹ For a helpful discussion on voluntary martyrdom, see G.E. M De Ste Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (Oxford, 2006). A. Droge also attempts to explain voluntary martyrdom in *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (New York, 1992). Droge's analysis, however, often seems colored by a political agenda.

²⁰ *Passio Maximiani and Isaac* (PL 8: 769a).

²¹ *Acta Saturnini* 14 (PL 8: 699). Although the fall does not harm Victoria, her intention was death.

²² *Passio Maximae Secundae et Donatillae* 22.

occasionally used them to attack Catholic buildings and holy sites. The Circumcellions harassed magistrates asking for martyrdom and sometimes committed suicide if the magistrates refused to give them the death penalty.²³ Circumcellions also had a proclivity for jumping off cliffs in their pursuit of martyrdom. Even though this group operated on the fringe of Donatist life, in his sermons, Augustine nevertheless attacks them when speaking of the Donatist toleration of voluntary martyrdom.

In a sermon delivered in 410 on Cyprian's feast day, Augustine embarks on a sustained assault on his Donatist enemies that focuses on their conception of martyrdom. In this sermon, Augustine tells his listeners that voluntary martyrs, like the Circumcellions, are not martyrs at all because they do not heed the proper examples. Augustine sharply criticizes his opponents, saying, "The Donatists, who falsely boast that Cyprian belongs to them, should pay attention [...] to the way he went to his martyrdom, and then they wouldn't throw themselves off cliffs."²⁴ Augustine maintains that true martyrs would follow the example of Cyprian, who waited for his persecutors to come to him. In doing this, he imitated Christ, who waited for the guards to seize him in the garden.²⁵ By following this line of argument, Augustine claims that the Donatists are failing to follow the example of both the founder of Christianity and the supposed founder of their sect. Furthermore, Augustine attacks the Donatist 'jumping' motif directly, claiming that it is not an avenue to martyrdom but that its origin is demonic. He reminds his hearers of the story of Satan's tempting Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple. Satan encourages Jesus to hurl himself down so that the angels will save him, an act that would prove Jesus' status as the Son of God. Jesus refuses, telling Satan that it is not proper to test God. Augustine believes that Donatists who jump to their deaths fall for this same temptation. He claims, "This, you see, is exactly what the devil is also suggesting to the Donatists, saying, "Hurl yourselves down, the angels are there to catch you; with such a death you don't go to punishment, but you win through to a crown".²⁶ Thus, Augustine claims that these so-called martyrs are not even Christians

²³ W.H.C. Frend, 'Donatus "paene totam Africam decepit". How?' *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 48 (1997) 616.

²⁴ Aug. *Serm.* 313E.2 (PLS 2: 616).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 313E.4 (PLS 2: 618).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 313E.4 (PLS 2: 618).

because in jumping from cliffs they listen to the devil. The harshness of Augustine's critique evinces the sense of urgency he felt. His audience needed to understand the dangers of aligning with a shadow church.

Not only do these voluntary martyrs follow the wrong examples, but according to Augustine they also lack patience, the Christian virtue necessary for avoiding suicide. Patience allowed the martyrs to endure the ills and hardships inflicted on them. Augustine contrasts this patience with impatience, which is an unwillingness to endure hardship.²⁷ Augustine accuses Donatist voluntary martyrs of demonstrating their impatience by preferring to end their lives rather than endure the hardships of governmental oppression or marriage.

Cause of Martyrdom versus the Martyrs' Sufferings

By redefining martyrdom as New Testament witness bearing, Augustine exalts the martyrs' cause over the martyrs' sufferings. In a sermon preached between 410 and 412, he says, 'Let us love in them not their sufferings, but the causes of their suffering because if we just love their sufferings, we are going to find many people who suffered worse things in bad causes.'²⁸ When preaching on the martyrs and martyrdom, Augustine frequently cites Psalm 43:1, in which the persecuted psalmist asks God to 'distinguish my cause'. After citing this passage Augustine often says, 'It is not the punishment that makes the martyr but the cause.'²⁹ Augustine freely admits that Donatists suffered, but their suffering was not martyrdom because their cause was outside the Catholic Church. In a sermon preached in the first decade of the fifth century, he illustrates this point by reminding his hearers that Jesus was crucified between two criminals. Though all three men received the same punishment, only Jesus' suffering had a just cause; the other two men suffered for their own iniquity.³⁰ In another sermon from about the same time, Augustine provocatively asserts that if suffering makes the martyr, then even the devil could claim the name:

If suffering is what is to be boasted about, then the devil himself can also do some boasting. Notice how much he is suffering, with his temples

²⁷ Ibid., 283.1 (Dolbeau 15).

²⁸ Ibid., 335.2 (PL 38: 1471).

²⁹ Ibid., 327.1 (PL 38: 1451). Cf. *Sermons* 274, 283, 285, 325, 335, 335G, and 359B.

³⁰ Ibid., 327.2 (PL 38: 1452).

everywhere being pulled down, his idols everywhere being smashed, his priests and soothsayers everywhere being beaten. Can he say, do you suppose, 'I too am a martyr, because I am enduring such great sufferings'?³¹

As in the case of Satan, Donatists did not suffer unjustly but reaped the consequences of their choices.

As mentioned above, Augustine viewed patience as the hallmark of true martyrdom. Many Donatist martyrs did not engage in voluntary martyrdom but suffered at the hands of Catholic magistrates. Nonetheless, Augustine teaches that they did not exhibit patience. Instead, they succumbed to patience's shadow vice, stubbornness. In a sermon preached in 414 on the martyrs of Maxula, Augustine says, 'Endurance in the form of a vice is stubbornness. For Stubbornness imitates patience, but it is not patience.'³² Augustine compares the Donatist martyr to a criminal who receives his punishment with defiance instead of repentance. He tells his congregation, 'He's prepared to be tortured for Donatus, and he doesn't conceal this by denial, but he confesses, he's not ashamed, he boasts of his iniquity.'³³ According to Augustine, Donatist martyrs did not receive a martyr's crown; instead, they only compounded their guilt by holding to their schism in the face of persecution.

True martyrdom required union with the church. The church belonged to God, not the bishops, and it could not be divided. In his sermon on Peter and Paul from around 400, Augustine claims that the Donatists stole part of God's flock and fed 'their own sheep'. He preaches, 'It was Peter's merit that he fed God's sheep; he would never have won the prize of true martyrdom [*vero martyrio coronatum*] if he had fed his own sheep.'³⁴ For a martyrdom to be true martyrdom, it had to take place in God's church, not that of Donatus.

Augustine came to these conclusions early in his preaching career. In his sermon from 397 on the martyrs Castus and Aemilius, Augustine clearly distinguishes between the rival churches, claiming that only his church had a just cause:

³¹ Ibid., 328.4 (PL 38: 1453).

³² Ibid., 283.7 (Dolbeau 15). My translation.

³³ Ibid., 283.7 (Dolbeau 15).

³⁴ Ibid., 299A.2 (Dolbeau 4). Augustine seemed to be particularly fond of this image of the Donatists as stolen sheep. Cf. *Sermon* 295.5.

And so let us honor the martyrs inside, in the tabernacle of the shepherd, in the members of the shepherd, ones marked by grace, not audacity; by piety, not temerity; as steadfast, not obstinate; as gathering together, not dividing and scattering. In a word, if you wish to imitate true martyrs, choose yourselves a cause, so that you can say to the Lord, *Judge me, O Lord, and distinguish my cause from an unholy nation* (Ps 43:1). Distinguish not my pain and punishment, because an unholy nation has that too; but my cause, which only a holy nation has. So choose yourselves a cause, hold onto a good and just cause, and with the Lord's help have no fear of any pain or punishment.³⁵

The Donatists, however, viewed the Catholics' version of unity as specious.

The Donatists believed that they possessed a unity of the pure and that Catholic calls for unity were ploys of Satan to destroy the true church, the Donatist Church. In a Donatist sermon delivered during a time of persecution by the Catholics in the first half of the fourth century, the preacher says:

Nevertheless, this rapacious robber was frustrated that he did not control everyone by this ruse. So the enemy of salvation concocted a more subtle conceit to violate the purity of faith. 'Christ', he said, 'is the lover of unity. Therefore, let there be unity.' Those people who were already fawning on him and were deserted by God came to be called 'Catholics'. By prejudice in favour of the name, those who refused to communicate with them were called 'heretics'.³⁶

Later he goes on to say, "Therefore, the one who corrupts holy discipline could violate the chastity of faith under the by-word of unity, i.e., by compelling unity with himself, not with God."³⁷ Augustine claimed that Christians did not have unity with God apart from the Catholic Church; the Donatists claimed that Christians could not have unity with God in the Catholic Church.

In order to support his own position, Augustine grounded his version of unity in the universal nature of Catholicism, a universality that posed problems for Donatists who were suspicious of the churches outside North Africa. Augustine viewed the church as a people on the march, a people who would change the society that was its antithesis. Augustine believed the Christian gospel could conquer the world.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 285.7 (PL 38: 1297).

³⁶ *Sermo de Passione Advocati et Donati* 3 (PL 8: 754).

³⁷ Ibid., 5 (PL 8: 755).

³⁸ Brown, *Augustine*, 209. Also see 220–21.

In the sermon from around 400 commemorating the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, Augustine cites Psalm 19:4, in which the knowledge of God goes out to all the earth. He claims that God spreads this knowledge through these apostles' martyrdoms. Augustine, however, does not pass up an opportunity to attack the schismatics: 'I imagine that they too are celebrating the birthday of the apostles today; they pretend, indeed, to celebrate this day, but they certainly daren't sing this psalm.'³⁹ Augustine believed that Donatists could not sing this psalm because some Donatists bishops taught that the church was only found in North Africa.

Augustine viewed the universal aspect of the church as foundational, and this universality entailed unity. If a martyr was outside Catholicism then he was not a martyr at all. In a sermon from 404, Augustine cites Luke 24:46, which also implies the universality of the gospel. He then adds, 'This is the Church you must acknowledge if you are a martyr, the Church expressly named by Christ's own lips, foretold by the prophets, his heralds, this the one you must hold onto; shed your blood in this Church and for this Church.'⁴⁰ The Donatists' attempts at martyrdom outside the communion of the Catholic Church earned no crowns.

The Church's Martyrs versus the Martyrs' Church

Augustine's church, however, had its own obstacle which impeded gaining the crown of martyrdom. At the turn of the fifth century, a Catholic living in North Africa no longer expected to die a martyr's death. Had true martyrdom then disappeared? In spite of a lack of opportunity to die for the faith, Augustine kept martyrdom within the reach of each member of his congregation. Emphasizing the martyrs' cause and downplaying their sufferings excluded the Donatists from his definition of martyrdom, while simultaneously expanding that definition to include all those Catholics who remained true to the faith. As early as 397 in a sermon on the martyr Quadratus, Augustine tells his people, 'What's required is the spirit of the martyr, because God, after all, does not delight in the shedding of blood. He has many hidden

³⁹ Aug. *Serm.* 299A.9 (Dolbeau 4).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 359B.19 (Dolbeau 2).

[*in occulto*] martyrs.⁴¹ Any faithful Catholic could consider himself a ‘hidden martyr’ as long as he had the right spirit. At a later date, Augustine argues that the three Hebrew boys whom Nebuchadnezzar threw in the fire received the crown of martyrdom because they had firm faith, even though they did not suffer.⁴² This firm faith should be coupled with endurance. Of course, faith and endurance naturally manifest the martyr’s witness or testimony concerning Christ. Thus, in 409 while preaching at the shrine of the Twenty Martyrs in Hippo, Augustine could say, ‘Everyone who preaches where he can, he is also a martyr.’⁴³

Even though the persecutions had stopped, Christians still faced subtler hardships. In a sermon preached in the first decade of the fifth century, Augustine says, ‘Trials and temptations don’t stop; fight them, and the crown is ready for you.’⁴⁴ Augustine must have believed that his congregation would find this teaching shocking, so he continues the sermon by posing the disbelieving question ‘when?’ and then answers it. He tells those gathered that the faithful can only receive their martyrs’ crowns at death. He uses the sickbed as his illustration, and claims that illness provides great opportunity for martyrdom. According to Augustine’s sermons, charms and magical remedies for illness were ubiquitous in North Africa at this time. By resisting the temptation to use these charms, Christians resisted the devil and bore witness to their faith in Christ.⁴⁵

In offering martyrdom to every Christian, Augustine moves the emphasis back to Paul’s idea of internal struggle.⁴⁶ The cosmic battle between God and Satan has returned from the floor of the arena to inside the Christian’s heart. In a sermon preached in the first decade of the fifth century, Augustine says:

We can’t see this adversary of ours, and we can defeat him. Why can’t we see him? Because it is inside us that we experience and check what he wishes to defeat us with. You can’t see your enemy the devil, but you experience your avarice in yourself. You can’t see your enemy the devil, but you experience your lust in yourself. You can’t see your enemy the devil, but you experience your anger in yourself. Defeat what you expe-

⁴¹ Ibid., 306E.6 (Dolbeau 18).

⁴² Ibid., 296.5 (PL 38: 1355).

⁴³ Ibid., 260E.2 (PLS 2: 588). My translation.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 328.8 (PLS 2: 801).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 328.8 (PLS 2: 801). Cf. *Serm.* 286.7; 306E.7–8.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Romans 7:15–25.

rience inside you, and those who are stalking you outside are already defeated.⁴⁷

Anyone can be a hidden martyr and receive the martyr's crown as long as he or she heeds the example of the martyrs by resisting the devil. In a sermon from 397, Augustine says, 'If you overcome not a man but the devil, [...] don't count yourself as not being a martyr. Your feast day is not indeed in the calendar, but your crown is ready waiting for you.'⁴⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, Augustine paid careful attention to defining and redefining martyrdom because of competition from Donatism, a sect that esteemed the martyrs so highly. Augustine reconstructs martyrdom as the act of bearing testimony, ignoring the notions of sacrifice that often attended it. This reconstruction gave him the tools to convince those in his church of the dangers of viewing martyrdom as the Donatists did. Augustine argues that the self-offerings of the Circumcellions were incompatible with the Christian faith. Furthermore, Donatism in general was incompatible with true martyrdom because it did not share the proper cause of the true church. Augustine claims that even though the Donatists might have the right baptism, they did not have love [*caritas*].⁴⁹ Without *caritas*, which manifests itself in unity, the Donatists could not claim to be the 'Church of the Martyrs'. While stripping the Donatists of their heritage, Augustine went so far as to reward the faithful in his own flock with the promise of a martyr's crown. His emphasis on the martyrs' testimony allowed him to offer martyrdom to all Catholics regardless of the presence or absence of persecution. Thus, Augustine reconstructs North African martyrdom so that his church was not merely the 'Church of the Martyrs'; in a sense, it became the Church *for* the Martyrs.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 328.8 (PLS 2: 801).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 306E.8 (Dolbeau 18).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 269.3 (PL 38: 1236).

EXCLUDED FROM POWER?
THE BOUNDARIES OF ORTHODOXY IN THE WORKS
OF ATHANASIUS AND JOHN OF EPHEBUS

Philip Wood

Churches of the Martyrs

The third-century ecclesiastical writer Apolinarius of Hierapolis devoted a section of his work against the Montanists to the issue of Montanist martyrdom. In the section of his work cited by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History* he observes that ‘when they have been refuted by argument [...] the Montanists take refuge in their many martyrs’. This, he argues, is fallacious, for ‘while heresies have many martyrs, we cannot agree with them on that account. Indeed, from the first, the Marcionites [too] had many martyrs, yet they did not confess Christ himself in truth’. He goes on to say that the martyrs of the true church separated themselves from Montanist prisoners, ‘because they did not wish to assent to the spirit of Montanus and his women.’¹

Apolinarius was reflecting on a religious environment where Christian communities were openly divided on issues of authority, dogma and prophetic inspiration.² And these issues remained significant enough in the early fourth century that Eusebius too was forced to address them in this history of the victorious church. Yet the attraction that ‘orthodox’ Christians felt to the martyr cult was clearly strong enough that Apolinarius needed to show ‘orthodox’ martyrs separating themselves from others with false beliefs. Eusebius’ history tells the story of a Christian people who, like their suffering God, have been made victorious through the process of their persecution, and he looks back on the era of persecution in the early third century as a time when the people worked miracles by uniting in fasting and

¹ Eusebius, *HE*, V, 16, 20–22.

² On authority and martyrdom among the Montanists, see C. Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and Church History* (Cambridge, 2002), 14 and 121–122.

prayer.³ Yet the similar claims of the Montanists to a special connection to divine miracles, this time through the leadership of female prophetesses, were also tied to martyrdom.⁴ And, though some Christians might condemn voluntary martyrdom, the various Christianities of the third century were united in a discourse of martyrdom, in the practice of dying for God and talking about it, which provided the crux of associated debates about authority and dogma.⁵ In other words, pre-Constantinian Christianity, while divided by many things, was united by the experience of persecution and martyrdom. It was an experience and source of prestige that transcended differences in theology and dogma.

The conversion of Constantine brought with it official patronage for an established church, and the transformation of the episcopate into a career fit for imperial aristocrats.⁶ But, simultaneously, the end of persecution by a pagan empire also brought the closure of an active discourse of martyrdom. The martyrs could now be recorded in history, as Eusebius did, or imitated through public asceticism, in the manner of Antony and Pachomius, but martyrdom could no longer be practiced as the ultimate proof of devotion for Christians living in a world of miracles. Various rigorist groups, the Donatists, Novatians and Meletians, all emphasised their connection to the church of the martyrs and their refusal to hand over the Gospels in a time of persecution and continued to produce martyr acts commemorating their martyred antecedents.⁷ But, critically, being no longer readily available, acts of martyrdom ceased to be the kind of public performance of a trust in God that had been threatening to other Christian sects and had formerly prompted the kind of defensive attacks on false martyrs that we saw in Apolinarius. It is suggested here that, in this sense, the era of Constantine not only brought about a change in the authority

³ Eusebius, *HE*, V, 8.

⁴ See M. Tilley, 'The passion of Felicity and Perpetua', in *Religions of late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. R. Valantasis (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 387–398 for a suggestion of the Montanist connections of these famous African martyrs.

⁵ See further D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA, 1999), 94–96. On voluntary martyrdom see G. De Ste Croix, *Persecution, Martyrdom and Orthodoxy*, ed. M. Whitby and J. Streeter (Oxford, 2006), 152–184.

⁶ P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI, 1992) and C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), 223–234.

⁷ For the Donatists, and Augustine's attempts to redefine 'martyrdom', see in this volume, C. Garbarino, 'Augustine, Donatists and Martyrdom'.

and patronage within Christianity. It also allowed theologians who disagreed with one another to develop a polemic over the issue of orthopraxy.

Athanasius and Egypt

Athanasius of Alexandria provides an example of a man frequently excluded from imperial support, but who relied on the support of monasteries, the urban mob and the reputation of a desert ascetic, the famous Antony, to acquire and retain power. By developing Antony into the successor of the martyrs, and applying a selective attack on the ascetic practices and imperial support of his opponents, Athanasius was able to survive the periods when he was excluded from imperial patronage. Thus, instead of a shared esteem for martyrdom, which cut across different forms of Christianity, and which could too easily serve to support the claims of his opponents, Athanasius' writings focus upon his personal connection to the ascetic life. Where Eusebius had emphasised the connection between the church of the Roman Empire and the martyrs of the third century, Athanasius' claims for orthodoxy were bound up with his relationship to the Egyptian monks who, he claimed, publicly supported him in the face of opposition from successive emperors and patriarchs of Alexandria. While Apolinarius had been forced into a defensive stance in his consideration of Montanist martyrs and admitted their attractiveness to 'orthodox' Christians, Athanasius enlisted contemporary asceticism to claim the history of martyrdom for himself and his theology.

In an era when emperors supported favoured churchmen and expelled their rivals, Athanasius, at least at the beginning of his career, frequently fell foul of both Constantine and his son Constantius II, his successor in the east. After his election as bishop of Alexandria in 328, his position met with opposition from other groups. These included the various Christological sects with whom he disagreed, whom he and later ecclesiastical historians labelled 'Arians', and Meletians, the followers of the rigorist bishop Meletius of Lycopolis who refused communion with repentant apostates and styled themselves the 'church of the martyrs'.⁸ Accused of mistreating these opposition groups, he was

⁸ D. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the Arian Controversy* (Oxford, 2006) has emphasised Athanasius'

deposed at the synod of Tyre in 335. Athanasius' subsequent career saw him rely on the patronage of the western emperor Constans and Rome to return to his see, often only for brief periods. These periods of exile produced an extensive amount of polemic to justify his position to his flock. One of the most striking examples of this is the *Life of Antony*, probably composed by Athanasius soon after Antony's death in 358, a period when he himself was periodically exiled to Upper Egypt, when he invoked the reputation of a desert holy man to justify his own theological position and to enhance his own authority as Antony's successor.

The early part of the life establishes Antony's credentials as a holy man. It recounts his decision to embrace the ascetic life, his training and his cultivation of the desert. This description is all set in a world removed from Alexandria and its complex urban politics, of which Athanasius was a part: Antony is only part of this urban world at the very beginning of the life, before his renunciation, and at the end, when he returns to condemn the Arians. It is only once Antony's ascetic credentials are well established in the wilderness that he returns to the city. Importantly, Athanasius stresses that he had always rejected the Arians and Meletians and that his arguments with philosophers were based solely on faith, and not on wisdom learnt from books. Antony is a figure uncontaminated by the outside world, whose orthodoxy cannot be disputed because it has come directly through the experience of God in the wilderness.⁹ Moreover, Antony places his own holy life and miracle working into the context of a longer history of martyrdom: he tells the Greek philosophers that 'self-control and virginity has never appeared before as it does now' and that this is shown by 'martyrs despising death and by virgins keeping themselves pure for the church'.¹⁰ Where Eusebius had imagined a golden age of martyrs in the past, Athanasius' Antony shows that the golden age is still present, on the edges of the Roman world, where orthodoxy is

presentation of all who opposed him as sharing an 'Arian theology' that misrepresented both the beliefs and structures of these groups. I employ the term 'Arian' here only as a reflection of Athanasius' construction, without implying that it reflects an underlying social reality. W. Crum, 'Some further Meletian documents', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 13 (1927), 19–26 at 22 collects evidence for the attribution of doctrinal 'heresy' to the Meletians.

⁹ *Life of Antony*, 20 on his illiteracy; 68 and 71 on heretics and philosophers.

¹⁰ *Life of Antony*, 79.

shown by the experience and miracles of holy men, rather than read through books.

Athanasius himself was only periodically in favour with the imperial authorities, and this reflects his emphasis on the purity of the wilderness as opposed to the city. Antony condemns Constantine, Eusebius' analogue to Moses himself,¹¹ as 'a mere man', and this suspicion of temporal authority is extended to his distrust of officials who support his theological opponents, such as the dux Balaicus, who is thrown from his horse, in a miracle that inverts Antony's own ability to control the animal world.¹² Antony enters the city after being purified in the desert, ready to heal demoniacs and to defeat heretics.¹³ Like Judas Maccabeus, Antony withdraws to a desert place, 'living amongst wild beasts in the mountains and feeding on herbs to avoid the pollution [of Jerusalem]',¹⁴ before returning to the city to purify it.

Athanasius ensures that Antony's entry into Alexandria is strongly connected to his own political and theological agenda.¹⁵ As well as attacking the Arians for their impiety, Antony also nominates Athanasius as his own successor and his conversations in the city remove any mandate for monks to oppose the wishes of their priests or to live in the city at all.¹⁶ Antony tells one interlocutor that 'like fish on dry land, monks lose their strength if they loiter amongst you'.¹⁷

Of course, it is important to remember how far Athanasius' Antony was moulded to fit the hagiographer's intentions. Samuel Rubenson has emphasised that the Antony we see in the letters attributed to him by Synesius of Cyrene do not show an illiterate, but an ascetic shaped by Origenistic theology.¹⁸ Similarly, Athanasius has removed any reference to the Meletian monasteries that existed in the Egyptian countryside and to the *apotaktikoi*, the communal dwellings of *monachoi* that are attested in the papyri for the cities of late antique Egypt: asceticism in late antique Egypt did not follow the uniform

¹¹ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* I, 12 (ed. and tr. A. Cameron and S. Hall).

¹² *Life of Antony*, 81 and 86. See 15 and 21 for his control of lions and crocodiles in the desert.

¹³ *Life of Antony*, 70.

¹⁴ 2 Maccabees 6.

¹⁵ D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), 81–84 emphasises the Athanasian alliance between monk and bishop.

¹⁶ *Life of Antony*, 101.

¹⁷ *Life of Antony*, 85.

¹⁸ S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, MN, 1995), esp. 35–54.

pattern that Athanasius presents.¹⁹ By presenting Antony as the ‘first monk’, Athanasius constructs a history of monasticism that gives himself the inheritance of Antony’s authority and excises the urban ascetics who had a more varied confessional allegiance. Instead, the desert and its monks are presented as an uncontaminated orthodox world, whose representative has directly intervened to confirm Athanasius’ position.

By presenting Antony’s monasticism as ‘Athanasian’ in theology and extra-urban in location, Athanasius sought to invoke contemporary asceticism to prove his own orthodoxy and to make the Arians and Meletians seem heterodox not only by their beliefs, but also by their practice, honouring false ascetics and persecuting real ascetics. Athanasius circumscribes the limits of where one should be trusting and where one should be sceptical of ascetic practice. For Athanasius, his own asceticism was a prime reason for his election as bishop, and he invokes this against the behaviour of his Arian opponents in Alexandria.²⁰ By contrast, the Arians are the allies of pagans and actively persecute the ‘orthodox’.²¹ The Arians’ heresy prevents them from being Christians any longer, joining a long rank of those excluded from the true faith,²² but they have also become persecutors, allowing Athanasius to present the relationship between the Arians and the orthodox as a continuation of that of the pagan persecutors and the early Christians.

The apex of these Arian misdemeanours is their treatment of orthodox ascetics in Alexandria. In his justification for his flight from Alexandria, Athanasius recounts how the ‘Arian’ bishop, George the Cappadocian, threw virgins into prison during Lent, plundered orphans and widows and called on the troops of ‘Sebastian the Manichee’ to oppress ‘the orthodox’ while they prayed at a cemetery.²³ Elsewhere, in his *History of the Arians*, Athanasius accuses another Arian bishop, Gregory, of persecuting ‘widows and the poor’, seizing

¹⁹ J. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 53–72 and 187–196 and D. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 3–4 on Meletian monasticism and the variety of pre-Pachomian cenobitism; A. Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church* (Harvard, MA, 2004), 15 on the construction of the difference between desert and city.

²⁰ *Apologia Contra Arianos*, 6.

²¹ *De Fuga*, 3 and 8; *History of the Arians*, 13. These accusations are re-echoed in Socrates, *HE*, II, 15–16.

²² *Sermon against the Arians*, 3.

²³ *De Fuga*, 6.

the alms of mendicants.²⁴ We should remember that bishops like Athanasius gained considerable leverage over the urban ascetics through their role in distributing alms, a facility that might have allowed them to exclude those who opposed their theological viewpoint. It was this same leverage that may have made Athanasius keen to keep organised monasteries beyond the city walls, a wish we see in his injunction to Antony. George's removal of widows' stipends may only pertain to certain female ascetics who had supported Athanasius.

George's actions certainly do not imply that Arians were opposed to asceticism. Athanasius remarks on their attempts to claim Antony for themselves and to win over 'orthodox' virgins.²⁵ Both George and Antony were competing over a single aspect of the bishop's portfolio: his ability to control alms and derive legitimacy from urban ascetics. Indeed, Athanasius' polemic includes a scepticism of his own, directed against Arian 'false' ascetics.²⁶ He reports that one Leontius castrated himself in order to carry on living with a female companion, Eustolium. As Athanasius reports it, this did not remove suspicion from Leontius and he was demoted, until he was later installed as bishop of Antioch by Constantius (whom Athanasius portrays as a new Ahab, an Arian tyrant).²⁷ Athanasius presents Leontius and Eustolium as interested only in the outward appearance of asceticism, which forces Leontius into performing a barbaric mockery of real asceticism in order to retain his position. The fact that the political situation did not confirm Athanasius' judgement is only explained by Constantius' intervention, and supplements his criticism of the emperor's behaviour.²⁸

The custom of male and female ascetics living together in the cities seems to have been common for early fourth century Christianity, a sign that their sexual natures had been transcended by their faith.²⁹ In spite of the impression of the later ecclesiastical histories, Athanasius and his allies were situated on an extreme wing of the fourth century, using the term Arian as a polemical category to blacken the reputations of a wide spectrum of theological belief. In the same way, their

²⁴ *History of the Arians*, 13 and 61–67.

²⁵ *Life of Antony*, 69; *De Fuga*, 6.

²⁶ S. Elm, *Virgins of God: the Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1996), 345–351 on the Arian attraction of 'a few silly women laden with sins'.

²⁷ *De Fuga*, 26; *History of the Arians*, 68.

²⁸ See, in general, L. Barnard, 'Athanasius and the Roman State', *Latomus* 36 (1977), 422–437 on Athanasius' increasing disregard for the Roman emperors.

²⁹ Elm, *Virgins*, 334–335.

criticisms of certain kinds of ascetic behaviour were also innovations, demarcating orthopraxy alongside their new orthodoxy.

Mesopotamia

Athanasius had developed a series of rhetorical constructions around Egyptian asceticism to exclude the Arians as simultaneously heterodox and heteropract. Yet it was also clear that Athanasius' opponents were closer to him than he sometimes admitted: as he puts it in his letter to the bishops of Egypt and Libya, 'Satan adopted the words of God when He spoke to Eve'.³⁰ Though they do not speak for themselves, Athanasius' opponents shared many of his ascetic objectives, even if they were not able to match his works of ascetic self-promotion such as the *Life of Antony*.

I would like to compare Athanasius to the sixth century hagiographer and historian John of Ephesus. Like Athanasius, John was periodically excluded from the patronage and protection of the state. His Miaphysite confession, the ancestors of the modern Syrian Orthodox, existed in a changing relationship with the state, sometimes as accepted schismatics and sometimes as persecuted heretics. John too develops a notion of an orthodox community bounded by behaviour as much as by belief. But his exposition of orthopraxy also provides an insight into the changing priorities of sixth-century Christianity, especially in John's defence of local ascetic custom and his confidence in monks as guardians of orthodoxy opposed to the official (Chalcedonian) church and its officials.

The Chalcedonian controversies of the sixth century were the second period of major strife over Christology within Roman Christianity. And John's position in this controversy provides an interesting comparison to Athanasius' construction of an ascetic high ground during his contest for power in fourth-century Alexandria. In the sixth century too, accusations of violence and differences in ascetic custom played a role in constructing the boundaries of 'orthodoxy' for the scattered leaders of the Miaphysite movement, who ceased to represent an imperial orthodoxy after the death of Anastasius in 518 and

³⁰ *Letter to the bishops of Egypt and Libya*, 2.

subsequently lived in exile in Egypt and rural Mesopotamia, as well as in monasteries in Constantinople.

As Volker Menze has shown, the acceptance of the council of Chalcedon became a defining feature of imperial orthodoxy when monks who refused to sign the Papal libellus, the confession of faith that acknowledged Chalcedon, were expelled from their monasteries and refused communion in 519–522.³¹ John of Ephesus, the hagiographer and historian, recorded these events in the reign of Justin II, some fifty years later. In his hagiographic record of these persecutions, the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, composed in 568, he emphasises the continuity of the behaviour of his saints with earlier demonstrations of piety and miracle-working.

John's hagiography seems to have been aimed towards a monastic audience that had once lived in his native Amida. It represents an appeal to the shared history of suffering that bound together by the experience of expulsion by the Chalcedonians. And, as such, it also fiercely opposes the then-emperor Justinian as a persecutor. But John was also a member of the Miaphysite community exiled to Constantinople, which had once benefited from the patronage of Empress Theodora and which was periodically favoured by later emperors, such as Justin II and Tiberius. John's *Ecclesiastical History*, whose confused third part (composed in 578–588)³² survives in full, presents a more moderate view of an emperor like Tiberius.³³ Here John's vitriol is reserved for the Chalcedonian patriarchs of Constantinople and those emperors who were willing to persecute the Miaphysites in the capital. The different perspectives of John's hagiography, focused on the monks of one locality, and of his history, which presents a more careful model of praise and blame, give us a rich and complex image of what constituted orthodox behaviour for John.

Lives of the Eastern Saints is dominated by its sense of present asceticism continuing the practices of the past. Several of John's saints are presented in pairs of master and disciple, where the senior monk demonstrates his pious credentials from acts of charity and public

³¹ V.-L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford, 2008), 67–89 and 111–120.

³² J. Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus: a Monophysite Historian in Sixth Century Byzantium* (Gröningen, 1995), 71.

³³ John of Ephesus, *HE*, III, III, 27–29 (ed. and tr. E.W. Brooks, *Johnannis Ephesini Historia Ecclesiastica pars tertia*, CSCO 105–106 *Scriptores Syri* 54–55 (Louvain, 1935–1936).

asceticism and establishes a lineage of orthodoxy that guarantees the prestige of his more junior successor. The second life in the pair then allows John to explore the change in situation after the beginning of persecution, when the Chalcedonians demonstrate their heresy by 'going about every land to expel monks from monasteries, great and small, bring down stylites from their columns, driving out hermits and forcing the people to take the Eucharist at sword-point'.³⁴

A good example of this pattern is the pair that open his collection, Habib and Zu'ra. Zu'ra follows his master as a stylite, but is forced down from his column because he cannot stand the depredations of the Chalcedonians and travels to Constantinople to upbraid Justinian in person.³⁵ Zu'ra confronts the emperor, imagined as Satan, 'roaring like a lion' and defies Pope Agapetus, who was responsible for the expulsion of the pro-Miaphysite patriarch of Constantinople, Anthimus.³⁶ Throughout this encounter, John emphasises Zu'ra's lack of normal political credentials: his very name means 'the small' and he is described entering the palace 'dressed in rags'.³⁷ Like Antony's return to Alexandria to denounce the Arians, Zu'ra's antagonism to the emperor is given power by his period of ascetic isolation, except that unlike Athanasius, John self-consciously draws on Zu'ra's own ascetic history, his position as the latest in a chain of ascetics that stretches back before the reign of the Chalcedonians Justin I and Justinian.

John's image of a ragged ascetic emerging in the wilderness is undoubtedly influenced by earlier hagiographies, John's hero being both ascetic and martyr, subjected to a persecution by 'those who call themselves Christians'. Athanasius re-invented Antony as an eremitic founder *ex nihilo*, without giving much attention to his earlier history or to the realities of persecution under Diocletian, or indeed to the attacks he alleges the Arians committed against the 'orthodox'. Perhaps the era of martyrdom was too divisive for the Alexandrian church: we should remember that the fourth century saw ongoing squabbles between the rigorist Meletians, who represented themselves as true successors to the martyrs, and other Christian groups. Antony

³⁴ John of Ephesus, *HE*, II (ed. J.-B. Chabot, *Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (Paris, 1933), 38).

³⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (ed. Brooks, PO 17, 12–14 and 18–20).

³⁶ Menze, *Syrian orthodox*, 200–207.

³⁷ *Lives* (ed. Brooks, PO 18, 25).

provided instead a vehicle for piety that was essentially free of a sense of history, where the image of the martyrs could be invoked in a generalised way, without appealing to specific, potentially controversial individuals.

Unlike Athanasius' Antony, John's ascetics have a more obvious history, which links them to their predecessors in a chain of masters and disciples, and they are modelled more closely on the martyrs, as well as on the saints of the fourth and fifth centuries. John's hagiography, as well as the second volume of his ecclesiastical history, are filled with accounts of wars, plagues and natural disasters and portents that accompany accounts of Chalcedonian persecution. And it is this disruption that forces his holy men to leave their dwellings and come out of the wilderness to protect a people abandoned by the emperor. Another of John's holy men, Bassian, laments at the destruction of the natural order: 'Who would not weep over the destruction of the race of men! All men run away from the fear of God [from orthodox religion]...we behave like deaf animals, without law or fear of judgement'.³⁸ It is this disordered world that draws down the stylite Zu'ra from his column to root out this corruption.

This image of the disordered world in John's hagiography is linked to the persecution of the Chalcedonians. They are portrayed as allies of the Jews, defending them from the righteous attacks of 'orthodox' saints, and using the services of a wealthy Samaritan at Justin II's court.³⁹ As persecutors, they renounce all their claims to orthodoxy. In the third part of John's ecclesiastical history, one monk asks the Chalcedonian patriarch John Scholasticus 'why a Christian sits in judgement over God's servants like a heathen?'⁴⁰ This image of persecution as an alien deed of heathens occurs again when John Scholasticus is trying to persuade the emperor Tiberius to persecute the Miaphysites: after John is forced to admit that the Miaphysites are neither pagans nor heretics, the emperor asks him: 'If they are Christians, then why do you urge me to persecute Christians as if I were Diocletian or one of the pagan kings of old?'.⁴¹ John does not seem to object to persecution as such: he himself conducted a persecution of the Montanists in Anatolia on behalf of Justinian. Instead, his implied argument is that

³⁸ *Lives* (ed. Brooks, PO 18, 651); *HE*, III, I, 19 and III, II, 29.

³⁹ *Lives* (ed. Brooks, PO 17, 90–92).

⁴⁰ John of Ephesus, *HE*, III, I, 9.

⁴¹ John of Ephesus, *HE*, III, I, 37.

since the Miaphysites are orthodox, men such as John Scholasticus show themselves to be heretics by their actions as persecutors.

Notably, John of Ephesus' polemic seems to be mainly invoked against Chalcedonian priests, rather than any large group of the laity, and his concern was as much with their behaviour towards the Miaphysites as their beliefs per se. Given that John does believe in the persecution of true heretics, he presents a difference of belief between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites that still allows for the pious acts of emperors and hopes for eventual reconciliation. The real boundaries he asserts are sacramental. When one Miaphysite monk dies in prison, he pronounces an anathema against the synodites in case they try to bury him or offer prayers for him after his death, and is buried as a martyr by 'orthodox Romans'.⁴² And when John Scholasticus wishes to enforce his authority over the Miaphysite monasteries of Constantinople, he breaks in and forces the monks to communicate and reconsecrates both the monasteries and the priests who served the monks.⁴³

John Scholasticus' behaviour suggests that the Chalcedonian leadership took the decisive step of denying the efficacy of Miaphysite ordinations. This was a notable contrast to the behaviour of the Miaphysites themselves in the 510s, who had accepted Chalcedonian priests: Philoxenus famously said that Satan himself would be a priest if he had been ordained according to the proper canons.⁴⁴ This belief in the efficacy of the canons is seen several times in the ecclesiastical history. When the Miaphysite bishop Stephen of Cyprus is arrested, and beaten he complains that 'the regulation of the church is destroyed: all the church canons have been trampled down'. When the Chalcedonians attempt to re-ordain him, he asks them 'In what constitution did you find the custom of annulling the ordination of orthodox bishops?'⁴⁵

Menze has noted that the Miaphysite missionary bishop, John of Tella, displayed great concern for the proper application of the canons

⁴² John of Ephesus, *HE*, III, I, 9.

⁴³ John of Ephesus, *HE*, III, I, 11–12.

⁴⁴ D. Michelson, 'Philoxenus of Mabbug's Vision of Churchmanship', *The Harp* (2009, forthcoming).

⁴⁵ John of Ephesus, *HE*, III, I, 18–19. Zachariah of Mytilene, *HE*, V, iv (ed. E.W. Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, CSCO 83–84 *Scriptores Syri* III, 5–6 (Paris-Louvain, 1919–1924), 216) complains about the practice of re-annointing converts by Miaphysite splinter groups in Egypt in the 490s.

for the ordination of priests, even in his exile in the 530s.⁴⁶ The same concern can be seen some forty years later in John's account: the Miaphysites have maintained an orthodox canonical tradition, so it is the act of a persecutor to deny the efficacy of their ordinations. At one stage, the priest Elisha, whom the Chalcedonians wish to re-ordain, asks the patriarch whether he wishes to re-baptise him as well.⁴⁷ The implication is that the Chalcedonians are acting like rigorists such as Paul of Samosata, by demanding the rebaptism of his own followers and denying the sacraments of others. Thus the issue for John, through which John Scholasticus shows his colours as a heretic, is not his belief per se, but his intolerance: that is his persecution in general and his failure to respect the fact that the Miaphysites had applied the canons in an orthodox manner.

Where John's history had focused on the canons as a source of legitimacy, his hagiography, directed to a Mesopotamian monastic audience,⁴⁸ gave prominent position to local ascetic practices, including some that had been banned by earlier bishops, such as Rabbula of Edessa. These include the prohibition of ascetics from living among secular people, growing their hair long or hanging irons on themselves; or from taking on lawsuits and from distributing holy oil, especially to women.⁴⁹ As well as describing his saints distributing charms of earth, similar in effect to the blessed oil that Rabbula banned, he celebrates the long hair of two of his saints, whom he calls 'nazirites' on the model of the judges of the Old Testament. One, John the Nazirite, is forced to flee into the countryside when the Chalcedonians expel him from his monastery. The second, Sergius, is captured by the Chalcedonians and 'shaved of the hair that marked his *naziroutho*'.⁵⁰ Here John emphasises the boundaries between the Miaphysites and Chalcedonians by drawing attention to their different value systems and centres

⁴⁶ Menze, *Syrian Orthodox Church*, 175–186 and idem, 'The *Regula ad Diaconos*: John of Tella, his eucharistic ecclesiology and the establishment of an ecclesiastical hierarchy in exile', *Oriens Christianus* 90 (2006), 44–90.

⁴⁷ John of Ephesus, *HE*, III, I, 15.

⁴⁸ Miaphysite educational centres were increasingly displaced into rural regions, outside the Chalcedonian control of the cities. See W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1972), 294–295 and 320.

⁴⁹ *Laws of Rabbula, On Monks*, 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20 and *On the bnay qyama*, 10, 18, 22, 53 (ed. Vööbus, 27–31 and 38–49).

⁵⁰ *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (ed. Brooks, PO 17, 39–48 and I, 104). I disagree with Brooks' gloss that his distinctive hairstyle was a tonsure.

of devotion. In failing to recognise Sergius' holiness and cutting off his hair, the Chalcedonians deny both the importance of his ascetic activity and the locally significant manner in which it was shown. By oppressing this custom, the Chalcedonians show themselves to be outside this indigenous tradition.

Conclusions

John of Ephesus and Athanasius both display the same capacity to unite differences in behaviour and religious practice to differences in belief. Both men encouraged their readers to observe the religious boundaries that they asserted, to construct an opposition group that behaved in the manner of pagan persecutors or departed from the norms of orthopraxy. In an environment when these churchmen had been excluded from official power, they could appeal to these boundaries to gather a support network in exile, for which monasteries in particular were important.

However, there are also important distinctions to make. Athanasius' ascetics were, in some ways, replacements for the martyrs: they represent a focus for religious devotion that could brush over the divided histories of the past. By contrast, John's ascetics are much more direct imitators of the martyrs, since they suffer in the Chalcedonian persecutions. And secondly, John's ascetics and persecuted priests are embedded in a history of asceticism and canonical practice that the timeless Antony is not.

John offers two forms of history that justify the orthodoxy of his protagonists: the canons that demonstrate the orthodoxy of the Miaphysite priests in Constantinople and the ascetic traditions that justify the defiance of Zu'ra or Sergius. John's production of these two distinct histories of 'right practice' illustrates the political quandary of the exiled bishop, caught between his monastic supporters in Mesopotamia and the court in Constantinople, each with their own history of orthopraxy. If Athanasius had been able to invoke a new foundation for monasticism in Antony, John of Ephesus clearly dealt with a Mesopotamian monasticism that had a developed self-history that he had to accommodate rather than dictate. This crystallisation of identities is evoked by one attempt at reconciliation from John's own lifetime. In 568, at Callinicum on the Euphrates, the imperial emissary Aman-tius agreed to all the essentials of the Severan position while avoiding

mention of the council of Chalcedon itself. This *libellus*, while accepted by the bishops present, was destroyed by their monastic supporters.⁵¹ Even if some Miaphysite bishops might have sought compromise with the Chalcedonians, for certain monasteries, union would mean capitulation, the victory of one history over another.

⁵¹ Described in W.A. Wigram, *The Separation of the Monophysites* (London, 1923), 144.

THE CONVERSION OF KING CALEB AND THE RELIGIOUS
AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF SIXTH-CENTURY
ETHIOPIA AND SOUTHERN ARABIA

Ralph Lee

Introduction

Ethiopia today is one of the poorest countries in the world – often jostling for last place in the United Nations table of Gross Domestic Product.¹ The sad state that Ethiopia is in today often colours the way in which Ethiopia is historically imagined. The purpose of this paper is to present the international influences and conflicts that Ethiopia was involved in during the sixth century. This is in order to gain a better understanding of Ethiopia's international standing during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and to explore the dynamics of the historical context in which a traditional saint and national hero, King Caleb, emerged. It is hoped that by this paper's conclusion it will be possible to see Ethiopia as a major international player in the sixth century, a dynamic force both in terms of its political ambition and religious influence. The tension in the understanding of Caleb's saintly role will also point to tensions in Ethiopia's political and ecclesiastical alliances.

First of all a disclaimer: the term 'Miaphysite' will be used to refer to a branch of the Christian Church in the sixth century CE. The fifth century saw debate developing over how to describe the human and divine nature of Christ resulting in divisions at the Council of Ephesus (431 CE), and again at Chalcedon (451 CE). Miaphysitism is sometimes associated with the anti-Chalcedonian party that affirmed a one-nature Christology over the two-nature one adopted at Chalcedon. The term is not, however, to be taken pejoratively since many of the anti-Chalcedonian Churches affirm the humanity of Christ as well as His divinity. The term is used for convenience to identify a major group in the church. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewāḥədo Church's (to

¹ United Nations Development Programme, 'Human Development Reports' (2008): <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics>. Retrieved 7/7/2008.

give it its modern official name) doctrinal expressions affirm fully the divinity and humanity of Christ.² A full understanding of Ethiopian Orthodox Christology would come from investigating the meaning of the Ge'ez word 'tewāḥədo'.³

The Coming of Christianity to Ethiopia

The New Testament gives an account of an Ethiopian Eunuch coming from the queen of the Ethiopians to Jerusalem to worship, and on that journey encountering the Apostle Peter (Acts 8:27). St Peter explains the meaning of a passage from the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7–8) that the Ethiopian eunuch is reading; in response the eunuch is baptised, and leaves rejoicing. This account is often discounted in the history of Christianity in Ethiopia since it does not seem that the encounter resulted in the establishment of a Christian Church in the Horn of Africa. It has been argued, however, that the fact that an Ethiopian is described as travelling from the royal Ethiopian court to worship at the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem harmonises with other evidence and demonstrates that Ethiopia enjoyed religious links with Palestine.⁴ In this light, it is possible that the account in Acts reveals the early acceptance of Christianity amongst Ethiopian Jews, or at least among Ethiopians with sympathy for Jewish beliefs. This pattern has been attested elsewhere, and parallels can be drawn with, for instance, Georgia in the Caucasus, where it seems Christianity was first associated with Jewish converts, with the new religion's wider acceptance coming later through the conversion of a king that gave a 'royal stamp of approval' to the process already underway.⁵

² For a fuller discussion, see F.W. Norris, 'Greek Christianities', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity, II: Constantine to c. 600*, ed. A. Casiday and F.W. Norris (Cambridge, 2007), 70–117.

³ W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 609, gives the meaning as 'oneness, union, unity', referring to the joining of the human and divine natures in Christ.

⁴ J. Gebremaryam, *Krstena be Etiopia* (Addis Abeba, 1996), 31–33.

⁵ T. Mgaloblishvili and G. Iulon, 'The Jewish Diaspora and Early Christianity in Georgia', in *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus*, ed. T. Mgaloblishvili (Richmond, 1998), 39–58.

Indeed, the history of Judaism in Ethiopia is controversial.⁶ Currently, the weight of evidence points to some sort of Jewish presence in Ethiopia from the first millennium BCE, connected with migrations of Semitic peoples from Southern Arabia.⁷ It is important to note that Jewish undercurrents have probably existed in Ethiopian Christianity from its origins, many of which remain today.⁸ The Ethiopian Church's claim to possess, even today, the Ark of the Covenant and the honour given to it in Christian worship is one of the most striking.⁹ Among the apparently Judaic practices present in Ethiopian Christianity are the keeping of Saturday as a Sabbath as well as Sunday, practices concerning ritual cleanness (for instance, menstruating women are forbidden to enter the Church building), circumcision, and the adherence to Levitical food regulations.¹⁰ This suggests a long standing relationship between Ethiopian Christianity and the Jewish faith.¹¹

The formal establishment of Christianity in Ethiopia, which today staunchly supports a 'one-nature' Christology and forms part of the group of churches sometimes called 'Miaphysite', probably dates from the second quarter of the fourth century CE. Traditionally, its origins coincide with the coming in the second quarter of the fourth century CE of a Syrian Christian named Frumentius to Axum, the capital of the ancient kingdom, and the conversion of King Ezana.¹² Frumentius, known in Ethiopia as Abba Salama, was later ordained bishop by Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria (295–373 CE), and returned as Ethiopia's first bishop.¹³ Greek and Ethiopic inscriptions in Axum attest to Ezana's conversion,¹⁴ but numismatic evidence and the absence of Ethiopian clergy at important synods in the Roman world suggests

⁶ Ethiopians Jews are often referred to as 'falashas'. See D. Kessler, *The Falashas: A short history of the Ethiopian Jews* (London, 1996).

⁷ E. Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible* (London, 2006), 1–31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 73–130.

⁹ See *ibid.* and also the Ethiopian national epic, the *Kebra Nagast* in E.A.W. Budge, *The Kebra Nagast* (New York, 2004).

¹⁰ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, II: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)*, Part Four: *The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451*, trans. O.C. Dean (London, 1996), 324–332; E. Ullendorff, 'Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (Monophysite) Christianity', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956) 216–256.

¹¹ Ullendorff, *Ethiopia*, 1–31.

¹² See Grillmeier, *Christ, II*: 295–301.

¹³ Grillmeier, *Christ, II*: 300.

¹⁴ W.G. Greenslade, 'Origin of Christianity in South Arabia', *The Moslem World* 21 (1931) 177–184.

Christianity's gradual establishment in the country, rather than a sudden mass conversion.¹⁵

The historical link with Alexandria posited from the time of Salama-Frumentius's consecration and the fact that Ethiopia was led spiritually by Egyptian Metropolitans for more than fifteen centuries have led many to see the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as subservient to the Egyptian.¹⁶ Although 'Coptic' simply means 'Egyptian', the Ethiopian Church is often referred to as Coptic and often Coptic influences are normally seen as the primary in the development of Ethiopian Christianity.¹⁷ An examination of the leadership of Egyptian metropolitans in Ethiopia, however, reveals that they often lacked knowledge of the country's languages and cultures.¹⁸ This opens up the possibility that other influences were important and, perhaps, more significant. From the records of Ethiopian bishops, it is also clear that from before the sixth century CE there were two bishops in Ethiopia, one in Axum (presumably the Egyptian) and another in Adulis.¹⁹ Indeed, Cosmos Indicopleustes testifies to there being bishops 'everywhere'. This further increases the possibility that the religious dynamics in Ethiopia during the formation of Christian identity in the country were complex rather than from Egypt alone in a monilinear way.

King Caleb: His Hagiography and the Kebra Nagast

King Caleb's mission to Southern Arabia is the focus of this paper. This mission sheds important light on the prevailing religious and political tensions in the Horn of Africa and Southern Arabia during the sixth century CE, placing contemporary influences upon and by Ethiopia in a different light. There are various accounts offering information of variable reliability on the events of Caleb's life, and we will start with the hagiographic ones.

The Ethiopic Synaxarium, or *Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, celebrates King Caleb on the 20th of the Ethiopian month of

¹⁵ A. Vööbus, *Early Versions of the New Testament* (Louvain, 1954), 243–249.

¹⁶ Ethiopia has had a native patriarch since only since 1959, and it maintains strong links with both Egyptian and Syrian Orthodox Churches.

¹⁷ A. Fortescue, *The Lesser Eastern Churches* (Piscataway, 2001), 297–298.

¹⁸ A. Taklahaymanot, 'The Egyptian Metropolitan of the Ethiopian Church', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 54 (1988) 175–222.

¹⁹ Taklahaymanot, 'Egyptian Metropolitan'.

Genbot, which is the 28th of May in the European calendar.²⁰ It summarises Caleb's achievements thus:

On this day died the holy and just man Caleb, King of Ethiopia. This saint loved and feared God, and he was of the True Faith. And when he heard that the Jews had killed the Christians in the city of Nagran he was filled with divine zeal, and sorrowed greatly. Then he rose up and went to the church wherein the kings of Ethiopia and the bishops are buried, and having come therein he stood up on the royal throne before the church, and he stripped off his beautiful and royal apparel, and dressed himself in rags. And he laid hold upon the horns of the altar, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and prayed in the following words: "O Lord, my God, the Lord of all created things. [...] Behold Thou, O God, and see what the impious infidel hath done to Thy flock! How he hath seized and slain the sons of Thy Church like sheep and goats, and hath burnt in fire the children of Thy Church. [...] behold, I will go out, and slay Thine enemies by the might of the Cross of Thine Only One and Thy Messiah, for I am jealous for Thee, and for my brethren, and for the believers my fathers [...]. Then Caleb the king went out from his royal city, and he departed and destroyed, and killed all the Jews who had laid waste the city of Nagran, and he performed countless miracles.²¹

The account continues by narrating that out of gratitude to God for his triumph over the Jews of Najran, Caleb 'forsook the world, and abandoned his kingdom' and became a solitary monk. His robes and crown were, we are told, sent to Jerusalem to be hung above the doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.²²

A more significant, hagiographic account of King Caleb is found in the *Kebra Nagast*, the *Glory of the Kings*.²³ This elaborate legend is mainly devoted to the account of the coming of the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia, and represents Ethiopia's national epic. King Caleb is one of only two Ethiopian kings with a significant position in it, the first being Menilik, the first king of Ethiopia, whom it claims

²⁰ E.A.W. Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church* (Cambridge, 1926). The text in Ge'ez can be found in G. Colin, *Le synaxaire éthiopien* (Turnhout, 1997). There is great uncertainty about the date of the Ethiopian Synaxarium, although many important kings, and other figures have their place in it.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 912–914.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Budge, *Kebra Nagast*. The critical edition of the Ge'ez text is found in C. Bezold, *Kebra Nagast: Die Herlichkeit der Könige nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten mal im äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutsche Übersetzung versehen*, *Abhandlungen der Philosophisch-Philologischen Klasse der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 23 (Munich, 1909).

to be the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Menilik, it asserts, brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia from Israel.²⁴ The *Kebrā Nagast* is a mysterious account, much embellished. Whatever its historical accuracy it lies at the heart of the source of identity of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.²⁵ Its date is uncertain, but there is a strong argument that its composition dates from the time of King Caleb, and parts of it possibly earlier than that, although the section including the account of Caleb likely dates from the time of the latest recension,²⁶ probably as late as the fourteenth century.²⁷ Strikingly, the *Kebrā Nagast* clearly places Ethiopia's Christian identity among Jewish roots, even making the claim that with the moving of the Ark, Ethiopia became God's chosen nation in the place of apostate Israel.²⁸ Caleb makes his appearance right at the end, when the King of Rome, Justinian, and the King of Ethiopia, Caleb divide the kingdoms of the earth between themselves. Their alliance was to see the end of the Jews:

And those two kings, Justinus the King of Rome and Caleb the King of Ethiopia, met together in Jerusalem. And their Archbishop was to make reading offerings and they were to establish the Faith in love, and they were to give each other gifts and the salutation of peace, and they were to divide between them the earth from the half of Jerusalem, even as we have already said at the beginning of this book [...] And thus after they had become united in a common bond, and had established the right faith they were to determine that the Jews were no longer to live [...].²⁹

Indeed, one possible reason for Caleb being revered in the *Kebrā Nagast* is that he restored the Ethiopian kingdom to its former limits as they were seen to be from the time of Menilik. Since the part of the *Kebrā Nagast* that incorporates this account is was probably a later addition, this account may also be a revision of events to paint Caleb as a saintly Miaphysite hero.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁵ Ullendorff, *Ethiopia*, 74

²⁶ D.A. Hubbard, 'The Literary Sources of the *Kebrā Nagast*', Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of St Andrews (St Andrews, 1956); D.W. Johnson, 'Dating the *Kebrā Nagast*', in *Peace and war in Byzantium: essays in honor of George T. Dennis, S.J.*, ed. T.S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (Washington D.C., 1995), 197–208.

²⁷ I. Shahid, 'The *Kebrā Nagast* in the Light of Recent Research', *Le Museon* 89 (1976) 133–178.

²⁸ Budge, *Kebrā Nagast*, 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

Some have viewed the author of the *Kebra Nagast* as faced with an awkward problem of identity in that Ethiopian Kings, including Caleb, are simultaneously presented as inheritors of the blessing of Israel, and yet also Christian.³⁰ The fact that Ethiopian Christianity appears to have represented a blend of Judaic practice with Christian theology from its inception suggests, however, that to the Ethiopians the dual Israelite-Christian identity of its kings was not a problem. If the unusually Jewish practices of the Ethiopian Christians do constitute a remnant of archaic Jewish-Christianity in the Horn of Africa,³¹ then the conflict between Judaic and Christian motifs in the Ethiopian culture is only problematic for observers external to Ethiopia's religious synthesis. According to Ullendorff, '[t]he doctrinal position of the Ethiopian national Church was always unenviable, caught as it was between the deeply rooted Judaic customs of the country and the necessity to maintain its theological prestige as a truly Christian body. Fortunately, these stresses became acute only in times of foreign pressure of religious controversy. [...] At other times the Abyssinian Monophysite Church and the Ethiopian nation have been at peace with their syncretistic Judaeo-Christian civilisation'.³² Additionally, it has to be emphasised that all Christian churches to a certain extent claim to have inherited the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, and so are to a certain extent 'Jewish'.

Moreover, the territory assigned to Ethiopia in the partition of the world recorded in the *Kebra Nagast* appears to be predominantly Miaphysite territory, with Caleb being assigned as protector of the Christian faith in these territories. After the accession of Justinian in Constantinople, the most significant Miaphysite kingdom remaining was Ethiopia. The country's role as the representative of the Miaphysite cause is in turn reflected in the extensive political relations known to have existed between Justinian and Caleb during the sixth century.³³ The political clout of the Ethiopian kingdom at this time cannot be underestimated, and the picture painted may represent the political

³⁰ See, for instance, W. Witakowski, 'Syrian Influences in Ethiopian Culture', *Orientalia Suecana* 38–39 (1989–1990) 191–202.

³¹ J. Daniélou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, I: *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London, 1964), 7–11; A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, I: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. J.S. Bowden (Atlanta, 1975), 9–11.

³² Ullendorff, *Ethiopia*, 107.

³³ Shahid, 'The *Kebra Nagast*', 133–178.

reality of Ethiopia's wide ranging influence, but the ecclesiastical alliances may have been more complex.

King Caleb and the Himyarites

Even if the claims made about Caleb in the Ethiopic Synaxarium and the *Kebra Nagast* are completely discounted, the discovery of the Syriac *Book of the Himyarites* fills in some of the uncertainties concerning the region's events during Caleb's reign. The *Book* is a crucial primary source for the history of the Southern Arabia in the sixth century, being discovered inside the ripped cloth covers of another text in 1920 and later published with an English translation in 1924.³⁴ It is most likely that the book was written by Simeon, Bishop of Beth-Arsham near the Sasanian capital at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and a contemporary of King Caleb of Ethiopia.³⁵ Many parts of this book are missing, but the work has thrown new light on related documents, including a letter written by Bishop Samuel and a well-known Syriac history ascribed to Dionysius of Tell-Mahre, both of which appear to use the *Book of the Himyarites* as their primary source and fill in some of the gaps in the *Book*.³⁶

The table of contents of the *Book of the Himyarites* is complete, and the detail supplied by Dionysius' account reveals some important information about King Caleb, which is consistent with the chapter headings in the *Book*:

Dimyanus [Dhu Nuwwas], King of the Himyarites learned of Roman merchants [...] while they were crossing the country of the Himyarites to enter the country of the Ethiopians, to trade with them as was the custom, and seized them and killed them, and plundered all their merchandise, saying 'because in the regions of the Romans, Christians are

³⁴ A. Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites* (London, 1924).

³⁵ Some of Simeon's letters can be dated to the first quarter of the 6th Century CE, but otherwise his dates are uncertain.

³⁶ See I. Shahid, 'The Book of the Himyarites: Authorship and Authenticity', *Le Museon* 76 (1963) 349–362; idem, *The Martyrs of Najran: New Documents* (Brussels, 1971), 253, which also contains the Syriac text and a translation of Samuel's letter at 43–64. For the *History* of Dionysius of Tell-Mahre, see *Chronicon Anonymum, Pseudo-Dionysianum Vulgo Dictum*, ed. I.B. Chabot, CSCO Scriptorum Syri, Textus, Series Tertia, Tomus II (Paris, 1933).

malignantly dispersing the Jews that are in their regions, and are killing them – because of this I am killing them'.³⁷

Dionysius then describes Caleb's reaction in the following terms: 'For if this torturer, the king of the Himyarites, surrenders to me so that I conquer him, I will become a Christian'.³⁸ In other words, at the time of the outbreak of violence against Christians in southern Arabia, Caleb, the king of the supposedly staunchly Christian (indeed, miaphysite) kingdom of Ethiopia, was not yet a Christian – a datum that conflicts with all of the later hagiographical accounts of his reign.

Two further extracts from Dionysius of Tel-Mahre and the *Book of the Himyarites* contrast with the hagiographic account in the Ethiopian Synaxarium. Firstly, Caleb's mission to South Arabia was not out of religious but economic zeal. Caleb reproached to the King of the Himyarites because:

[...] you acted wickedly, you killed the Christian merchants from Rome, and you ceased trade and prevented sustenance to my kingdom.³⁹

In contrast to the Synaxarium, his motivation appears not to have been zeal for God, but rather zeal for preserving the economic health of Ethiopia. Dhu Nuwwas, the Jewish convert and King of Himyar was an ally of Persia, and Caleb would have been well aware of the threat the Persians presented to Ethiopia's economic interests in the region.⁴⁰ But what is, undoubtedly, most significant is that it appears that King Caleb was not a Christian at the time of his Arabian campaigns. After the success of his first mission, however, we read:

And from that time after his victory he did not linger in fulfilling his vow, but he sent two of his nobles to King Justinian that he might send a bishop and clergy to him [...] and he was taught the faith and was baptized and he became a Christian, he and all of his nobles while urging all [the people] of the region to become Christians, and to establish churches in it.⁴¹

This is a remarkable statement considering the claim that Ethiopia has to have been Christian since the early fourth century, and suggests

³⁷ *Chronicon Anonymum*, ed. Chabot, 55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁰ D. Bundy, 'Early Asian and East African Christianities', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, II: *Constantine to c. 600*, ed. Casiday and Norris, 142.

⁴¹ *Chronicon Anonymum*, ed. Chabot, 56.

that the establishment of a Christian kingdom in Ethiopia did not take place as rapidly as otherwise thought. The continuation of the account reports that an unnamed Jewish king regained control of the Himyarite kingdom shortly afterwards and again persecuted Christians there. Again Caleb took his army to South Arabia, and established another Christian king. This account also points to the strong links that Ethiopia maintained with Arabia in trade and culture.⁴² There are other accounts of these events in Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic and Ethiopic,⁴³ but the primary source chronologically remains the *Book of the Himyarites*.⁴⁴ Inscriptions at Mareb in modern day Yemen in Ethiopic and Sabean further testify to Ethiopia's involvement in campaigns in the Arabian peninsula around this time.⁴⁵ It is clear that there was a significant degree of interaction between the Ethiopian kingdom and the Jews of Southern Arabia during the establishment of Christianity in Ethiopia. This would add to the Falashas, allowing a sustained Jewish influence on the Miaphysite churches in Southern Arabia and in Ethiopia.

Consistent with the idea that the *Kebrā Nagast* celebrates Caleb's restoration of Ethiopia's rightful territory is a speech by Caleb recorded in the *Book of the Himyarites*. This describes the victory Caleb won along the lines of the biblical accounts of the Promised Land's being given to Moses,⁴⁶ and in its later parts extols Caleb as 'the believing King',⁴⁷ 'the Christ-loving King',⁴⁸ comparing his acts with David's deliverance of Israel from Goliath.⁴⁹

Throughout the sixth century, Arabia as a region saw conflict with Rome over non-Chalcedonian Christianity, defended theologically by prominent Miaphysites such as Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Bishop Simeon of Beth-Arsam.⁵⁰ The link established here between Arabia and Ethiopia during this period suggests that

⁴² Shahid, *Martyrs*, 143–152

⁴³ Bundy, 'Early Asian', in *Cambridge History of Christianity*, II: *Constantine to c. 600*, ed. Casiday and Norris, 142.

⁴⁴ Shahid, *Martyrs*, 143–152

⁴⁵ A. Jamme, Inscription no. 577 in *Sabaeen Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis (Marib)* (Baltimore, 1962); M. Kamil, 'An Ethiopic Inscription Found at Mareb', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9 (1964) 56–57.

⁴⁶ Moberg, *Book of the Himyarites*, 47b–48b.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 49a.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 54a.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 46a.

⁵⁰ Shahid, *Martyrs*, 31–41.

the Miaphysite influence of these bishops would have extended into Ethiopia, and that Miaphysite leaders would have been glad of a powerful converted king to support their cause. A fourth-century parallel testifies to earlier ecclesiastical links between Ethiopia, South Arabia and the Roman Empire in the activity of the missionary Theophilus of India, who is said to have built churches in Najran amongst other places. Theophilus travelled from South Arabia to Ethiopia, carrying a letter from the Roman Emperor Constantius (317–361) to the two rulers of Ethiopia, Ezana and Saizana (321–360). The letter demanded the recall of Bishop Frumentius and his appearance before George the Cappadocian, bishop of Alexandria (357–358), in order that he accept the Arian form of Christianity. The Ethiopians refused, and Frumentius remained in Axum, his Nicene Christianity unchanged.⁵¹

Politically, given the threat from Persia in the region during the sixth century, the final decision to side with the Miaphysites could also have been partly motivated by a desire to save Ethiopia from being seen as too close an ally of Constantinople. The account attributed to Dionysius of Tell-Mahre later tells us that the second Christian King of Himyar (340–378) rejected the Council of Chalcedon at a time of controversy over Chalcedon in Alexandria,⁵² and it is likely that the Ethiopians sided with the non-Chalcedonian side at this time.

Conclusion

Drawing together the hagiographic accounts and the primary sources, we can see that the hagiographic accounts certainly reflect real events which took place in Southern Arabia. Yet they are also somewhat embellished, particularly in obscuring the apparently pagan past of King Caleb. They simultaneously distort the reality they reflect by presenting Caleb, and Ethiopian society, as committed to Christianity prior to the war in Najran. However, this paper shows that this is may not have been the case, or at least that Christianity was not permanently adopted as the state religion. Caleb's being a Christian and a powerful political figure later in his life is not under question, and his appeal to Constantinople recorded in Dionysius of Tel-Mahre's

⁵¹ I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington D.C., 1984), 91.

⁵² *Chronicon Anonymum*, ed. Chabot, 69.

account may reflect a much less clear set of ecclesiastical alliances in the region than was apparent. During the sixth century, tension between Christians and Jews was present both in Byzantium and in Arabia. Whilst the *Kebrā Nagast* and the *Book of the Himyarites* do not necessarily rely on the same source, they belong to this world. They both eulogise Caleb and the Ethiopian monarchy, recording conflict with Jews and commemorating Ethiopia's status as defender of the Miaphysite branch of Christianity. Caleb's political exploits in the region prior to the sixth century tension may have made him a useful figure to assert Ethiopia's political claims, and by this time it would have been necessary to affirm him as staunchly Miaphysite to maintain Ethiopia's Christian credentials. With the decline of the Axumite empire under the rapid spread of Islam, Ethiopia may have lacked such a strong figure with great political influence in the region with whom to identify, so it became necessary to revise some of his religious past. A full analysis is beyond the scope of this short paper, but the writer of the *Kebrā Nagast* appears to have recognised in the events recounted in the *Book of the Himyarites* an opportunity to complete the legend relating to the coming of the Ark to Ethiopia, and Ethiopia's inheriting of God's blessing in the place of Israel. This took place through Ethiopia's assuming its place as ruler over many kingdoms and defender of the true (Miaphysite) faith, whilst also fusing both Jewish and Christian identities consistent with the peculiarly Jewish brand of Christianity found to this day in Ethiopia, which is possibly a remnant of the archaic Jewish-Christian movement. By the time of the latest recension of the *Kebrā Nagast* any exploitation of the political reality of the fourth century for the validation of Ethiopia's Miaphysite identity, and its claim to political dominance in the region would require Caleb to be strongly identified with this form of Christianity. The suggestion may be made therefore, that Caleb's Christian identity was revised as early as the sixth century, but certainly by the time of the fourteenth century recension of the *Kebrā Nagast*.

THE EMERGENCE OF MARTYRS' SHRINES IN LATE
ANTIQUITY IRAN: CONFLICT, CONSENSUS,
AND COMMUNAL INSTITUTIONS

Richard Payne

Between the beginning of the fifth century and the end of the seventh, the Christian dead became ever more prominent participants in the society of Iran.¹ The early Sasanian state's cultivation of fear within, and attempt to assert control of, an increasingly organized religious community through the public execution of its leaders, both secular and religious, had provided the Christians of the empire with countless martyrs. The 'Great Persecution' of Shapur II (309–379), continually re-imagined in subsequent centuries, resulted in the deaths of nobles (*bar here*), ascetics (*bnai* and *banat qyama*), lower clergy, bishops, and more humble members of the Christian community from ca. 340, especially within the politically and economically sensitive regions of Northern Mesopotamia and Khuzestan.² Yazdgard II (438–457) similarly employed such mass executions before a civic audience to quell the Christian elites of Karka d-Beit Slok in Northern Mesopotamia.³ However, those Christians transformed, through textual and spatial

¹ This is not to suggest a decline in the importance of saints' cults from the late seventh-century onward, but merely to signal a hiatus in our evidence and a possible cessation in the steady expansion of cults characteristic of the late Sasanian period. The revival of martyrs' cults in medieval Northern Mesopotamia, between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, has yet to attract the sustained attention of a historian. See J.M. Fiey, *Saints syriaques* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 54–55, 65–66.

² K. Mosig-Walburg, 'Christenverfolgung und Römerkrieg: Zu Ursachen, Ausmaß und Zielrichtung der Christenverfolgung unter Šāpūr II', *Iranistik* 7 (2005) 5–84, and J. Wiesehöfer, "'Geteilte Loyalitäten': Religiöse Minderheiten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rom und dem sasanidischen Iran', *Klio* 75 (1993) 362–382, both stress the political contexts of the persecution. G.G. Blum, 'Zur religionspolitischen Situation der persischen Kirche im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 91 (1980) 11–32 at 24, importantly stressed the expanding organizational structure of the church as among 'der tieftsten Ursachen für die spätere Verfolgungswelle'. Scholarship has not begun to address the reimagination of the 'Great Persecution' in the sixth, seventh, and subsequent centuries.

³ S. McDonough, 'A Question of Faith? Persecution and Political Centralization in the Sasanian Empire of Yazdgard II (438–457 CE)', in *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, ed. H. Drake (Aldershot, 2006), 69–81.

practices of legitimation, into martyrs during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries were chiefly victims of the kind of quotidian violence characteristic of Sasanian political culture rather than organized ‘persecutions’, executed for impudent violation of religious boundaries the monarchy was determined to maintain.⁴ There was, in short, a steady stream of Christian dead for the orchestrators of martyrs’ cults to position within the settlements and landscapes of Iran. Although the martyrologies of the fourth century frequently commemorated sites of martyrdom, it was only from 410 onward, when the Sasanian king of kings began to patronize Christian institutions, that bishops, monks, and lay patrons established martyrs’ cults openly and industriously in civic and rural contexts.⁵ From highly symbolic points in the landscape such as Mount Bisutun to major cities such as Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the martyrs came to impart prosperity and healing, to provide symbols of Christian prestige, and to present particular visions of religious community to the inhabitants of the Iranian empire in late antiquity.

Martyrologies and Communities

Saints, their patrons, and their cults are among the best-documented aspects of Christianity in the late antique Iranian world. The literary specialists of the Church of the East remained very much in touch with the development of the hagiographical arts on both sides of the

⁴ For convenient overviews of these acts of violence that nonetheless uncritically perpetuate the representations of the martyrologies themselves, see P. Bruns, ‘Beobachtungen zu den Rechtsgrundlagen der Christenverfolgungen im Sasanidenreich’, *Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 103 (2008) 82–112; and J. Rist, ‘Die Verfolgung der Christen im spätantiken Sasanidenreich: Ursachen, Verlauf und Folgen’, *Oriens Christianus* 80 (1996) 17–42.

⁵ Fourth-century martyrologies often described sites and landscapes of martyrdom, without referring to shrines and only exceptionally to the fate of martyrs’ bodies. See e.g. *Martyrdom of Jacob and Mary*, ed. P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II (Leipzig/Paris, 1897), 307; *Martyrdom of Tarbo*, in idem, 254–260, 259; *Martyrdom of Teqla*, in idem, 308–313; *Martyrdom of Shahdost*, in idem, 276–281, 280–281. Both the *Martyrdom of Badma*, in idem, 347–351, 351, and the *Martyrdom of Shapur and his Companions*, 51–56, 56, recorded that their fellow Christians merely provided the corpses with a proper burial. On the Sasanians’ patronage and cooptation of bishops and their institutions, see S. McDonough, ‘Power by Negotiation: Institutional Reform in the Fifth Century Sasanian Empire’, unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2005, and idem, ‘Bishops or Bureaucrats?: Christian Clergy and the State in the Middle Sasanian Period’, in *Current Research in Sasanian Archaeology, Art and History*, ed. D. Kennet and P. Luft (Oxford, 2008), 87–92.

Euphrates.⁶ As a result, we possess approximately sixty martyrologies composed in Syriac surviving from Sasanian Iran that evolved from pithy accounts of a saint's origin and execution to the most elaborate of narratives in the early seventh century.⁷ The study of these materials is currently undergoing a long overdue renaissance.⁸ On the basis of earlier contributions to the literary structure and composition of these texts and their value as passive sources of historical geography, chronology, and political history, recent studies have disclosed the ways in which Sasanian martyrologies actively constructed religious difference and accommodated cultural diversity.⁹ These and future studies stand to benefit from an examination of the emergence of the physical structures of veneration in the service of which the martyrologies were produced. The present intervention will examine the evidence for the establishment of individual shrines with a view to revealing the diverse social contexts from which martyrs' cults emerged and the peculiar structures of communal authority they engendered.

Ecclesiastical historians have tended to privilege the patriarchal perspective of our canonical and historiographical sources and to represent the Christians of the Iranian world as a religious community naturally progressing toward unification under the catholicopatriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, a pyramidal ecclesiastical hierarchy, and a uniform collection of canons.¹⁰ For their part, historians of the Sasanian empire have been content to depict the structures of religious

⁶ P. Peeters, *Orient et Byzance: Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine* (Brussels, 1950); S. Brock, 'Review: *Untersuchungen zur syrischen Literaturgeschichte I: Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung aus der Christenverfolgung Schapurs II* by Gernot Wiessner', *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968) 300–309.

⁷ S. Brock, *The History of Mar Ma'in with a Guide to the Persian Martyr Acts* (Piscataway, NJ, 2008), 77–125, now provides an invaluable guide to the texts and the most important manuscripts.

⁸ S. Brock, 'Saints in Syriac: A Little Tapped Resource', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008) 181–196.

⁹ A. Becker, 'Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and "Fear" as Religious Categories in the Sasanian Empire: The Case of the *Martyrdom of Gregory* and the *Martyrdom of Yazdpane'h*', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2 (2009) 300–336; J. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley, CA, 2006).

¹⁰ Cf. J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide* (Paris, 1904), and J.M. Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire de l'église en Iraq* (Louvain, 1970), the foundational and indispensable works. Most scholars would now deny the Church of the East doctrinal unity before the seventh century, which is not to minimize the importance of the pursuit of such unity: S. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church: A Lamentable Misnomer', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 78 (1996) 23–35.

community as the most salient elements in social relations and to envision late antique Iran as a society of discrete religious communities.¹¹ Such structures undoubtedly existed, even if the state patronage on which their expansion depended was unreliable. But an assessment of their salience requires investigation of their constitution in particular localities – in an empire of astounding cultural, social, and ecological diversity – that will have defined leadership and distributed authority in varying ways. Martyrs' shrines provide an alternative, local perspective on the development of Christian institutions, one that foregrounds the role of local elites who could both contest and complement the communal leadership of bishops and their clerical hierarchies. The martyrological literature, overwhelmingly but never exclusively local in orientation, offers the heterogeneous provincial social structures through which Christian communities were realized, rather than the principal episcopates, as the points of departure for the study of Christianity in Iranian society.

The bones and blood of the martyrs constituted a uniquely powerful resource for the symbolic construction of communal unity.¹² Shared suffering and loss could emplot individual Christian communities vertically in time with the apostolic community and horizontally in space with the universal Christian community of 'all the martyrs and confessors of the east, the west, the north and the south.'¹³ To acquire a relic of a martyr was to possess a symbolic centre of the Christian church and to determine the role that symbol would play in the definition of its boundaries and hierarchies. In late antique Iran, those symbols were largely in the hands of lay men and women, from which they could pass, through diverse acts of transfer, to martyrs' shrines that were sites of negotiation between lay elites, bishops, and monasteries over their respective roles in the leadership of the Christian people and over the terms of membership therein. Well-placed individuals seized the corpses of the recently executed where possible.¹⁴ Among the soldiers charged to defend the bodies from pillagers were often Christian

¹¹ M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), 280–506, has provided the most influential, elegant, and useful of such analyses.

¹² For the symbolic construction of consensus within the cult of saints see also, in this volume, P. Booth, 'Orthodox and Heretic in the Early Byzantine Cult(s) of Saints Cosmas and Damian'.

¹³ *Martyrdom of Jacob the Sliced*, ed. P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, II (Leipzig/Paris, 1897), 539–558, 556.

¹⁴ The bulk of the evidence will be discussed below.

troops who themselves appropriated martyrs' remains. Some soldiers even commissioned the composition of a martyrology, presumably for a relic in their possession.¹⁵ Other purchased martyrs' corpses, often from their guards.¹⁶ As we shall see, powerful Christians able to invest in saints were prominent among their possessors.¹⁷ In the hagiographies from the fourth through seventh centuries, the bodies of the saints invariably fell into lay hands in the immediate wake of the martyrdom, with the exception of the relics acquired by the industrious monks of Sliq Harubta to be discussed below. It is the subsequent fate of the relics that varied. Private relic cults remained common throughout the Iranian world in late antiquity and beyond.¹⁸ But some laymen elected to place their symbolic power in the service of a broader Christian collectivity either by themselves constructing a martyrs' shrine or relinquishing their possession of relics to a cult orchestrated by bishops or monks. Martyrs, their bodies, and their shrines were thus as likely to unleash centrifugal as centripetal forces within Christian communities.¹⁹ The orchestrators of the new habitations of the saints from the early fifth century onward carefully navigated the symbolic polyphony of the martyrs and, in the process, gave rise to distinctive configurations of communal unity.

The Martyrs in an Iranian Society

The emergence of martyrs' cults aroused minimal interest, let alone intervention, on the part of the Zoroastrian religious professionals of the empire. Much has been made of the disturbances the Christian dead posed to a society that adhered to Zoroastrian purity regulations for

¹⁵ *Martyrdom of Zebina and Companions*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, II: 39–51, 51.

¹⁶ *Martyrdom of Jacob the Sliced*, 557; *Martyrdom of Zebina and Companions*, 50, where a companion of the martyrs procured their corpses for 500 drachms and 3 *qarbasin* of silk.

¹⁷ An Armenian noblewoman in the Iranian highlands provides an early example: *Martyrdom of 'Aqebshma*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum II*, 351–396, 374.

¹⁸ Cf. *History of Mar Pinhas*, ed. P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum IV* (Paris and Leipzig, 1894), 208–218.

¹⁹ P. Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 1982), 23–49. See also now K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), 61–188, on the pervasiveness of private cults, their leading role in the stimulation of religious change, and the concomitant conflicts between bishops and lay elite impresarios of cults.

the disposal of the deceased.²⁰ The purity of *Ērānšahr*, the Zoroastrian appellation and concept of the Iranian empire, depended more specifically on the treatment of putrefying corpses than on the exclusion of the dead from its settlements and landscapes. Putrefaction's demon, Nasuš, was among the most menacing of pollutants, the neutralization of whose effects engendered a complex set of ritual practices that governed the disposal of corpses.²¹ Once transferred, under precisely ritualized circumstances, to an uninhabited site, sacred animals, dogs and birds, uniquely immune against Nasuš's powers cleansed the body of its putrefying flesh, leaving dry bones that in the Sasanian period were preserved in ossuaries (*astōdān*).²² There is little evidence that non-Zoroastrians were compelled to observe these regulations. But irreconcilable practices of corpse disposal were a possible site of conflict to which Christian and Zoroastrian religious professionals could draw attention in their efforts to elaborate boundaries.²³ Burial within the ground polluted the soil, among the most sacred substances in the Good Religion. Executioners thus cast the corpses of their victims to the exposure fields where the dogs accomplished their holy excarnation, an act Christian hagiographers stylized as a further assault on their saints.²⁴ It was, however, principally the handling of the body during putrefaction that could occasion controversy. And there is evidence for Christians avoiding such conflict: the monks of Sliq Harubta waited until 'the flesh (*pagre*) had fallen from the bones (*garme*)' before placing the bodies of the ten martyrs of Beit Garmai within a

²⁰ P. Bruns, 'Reliquien und Reliquienverehrung in den syro-persischen Märtyrerakten', *Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 101 (2006) 194–213, esp. 194–201.

²¹ M. Meytarchiyan, *Pogrebal'nie Obryadi Zoroastriitsev* (Moscow, 2001), 42–64.

²² D. Huff, 'Archaeological Evidence for Zoroastrian Funerary Practices', in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, ed. M. Stausberg (Leiden, 2004), 593–630; Meytarchiyan, *Pogrebal'nie Obryadi Zoroastriitsev*, 65–101.

²³ *Chronicle of Seert II*, ed. and trans. A. Scher, *Histoire nestorienne (Chronique de Séert)*, seconde partie fasc. 1, PO 7 (Paris, 1911), 97–203, 130; *Martyrdom of Peroz*, 254; *Martyrdom of 'Aqebshma*, 361. Cf. R. Brody, 'Judaism in the Sasanian Empire: A Case Study in Religious Coexistence', *Irano-Judaica* 2 (1990) 52–62, 58. Olfactory miracles appear to assert the holiness of the newly dead against Zoroastrian notions of impurity: *History of Mar Qardagh*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, II: 442–506, 505, trans. Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 19–69, 67, and *Martyrdom of Gregory the Commander*, 392.

²⁴ E.g. *Martyrdom of Bar Shebya*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, IV: 281–284, 283; *Martyrdom of Shirin*, ed. P. Devos, 'Sainte Šīrīn, martyre sous Khusrau Ier Anōšarvān', *Analecta Bollandiana* 64 (1946) 87–131, 130, and trans. idem, 'La jeune martyre perse sainte Šīrīn', *Analecta Bollandiana* 112 (1994) 5–31, 30–31.

shrine.²⁵ While involving a variety of individual practices, such as the transportation of bodies still unclean and the use of bloody soil as *hnana*, Zoroastrian religious professionals would have abhorred, the subsequent veneration of non-putrefying bodies was not fundamentally novel within or foreign to Iranian society. Whether in portable ossuaries or in cliffside tombs, Sasanian elites of all religious affiliations preserved, memorialized, and monumentalized the bones of their dead. In a remarkable example of convergence between Iranian and Christian mortuary practices, a tomb on the Kuh-i Rahmat between Istakhr and Persepolis, which contained numerous Zoroastrian *astōdānān* in a landscape imbued with religious significance, prominently displayed an unambiguously Christian cross.²⁶

A Sasanian king of kings' patronage of the empire's first major martyrs' shrine thus hardly entailed a re-imagining of the relationship between the living and the dead. The introduction of martyrs' shrines to Iran was, like many ecclesiastical institutions, a product of imperial and episcopal collaboration between Yazdgard I and Maruta, the Roman bishop of Maipherqat. The *Martyrdom of Narsai*, a work composed between 421 and 424, described a martyrs' shrine established near Seleucia-Ctesiphon by Maruta with the support of Yazdgard I that appears to have stimulated the subsequent expansion of cults.²⁷ The shrine was considered the suitable site for the newly martyred Narsai's body:

We Christians took the body of the blessed martyr together with his head and blood, and transferred it to the martyrs' shrine (*beit sahde*) built by Mar Maruta the bishop of Sop, blessed, worthy of good memory, and a friend of the martyrs. This place was built by him through a decree (*saqra*) of the king [Yazdgard], because....[king Shapur] slew

²⁵ *Martyrdom of the Ten Martyrs from Beit Garmai*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* IV: 184–188, 187–188.

²⁶ D. Huff, 'Ein christliches Felsgrab bei Istakhr', in *Archaeologia iranica et orientalis: Miscellanea in honorem Louis Vanden Berghe*, ed. L. de Meyer and E. Haerincx (Ghent, 1989), 713–729. S. Hauser, 'Christliche Archäologie im Sasanidenreich: Grundlagen der Interpretation und Bestandsaufnahme der Evidenz', in *Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich*, ed. A. Mustafa, J. Tubach und G.S. Vashalomidze (Wiesbaden, 2007), 93–136, for a very revealing discussion of the dating of the site.

²⁷ P. Peeters, 'Abgar: Hagiographe perse méconnu (début du V siècle)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 83 (1965) 303–328, 326, for the date of composition, and *passim* for the hagiographer and his oeuvre. On Christian representations of Yazdgard, see S. McDonough, 'A Second Constantine?: The Sasanian King Yazdgard in Christian History and Historiography', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1 (2008) 127–140.

118 martyrs there in a single day. For this reason, Mar Maruta the bishop requested this place and built in it a glorious and adorned temple (*haykla*) to the honour of the glorified martyrs.²⁸

The Armenian *History of Maruta* similarly described the institution of a 'tomb' (*hangstaran*) for the martyrs 'by command of the ruler' (*hramanay arkayin*).²⁹ Maruta was of course famed for his zealous accumulation of martyrs' relics, transforming the city of Maipherqat into Martyropolis.³⁰ He apparently persuaded king Yazdgard, in the course of the diplomatic negotiations he undertook between 408 and 410 to secure the recognition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, to advocate the cultivation of a martyrs' cult in his kingdom, that is, the creation of an institution for the conservation and commemoration of the Christian dead. We know of no such shrines before this royally sanctioned venture.³¹ The fourth-century *Martyrdom of Miles* recounted how the Christians of Malqin, near Rayy, placed the bones of Miles and his associates within their village and benefited from their apotropaic powers.³² But the collective veneration of relics does not constitute a shrine with a physical structure that sets off the martyrs from the less than special dead. The construction of a shrine, especially when combined with the composition of a martyrological account and the institution of a feast, enabled the organizers of a cult to restrict the meanings their relics can support and to endow the relics with a unique variety of spatially articulated legitimacy. Maruta and Yazdgard introduced a new technology for communicating the messages of the martyrs in Iranian society, one of no small consequence for the development of East Syrian Christianity.

²⁸ *Martyrdom of Narsai*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II: 170–180, 180. Peeters, 'Abgar: Hagiographe perse', 309.

²⁹ *History of Maruta*, ed. L. Alishan, *Vark' ew vkayabanut'iwnk' srbots'* (Venice, 1874), 17–32, 30, and trans. R. Marcus, 'The Armenian Life of Maruta of Maipherkat', *Harvard Theological Review* 25 (1932) 47–71, 67.

³⁰ E. Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), 45–59.

³¹ References to fourth century shrines in the tenth century *Chronicle of Seert* likely reflect later foundations. There is, for instance, no reference to a shrine for the body of the catholicos Barba'shem in his fourth century martyrology, although the *Chronicle of Seert* claimed he was installed in a shrine by a bishop in Khuzistan: *Martyrdom of Barba'shem*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II: 296–303, and *Chronicle of Seert I*, ed. and trans. A. Scher, *Histoire nestorienne (Chronique de Séert), première partie II*, PO 5 (Paris, 1911), 219–344, 223.

³² *Martyrdom of Miles*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* II: 260–275, 274–275, for the dating of which see Brock, 'Saints in Syriac', 184–185.

Monks, Bishops, and the Diffusion of Cults in the Fifth Century

If a Roman bishop and a king of kings introduced the institution, monks, provincial bishops, and lay elites undertook to construct shrines across the empire. The prestige of Maruta's shrine is evident from its ability to attract the relics of Narsai and to inspire a stream of imitators. The monk Abgar, the only hagiographer whose name and context are known from the fifth or sixth centuries, composed four martyrologies that propagated cults of martyrs from the reigns of Yazdgard I and Bahram V (421–438) and, in the process, documented the energetic responses of a monastic community to the emergence of the martyrs' shrine.³³ The monks of the monastery of Sliq Harubta, 'Seleucia Destroyed', dwelled in the vicinity of the site of the martyrs' execution and appropriated, on one occasion with the assistance of Christian merchants, their corpses and blood-soaked earth. It was the monks of Sliq Harubta who had delivered Narsai's body to the shrine of Maruta. However, the monks soon transferred some of his relics to the martyrrium of Hesna d-Lawarne, 'the fortress of Lawarne', whose origin is undocumented, for fear of their destruction during the violence of Bahram V: 'Out of fear for the Magians, lest they uncover and defile them, we brought some of the bones of the glorious athlete and treasure of life and placed them among the martyrs of Lawarne for the assistance and healing of men.'³⁴ Here the monks of Sliq Harubta also deposited the head of Tataq and the bodies of the ten martyrs of Beit Garmai, after their putrefaction was complete, in the martyrrium of the fortress of Lawarne.³⁵ In the shadow of Maruta's foundation, monks asserted themselves as the guardians and promoters of a new variety of relic cult. Where the martyrologies of the fourth century had been unconcerned with the fate of the martyrs' bodies, Abgar's texts carefully traced the genealogy of relics of the early fifth-century martyrs and the institutional circumstances of their veneration, suggesting that a profound shift was taking place in the ideological relationship

³³ L. van Rompay, 'Impetuous Martyrs? The Situation of the Persian Christians in the Last Years of Yazdgard I (419–420)', in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective: Memorial Louis Reekmans*, ed. M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun, (Leuven, 1995): 363–375, offers an analysis of these individual martyrs, denying their impetuosity.

³⁴ *Martyrdom of Narsai*, 180.

³⁵ *Martyrdom of Tataq*, 183–184; *Martyrdom of the Ten Martyrs*, 187–188.

between martyrs, their bodies, and their places of interment within Maruta's sphere of influence.

Abgar, moreover, indicated the appeal of the new configuration of martyr and shrine to a bishop somewhat further afield: Bishop Sawma of the city of Karka d-Ledan in Khuzestan. In the *Martyrdom of Jacob the Notary*, he recounted how the body of the saint, initially acquired by the monks, was transferred to Karka d-Ledan. The mother of the saint and bishop Sawma 'placed it in an honoured place that was suitable for the glorious deeds of a perfect martyr', a circumlocution whose avoidance of the word martyrrium (*beit sahde*) may reveal the author's uncertainty concerning the nature of the shrine and its equivalence with those known to him in Seleucia-Ctesiphon.³⁶ The passage offers an important link between the milieu of Maruta and Abgar and the other documented shrine of the first half of the fifth century. Bishop Sawma engineered the translation of Pusai and Marta, martyred under Shapur II, from the hands of a particular family to an episcopal cult in the year 429, only a few years after the composition of Abgar's narrative. The *Martyrdom of Pusai* and the *Martyrdom of Marta*, which were produced in Karka d-Ledan in the mid fifth century to legitimate the translation and the bishop's newfound role as the organizer of a martyrs' cult, narrated the history of the saints' bodies, in a manner reminiscent of Abgar's works, and thematized the hazards of the private appropriation of relics.³⁷ A miracle obstructed a layman's venture to seize the saint. When a member of the military furtively absconded with the body of Pusai, his mule miraculously fled to deliver the body to a local ascetic woman (*banat qyama*) worthy of its possession.³⁸ The woman's brother proceeded to purchase the relics of Marta, and the

³⁶ *Martyrdom of Jacob the Notary*, 200.

³⁷ G. Wiessner, 'Zum Problem der zeitlichen und örtlichen Festlegung der erhaltenen syro-persischen Märtyrerakten: Das Pusai-Martyrium', in *Paul de Lagarde und die syrische Kirchengeschichte* (Göttingen, 1968), 231–251, 241–244, offered two possible dates for the *Martyrdom of Pusai*'s composition, on the basis of the translation as a *terminus post quem* and Karka d-Ledan's position in the travails of ecclesiastical politics: the period immediately following the translation and the first half of the sixth century. He did not refer to Abgar's relationship with bishop Sawma, which indicates the bishop's familiarity with martyrological production at Seleucia-Ctesiphon and supports the earlier of Wiessner's possible dates. The exigencies of the new shrine compelled Sawma, or one of his immediate successors, to commission narratives underpinning episcopal authority over its precincts and elaborating a fusion of bishop, city, and cult.

³⁸ *Martyrdom of Pusai*, 230–231.

family established a domestic cult of the saints that was likely typical of East Syrian practice. To approximate this cult as closely as possible with its episcopal successor, the hagiographer described her devotions as an annual commemoration (*dukrana*) performed within her residence 'in the vicinity of the priests of the church'.³⁹ Upon her death, however, the relics were subject to an inheritance dispute between the sons of her brother, who proposed to divide the bodies. The bishop of Karka d-Ledan, Sawma, intervened and persuaded the family to relinquish the saints to 'the members of the church of Karka' (*bnai 'edta d-Karka*). In the eighth year of Bahram V's reign, 429, bishop Sawma transferred the relics to the 'treasury' (*syamta*) of the church of Karka d-Ledan.⁴⁰ The *Martyrdom of Pusai* expressed the civic character of the new cult by introducing an account of the city's foundation at its outset and declaring the saints' relic 'a treasury of blessing for the inhabitants of its city'.⁴¹ Objects that had once distinguished the piety of a family now communicated the unity of the Christians of Karka d-Ledan under the leadership of their bishop.⁴²

Toward the end of the fifth century, the bishop of the city of Karka d-Beit Slok (modern Kirkuk) similarly instituted a martyrs' shrine representative of a civic collectivity that aimed to subordinate a plurality of familial, domestic cults to a single, episcopally directed civic cult. Bishop Maron constructed a monastery (*daira*) upon the hill outside of the city where many of the martyrs had been slain, which included a martyrium for their relics.⁴³ A festival of the martyrs was simultaneously

³⁹ *Martyrdom of Marta*, 240.

⁴⁰ *Martyrdom of Marta*, 240–241.

⁴¹ *Martyrdom of Pusai*, 208–210, 232.

⁴² Wiessner, 'Das Pusai-Martyrium', 234, characterized this aspect of the text as the 'Niederschlag einer 'national'-chuzistanischen Lokaltradition'. But the focus was significantly upon the city, not the province.

⁴³ *History of Karka d-Beit Slok and its Martyrs*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, II: 507–535, 530–531. The martyrium of Karka d-Beit Slok, known to posterity as the Church of Mar Tahmizgard, was still standing at the beginning of the twentieth century. Before its destruction during the First World War, the architectural historians Gertrude Bell and Walter Bachmann documented its features and dated its construction to the late fifth-century, with additions in the early Islamic period: G. Bell, *Churches and Monasteries of the Tûr 'Abdin and Neighbouring Districts* (Heidelberg, 1913), 100–103, and W. Bachmann, *Kirchen und Moscheen in Armenien und Kurdistan* (Leipzig, 1913), 18 ff. However, subsequent investigation has dated the surviving structures to the tenth-century, and therefore the physical structure of the shrine is beyond the scope of the present essay: U. Monneret de Villard, *Le chiese della Mesopotamia* (Rome, 1940), 27.

established to communicate the power of Karka's martyrs and, not least, bishops across Northern Mesopotamia, where the civic shrine was both innovative and unique. The *History of Karka d-Beit Slok and its Martyrs*, composed as a transcript for the feast around the year 600, highlighted the role of particular noble families and their martyrs in the cult in a narrative that, as will be argued in greater detail elsewhere, endeavoured to promote the aristocracy within its representation of the Christian community.⁴⁴ The bulk of Karka d-Beit Slok's commemorated martyrs, including those from among the ranks of its bishops, were members of the landed nobility of Northern Mesopotamia. The hagiographer often expressly indicated the particular families to which martyrs belonged.⁴⁵ Karka's noble families retained a memory, and probably also relics, of their martyred predecessors and boasted of their martyrdoms as much as of their distinguished lineages. Unlike most other martyrologies of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, the *History of Karka* did not dwell on the relics of the saints as much as on the landscapes of martyrdom – those relics may have remained partly in the hands of the families so prominent in the text. But even if the aristocratic families of Karka retained a claim on their saints, the martyrs' shrine and festival incorporated all of the city's martyrs to assert the unity of 'the people of the Christians' (*'ama d-krestyane*) and 'the inhabitants of Karka' (*karkaye*) without diminishing the privileged place of its more distinguished members.⁴⁶ The comparatively well-documented fifth-century shrines of Karka d-Ledan and Karka d-Beit Slok demonstrate that the emergence of such civic cults depended on the delicate transfer of relics from lay to episcopal hands. Both shrines produced martyrologies that cautiously addressed, in very different ways, the potential tensions inhering in martyrs that had once been associated with particular families to place those martyrs in the service of Christian collectivities defined by loyalty to city and bishop.

⁴⁴ J.M. Fiey, 'Vers la réhabilitation de l'Histoire de Karka d'Bét Slôh', *Analecta Bollandiana* 82 (1964) 189–222, endeavoured to demonstrate that the text was a reliable source for the city's history and produced a useful overview of its contents in the process. For the role of the aristocracy in the narrative, see R. Payne, 'Avoiding Ethnicity: Uses of the Past in Late Antique Northern Mesopotamia', in *Visions of Community: Ethnicity, Religion and Power in the Early Medieval West, Byzantium and the Islamic World*, ed. W. Pohl, C. Gantner, and R. Payne (Ashgate, forthcoming).

⁴⁵ E.g. *History of Karka d-Beit Slok and its Martyrs*, 517–518, 521.

⁴⁶ *History of Karka d-Beit Slok and its Martyrs*, 523–524, 526.

These innovative shrines, in turn, exerted a palpable influence on surrounding regions.⁴⁷ A martyrology composed in the region of Belashphar in the Iranian highlands around the year 500 described the attraction the *beit sahde* of Karka d-Beit Slok exercised on its inhabitants, that is, across a distance of approximately 300 kilometres.⁴⁸ We possess one martyrology from the early period of cultic expansion, the latter half of the fifth or the first half of the sixth century, that included an account of the foundation of a shrine in a rural context, the concerns of which paralleled those of the urban bishops: the *Martyrdom of the Captives*.⁴⁹ A certain head of a monastery (*rish दौरا*) constructed a martyrium (*beit sahde*), translated relics from a family, and likely commissioned the production of the *Martyrdom of the Captives*, which recounted the privileged relationship between the landowners of a village known as Beit Gapta and the bones of the martyrs.⁵⁰ The saints had perished during the 'Great Persecution' of the fourth century, and a pious family had preserved their relics and fostered the renewal of the region's fertility through the intervention of the saints. When Shapur II deported the Christian population of the Roman city of Beit Zabdai to the Iranian highlands, they were promised fertile land 'of vineyards, olive trees, and date palms' if they would exchange the 'religion of Caesar' (*dehlta d-qesar*) for the 'religion of Shapur' (*dehlta d-shabur*).⁵¹ One of the Christians, Abdisho, survived the ensuing slaughter of his steadfast co-religionists, preserved their bodies within a cave, and thereby ensured the power and prosperity of the region's Christians. For after his eventual martyrdom, the land became parched and deserted until a son of a local family who had assisted Abdisho and tended to the martyrs' relics petitioned the saints for their intervention. Through his annual commemoration (*dukрана*) of the martyrs, water returned to the land, and he restored the village: 'The Lord gave him

⁴⁷ Wiessner, 'Das Pusai-Martyrium', 244–247, invoked the onomastic evidence for the influence of Karka d-Ledan's shrine throughout the region of Khuzistan.

⁴⁸ *Martyrdom of Pethion, Adurhormizd, and Anahid*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, II; 559–631, 563.

⁴⁹ *Martyrdom of the Captives*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, II: 316–324. The narrative is a re-working of an earlier martyrology, one version of which survives in Greek: *Martyrdom of Ia*, ed. and trans. H. Delehay, *Les versions grecques des actes des martyrs persans sous Sapor II*, PO 7 (Paris, 1907), 405–560, 453–460. The admittedly tentative dating is based on the straightforward style of the text characteristic of fifth century martyrologies.

⁵⁰ *Martyrdom of the Captives*, 324.

⁵¹ *Martyrdom of the Captives*, 319.

a blessing (*burkta*) within it, he possessed it, and it was named after him.⁵² Just as the bishop of Karka d-Beit Slok delicately extricated the cult of the martyrs from aristocratic hands, a monastic leader in the Iranian highlands placed the relics under his tutelage while at the same time propagating, through the production of a martyrological narrative, the saints' special relationship with the settlement's landowners that underpinned the prosperity of the locality.

The 'Friend of Christ': Elite Patrons of Late Sasanian Martyrs' Shrines

In the efforts of bishops and monks to imitate Maruta, whether directly or indirectly, we can discern the outlines of the processes through which saints came to participate in Iranian society, as representatives of cities and bishops, of families and aristocrats. Within decades of Maruta and Abgar, the martyrs have moved from the martyria of Seleucia-Ctesiphon frequented by monastic devotees to provincial cities of economic and political importance and rural landowners' exploitations. But if bishops and monks, often in collaboration, provided the impetus for the initial expansion of martyrs' shrines, sixth century sources document a shift in the orchestration of saints' cults. In martyrologies of the late Sasanian period (ca. 500–636), laymen themselves took the initiative in establishing and organizing the cults of martyrs, both the newly slain and those drawn from the storehouse of Shapur II's victims. While the bishops who produced, promoted, and/or preserved the surviving literary sources tend to dominate modern accounts of East Syrian Christianity, lay Christian magnates, comparatively unsung imperial officials, landed nobles, and merchants, were major agents of the expansion of one of the church's fundamental institutions. Bishops, monks, and their hagiographers had laboured to extract the martyrs' from lay possession and to employ them symbolically to refashion their communities. Now laymen engaged in the selfsame enterprise.

Martyrologies recorded and recognized lay foundation and control of martyrs' shrines that contributed no less actively to the symbolic construction of Christian communities than those of bishops or

⁵² *Martyrdom of the Captives*, 323. Cf. *Contest of the Martyrs Slain in Various Lands*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, II: 303–306, 305, where the martyrs' bodies 'fatten' the land.

monks. If in their narratives they rendered the saints representatives of a broader 'Christian people' and elaborated upon the challenges lay elites could pose to its cohesion, the hagiographers lauded the patronage of the 'friends of Christ' that provided Christians with access to their saints. Christian social and economic elites with the capital to invest in both the acquisition of relics and the construction of shrines came to preside over an institution constitutive of communal unity, a phenomenon that well illustrates the distinctive role of lay leaders within East Syrian Christianity. As our sources inform us of the activities of Christian laymen almost exclusively in their capacity as patrons of saints, individual accounts of the establishment of martyrs' shrines provide unique insight into the role of lay potentates in the organization of Christian communities and their relationship with the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

During the sixth and early seventh centuries, several converts from Zoroastrianism to Christianity fell victim to the machinations of their relatives and rivals who stood to profit ideologically and materially from their deaths. As potential symbols in the service of Christian differentiation, their stories attracted the literary talents of some of the most capable and ambitious intellects of the Church of the East.⁵³ Their bodies attracted the patronage of laymen.⁵⁴ The sons of Yazdin, perhaps the most powerful Christian clan in late Sasanian society, purchased the body of the martyr Anastasius, dressed it in fine funerary linen, and entrusted it to a shrine in the otherwise unknown monastery of Saint Sergius.⁵⁵ While the *Martyrdom of Anastasios* was composed in support of the saint's veneration in Roman territory and was accordingly uninterested in the ongoing relationship between Yazdin's family

⁵³ Babai the Great, *History of George the Priest*, ed. P. Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar Jabalaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques nestoriens* (Paris/Leipzig, 1895), 416–571; Ishoyahb III, *History of Ishosabran*, ed. J.B. Chabot, 'Histoire de Jésus-Sabran', *Nouvelles Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Littéraires* 7 (1897) 485–584.

⁵⁴ In addition to the accounts discussed below, the *History of Abd al-Masih*, ed. and trans. J. Corluy, 'Acta sancti Mar Abdu'l Masich', *Analecta Bollandiana* 5 (1886) 5–52, describes merchants' constructing a shrine for a supposedly fourth century martyr. But, although the cult likely originated in the sixth century Sasanian empire, the shrine was constructed in Roman territory: J.M. Fiey, 'Encore 'Abdulmasih de Singār', *Le Muséon* 77 (1964) 205–221, 210–211.

⁵⁵ *Life and Martyrdom of Anastasios*, ed. and trans. B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VII^e siècle*, I: *Les textes* (Paris, 1992), 40–91, 84–87, and, on Yazdin's family, see J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, III: *Bêt Gar-mai, Bêt Aramâyé et Maïšān nestoriens* (Beirut, 1968), 23–28.

and the shrine, two late Sasanian martyrologies placed the martyrs' patrons centrally within their commemorative narratives. When Shirin, a native of Karka d-Beit Slok, was slain in the southern province of Beit Aramaye in 559, local Christians seized her body. But a 'friend of Christ' (*philochristos*), Bateos, from the city of Lashom province of Beit Garmai, intervened to take possession of the body and to return Shirin to her native province. According to the *Martyrdom of Shirin*, the saint designated Bateos the rightful heir of her remains in preparation for her death, an arrangement neither the Christians of Beit Aramaye nor Beit Garmai dared disrespect. Bateos established a shrine and a feast for the saint, at an unfortunately unspecified site, presumably in or near the city of Lashom:

After he had obtained her body (*leipsanon*), he built a house from his own resources as a sanctuary (*eukterion*). And although he encountered many attacks by Magians wishing to obstruct such an intention, he nevertheless completed this sanctuary and, with fitting honour, accomplished the deposition of the body of the holy Shirin. There the faithful gather from various places for the public feast (*pandemon eorten*) and perform commemoration on the day of so great a contest.⁵⁶

As the congregated admirers commemorated the martyrdom of the saint, they also celebrated the beneficence of the layman who facilitated the festivities.

Another lay patron, endowed with the similar epithet 'friend of the Christ-fearers', enjoyed a panegyric of his euergetism in the course of the celebration of the cult he instituted. Abrodaq, a notable (*yadi 'a*) and imperial official from Seleucia-Ctesiphon prominent in the politics of the Church of the East in the mid sixth century, had his servants (*'abde*) seize and deliver the body of the martyr Yazdpaneḥ to a shrine in the city, where the relics of the contemporary martyr Gregory were also lain.⁵⁷ The author of the *History of Yazdpaneḥ* lauded his patronage of the church in terms that endowed the notable with attributes characteristic of episcopal authority:

⁵⁶ *Martyrdom of Shirin*, 130–131/31.

⁵⁷ *History of Yazdpaneḥ*, ed. Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar Jabalaha*, 394–415, 410–411; *History of Mar Aba*, ed. Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar Jahbalaha*, 206–287, 232–233, which described Abrodaq's prominence at court and intervention on Mar Aba's behalf. For the date and authorship of the text, see Becker, 'Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and "Fear"', 308. After the body's removal, certain lay faithful collected the bloody soil as *ḥnana* and established a shrine (*beit segdta*) upon the site of his death: *History of Yazdpaneḥ*, 412.

A certain notable man in the kingdom, faithful and rich, in both worlds, a son of Abraham in his faith, a companion of Job in his manner of life, a disciple of Christ in truth, a father of the widows and orphans, a baker for the poor, a refuge of peace for the troubled and oppressed, a benefactor of priests and a friend of the Christ-fearers, a builder of churches and a founder of monasteries, burned with zeal for the religion of God (*dehlat 'alaha*) through the holy spirit, equal to Joseph the councillor who prepared the body of our lord Jesus Christ for burial, whose name was Abrodaq, from the city of Veh-Ardashir.⁵⁸

The inclusion of so rhetorical a declamation in praise of a lay patron within a hagiographical text intimately connected with the cult is indicative of the ways in which lay leadership could be paraded and promoted at martyrs' shrines. Abrodaq was presented as the patron and promoter of those institutions most central to the instantiation of Christian community: poor relief, priests, the construction of churches and monasteries, and not least the establishment of martyrs' shrines. The rhetoric of 'friends of Christ(-fearers)', applied to both Abrodaq and Bateos, implies that such panegyrics of lay patrons were not unique to their shrines. Notable Christians who supported communal institutions could enjoy as prominent a position within communal hierarchies of leadership as bishops.

Shrines and Aristocratic Residences in Northern Mesopotamia

The physical structures of a shrine – its architectural setting and position in the landscape – framed the relationship between lay patrons and their saints. Unfortunately archaeological excavations have contributed little to our knowledge of the cult of saints in the Iranian world, even as a surprising number of churches and monasteries have been uncovered.⁵⁹ Although neither the *Martyrdom of Shirin* nor the *History of Yazdpane* described the setting of their shrines, two

⁵⁸ *History of Yazdpane*, 410. The discourse of 'fear' (*dehlta*), as a designation for the 'fear of God' in direct contrast with false 'fears', suffused the text and signalled an intellectual and affective stance towards Zoroastrianism of increasing militance: Becker, 'Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and "Fear"', 308–311, 326–329. Abrodaq's epithet thus highlights the process of enlisting the support of lay patrons for the reinventions of communal belonging developed in the late Sasanian period.

⁵⁹ See Hauser, 'Christliche Archäologie im Sasanidenreich', *passim*, and M. Cassis, 'Kokhe, Cradle of the Church of the East: An Archaeological and Comparative Study', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 2 (2002) 62–78, for overviews of the archaeology. Hauser signals the remarkably high incidence of churches and

Northern Mesopotamian texts, the *History of Saba* and the *History of Mar Qardagh*, devoted sustained attention to the sites and structures of their shrines. They attest to important substantive and symbolic connections between martyrs' shrines and the rural or suburban estates characteristic of elite residences in late Sasanian society. The *History of Saba* recounted the creation of a shrine at a fortress-residence in Beit Arbaye, the frontier district whose principal city was Nisibis, a practice that may account for the presence of shrines in suburban fortresses elsewhere in the empire.⁶⁰ Saba was among the saints purportedly martyred during the 'Great Persecution' of Shapur II whose martyrology was confected to support a cult in the late Sasanian period.⁶¹ The narrative determinedly associated the saint with the 'fortress of Tadeq' (*hesna d-tadeq*), before which the saint was executed and within which his body was preserved. The fortress belonged to Tadeq, a Christian who together with his associate Italaha consoled the saint within his fortified residence and initiated the cult there after his martyrdom:

[Tadeq and Italaha] removed the body of the saint from the cavern into which it had been thrown, and brought it into the fortress of Tadeq. They made a reliquary of gold and placed the body of the saint within it. They placed the reliquary in the house in a place that was reserved for them in which to pray.⁶²

The martyrology, composed to legitimate and promote the shrine's healing powers, likely retrojected the fifth or sixth-century circumstances of its foundation into the fourth century and affirmed its association with the family and residence of Tadeq. Such fortified habitations were the predominant form of elite residence in late Sasanian Northern Mesopotamia, even as civic residences were of increasing importance.⁶³ Some owners of rural estates elected to cultivate martyrs'

monasteries in Sasanian excavations, while Cassis argues for stylistic commonalities, likely deriving from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, in Christian structures across the empire.

⁶⁰ E.g. Hesna d-Lawarne, mentioned above.

⁶¹ *History of Saba*, ed. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, IV: 222–249.

⁶² *History of Saba*, 249. Gregory was also placed in a *glosqama*: *Martyrdom of Gregory the Commander*, 391.

⁶³ H. Kennedy, 'From Shahristan to Medina', *Studia Islamica* 102/103 (2006) 5–34, stresses, perhaps excessively, the rural priorities of Sasanian elites and surveys the archaeological and literary evidence.

cults within their residences and even to convert them wholly into shrines, often combined with monasteries.⁶⁴

The *History of Mar Qardagh*, like the *History of Saba* a late Sasanian reinvention of a supposedly fourth-century martyr, narrated the conversion of such a residence together with the conversion of its saint. Qardagh's hagiographer linked him even more systematically with the 'strong fortress (*hesna*) and beautiful house' at Melqi upon a hillock in the vicinity of Arbela in which the saint resided.⁶⁵ Joel Walker has demonstrated the centrality of the aristocratic fortified residence to the structure of the narrative: Mar Qardagh constructed the fortress at the height of his career as an avowedly Zoroastrian *marzbān*, confessed Christ for the first time within his bedroom, and was martyred, like Mar Saba, before the gates of the fortress.⁶⁶ At some point in the late Sasanian period, before the composition of the *History of Mar Qardagh*, certain unnamed faithful constructed a 'great and handsome shrine (*haykla*)' on the site of the hilltop fortress.⁶⁷ What had once been an aristocratic residence, indeed the fortress of the principal military official in the region, became the habitation of a saint. The hagiographer's obsession with questions of aristocratic identity betrays his elite audience, and the account's precise record of the saint's lineage – Qardagh was descended from Nimrod via father Gušnōy and from Sennacherib via his mother – suggests his cult was closely linked with a particular noble family, who likely were the proprietors of the estate at Melqi, as Northern Mesopotamian elites often associated themselves with the Assyrian kingdom. The position of the shrine within a familial estate well informs the negotiation of aristocratic and ecclesiastical priorities in the *History of Mar Qardagh*, a topographical expression of communal tension reminiscent of the *History of Karka*'s balance

⁶⁴ A monastery (*daira*) was eventually constructed at *Hesna d-Tadeq*; *History of Saba*, 246. C. Villagomez, 'The Fields, Flocks, and Finances of Monks: Economic Life at Nestorian Monasteries, 500–850', Unpublished PhD Dissertation (University of California, Los Angeles, 1998), documented the close ties between monasteries and lay patrons in the late sixth and seventh centuries.

⁶⁵ J. Walker, 'The Legacy of Mesopotamia in Late Antique Iraq: The Christian Martyr Shrine at Melqi (Neo-Assyrian Milqia)', *ARAM* 18–19 (2006–2007) 483–508, reveals the site's continuity with a Neo-Assyrian temple.

⁶⁶ Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 254–256, 271–274. *History of Mar Qardagh*, 445/23, 458–459/34, 503–504/66–67.

⁶⁷ *History of Mar Qardagh*, 506/68, a structure that was later converted into a four-naved church and martyrrium: Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 256.

between bishops and aristocrats in its reinterpretation of Karka d-Beit Slok's landscape.

Contestations of Communal Leadership in the Sixth Century

Martyrs' shrines were thus established, and proceeded to develop, against a social background as variegated and vertiginous as Iranian society itself. Bishops and monks, above all through their production of martyrologies, sought to position themselves as mediators between the saints, their lay patrons, and the Christian community, but, with the possible exceptions of Abgar and the bishop of Karka d-Ledan, they could do so only by means of narratives that accorded a privileged place to the 'friends of Christ' within the leadership and representation of the Christian people. Conflict between lay elites and reforming bishops, especially the catholicos Mar Aba and his allies, over the nature of their respective roles within the church was the leitmotiv of ecclesiastical politics in the late Sasanian period.⁶⁸ Factionalism fuelled by familial control of bishoprics had divided the Christians of many of the empire's cities during the first half of the sixth century.⁶⁹ The lack of an Iranian Constantine has sometimes led scholars to overlook the confrontations between secular and ecclesiastical powers within the church that pervade our sources. But in a non-Christian empire it was powerful laymen, not emperors, who supported, rivalled, and manoeuvred among bishops.

Where some Christian elites conspired together with their Zoroastrian counterparts to have the catholicos Mar Aba imprisoned, the notable Abrodaq intervened to secure his release.⁷⁰ Both positions vis-à-vis the catholicos are suggestive of the political clout of laymen on which bishops relied. The most famed benefactor of the late Sasanian church, Yazdin, was lauded as 'an advocate for the church like

⁶⁸ Labourt, *Christianisme dans l'empire perse*, 163–191, remains the best discussion of Mar Aba's reforms. On models of lay and ecclesiastical authority in the immediate post-conquest period, see R. Payne, 'Persecuting Heresy in Early Islamic Iraq: The Catholicos Ishoyahb III and the Elites of Nisibis', in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. N. Lenski and A. Cain (Aldershot, 2009), 397–409.

⁶⁹ The institution of a married episcopate in 484 ensured that bishops were firmly embedded within familial networks: P. Bruns, 'Barsauma von Nisibis und die Aufhebung der Klerikerenthaltbarkeit im Gefolge der Synode von Beth-Lapat (484)', *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* 37 (2005) 1–42.

⁷⁰ See footnote 57 above.

Constantine and Theodosius', a comparison of a lay potentate with the most Christian emperors that well characterizes East Syrian ideals of a consensual relationship between the secular and ecclesial spheres.⁷¹ Not all laymen were as cooperative as Yazdin. The canons issued in condemnation of faithful disrespectful of episcopal authority are voluminous. They sat in the place of honor during ecclesiastical synods to cast judgment upon deacons, priests, and bishops.⁷² They instigated disputes and factions among the clergy.⁷³ And, not least, they engaged in social practices, such as consanguineous marriage and feasting, the repudiation of which as 'pagan' the bishops sought to establish as the distinguishing mark of true Christians.⁷⁴ From the tenure of Mar Aba, reforming bishops often associated with the School of Nisibis combined these newly established religious boundaries with canonical legislation against episcopal marriage, manipulation of episcopal elections, and the private appropriation of ecclesiastical property to create a church governed by a trans-regional, pyramidal hierarchy more immune from worldly interference. Martyrs' shrines were both obstacles to and vehicles for the communication of this vision of Christian community, which was no less influential for its concessions.

The martyrologies' representations of consensus, and intimations of tension, thus alert us to the importance of martyrs' shrines as sites where lay and ecclesiastical leaders, through the execution and modification of their roles in cultic organization, negotiated their respective positions within the distribution of communal authority. On the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the production of new martyrological transcripts, or the adjustment of existing ones, kept the terms of that relationship in flux. Lay elites, on the other hand, were better positioned economically and socially to gain possession of saints' bodies, to construct their habitations, and to fund their festivities. Within these constraints, bishops, at least as early as Sawma of Karka d-Ledan,

⁷¹ *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, ed. I. Guidi, *Chronicon Anonymum*, CSCO 1–2 Scriptores Syri 1 (Louvain, 1903), 23.

⁷² *Synodicon Orientale*, ed. and trans. J.B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale, ou recueil de synodes nestoriens* (Paris, 1902), 103/361.

⁷³ *Synodicon Orientale*, 82.

⁷⁴ Mar Aba, *Regulations of Marriage*, ed. and trans. E. Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher III* (Berlin, 1914), 258–285; *Synodicon Orientale*, 83/335–336, 550/561; *History of Mar Aba*, 238; M. Hutter, 'Mār Abā and the Impact of Zoroastrianism on Christianity in the 6th Century,' in *Religious Themes and Texts of Pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia: Studies in Honour of Professor Gherardo Gnoli*, ed. C. Cereti, M. Maggi, and E. Provasi (Wiesbaden, 2003), 167–174.

sought to check the centrifugal force of martyrs' relics so rarely supportive of episcopal authority. In 554, the Synod of Joseph, convened to reaffirm and extend Mar Aba's reforms, issued a canon that aimed to define the place of martyrs' shrines in its proposed redistribution of communal authority:

It was determined by others that monasteries and martyrs' shrines (*beit sahde*) not be built in a city or the vicinity of a city. It was said in the assembly of bishops that this thinking was opposed to Christianity. Pagans (*hanpe*) and Jews, moreover, are pleased that Christianity does not flourish [...] [But we decree] that churches, monasteries, temples, and martyrs' shrines be built in the cities and vicinity of cities. But the eucharist is not to be offered in them and baptism not to be given in them, except with the permission of the bishops on special days.⁷⁵

The canon of the Synod of Acacius to which the bishops referred excluded monasteries, not martyrs' shrines, from cities. While signalling the equivalent challenges posed by monasteries and martyrs' shrines to episcopal authority, the Synod of Joseph indicates the eagerness with which sixth-century bishops promoted cults within cities, their primary field of action, and endeavoured to reserve liturgical and baptismal rites to institutions under the direction of religious professionals whose authority was episcopally regulated.⁷⁶ However, although suggestive of episcopal ambitions, the canon asserts only modest claims over institutions evidently critical to the symbolic expression of Christianity in the face of 'pagans and Jews'. As long as they do not interfere with the administration of the sacraments, bishops abstained from bringing their institutional prerogatives to bear upon the cults of saints, regardless of the ecclesial status of their orchestrators.

It was primarily through literary production that bishops, priests, and monks enlisted martyrs in their own distinctive symbolic constructions of community.⁷⁷ If shrines and relics were often in the possession of, or continued to be associated with, laymen, the body of a

⁷⁵ *Synodicon Orientale*, 106–107/364.

⁷⁶ M. Tamcke, *Der Katholikos-Patriarch Sabrišo' I. (596–604) und das Mönchtum* (Frankfurt, 1988), discusses the bishops' efforts to control independent asceticism in the late Sasanian period, a topic very much in need of further research.

⁷⁷ As G.J. Reinink, 'Babai the Great's *Life of George* and the Propagation of Doctrine in the Late Sasanian Empire', in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium, and the Christian Orient*, ed. J.W. Drijvers and J.M. Watt (Leiden, 1999), 171–194, well demonstrates for Babai's attempts to redefine the Christian community in terms of orthodoxy.

saint, occasion of his or her annual commemoration, and the site of a martyrdom constituted 'authorized and authorizing objects, times, and places' that rendered the speech of Christian religious professionals consequential, that is, authoritative.⁷⁸ Clerics could not control the saints, but they could control their stories. The production and declamation of martyrologies permitted clerical representatives of the saints to provide persuasive interpretations of their lives and deaths and to limit the symbolic functions for which they could be mobilized. In late antique economies of communication, those versed in the hagiographical arts were uniquely privileged. We have seen how hagiographers alternatively assailed, suppressed, or sanctioned the lay appropriation of the saints. But beyond the inevitable necessity of accounting for the circumstances of translation, late Sasanian hagiographers evoked themes of urgency for laymen in the course of their narratives.

Several hagiographers, including those most laudatory of lay patrons, mobilized martyrs' shrines in support of the reforms of Mar Aba that had proved highly divisive among laymen. The catholicos had pegged Christian belonging on the rejection of Zoroastrian feasts, or more specifically foods subjected to Zoroastrian rites, a problematic proposition for Sasanian elites for whom feasts and banquets were basic to the maintenance of social status. Shirin, Qardagh, Gregory, and other late Sasanian martyrs made manifest their conversions to Christianity by refusing to partake of Zoroastrian meals.⁷⁹ In narrating the saints' respect for the boundaries Mar Aba and his allies instituted, hagiographers challenged laymen disrespectful of his 'laws' (*namose*). More generally, martyrs were harnessed to express Christian superiority over Zoroastrianism in the sixth and seventh centuries.⁸⁰ But even as the martyrologies contributed to the ongoing elevation of new boundaries between Christianity and Zoroastrianism potentially problematic for elites whose careers required their transgression, they recognized lay patrons within their accounts and, in the case of the *History of Mar Qardagh*, accommodated aspects of Iranian elite culture – the

⁷⁸ B. Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Coercion* (Chicago, IL, 1994), esp. 7–9.

⁷⁹ *Martyrdom of Shirin*, 117/21; *History of Gregory the Commander*, 354–355; *History of Mar Qardagh*, 459–460; *Martyrdom of Yazdbozid*, ed. Alishan, *Vark' ew vkayabanut'iwkn'srbots'*, 124–130, 125.

⁸⁰ Becker, 'Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and "Fear"', *passim*; J. Walker, 'Against the Eternity of the Stars: Disputation and Christian Philosophy in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia', in *La Persia e Bisanzio: Convegno internazionale, Roma 14–18 ottobre 2002*, ed. A. Carile et al. (Rome, 2004), 510–537; idem, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 164–205.

aristocratic and courtly culture of manly valiance – in Christian terms.⁸¹ Late Sasanian martyrologies simultaneously advanced definitions of communal membership engineered under patriarchal direction and legitimized the particular local structures of authority, dominated by lay elites, on which the foundations of Christian communal institutions rested. They point to episodes of consensus, generated through finely crafted hagiographical transcripts, between lay elites and bishops whose relationship was otherwise marked by conflict over competing visions of communal authority and the terms of communal membership. As bishops asserted the autonomy of ecclesiastical institutions vis-à-vis lay elites and new definitions of Christian difference vis-à-vis Zoroastrianism, they relied upon the support of Abrodaq, Bateos, Yazdin, and countless other lay patrons whose names have not been preserved, which martyrs' shrines served both to cultivate and communicate.

Conclusion

The saints thus expose some of the paradoxes characteristic of Christianity in the Iranian world. Their hagiographers subordinated the saints to representations of Christians as 'a people of God', 'people of the Christians', or 'the God-fearers'. They insisted on the merits to be accrued from a wholesale rejection of familial and social ties potentially corrosive of non-reciprocal religious affiliations.⁸² These representations have been interpreted as more or less apposite approximations of the ways in which Christians imagined and organized themselves.⁸³ Yet these selfsame hagiographers, in recording the circumstances in which martyrs' shrines were established, indicated the diversity of symbolic purposes to which the lay men and women in possession of saints put their relics. Saints could simply supply the distinguishing marks of familial piety, like Pusai and Marta in Karka d-Ledan,

⁸¹ Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 121–163; G. Wiessner, 'Christlicher Heiligenkult im Umkreis eines sassanidischen Großkönigs', in *Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500 Jahrfeier Irans*, ed. W. Eilers (Stuttgart, 1971) 141–155.

⁸² Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 206–245, on familial rejection in late Sasanian hagiography. See *Martyrdom of Shirin*, 116/19, for the rejection of nobility (*eugeneia*).

⁸³ S. Brock, 'Christians in the Sasanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties', in *Religion and National Identity*, ed. S. Mews (Oxford, 1982), 1–19, 15–16.

but increasingly elites, often in league with monks, bishops, and the lower clergy, positioned the saints to give symbolic expression to their social status. Landowners in the Iranian highlands claimed the martyrs of Beit Zabdai conferred their lands' agricultural fertility and thereby sanctified their exploitation. The aristocrats of Karka d-Beit Slok had the noble histories of their lineages recounted alongside those of the martyrs during the feast of the city's saints. Lay patrons throughout Mesopotamia enjoyed panegyrics of their stature, as great in heaven as on earth, at the shrines they instituted. And saints came to dwell in the rural residences of the Northern Mesopotamian aristocracy.

Martyrs' shrines and their feasts gathered the dispersed populations of particular localities to commemorate the patronage and dominance of Christian elites as well as their saints. For Christian landowners and officials in a polycultural society, these were perhaps unique occasions when they could assert their social status publicly undiminished by the presence of their Zoroastrian compeers, often of higher status. Martyrs' shrines offered novel stages for the performance of elite identities. It is in the context of such self-dramatization that the evocations of communal unity and chastisements of its transgressors so characteristic of Sasanian martyrologies should be interpreted. Through the production of martyrological texts, the architects of a more hierarchical Christian community incommensurably superior to Zoroastrianism endeavoured to appropriate the symbolic power of shrines without impinging upon the saints' special relationship with elite patrons, a project that required, and obtained, the endorsement of the 'friends of Christ'.

ORTHODOX AND HERETIC IN THE EARLY BYZANTINE CULT(S) OF SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN

Phil Booth

Introduction

The historian of the Constantinopolitan cult of saints Cosmas and Damian is immediately confronted by a veritable maelstrom of competing origins, shrines, and saints.¹ The liturgical calendar of the Constantinopolitan Church, for example, celebrates three homonymous pairs: the first, Romans, martyred under Carinus and celebrated on the 1st July; the second, Arabians, martyred under Diocletian and celebrated on the 1st October; and the third, Asians, dying naturally at an unspecified date and celebrated on the 1st November.² The cult had, however, most probably begun in Syria, at a place called ‘Pheremma’ in the region of Cyrrhus.³ It seemingly reached the capital in the second

¹ For the vast and complex hagiographic corpus of the saints, which includes lives, miracles and encomia in Latin, Greek, Coptic, Syriac and Arabic, see M. van Esbroeck, ‘La diffusion orientale de la légende des saints Cosme et Damian’, in *Hagiographie, Cultures et Sociétés: IV^e–XII^e siècles*, Études Augustiniennes (Paris, 1981), 61–77; G. Luongo, ‘Il “dossier” agiografico dei santi Cosma e Damiano’, in *Sant’Eufemia d’Aspromonte*, ed. S. Leanza (Soveria Mannelli, 1997), 33–89. This paper primarily examines two published collections of Greek miracles: L. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian: Texte und Einleitung* (Leipzig, 1907) [henceforth, Deubner]; E. Rupprecht, *Cosmae et Damiani Sanctorum Medicorum Vitam et Miracula e Codice Londiniensi* (Berlin, 1935) [henceforth, Rupprecht]. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

² See respectively H. Delehaye, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi* (Brussels, 1902) 791, 144, 185; reproduced in Deubner, 38–40.

³ The name Pheremma is recorded in the so-called ‘Asiatic’ and ‘Arab’ synaxaria, in the ‘Asiatic’ *Life* and in Rupprecht, the opening miracles of which repeat the details of the latter *Life*; see respectively Delehaye, *Synaxarium* 185, 791; Deubner, 91, 93; Rupprecht, *Miracles* 1–2. Rupprecht, *Miracles* 1 tells us that, ‘The remains of the saints lie in a place called Pheremma, which is in Cyrrhus’, and *ibid.* 18 and Deubner *Miracles* 12 also refer to the saints’ cult in the city. A cult of Cosmas is mentioned at Cyrrhus by Theodoret, *Epistle* 145, ed. Y. Azéma (Paris, 1965), 168, and Procopius, *Buildings* 2.11, ed. H.B. Dewing (Cambridge, MA, 1954), 174 claims that the bodies of the saints lay there. Similarly, Theodosius, *Topography of the Holy Land* 32, ed. P. Geyer (Prague, 1898), 150 refers to the saints in *Quiro*. The *chōrē tōn Kurēstikōn* is

half of the fifth century,⁴ when Paulina, the mother of the imperial usurper Leontius (484–488), dedicated a church to the saints in the northern Blachernae region.⁵ By the mid-sixth century, however, the Blachernae cult had reportedly gone into decline, for Procopius in his *Buildings* refers to its restoration by a grateful Justinian, miraculously cured by the saints when secular physicians had despaired of him. ‘In gratitude [the emperor] repaid them as much as any man is able, altering and remodelling the entire building, which before was rather unattractive and lowly, and not worthy of its dedication to such saints. He beautified and enlarged their temple, flooding it with beams of light and adding many things which had not been there before.’⁶ Soon after the cult’s restoration it was expanded by Justin II, who founded an alternate cultic centre *en tois Basiliskou*.⁷ In the early 620s, however,

also given as the setting for the saints’ martyrdom by John Malalas, *Chronicle* 12.36, ed. H. Thurn (Berlin, 2000), 235.

⁴ On the subsequent spread of the cult in the east, see the references at P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d’Orient: Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe* (Paris, 1985), 268, 330, 339, 346, 352, 354, 372, 388, 403. In the west, see A. Wittman, *Kosmas und Damian: Kultausbereitung und Volksdevotion* (Berlin, 1967). On the iconography and epigraphy of the cult in the sixth century, see also M. Perraymond, ‘Linee di diffusione del culto dei santi Anargiri attraverso le testimonianze monumentali e epigrafiche del VI secolo’ in *Acta XIII Congressus Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae* (Split, 1998), ed. N. Cambi and E. Marin, II: 673–686. Disappointing is S.K. Hamarneh, ‘Memorial Honoring the Twin Arabian Patrons of Medicine and Pharmacy’ in *Proceedings of the Symposium on Bilād al-Shām during the Byzantine Period*, ed. M.A. Bakht and M. Asfour (Amman, 1986), II: 212–227.

⁵ See C. Mango, ‘On the Cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian at Constantinople’, in *Thumiamia stē mnēmē tēs Laskarinas Mpoura* (Athens, 1994), 189–192, correcting the patriographical tradition which places the foundation of the shrine under Theodosius the Younger. For the latter see *Patria* 3.146, ed. T. Preger (Leipzig, 1907), 261–263. Mango rightly corrects the view of R. Janin, *Le Siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Oecuménique: Les Églises et les Monastères* (Paris, 1969), 289, that the church was located further north at modern Eyoup. Deubner, *Miracles* 18 and Rupprecht, *Miracles* 7, 17, 18, 20 and (perhaps) 37 all refer to the shrine *en Blachernais*, as does the *Paschal Chronicle* 623, 626, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn, 1832), 713, 725. We need not accept the suggestion of Michael and Mary Whitby that the author of the latter perhaps uses ‘Blachernae’ ‘loosely for a wide area’, at *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD* (Liverpool, 1989), 166 n.451.

⁶ Procopius, *Buildings* 1.6.6–7 (Dewing 62). For the same passage cf. the analysis of M. Dal Santo, ‘The God-protected empire? Scepticism towards the saints’ cult in early Byzantium’ (this volume).

⁷ See *Patria* 3.123 (Preger 255); John Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories* 14.10 ed. L. Dindorf (Teubner, 1870–1871), v.3 285. An epigram dedicated by Justin and Sophia *eis tous hagious Anargurous tous eis ta Basiliskou* also survives in the *Anthologia Palatina* 1.11, ed. F. Conca et al. (Turin, 2005), 90. Theophanes, *Chronicle* 6062 (569/70), ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), 243 similarly describes Justin’s construction of a (most probably identical) church of the saints, but locates it *en tois Dareiou*. Janin, *Le Siège*

the main shrine at Blachernae, precariously positioned beyond the Theodosian Walls,⁸ was pillaged and then burnt by marauding Avars, and subsequently went into relative decline.⁹

In 1907, Ludwig Deubner edited and published forty-eight miracles of the saints, proposing six separate authors, of whom only the last can be identified – Maximus the Deacon, who recorded several new miracles, and reworked several earlier tales, in the early fourteenth century.¹⁰ That at least the first three collections of those miracles were originally composed in sixth-century Constantinople may unfortunately be judged only by circumstance. One is specifically located *en Blachernais*, and others are quite obviously Constantinopolitan, even if some lack localising references. And while all are painfully lacking in historicising detail or phraseology, fleeting indications nevertheless point to a sixth-century origin. Beyond the basic but nonetheless accurate observation that ‘C’est bien à cette époque, si pas plus haut encore, que la couleur des récits, le milieu et les circonstances

de Constantinople 285 identifies the two churches. See also the imperial celebrations at the shrines *en Blachernais* and *en tois Basiliskou* on the 1st July and 1st November; *De Ceremoniis* 2.13, ed. J.J. Reiske (Bonn, 1829), 559f., 562. For one of these Constantinopolitan cults in the reign of Maurice, see also John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow* 127 [PG 87: 3 2989D–2992B].

⁸ See Mango, ‘On the Cult’, 189f. Mango’s contention that the church lay ‘on the hill just outside the Blachernae walls’ (based on the description of the shrine’s location by Procopius) is supported by Deubner *Miracles* 18, where a patient exiting from the Church of the Theotokos at Blachernae is able to point to the saints ‘who possess that martyrrium up there’.

⁹ See *Paschal Chronicle* 623, 626 (Dindorf, 713, 725). The cult appears only to have regained something of its former glory following its reconstruction by Michael IV (1034–1041); see Michael Psellos, *Chronicle* 4.31 ed. É. Renauld (Paris, 1926), 71–73; John Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories* 17.17 (Dindorf, IV: 148f.). On the history of the cult see Janin, *Le Siège de Constantinople* 285–289; A.-M. Talbot, ‘Metaphrasis in the Early Palaiologan Period: The *Miracula* of Kosmas and Damian by Maximos the Deacon’, in *The Heroes of the Orthodox Church: The New Saints, 8th–16th c.*, ed. E. Kountoura-Clarke (Athens, 2004), 227–237.

¹⁰ For the manuscript tradition of these miracles see Deubner, 3–37. In his edition Deubner included only those miracles originally composed by Maximus, even though the latter reworked several from earlier collections. On these miracles, and the telling adaptations made by Maximus for his fourteenth-century audience, see Talbot, ‘Metaphrasis in the Early Palaiologan Period’. For a basic guide both to the history of the cult and to the themes and content of the *Miracles* see I. Csepregi, ‘The Miracles of Saints Cosmas and Damian: Characteristics of Dream Healing’, *Annual of Medieval Studies at the CEU* 8 (2002) 89–121; E. Giannarelli, ‘I Cristiani, La Medicina, Cosma e Damiano’, in *Cosma e Damiano dall’Oriente a Firenze*, ed. eadem (Florence, 2002), 7–65.

nous invitent à placer les plus anciens Miracles',¹¹ Sophronius's *Miracles of Cyrus and John*, written in the early 610s, references two of those miracles contained within collections one and three, a fact which encourages us to situate such collections in the period immediately preceding.¹² This paper assumes, therefore, that the first three collections of Deubner's *Miracles* were originally produced by devotees of the saints in sixth-century Constantinople, and argues, furthermore, that such activity coincided with the promotion of the cult by Justinian and by Justin II.

This paper contends that Christian shrines (and, in particular, healing shrines) were frequented by Christians of various degrees of doctrinal inclination or conviction. While all such shrines regularly and very publicly proclaimed their particular doctrinal affiliation – through the creed, choice of clergy and the diptychs, for example – those opposed or indifferent to the official doctrinal position of a shrine could put into play various strategies of resistance through which to circumvent or subvert a shrine's particular confession. The authors of saints' miracles, however, near invariably attempted to suppress that polyphony, and to establish unambiguously the orthodox credentials of the saints (and thus also the necessity of orthodox belief to a successful supplication). The *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian* too present their saints as 'orthodox' but, in contrast to comparable literature from elsewhere in the empire, leave the particularities of such 'orthodox' belief undetermined. Furthermore, the authors not only acknowledge the existence of 'heretics' amongst the shrine's clientele, but also include them, unrepentant, as recipients of the saints' healing power. The doctrinal silence of the saints, and their reluctant toleration of unconverted heretics, this paper argues, find tantalising parallels in the religious

¹¹ H. Delehaye, 'Les Recueils Antiques de Miracles des Saints', *Analecta Bollandia* 43 (1925) 10. For incubatory miracles as a product of the prevailing conditions of the sixth and seventh centuries see also P. Booth, 'Saints and Soteriology in Sophronius Sophista's *Miracles of Cyrus and John*' in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. T. Claydon and P. Clarke, *Studies in Church History* 45 (Woodbridge, 2009), 52–63.

¹² See *Miracles of Cyrus and John* 30.13 ed. N.F. Marcos (Madrid, 1975), 305: 'Some also say that Cosmas and Damian the co-doctors and co-martyrs did something similar in the case of the paralytic and the mute woman. And indeed, Cyrus and John have also performed that involving the Jewish woman with the cancer hidden within.' Sophronius seemingly refers to Deubner *Miracles* 24 and 2 respectively. The miracle of the paralytic and the mute is also ascribed contemporaneously to saint Menas; see Delehaye, 'Les Recueils Antiques', 48f.

strategies of Cosmas and Damian's imperial benefactors, benefactors who had encouraged the promotion of such cults precisely because they were, in the words of Wendy Mayer, 'popular and theologically multivalent.'¹³ Cosmas and Damian were, therefore, the imperial saints par excellence.

Orthodox and Heretic

In precisely that year in which Deubner had published his critical edition of the *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian*, a tenth- or eleventh-century manuscript was discovered at the Coptic monastery of Edfu in Egypt.¹⁴ Published by Ernst Rupprecht in 1935, it contained thirty-eight miracles of the saints, of which fourteen were without equivalents within the Deubner collections.¹⁵ Several of those miracles are similarly located at the same shrine *en Blachernais*,¹⁶ and one tantalisingly refers to an intellectual, Stephanus the Sophist, composer of *ta ethnika biblika* – this, one suspects, is none other than Stephanus Byzantinus, the Constantinopolitan author of a sixth-century geography, entitled *Ethnika* and dedicated to Justinian I.¹⁷ If, then, the miracles contained within the Egyptian manuscript appear comparable to the Deubner collections in origin, date and content, there is nonetheless

¹³ W. Mayer, 'Antioch and the intersection between religious factionalism, place and power', in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. N. Lenski and A. Cain (Aldershot, 2009), 357–367. I am extremely grateful to Wendy for an advanced copy of her article.

¹⁴ The manuscript is first described in print by R. de Rustafjaell, *The Light of Egypt from recently discovered predynastic and early Christian Records* (London, 1909), 89–98.

¹⁵ See Rupprecht, *Miracles* 4, 8, 10, 12, 15–20, 27, 31–32, 38. It should be noted, however, that those Egyptian *Miracles* also contained within the Deubner collections employ a different vocabulary and rhetorical style to the latter, and include or exclude digressions and narrative elements not contained with their equivalents.

¹⁶ 'Blachernae' is referred to at Rupprecht, *Miracles* 7, 17, 18, 20 (and perhaps 37). Indeed, in Rupprecht *Miracles* 18 a patient suffering from a disease of the eyes visits the saints' shrine at Cyrrhus. The saints appear and inform him, 'You cannot obtain a cure here. Go to our temple at Blachernae'. He does so and is subsequently healed. It is a wonderful expression of the eclipsing of Cyrrhus as the pre-eminent cultic centre. Cf. also Deubner, *Miracles* 12, in which a devotee of the saints from Cyrrhus visits the saints at Constantinople.

¹⁷ Rupprecht, *Miracles* 10. On Stephanus see most recently *Stephani Byzantii Ethnica: Volumen I: A–Γ*, ed. M. Billerbeck et al. (Berlin, 2006), 3f. For a sixth-century origin of elements within the Egyptian collection see also Rupprecht, *Miracles* 22, the protagonist of which is a 'Severan'.

a significant difference of emphasis. While Deubner's *Miracles* are remarkably devoid of doctrinal statements – *Miracles* 17 refers to an 'Exakionite', *Miracles* 26 simply to 'a heretic' – those within the Egyptian manuscript are often explicitly anti-Chalcedonian in tone. Thus *Miracles* 19:

Now came a man sick with a terrible illness, a Nestorian who held Nestorius's loathsome dogmas, dividing Christ in two natures after the Incarnation, and never admitting that His mother is called Mother of God... When the heretic was lying and summoning the saints, someone appeared to him in a fit of rage and asked him to confess the following: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' all the way up to 'The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us'. When he immediately confessed this he went on, 'And so if the Word is God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst men, he was never divided, but was one, as was his nature. And she who bore him, who gave birth to the Word God enfleshed, is Mother of God'. He said these things and could then no longer be seen. But immediately the saints appeared and said to him, 'We are Cosmas and Damian, sent by Christ to give you your health, since you have made an orthodox confession. Eat this bean stew and you will quickly be cured'. The man did as ordered and found swift release from his disease. And until he died he continued to make the orthodox confession of one nature of God the Word undivided, and of Mary the holy Virgin as Mother of God, and in return for the health of his soul, and also of his body, gave thanks first to Christ God and then to his saints.¹⁸

As Ildiko Csepregi has observed, 'The text is clearly an anti-Chalcedonian creed,' with dyophysite Christology labelled broadly as 'Nestorian'.¹⁹ That anti-Chalcedonian emphasis is also evident elsewhere in the collection: one miracle features a dyophysite who is, in Deubner's equivalent, an Arian 'Exakionite',²⁰ and the protagonist of *Miracles* 22 is called 'a pious Severan' (in Deubner's equivalent, he is simply 'a pious man').²¹

Csepregi has recently attempted to explain the discrepancy in doctrinal emphasis by suggesting (with Rupprecht) that the Egyptian

¹⁸ Rupprecht, *Miracles* 19.

¹⁹ I. Csepregi, 'Mysteries for the Uninitiated: The Role and Symbolism of the Eucharist in Miraculous Dream Healing' in *The Eucharist in Theology and Philosophy: Issues of Doctrinal History in East and West from the Patristic Age to the Reformation*, ed. I. Perczel, R. Forrai, G. Geréby (Leuven, 2006), 97–130 at 114.

²⁰ Rupprecht, *Miracles* 21; Deubner, *Miracles* 17.

²¹ Deubner, *Miracles* 20.

manuscript records ‘an earlier stage of the cult than [Deubner’s] collection...preceding the Chalcedonian one’, but furthermore that it constitutes ‘the testimonial of a healing cult of a primarily monophysite nature, which, when transferred to the capital, underwent a dogmatic and theological revision.’²² Beyond the difficulties involved in establishing the primitivism of the Egyptian collection (for which there is no obvious justification),²³ the necessary assignment of the two collections to two separate cults (or to two separate stages of a single cult) is belied by the extraordinary witness of a miracle contained within the Deubner collection. It concerns the leader of an unspecified heretical sect:

And when he came to believe in the saints through the accomplishment of that deed (for heretics are accustomed to do so through visible proof and not simply through hearing about something), after some time the saints anyhow prophesised to him that he would become head of his sect. He left and from then on he continuously worshipped the servants of Christ and frequented their glorious home. And when, as the saints had prophesised, he obtained the headship [of his sect], at the precise moment which they had indicated to him, he wrote, as I found out, miracles of the saints, endeavouring to measure this Aegean, this Atlantic Ocean of the saints. And he hastened, as I learnt, to become a sheep of Christ’s orthodox flock, if the respect of his fellow men had not been a hindrance to him, as once it was to the Jews, as the Evangelist says about them, when many of them recognised the lord Jesus to be Christ, but none would openly confess it [John 12:42].²⁴

The author of Deubner’s *Miracles* 26 thus knew of a collection of miracles composed by a heretical (and unconverted) devotee of the saints. It is therefore evident that the doctrinal constituency of the Constantinopolitan shrine *en Blachernais* was diverse, and consequently capable of generating tales of a similarly diverse doctrinal nature. Although the precise origins of the anti-Chalcedonian emphasis within Rupprecht’s collection cannot be established conclusively (later interpolation is an obvious possibility), that emphasis nevertheless vividly underlines the *potential* for simultaneous but divergent perspectives

²² Csepregi, ‘Mysteries for the Uninitiated’, 115.

²³ See the important review of Rupprecht’s publication by F. Halkin, ‘Publications récentes de textes hagiographiques Grecs’, *Analecta Bollandia* 53 (1935) 374–381 at 376f.

²⁴ Deubner, *Miracles* 26. The same tale is told at Rupprecht, *Miracles* 35, although the protagonist is described as ‘a deacon of the church of the imperial city, a pious man’, and there is no reference to his composition of a collection of the saints’ *Miracles*.

on the same saints according to doctrinal confession. Heretical supplicants at a shrine administered by a competing faction were, therefore, not necessarily complicit in the reading of the saints expounded in the liturgy. A saint's doctrinal identity was not monolithic or assumed, but contested and in constant need of (re-)negotiation.

The principle by which culturally diverse cultic factions might imbue the saints with various, contradictory meanings is wonderfully captured by Deubner's *Miracles* 9 (or *Miracles* 23 in the Egyptian manuscript). It concerns a pagan *scholastikos*:

The compassion, kindness and beneficence of Christ's slaves Cosmas and Damian extended to all men, especially to the weak, even to the impious pagans, who recognised the charisms of their cures, and the diverse and varied operations of their miracles, but because of the defilement of their impious religion called Christ's glorious servants not Cosmas and Damian but Castor and Pollux... [A pagan fell ill and] all his friends unanimously advised him to come to the home of saints Cosmas and Damian. They did, however, not send him to the saints themselves... but rather with an eye towards Castor and Pollux, whose stories are contained within their vain and pernicious texts.

Just as the shrine's devotees might situate the saints at divergent points upon the Christian doctrinal spectrum, therefore, so too might they construct them as their pagan equivalents, Castor and Pollux.²⁵ *Miracles* 9, then, epitomises the ability of the saints simultaneously to absorb a multiplicity of conflicting meanings, and thus also to embrace a cultic constituency which included not only various Christians but also, perhaps, non-Christians.²⁶ Correspondingly, there existed a variety of

²⁵ Cf. *Miracles of Thecla* 40, ed. G. Dagron (Brussels, 1978), 396–398, in which a pagan sophist similarly attributes his healing at the shrine of St Thecla to the pagan god Sarpedon: 'For when with great sagacity and depth of mind he proclaimed and conceded that she [Thecla] had provided a cure, he nevertheless attributed the gift of the remedy to another: 'It was Sarpedon,' he said, 'who commanded me to seek it from her and to take it'.

²⁶ I stress 'perhaps' because I am here less interested in the historicity of reported pagan supplications than in the principle which they express. Nevertheless, accusations of continued pagan activity within Constantinople are not unknown in the sixth century; see e.g. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. F. Nau, 'Analyse de la seconde partie inédite de l'Histoire Ecclésiastique de Jean d'Asie', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 2 (1897) 455–493, at 481–482; John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.42 (Thurn 377); Theophylact Simocatta, *Histories* 1.11, ed. C. de Boor (Teubner, 1952) 59–62; Theophanes, *Chronicle* 6022 (529/30), ed. de Boor, 180. For the thesis that the Constantinopolitan cult of Cosmas and Damian was a transformation of a Constantinopolitan cult of Castor of Pollux described by Hesychius of Miletus, see Deubner, 52–59.

Miracles of Cosmas and Damian in sixth-century Constantinople, all no doubt imprinted with the particular ideologies of their authors.²⁷

Indeed, the presence of nominally opposed Christian factions within a single shrine is described with remarkable regularity in a variety of sixth- and seventh-century literature. In the anti-Chalcedonian tradition, John Rufus, Severus of Antioch and John of Ephesus all contemporaneously describe (and denounce) the participation of Chalcedonian heretics within the orthodox liturgy,²⁸ while a sixth-century text contained within the anti-Chalcedonian, west-Syrian *Synodikon* comments specifically on the rife doctrinal apathy at shrines of healing saints: 'Very often,' it says, 'the sick enter and lay down in the martyries kept by the orthodox and desire to be given of the sacred mysteries concerning which, during the time of their healing, they do not distinguish the sacrifice of the orthodox from that of the heretics'.²⁹ In the Chalcedonian tradition, John Moschus too reproaches those Christians who participate indiscreetly in the eucharist of the opposing camp,³⁰ while his protégé Sophronius Sophista, in his *Miracles of Cyrus and John*, describes several strategies by which heretical supplicants were able to circumvent a healing shrine's particular doctrinal position. In *Miracles* 36 he describes how the heretic Theodore came to the saints and was encouraged by them to participate in the Chalcedonian sacraments. 'No, I shall not come', he says. 'For I am of another doctrine, and not of the confession of the Church. Today

²⁷ Rupprecht, *Miracles* 10 acknowledges the existence of another collection, a *biblion enkōmiastikon* composed by 'Stephanus the Sophist', perhaps the famed geographer of the age of Justinian; see above n. 17. Ernst Lucius also cites the witness of the Suda for yet another collection, composed by one Christodorus of Thebes (in Egypt); see *Die Anfänge des Heiligenkults in der christlichen Kirche* (Tübingen, 1904), 258 n.4.

²⁸ E.g. John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* 80, ed. F. Nau (Paris, 1912), 136f.; John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 5, ed. E.W. Brooks (Paris, 1923), 101–103; Severus of Antioch, *Select Letters* 4.10, ed. E.W. Brooks (London 1904), I: 306–309. For the presence of Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian at the shrines of St Symeon Stylites at Qalat Seman and St Sergius at Resafa, see respectively P. Peeters, *Orient et Byzance: Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie Byzantine* (Brussels, 1950), 134–136; E. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, CA. 1999), 156f.

²⁹ *The Ecclesiastical Canons Which Were Given by the Holy Fathers During the Time of Persecution* 4 [trans. Vööbus v.1 161f.]. Cf. *ibid.*, 3: 'It occurs, indeed, in the martyries kept by the orthodox that at the time when the orthodox clerics complete the sacred mysteries, there are present persons who join without distinction the adherence of the Council of Chalcedon and (also) join in participating in the holy mysteries celebrated by one of the orthodox priests' [trans. Vööbus 160f.].

³⁰ See e.g. *Spiritual Meadow* 30, 48, 49, 178, 188 [PG 87.3 2877C–2879A, 2904A–B, 2904B–2905A, 3048B–3049A, 3065B–3068A].

I await my mother, who is bringing the gifts of my own communion'. Having refused to commune within the Chalcedonian Church, Theodore then requests the saints' permission to take some oil from their tomb. 'For many who are not in communion still do this,' Sophronius says, 'taking the oil which burns in the candle instead of the holy body and blood of Christ God and Saviour of us all.'³¹ Theodore, therefore, simply circumvents the shrine's sacramental system by substituting the Chalcedonian eucharist for his own imported host and for the oil from the saints' tomb. Similarly, in Sophronius's *Miracles* 38 the heretic Stephanus is healed by the saints and converts to the Chalcedonian faith. His slave asks him, 'Look, my lord, here we have obeyed the saints' commands and have communicated with the catholic Church. But when, God willing, we take to the road home, shall we abide by their orders, or return again to how it was before?' Stephanus replies, 'While we are here we act as the martyrs see fit, but when we depart from them we shall revert back to our own dogmas as before, and to the faith which our fathers handed down to us'.³²

While doctrinal boundaries and identities thus appear more fluid than the majority of cultic observers might confess, the authors of Deubner's *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian* diverge from that majority in a crucial way. In Sophronius's *Miracles of Cyrus and John*, for example, the particular doctrinal adherence of its heretics is – as in Rupprecht's Egyptian collection – scarcely ambiguous. Sophronius's heretics are enemies of the doctrine of Chalcedon, and conversion to that doctrine is a vital precondition of a patient's cure.³³ Sophronius's scheme, therefore, admits the diversity of the cult's constituency but nonetheless attempts to suppress it by presenting the saints as 'officially' Chalcedonian. The Deubner collections, by contrast, are markedly devoid of doctrinal content. A single aforementioned

³¹ *Miracles* 36.15 (Marcos, 325).

³² *Ibid.*, 38.6 (Marcos, 334). Cf. *ibid.*, 37, in which an anti-Chalcedonian cleric converts at Menouthis but then is convinced to return to his previous doctrine upon leaving the shrine. See also the fascinating incident recorded at *ibid.*, 12.12–18, which reports the regular presence of anti-Chalcedonian clergy within the (Chalcedonian) Church of the Theotokos at Alexandria ('called Theona').

³³ Sophronius refers to his miaphysite heretics variously as Theodosians, Severans, Julianists, Apollinarians and Gaianites (see *Miracles of Cyrus and John* 12.6, 12.11, 12.17, 36.7, 37.4), although explicit mention of the Council of Chalcedon occurs in only one miracle (*ibid.*, 39.5, with more text preserved in the Latin at PG 87: 3 3574A). On the 'Chalcedonian logic' of the text, however, see Booth, 'Saints and Soteriology', 59–62.

reference, to an Arian 'Exakionite', appears conspicuously non-partisan in Chalcedonian terms, and the heretic of *Miracles* 26 is simply that, a 'heretic'.³⁴ The authors of the Deubner collections, it appears, enact a politics of doctrinal indeterminacy, a strenuous, self-conscious attempt to avoid the cult's doctrinal classification.³⁵ Furthermore, and even more remarkably, orthodox faith is not, in the Deubner's collections, pre-requisite to a patient's cure. Pagans and Jews eventually convert; sceptics are corrected; but the saints' heretical supplicants are cured without repentance.³⁶ *Miracles* 17 even eulogises the saints' doctrinal inclusivity:

The glorious saints Cosmas and Damian have spread the nets of their cure far and wide. Through these nets they take hostage the diseases of the sick and swiftly provide strength for the weak, not only curing men who adhere to their own faith but also, in the goodness and forbearance which is proper to them, treating those who have distanced themselves from orthodoxy.³⁷

Cosmas and Damian, therefore, not only absorb a multiplicity of doctrinal meanings, they also project, through their *Miracles*, an ideology within which that multiplicity is both acknowledged and preserved.

The Imperial Saints

When Maximus the Deacon rewrote certain of Deubner's *Miracles* for a fourteenth-century audience, some anachronisms contained within the texts required explanation. The inclusion of pagans, for example, was a cause for acute embarrassment, but most revealing is Maximus's reaction to Deubner's *Miracles* 17. Thus Alice-Mary Talbot:

³⁴ The term 'Exakionite' refers to the Theodosian expulsion of Arians from Constantinople, who subsequently gathered at the Exakionion outside the city walls; see Theodoret of Cyrrihus, *Compendium of Heretical Fables* 4.3 ed. PG 83 421B. The term was still in currency in the sixth and seventh centuries; see John Malalas, *Chronicle* 14.41, 15.10, 18.7 (Thurn, 295, 308, 357); *Paschal Chronicle* 379, 467, 485 (Dindorf, 561, 597, 605).

³⁵ I have adapted the 'politics of cultural indeterminacy' used in C.B. Champion, *Cultural Politics in Polybius's Histories* (Berkeley, CA. 2004).

³⁶ For pagans and Jews see Deubner *Miracles* 2, 9, 10; for sceptics see esp. *ibid.* 18. On scepticism within the text, and its intersection with a broader discourse on the cult of the saints in this period, see M.J. Dal Santo, 'The God-protected Empire? Scepticism towards the Cult of the Saints in Early Byzantium' (this volume).

³⁷ Cf. Rupperecht, *Miracles* 21, where a dyophysite is reluctantly cured by the saints (although the quoted exposition is absent).

Even more upsetting to Maximus than pagans were heretics, and he was clearly distressed by the original author's inclusion of Miracle 17. This was the tale of a member of the Exakionite (or Arian) sect, who was paralysed in both legs and came to the shrine in search of a cure. Kosmas and Damian healed him after some delay, even though he did not repent his heretical views. Maximus provides an extensive introduction to his reworked account of the miracle, apologising for including heretics in his narrative. He cannot understand why the first author left his readers in doubt as to whether the healed paralytic eventually converted to orthodoxy, the resolution that Maximus would clearly favor.³⁸

In the fourteenth century, Maximus was understandably perplexed by the sixth-century author's studied refusal to acknowledge orthodoxy as a necessary prerequisite of the saints' activity. The strange silences and omissions of the *Miracles*, however, become more comprehensible once they are resituated within the context of their production, for they then can be seen to intersect with the religious policies of sixth-century emperors, and particularly those of Justinian and Justin II.

In *Miracles* 17, the aforementioned Arian Exakionite comes to the shrine in hope of a cure. Not daring to enter the saints' shrine, the heretic decides to sleep instead in the narthex. One night, the saints make their rounds there, and one says to the other, 'What is it about this man that he has spent so much time here already?', and he replies, 'Leave him here to lie outside, for he has not entered in. Here, let us cure those of the orthodox faith, and let this one die'. The author then explains: 'This they said not because they judged him to be beyond their cure, but because they wisely foresaw his deviation from the faith.' After two days, the heretic then sees the saints a second time: 'And so again one of them said to the other, "He has been outside our home for so long, he now deserves to obtain a cure from us". And the other answered him curtly and said, "If he wants something, give it to him quickly, and let him leave our home quickly, lest he pollute the place".'³⁹ While Maximus would later despair at the saints' liberal attitude, their reluctant toleration nevertheless finds a tantalising parallel in the intermittent attempts of sixth-century emperors to appease Arian *foederati*. In 527, Justin I and Justinian published a law which explicitly exempted Goths from religious persecution,⁴⁰

³⁸ Talbot, 'Metaphrasis in the Early Palaiologan Period', 234.

³⁹ *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian* 17 (Deubner, 142f.).

⁴⁰ See *Codex Justinianus* 1.5.12.17, ed. P. Krueger (Berlin, 1954), 54.

and John Malalas refers to Justinian's toleration precisely of 'Exakionite Arians'.⁴¹ The healing of an Exakionite within the *Miracles* thus expresses a sixth-century religious inclusivity made necessary by the threat of Gothic rebellion, and reflected within contemporary political ideology.

At the same time, the *Miracles*' remarkable silence on contemporary Christology is paralleled by the attempts of Justinian and Justin II both to achieve religious unity through silence on Chalcedon – as, perhaps, in the so-called 'first *Henotikon*' of Justin II⁴² – and to mediate between religious factions through the projection of deliberate doctrinal ambiguity – most notably, of course, in the Chalcedonian/anti-Chalcedonian pairings of Justinian/Theodora and Justin II/Sophia.⁴³ It should be noted that such deliberate ambiguities were but single strat-

⁴¹ John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.7 (Thurn, 357); cf. Theophanes, *Chronicle* 6020 (527/8) (de Boor, 176). The appeasement of Arian *foederati* continued to be an issue even in the reign of Tiberius, when John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.13, ed. E.W. Brooks (Louvain, 1952), 138–139 reports the emperor's aborted attempts to provide their wives with places of worship. The period of Arian ascendancy had however long since passed. On sixth-century imperial policy towards Arianism, see G. Greatrex, 'Justin I and the Arians', *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001) 72–81. It is notable that the sole explicit doctrinal reference contained within the extensive and contemporary *Life of Symeon the Younger* also concerns a Gothic Arian. See *Life of Symeon the Younger* 226, ed. P. van den Ven 2 vols. (Brussels, 1962), I: 197, with 167–170*.

⁴² The 'first *Henotikon*' is described by Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 10.2, ed. J.B. Chabot (Paris, 1899–1910), II: 285–287. Proposed to a meeting of anti-Chalcedonians at Callinicum, and despite considerable concessions to their doctrinal position, it was, according to Michael, rejected by the monks for its failure explicitly to condemn Chalcedon. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.19–20 (Brooks, 23–27) records further discussions in Constantinople, and the apparent corruption of a previously reconciliatory Justin by 'Nestorian' advisers. This reportedly resulted in a more resolutely Chalcedonian edict, most probably that reproduced by Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.4, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London, 1898), 197–201; Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 10.4 (Chabot, II: 295–299). It is notable that while this latter edict was couched in Chalcedonian terminology, it still made no explicit mention of the Council. For further discussion, see Av. Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. D. Baker, *Studies in Church History* 13 (Oxford, 1976) [repr. ead. *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London, 1981) X], *contra* Frend, *The Rise*, 316–323; Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus*, 212–214.

⁴³ Theodora's anti-Chalcedonism was well-known and recognised by some contemporaries as a deliberate ploy; see Procopius, *Secret History* 10.13–15, ed. H.B. Dewing (Cambridge, 1935), 124–126; Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.10 (Bidez and Parmentier, 160). Sophia was officially pro-Chalcedonian during Justin's reign but rumours appear to have circulated of her anti-Chalcedonian sympathies; see John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.9–10 (Brooks, 67–71); Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 10.7 (Chabot, II: 306–307). On Theodora, see C. Foss, 'The Empress Theodora', *Byzantion* 72 (2002) 141–176. On Sophia see Av. Cameron, 'The Empress Sophia', *Byzantion* 45 (1975) 5–21 [repr. ead. *Continuity and Change* XI].

egies within far broader imperial attempts to achieve doctrinal consensus, attempts which oscillated from toleration through accommodation to persecution.⁴⁴ Deubner's *Miracles*, however, allowed for such shifts in imperial approach, for in retaining the notion of an 'orthodox' faith but nevertheless failing to define it, they both anticipated and accommodated incessant imperial re-positioning on matters of doctrine. At the same time, by including indeterminate 'heretics' within the saints' clientele, the *Miracles* sanctioned the integration of such groups while still proffering forth the possibility of an 'orthodox' consensus (however contemporaneously defined). The shrine is thus presented as a microcosm of empire, in which saints Cosmas and Damian, emperor-like, preside over Constantinople's various religious factions, patronising heretics while all the time pointing to a potential, 'orthodox' resolution.⁴⁵

In a seminal study of Constantinople in the sixth and seventh centuries, Averil Cameron has seen the imperial promotion of the Virgin and of saints' iconography as indicative of a process by which icons and cults, through their imperial associations, 'came to express not merely an urban but also an imperial consensus.'⁴⁶ This paper has argued that such symbols were apposite to imperial ambitions not only for their local or imperial associations, but also for their inherent, doctrinal

⁴⁴ On the vicissitudes of imperial religious policy in the second half of the sixth century, see Frend, *The Rise*, 255–295, 316ff.; J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450–680 A.D.* (New York, NY, 1989), 207–292; P. Allen, 'Neo-Chalcedonism and the Patriarchs of the Late Sixth Century', *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 5–17; ead. *Evagrius Scholasticus*, 21–44; Av. Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II'; ead., 'Justin I and Justinian', in *Cambridge Ancient History*, XIV: *Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425–600*, ed. eadem, B. Ward-Perkins, M. Whitby (Cambridge, 2000), 63–85; M. Whitby, 'The successors of Justinian', in *ibid.*, 86–111.

⁴⁵ For the symbolic construction of consensus within hagiography see also, in this volume, R. Payne, 'The emergence of martyrs' shrines in late antique Iran: Conflict, consensus and communal institutions'.

⁴⁶ Av. Cameron, 'Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium', *Past and Present* 84 (1979) 3–35 at 24 [repr. ead. *Continuity and Change* XVIII]. See also ead. 'The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople: A City Finds Its Symbol', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 29 (1978) 79–108 [repr. ead. *Continuity and Change* XVI]; 'The Virgin's Robe: An Episode in the History of Early Seventh-Century Constantinople', *Byzantion* 49 (1979) 42–56 [repr. ead. *Continuity and Change* XVII]. Ead. 'The Theotokos', 101 adds the observation (with reference to the cult of the Virgin but equally applicable to the cult of saints Cosmas and Damian) that it was 'in the interests of the authorities to encourage and institutionalize the growth of a cult which might convey a sense of divine help and support (and divert attention from an administration often itself in need of aid)'. For an important qualification of Cameron's earlier views, however, see M. Dal Santo, 'The God-protected empire? Scepticism towards the saints' cult in early Byzantium' (this volume).

imprecision. Indeed, in a recent study of imperial constructions within Justinianic Antioch – though equally applicable to the Constantinopolitan building programmes both of Justinian and of Justin II – Wendy Mayer has argued that local churches of the Virgin, the archangel Michael and *saints Cosmas and Damian* were promoted by Justinian precisely for their ability ‘to generate goodwill across the theological divide...without promoting an overt theological agendum’.⁴⁷ It has been suggested here that all cults were (in Mayer’s words) ‘theologically multivalent’, for all were capable of various, simultaneous doctrinal identities according to the (often contradictory or indifferent) perspectives of their supplicants.⁴⁸ The authors of Deubner’s *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian*, however, in contrast to comparable authorities from the provinces, attempt not to suppress but rather to exploit that multivalency – to acknowledge the conflicts of doctrinal meaning which surround the saints, but not to make such conflicts an impediment to their patronage. The authors of the *Miracles* thus presented the cult as an arena within which Constantinopolitan Christians of various doctrinal inclinations and convictions might converge, while all the time attempting to orientate that diverse clientele towards an imperial, ‘orthodox’ consensus brokered by the saints.

⁴⁷ Mayer, ‘Antioch and the intersection’. Mayer’s analysis applies principally to Antioch, where Procopius and John Malalas refer to the construction of these cults; see Procopius, *Buildings* 2.10.24–25 (Dewing, 172); Malalas, *Chronicle* 17.19 (Thurn, 351). It is, however, equally applicable to Constantinople, where the same triad of cults was popular with both Justinian and Justin II. Justinian: for Cosmas and Damian see Procopius, *Buildings* 1.6.6–7 (Dewing, 62); for the Theotokos see *ibid.*, 1.3.1–13 (Dewing, 38–42); for Michael see *ibid.*, 1.3.14–18 (Dewing, 42). Justin II: for Cosmas and Damian see above n.7; for Michael see Theophanes, *Chronicle* 6061 (568/9) (de Boor, 243), *Patria* 3.36 (Preger, 229), Cedrenus, *Compendium of Histories* ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838) v.1 685; for the Theotokos see *Anthologia Palatina* 1.2–3 (Conca et al., 80), Theophanes, *Chronicle* 6064 (571/2), 6069 (576/7) (de Boor 244, 248), *Patria* 3.23, 3.32 (Preger, 220, 226f.), Cedrenus, *Compendium of Histories* (Bekker, I: 602). On the building activities of Justin II see the indispensable article by Av. Cameron, ‘The Artistic Patronage of Justin II’, *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 62–84 [repr. ead. *Continuity and Change* XII]. It is notable that Theophanes dates Justin II’s construction of a Constantinopolitan shrine to saints Cosmas and Damian to 569/70, and thus to the years of attempted reconciliation with the anti-Chalcedonians; see above n. 7.

⁴⁸ Cf. on the holy man P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), 60. Unlike Brown, however, I am less convinced that the holy man (or indeed the saint) both ‘embraced and, eventually, reduced to order the many conflicting systems of explanation that characterised the religious world of late antiquity’ (*ibid.*; my italics). I make no such claim for Cosmas and Damian here.

THE GOD-PROTECTED EMPIRE? SCEPTICISM TOWARDS THE CULT OF SAINTS IN EARLY BYZANTIUM

Matthew Dal Santo

Some time around the year 590, Eustratius († after 602), a well-read priest in the entourage of the controversial Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople (553–567, 577–582), penned a rebuttal of claims that the saints' miracles were fakes.¹ Apparently emboldened by Aristotle's thesis of the soul's inseparability from the body, critics of the saints' cult (whom Eustratius called 'philosophers', not necessarily ironically) argued that the saints' souls were not active in the next life. Owing to the dependence of all human souls upon their bodies for the ability to move, speak and act, the saints – like everyone else – lay dormant in a state of 'soul sleep' until the resurrection, unmoved by the prayers of the faithful.² If some believed in perceiving visions or miracles at the saints' shrines, so the sceptics' argument ran, this was actually God or an angel assuming the saints' form.³ Eustratius – our presbyter in the Great Church – was not impressed. Assembling a mass of proof texts from the Scriptures, Fathers and Lives of the saints, Eustratius's *On the State of Souls after Death* refuted the philosophers' opinions for what they really were: an outright assault on Christian piety and a grave misunderstanding of the nature of God's engagement with humankind. Indeed, Eustratius contended that the saints' cult was no 'optional extra' of Christian belief.⁴ On the reality of the saints'

¹ Eustratius of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death = Eustratii Presbyteri Constantinopolitani: De statu animarum post mortem*, ed. P. van Deun, CCSG 60 (Turnhout, 2006).

² For the Aristotelian inspiration behind the sceptics' claims, see N. Constanas, 'An apology for the cult of saints in late antiquity: Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002) 267–285 at 281. Cf. D. Krausmüller, 'God or angels as impersonators of saints: a belief in its context in the *Refutation* of Eustratius of Constantinople and the writings of Anastasius of Sinai', *Golden Horn* 2 (1998/99) = <http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/goudenhoorn/62dirk.html>.

³ Eustratius of Constantinople, *Stat. anim.* = CCSG 60: 50–60.

⁴ For a useful introduction to contemporary piety, see D. Krueger, 'Christian piety and practice in the sixth century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, M. Maas (ed.) (Cambridge, 2005), 291–315.

miracles hung not only a proper conception of the Incarnation, but also any hope of assisting the dead. For, far from dormant, not only the saints, but all human souls were active in the afterlife. For the saints, this meant the ability to perform miracles for their supplicants; for the rest of humanity, it signified the possibility of the soul's ritual purification *post mortem* through the priest's offering of the Eucharist on its behalf.⁵ Thus, in Eustratius's relatively brief treatise there already appears an important intersection of vested interests in the saints' cult: the anthropology on which it rested underlay the claims of the imperial Church to act as a mediator between God and human society, both in this life and the next through its priestly and sacramental structures.

Eustratius's treatise is important because it focuses attention on a remarkable degree of scepticism, even hostility, towards the saints' cult in Constantinople at the end of the sixth century. This period has usually been noted for the intensified permeation by Christianity of the imaginative and symbolic landscape of East Roman society which it is alleged took place at this time.⁶ It is regularly remarked, for example, that from the reign of the great Justinian (527–565) the destiny of the empire generally, and the authority of the imperial office specifically, came to be identified directly with the legitimising interests of Christian Providence.⁷ From this perspective, the empire was, as a number of contemporary writers claim, uniquely 'God-guarded'

⁵ Eustratius of Constantinople, *Stat. anim.* = CCSG 60:2342–726. See also N. Conostas, "To sleep, perchance to dream": the middle state of souls in patristic and Byzantine literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001) 91–124.

⁶ See above all the seminal articles by Averil Cameron, 'The early religious policies of Justin II', in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, D. Baker (ed.), *Studies in Church History* 13 (Oxford, 1976), 51–67, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (Aldershot, 1981), X; eadem, 'The Theotokos in sixth-century Constantinople: a city finds its symbol', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 29 (1978) 79–108, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, XVI; eadem, 'Images of authority: elites and icons in late sixth-century Byzantium', *Past and Present* 84 (1979) 3–35, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, XVIII.

⁷ J.A.S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian: The circumstances of imperial power* (London, 1996), 58–65 and 252: '[...] in Justinian's reign, secular space grew narrower, the political and ecclesiastical sectors moved into closer union, and there was no safe space left for the outside.' See also J. Moorhead, *Justinian* (London, 1994), 116–120. One also thinks of the political and eschatological claims implicit in Justinian's ecclesiastical building programme, with Constantinople's Hagia Sophia its *chef d'œuvre*. See P. Magdalino, 'The history of the future and its uses: prophecy, policy and propaganda', in *The Making of Byzantine History: Studies dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*, ed. R. Beaton and C. Roueché (London, 1993), 3–34 at 12–13.

(θεοφυλάκτος).⁸ Moreover, Averil Cameron has demonstrated that the last decades of the sixth century saw a concerted effort by the imperial government to tie its legitimacy and prestige to saints' and relic cults.⁹ This process led to the increasing incorporation of numerous objects of Christian cult and piety (including icons and saints' relics) into imperial ceremonial.¹⁰ In fact, the reign of Emperor Maurice (582–602) – the period when Eustratius was writing – has been singled out for special attention. Not only did Maurice play a prominent role in promoting the cult of the Virgin Mary (notably by instituting the feast of the Virgin's Assumption on 15 August);¹¹ he was also a conspicuous patron of numerous saints. We know from various sources that Maurice and his ministers attempted to acquire, for veneration at Constantinople, the bodies of St Demetrius from Thessalonica and St Daniel the Prophet from Ctesiphon, while the Empress Constantina sought to obtain St Paul's head from Rome.¹² Living saints were also courted. In 590 Golinduch, the 'living martyr' of Persia, fortuitously appeared inside the empire's Mesopotamian frontier in the train of the refugee Khusro.¹³ Acclaimed as a saint, Golinduch was promptly invited to bless the government at Constantinople, but died before she

⁸ Averil Cameron, 'Images of authority', 23.

⁹ Averil Cameron, 'Images of authority', 18–24. See also J. Haldon, 'Supplementary essay', in *The Miracles of St Artemios: A collection of miracle stories by an anonymous author of seventh-century Byzantium*, V.S. Crisafulli and J.W. Nesbitt (eds.) (Leiden, 1997), 33–73, esp. 43–44.

¹⁰ Averil Cameron, 'Images of authority', 6–15; eadem, 'Theotokos', 98: '[...] the rise of icons is concomitant with an increase in the veneration of relics, and [...] both have their place in Marian devotion'. For the Christianisation of imperial ceremonial in the sixth century, see also S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1981), 240–259; G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le 'césaro-papisme' byzantin* (Paris, 1996), 74–105.

¹¹ On the Virgin's Assumption, see Averil Cameron, 'Theotokos', 86–87; and B. Daley, '“At the hour of our death”: Mary's Dormition and Christian dying in late patristic and early Byzantine literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001) 71–89, esp. 80–81.

¹² The evidence is collected by M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan warfare* (Oxford, 1988), 22–23. On St Paul's head, see Gregory the Great, *ep.* 4.30 in *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistolarum*, ed. D. Norberg CCSL 140 (Turnhout, 1981), 248–250, with discussion in J. McCulloh, 'The cult of relics in the letters and *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great: a lexicographical study', *Traditio* 32 (1976) 145–184.

¹³ On the *Life of Golinduch*, see P. Peeters, 'Sainte Golinduch, martyre perse', *Analecta Bollandiana* 62 (1944) 74–125 and G. Garitte, 'La passion géorgienne de sainte Golindouch', *Analecta bollandiana* 74 (1956) 405–440. Martyred in Persia under Hormizd IV (579–590), it was claimed that an angel brought her back to life. Her story is recorded in numerous sources from the sixth and seventh centuries. See now also

could make the journey. (In fact, we owe the most elaborate account of her life to Eustratius, our defender of the saints' cult at the Great Church.) Later in the same decade, St Theodore of Sykeon, the bishop of a small town in Galatia who had earned a measure of fame through his dedicated asceticism, was similarly invited and, according to his biographer, fêted in the capital by the emperor, patriarch and other government officials.¹⁴

But Maurice's reign is noteworthy for other reasons as well. The Persian, Avar, Slav and Lombard incursions that bore upon the empire across several fronts in this period are well known.¹⁵ Just as significantly, however, Peter Sarris has argued that the repeated mutinies that broke out in the imperial army over paycuts during Maurice's reign reflect the fact that, as a result of systemic corruption, plague and invasion, there were serious problems in the collection of imperial fiscal revenues throughout the second half of the sixth century.¹⁶ Indeed, it seems likely that, as pressure subsequently mounted upon the imperial government from a number of quarters, Maurice and his entourage sought to bolster the authority of imperial rule by assembling an unprecedented array of saintly and other relics in the capital, both in order to enlist the saints' prayers in aid of the government's stability and in order to discourage (ultimately in vain) political revolution by enhancing the sacredness of the emperor's authority through his manipulation of these cult objects.¹⁷ The empire's 'religious turn' is normally viewed as a positive development. Emphasising the value of icon and relic cults for legitimising imperial authority at this time, Averil Cameron argued that 'the late sixth century was crucial. It was a time when the Byzantine emperors in the capital presided over a process of cultural integration by which the élite and its ruler came to be fully identified. In this society such integration could only be

M. Dal Santo, 'Imperial Power and its Subversion in Eustratius of Constantinople's *Life and Martyrdom of Golinduch* (c. 602)', *Byzantion* 81 (2011) forthcoming.

¹⁴ *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, c. 82 in *La Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Brussels, 1970), 69 = E. Dawes and N.H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford, 1948), 145.

¹⁵ See esp. Michael Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 11–13 and 24 (on disturbances in Egypt).

¹⁶ P. Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2006), 228–234.

¹⁷ This is certainly the impression which Eustratius leaves us with in his *Life of Golinduch*. For the text, see A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ανάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, 4.149–174 (St Petersburg, 1897) and 5.395–396 (St Petersburg, 1898).

expressed in religious terms.¹⁸ Yet inasmuch as this ‘integration’ signified the elaboration of a more specifically Christian image and rationale for the authority of the imperial office, we should not delude ourselves as to how much this reflected the weakness rather than the strength of the emperor’s position in the later sixth century.¹⁹ It would not be surprising if the strains and often devastating setbacks which the empire faced in this period should have challenged to the point of undermining the Justinianic rhetoric of God’s special appointment and protection of the Christian empire, its emperor and inhabitants, especially as these were thought to be expressed through the ministrations of his saints.²⁰ Indeed, claims regarding the empire’s providential role in history may, during the straitened conditions of the 580s and 590s, have been made all the more hollow by the contrast between reality as perceived and the rhetoric itself.

For these reasons, it will be argued here that the disbelief regarding the saints’ miracles that Eustratius faced down was not *sui generis*, but reflected a more generalised anxiety about the saints and their miracles at the end of the sixth century, one which possibly indicates a dissenting current in the face of the broader stream of imperial ideology and public political culture. In fact, dissent towards the saints’ cult is almost symptomatic of the hagiographical sources written between Justin II’s reign and the Persian and Arab conquests of the seventh century, a period which may be conceived of as representing a time of sustained crisis for the Christian empire.²¹ Yet the consequences of

¹⁸ Averil Cameron, ‘Images of authority’, 4.

¹⁹ Compare N. Baynes, ‘The supernatural defenders of Constantinople’, in idem, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), 248–260 at 249: ‘The conviction that the city of Constantine was God-guarded [...] must surely have had profound psychological significance’.

²⁰ On the challenge which, from 542, the repeated outbreaks of the plague presented to notions of the empire’s providential dispensation, see A. Kaldellis, ‘The literature of plague and the anxieties of piety in sixth-century Byzantium’, in *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque*, ed. F. Mormando and T. Worcester (Kirksville, MO, 2007), 1–22. I thank Phil Booth for bringing this article and many others to my attention.

²¹ For scepticism towards the saints, see G. Dagron, ‘L’ombre d’un doute: l’hagiographie en question, VI^e–XI^e siècles’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992) 59–68; V. Déroche, ‘Tensions et contradictions dans les recueils de miracles de la première époque byzantine’, in *Miracle et Karama: Hagiographies Médiévales Comparées*, D. Aigle (ed.), Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études Sciences Religieuses 109 (Turnhout, 2000), 145–166; J. Haldon, ‘“Tortured by my conscience”. The *Laudatio Therapontis*: a neglected source of the later seventh or early eighth centuries’, in *From Rome to*

this less than fully credulous, or 'sceptical', attitude do not seem to have been discussed with respect to the claims of an imperial ideology increasingly expressed in exclusively Christian terms. Certainly, this is not to dispute the fact that there was a striking proliferation of miracle collections at Constantinople and elsewhere from the end of the sixth and seventh centuries. These have often been taken as a mirror reflection of the cultural integration of Byzantine society around the saints as powerful symbols of the divine protection upon which its citizens had come to believe the empire relied. No doubt there is much truth in this analysis. In the light of Eustratius's apology, however, it is valid to wonder just how universal belief in trumpeted religious phenomena like the saints' cult actually was, especially regarding the 'cultural integration' and 'idea of mediation' they are supposed to represent.²² Is it not possible that, to a large extent, both of these are part of the discursive illusion the texts themselves and their authors wished to create?²³

The Saints' Post-Mortem Activity

First, it seems important to try to date Eustratius's *On the State of Souls* more precisely than has been done heretofore, although I do not intend to offer a conclusive judgement on that topic.²⁴ It is nevertheless clear that the text must have been written after 582, since Eustratius's patron, Patriarch Eutychius, is referred to as deceased

Constantinople: Studies in honour of Averil Cameron, ed. H. Amirav and B. ter Haar Romeny (Leuven, 2007), 263–278.

²² Averil Cameron, 'Theotokos', 108 ('idea of mediation'): '[...] in the later sixth century we can see Byzantium developing [...] through the idea of mediation [...] to belief in a total union of body and spirit, the ultimate possible guarantee of safety and protection.' The Virgin's girdle, physically preserved in Constantinople, was believed to guarantee her spiritual patronage of the empire in heaven. For the growth of this belief, see Averil Cameron, 'The Virgin's Robe: an episode in the history of early seventh-century Constantinople', *Byzantion* 49 (1979) 42–56; repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, XVII.

²³ Similar queries have been raised in respect of other religious phenomena in late antiquity. See esp. Averil Cameron who questions 'how far the asceticism we see in the texts of late antiquity really did operate in society at large. Might it not be a textual matter, internal to writing?': Averil Cameron, 'On defining the holy man', in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P.A. Hayward (Oxford, 1999), 27–43 at 41.

²⁴ Indeed, it is not certain that one is actually possible given the state of the evidence.

and his death is known to have occurred in that year.²⁵ It is also almost certain that *On the State of Souls* was written before 602 when Eustratius composed his Greek version of an earlier (possibly Syriac) *Life of Golinduch*, since the latter *Life* assumes knowledge of the arguments in favour of the saints' intercession for the living in heaven which Eustratius developed in *On the State of Souls*. But there is also other more circumstantial evidence which allows us to view Eustratius's apology for the saints as but one symptom of a broader anxiety at Constantinople (and elsewhere, as we shall see) about the reality of the saints' alleged miracles. Of utmost significance in this respect is Theophylact Simocatta's account of Emperor Maurice's activities at the shrine of St Euphemia at Chalcedon, which Theophylact reports as taking place in 593.²⁶ At this time, according to Theophylact, Maurice began to doubt in the miraculous profusion of blood which was claimed to pour annually from Euphemia's tomb on the saint's feast day.²⁷ Instead of interpreting this as a miracle, Maurice is said to have 'belittled the miracles, rejected the wonder outright and attributed the mystery to men's crafty devices' (καὶ σμικρολογεῖται τὰ θαύματα, καὶ ἀποδοκιμάζεται παρ' αὐτῷ τὸ παράδοξον, καὶ ῥαδιουργικαῖς ἐπινοίαις ἀνθρώπων ἀνατίθησι τὸ μυστήριον). To test the claims of the shrine's clergy, therefore, Maurice had the tomb sealed the day before Euphemia's expected profusion. When, however, the miracle

²⁵ Eustratius wrote a *Life of the patriarch* which can be found in Eustratius of Constantinople, *Eustratii Presbyteri Constantinopolitani: Vita Eutychiei Patriarchae Constantinopolitani*, ed. C. Laga, CCSG 25 (Turnhout, 1992). For commentary, see Averil Cameron, 'Eustratius's *Life of Eutychius* and the Fifth Ecumenical Council', in *Kathegetria: Essays presented to Joan Hussey* (Camberley, 1988), repr. in eadem, *Changing cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot, 1996), I; eadem, 'Models of the past in the late sixth century: the *Life of the Patriarch Eutychius*', in *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity*, ed. Graeme Clarke (Rushcutters Bay, NSW, 1990), 205–223, repr. in eadem, *Changing Cultures*, II. Eutychius, originally a monk, was deposed by Justinian in 565 for opposing imperial apothartodocetism: Averil Cameron, 'Models', 210 and 215. Before this fall from favour, however, he was also the subject of a combined encomium by Paul the Silentiary with Justinian on the occasion of the rededication of Hagia Sophia in 565: Mary Whitby, 'Eutychius, Patriarch of Constantinople: an epic holy man', in *Homo Viator: Classical essays for John Bramble* (Bristol, 1987), 297–308.

²⁶ See Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1887) 8.14.1–9 = *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, trans. Michael and Mary Whitby (Oxford, 1986), 233–234. I thank Phil Booth for pointing this story out to me.

²⁷ Evagrius Scholasticus offers a somewhat different account of the nature of the miracle that occurred at Euphemia's shrine: *Ecclesiastical History* 2.3, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London, 1898) = M. Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus* (Liverpool, 2000), 62–65.

subsequently occurred unimpeded, the miraculous power of Euphemia's relics was vindicated and the emperor's disbelief visibly (and embarrassingly) admonished.

Yet the doubts regarding a long-established Christian cult centre which Theophylact attributes to Maurice here are highly uncharacteristic of the emperor's approach to religious matters – so much so that it invites us to question aspects of the seventh-century historian's account. Usually, Theophylact stresses Maurice's piety and his reverence for the shrines and relics of the saints and the Virgin.²⁸ In 590, for example, 'eager to obtain some divine guardianship to accompany him on campaign' (γλιχόμενος καὶ θείας τινὸς ἐποπτίας συστρατευσομένης αὐτῷ), Maurice spent the day supplicating the Virgin at Pege, a shrine Justinian had constructed just outside Constantinople's walls.²⁹ The Virgin's girdle and the Mandylion are also clearly associated by Theophylact with Maurice's patronage, and it was said that during Lent 596 Maurice took for his own use the bedding formerly used by the saintly John the Faster (the late patriarch of Constantinople), 'as if he thought that he would partake of divine grace thereby' (θείας τινὸς ἐντεῦθεν ὡσπερ οἰόμενος μεταλήψεσθαι χάριτος).³⁰ In view of this, it is possible that the story of Maurice's scepticism at Euphemia's shrine stems from an original source, probably produced under Phocas (602–610), hostile to Maurice, which pointed to Maurice's display of impiety at the shrine at Chalcedon in order to defame the late emperor as a heretic sympathetic to the miaphysite cause, since St Euphemia was widely viewed by Chalcedonians as 'guarantor' of the fourth council's decisions.³¹ At the same time, however, it was also known that after the outbreak of Phocas's coup against his government, Maurice and

²⁸ For example, Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. de Boor, 5.16.11–6.1.7, 7.6.5, 8.5.2 = *History*, Whitby and Whitby (eds.), 156–159, 186, 216.

²⁹ Theophylact Simocatta, *History* 5.16.6–8, ed. de Boor = *History*, Whitby and Whitby (eds.), 156.

³⁰ Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. de Boor, 3.1.8–12 (Mandylion), 7.6.5 (John the Faster), 8.5.2 (Virgin's girdle) = *History*, Whitby and Whitby (eds.), 73–75, 186, 216.

³¹ H. Grégoire, 'Sainte Euphémie et l'empereur Maurice', *Le Muséon* 59 (1946) 295–302. On Euphemia's shrine as the venue for the Council of 451, see A.M. Schneider, 'Sankt Euphemia und das Konzil von Chalkedon', in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht (Würzburg, 1951), I: 291–302; R. Price and M. Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool, 2005) I: 42. Note also the seventh-century Armenian story disputing Euphemia's patronage of the Chalcedonian definition: G. Babian, *The relations between the Armenian and Georgian Churches: According to the Armenian sources, 300–610* (Antelias, Lebanon, 2001), 317–318. I thank Phil Booth for pointing this story out.

his sons were slain at the harbour of Eutropius at Chalcedon – an ignominious end which perhaps implied the saint’s failure to offer the emperor effective succour from his enemies.³² Theophylact’s story of the emperor’s doubts in Euphemia’s miracles could, in this sense, have been intended to account for Maurice’s downfall and to safeguard Euphemia, her shrine and her cult from hostile allegations. According to his modern translators, it was not uncommon for Theophylact to muddle his sources by including material originally written under Phocas to defame his hero, but this seems to be a much more conscious manipulation of the traditions at his disposal.³³

Be that as it may, it is compelling to link Maurice’s intervention at the shrine of Euphemia in 593 to the sceptical arguments about the saints’ activity *post mortem* which Eustratius rebutted. As we have seen, the latter attempted to refute the allegation regarding the inactivity of the saints’ disembodied souls *post mortem* (which made it impossible for the saints to be considered the real agents of their posthumous miracles) and, conversely, to display the accuracy of accounts of their miracles and visions. Not least the terms of Theophylact’s account indicate that the controversy over Euphemia’s miraculous profusions of blood mirrored the debate visible in Eustratius’s treatise. Thus, Theophylact appears to echo Eustratius when he writes of ‘that superabundance of divine activity’ (τὴν ὑπεροχὴν τῆς θείας ἐνεργείας ἐκεῖνης) present in Euphemia’s relics,³⁴ and when he affirms that Maurice’s test had the result of proving that ‘through the miracles [which Euphemia performed at the shrine], she became an indubitable witness to her own power: once again rivers of aromatic blood sprang from the tomb, the martyr gushed with the discharges, sponges were enriched with fragrant blood, and the martyr multiplied the effluence. [...] in this way, the martyr educated the emperor’s disbelief.’³⁵ Theophylact’s

³² See Michael Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 26. The imperial family had been earlier arrested at the shrine of St Autonomus at Praeneste on the Gulf of Izmit: *Chronicon paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1832), I: 694 = Michael and Mary Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale, 284–628 AD* (Liverpool, 1989), 143, with n. 402.

³³ Whitby and Whitby (eds.), *History*, xxiv–xxv.

³⁴ Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. de Boor, 8.14.3.

³⁵ Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. de Boor, 8.14.8 = *History*, trans. Whitby and Whitby, 233: ἐπεὶ δ’ ἡ κυρία ἐπεδήμει ἡμέρα, βασανίζεται τὸ ἀπόρητον, ἐξετάζεται τὸ μυστήριον, τὰ θαύματα δοκιμάζεται, καὶ γίνεται τῆς ἑαυτῆς δυνάμεως διὰ τῶν θαυμάτων ἀπαράγραφος μάρτυς, καὶ πάλιν μεμυρισμένων αἱμάτων ἀπὸ τοῦ μνήματος πηγάζουσι ποταμοί, καὶ βλύζει ταῖς ἐκπομαῖς τὸ μυστήριον, καὶ πιαίνονται σπόγγοι

emphasis here on Euphemia as the subject of these miracles strongly personalises her intervention from beyond the grave and resonates with Eustratius's claim that it was the co-operation of divine power with the saints' human energy that enabled the saints' very own souls to perform deeds contrary to nature.³⁶ Like Eustratius, Theophylact was clearly implying that saints like Euphemia should properly be considered the direct agents of their own miracles, rather than the merely visible proxy an action actually undertaken by God or an angel.³⁷ The evidence that seals the link, however, is Theophylact's curious remark that the origins of Maurice's motivations in applying a test on the shrine lay in 'a certain notion concerning the divinity of the soul', which 'rashly occurred' to the emperor (εἰσέρχεται τοίνυν εἰς τὸν βασιλέα Μαυρίκιον ἔννοιά τις [...] ῥαθυμία περὶ τὰ θεῖα ψυχῆς).³⁸ Of course, the status of the human soul *post mortem* was at the heart of the polemic between Eustratius and those critical of the saints' cult.³⁹

Thus, on these admittedly circumstantial but, I think, compelling grounds it seems likely that Eustratius's treatise in defence of the saints' miracles was written in the early 590s, slightly before or after the Euphemia controversy in 593. That the early years of the last decade of the sixth century witnessed the outbreak of the debate glimpsed in *On the State of Souls* is arguably borne out by other hints from the sources. I have argued elsewhere that Gregory the Great's *Dialogues on the Miracles of the Italian Fathers*, more or less securely datable to 593–594, reflect the eruption of this controversy at Rome, as

εὐωδίας αἱμάτων, καὶ πολυπλασιάζει ἡ μάρτυς τὴν ἔκκριαν· [...] οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἡ μάρτυς ἐπαιδαγωγεῖ τοῦ βασιλέως τὸ ἄπιστον·

³⁶ Eustratius of Constantinople, *Stat. anim.* = CCSG 60: 943–945: Καὶ αὐταὶ ποῦ πάντως εἰσὶν αἱ ἐμφανίζουσαι, κἂν εἰ ὁ θεὸς δι' αὐτῶν ἐνεργῶν τὰς χάριτας δίδωσιν τοῖς αὐτὸν ἐπικαλουμένοις.

³⁷ Eustratius of Constantinople, *Stat. anim.* = CCSG 60: 442–444: αἱ τῶν ἁγίων ψυχῶν κατ' οὐσίαν ἰδίαν παροῦσαι. Those sceptical of the saints' miracles contended, by contrast, that God or angels temporarily assumed the saints' form. Eustratius of Constantinople, *Stat. anim.* = CCSG 60: 445–448: Οὔτε δὲ οἱ ἅγιοι ἄγγελοι, οὔτε αἱ τῶν ἁγίων ψυχῶν θεοῦ κελεύσεως διχῶς τὰς ἐμφανείας ἡγουν τὰς ἐνεργείας ποιοῦνται ποτέ: δούλοι γὰρ ὄντες, τὰ προστασσόμενα μετὰ φόβου ἀποπληροῦσιν.

³⁸ Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. de Boor, 8.14.6 = *History*, trans. Whitby and Whitby, 233.

³⁹ Constatas, 'Apology', 269–272. Rather than seeing the test Maurice imposed on Euphemia's shrine as an expression of the emperor's own 'disbelief' in the shrine's abilities, it would be possible to cast the event as an attempt to adjudicate between sceptics and those, like Eustratius, who defended the saints' miracles. If so, Maurice's intention was doubtless to vindicate emphatically the saints' miracles and their apologists.

does a passage from his *Moralia*.⁴⁰ Further still to the West, Gregory of Tours, whose sensitivity to religious developments in the Eastern Empire has been noted before, defended the activity of the soul *post mortem* against the sceptical arguments of a renegade priest during Lent 590.⁴¹ Although this debate seemed to focus more properly on the possibility of bodily resurrection than that at Constantinople, the Gallic bishop nonetheless cited many of the same biblical authorities (Gen 4.10, 25.8, Lk 16.45) as Eustratius.⁴² Elsewhere in the empire itself, Sophronius of Jerusalem's *Miracles of Cyrus and John*, composed at Alexandria between 610 and 614, pointedly defended the autonomy of the saints' patronal activity *post mortem* against that of the angels,⁴³ while, in the *Life of John the Almsgiver*, written around 641 on Cyprus, Leontius of Neapolis argued for the efficacy of prayer for the dead.⁴⁴ In

⁴⁰ M. Dal Santo, 'Gregory the Great and Eustratius of Constantinople: the *Dialogues on the Miracles of the Italian Fathers* as an apology for the cult of the saints', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17 (2009) 421–457. Recent arguments against the authenticity of Gregory's text carry no conviction: see M. Dal Santo, 'The shadow of a doubt? A note on the *Dialogues* and *Registrum Epistolarum* of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604)', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61 (2010) 3–17 (with bibliography).

⁴¹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X, X: 13, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, SS rer. Merov. 1, 1, 496, = L. Thorpe, *History of the Franks* (London, 1974), 561. For commentary on this episode, see R. Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 109–111. On Gregory of Tours, Gaul and the Eastern Empire, see Averil Cameron, 'The Byzantine sources of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 26 (1975) 421–426; repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, XV; R.A. Markus, 'The cult of icons in sixth-century Gaul', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 29 (1978) 151–157, repr. in idem, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great* (London, 1983).

⁴² Of course, Gregory was an enthusiastic partisan of the saints' cult with a vested interest in ensuring that due religion, *reverentia*, was shown to his heavenly patron, St Martin: P. Brown, 'Relics and social status in the age of Gregory of Tours', *The Stanton Lecture, 1976, University of Reading* (Reading, 1977); repr. idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), 222–250 at 230; and for Gregory's lifelong devotion to various saintly patrons, Van Dam, *Saints*, 50–81.

⁴³ See esp. Miracle 51 in *Los Thaumata de Sofronio: Contribucion al Estudio de la Incubatio Cristiana*, ed. N. Fernandez-Marcos (Madrid, 1975). A French translation is available in *Sophrone de Jérusalem: Miracles des saints Cyr et Jean*, trans. J. Gascoü (Paris, 2006). For commentary on the collection, see P. Booth, 'Saints and soteriology in Sophronius Sophista's *Miracles of Cyrus and John*', in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. P. Clarke and T. Claydon, *Studies in Church History* 45 (Woodbridge, 2009), 52–63 (with bibliography).

⁴⁴ For the Greek text with French translation, see *Léontios de Néapolis: Vie de Syméon le Fou, Vie de Jean de Chypre*, ed. A.J. Festugière and L. Rydén (Paris, 1974). English (abridged): Dawes and Baynes, *Byzantine Saints*. On Leontius's Life, see C. Mango, 'A Byzantine hagiographer at work: Leontios of Neapolis', in *Byzanz und der Westen: Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters*, ed. I. Hutter and H. Hunger, *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* 432

other words, this was a world in which stories confirming the ongoing activity *post mortem* of the human soul – sainted or otherwise – appear to have travelled far and wide.

Returning to the capital, we know that, despite the vigorous rebuttals made by defenders of the saints' cult in the 590s, the debate lived on. Indeed, it can be argued that it formed part of the context for the early seventh-century *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, where anxiety to shore up the saints' ongoing activity *post mortem* is also visible.⁴⁵ Here Theodore's hagiographer contrived a confrontation between some angels and Theodore's heavenly protectors, Sts Cosmas and Damian, whose healing shrine at Constantinople Justinian himself had lavishly embellished after finding relief there from an illness which the physicians had been unable to cure.⁴⁶ According to Procopius, Cosmas and Damian appeared to the emperor in a vision 'and saved him unexpectedly and contrary to all human reason'.⁴⁷ In the light of Anthony Kaldellis's arguments, that Procopius was quietly expressing his own (and others') scepticism in this ambiguous comment is certainly possible, if not provable.⁴⁸ In the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, however, the confrontation between Cosmas and Damian and the angels aims indisputably at demonstrating the autonomy (indeed, the superiority) of the saints' intercessory powers in heaven from the rights and duties of the angels. That Christ himself should ultimately appear as he does in order to vouch for the saints' direct access to God strongly suggests that the vindication of the saints' ability to mediate effectively between

(Vienna, 1984), 25–41; J. Hofstra, 'Leontios van Neapolis als hagiograaf', in *De Heiligenverering in de eerste eeuwen van het Christendom* (Nijmegen, 1988), 186–192.

⁴⁵ For commentary on Theodore, see P. Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople* (Cambridge, 2008), 194–197; R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine society and its icons* (London, 1985), 9–49; R. Browning, 'The "low-level" saint's Life in the early Byzantine world', in *The Byzantine Saint (Supplement to Sobornost 5)*, ed. S. Hackel (London, 1981), 117–127.

⁴⁶ *Life of Theodore* c. 39 in Festugière, *Vie*, 34–35 = Dawes and Baynes, *Byzantine Saints*, 115–116. For Justinian's renovation of the shrine, see the following note below.

⁴⁷ Procopius, *Buildings*, I.6.5–8 = Procopius, vol. VII, ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing and G. Downey, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), 62–63. Indeed, Phil Booth has argued that Cosmas and Damian were consciously transformed by Justinian and his successor, Justin II, into an imperially sponsored cult. See P. Booth, 'Orthodox and heretic in the early Byzantine cult(s) of Saints Cosmas and Damian', in this volume.

⁴⁸ See A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, history and philosophy at the end of antiquity* (Philadelphia, Penn., 2004), 165–221; idem, 'The historical and religious views of Agathias: a re-interpretation', *Byzantion* 69 (1999) 206–252.

God and their earth-bound supplicants underlies the purpose of the narrative. If this is so, then the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* can be read as participating, with Eustratius, in the contemporary debate in Constantinople about the nature and reality of the saints' activity *post mortem* since any transferral of responsibility for the saints' miracles to the angels necessarily undercut the confidence that supplicants could have in the various saints' cults on offer in the capital.

Sceptical criticism of the saints' activity *post mortem* is visible even in contemporary miracle collections. What distinguishes, moreover, a collection like that of the *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian* is the degree of its anonymous authors' awareness of many of the arguments which Eustratius rebutted in *On the State of Souls*.⁴⁹ At least one of these authors insists, for example, upon the physically real rather than illusory character of the saints' apparitions and repeatedly underlines the reality of the saints' personal agency in their healings. This author thus exhorts his/her audience in these striking terms: 'Let nobody imagine that the apparition of the saints was a mere illusion (φαντασίαν), as the crazy-minded ones do (ὅπερ τῶν πάνυ λίαν ἀφρόνων)'; and 'let nobody [...] dispute or doubt any of the miracles or appearances of the saints, or belittle the narration of their favours and healings'.⁵⁰ In another instance, it is stated that for various reasons 'their [that is, Cosmas and Damian's] apparition could not be considered a "fantasy" (φαντασία)'.⁵¹ This suggests that the author of this particular miracle story was aware of the need to configure his/her representation of the saints' miracles in such a way as to head off any notion that the saints' appearances were mere illusions, which evidently indicates that that was how some in the audience viewed them. Another narrative concluded with its author specifically asserting that 'keeping the faith of all those who call on them, these all-wise saints can be

⁴⁹ For the Greek text of this collection, see *Kosmas und Damian: Texte und Einleitung*, ed. L. Deubner (Teubner, 1907). A French translation is available in *Collections grecques de Miracles: Sainte Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean (extraits), St Georges*, trans. A.-J. Festugière (Paris, 1971). Deubner's edition gathers several separate collections of miracles, of which the first three may be dated as from the sixth century. See Booth, 'Orthodox and heretic', in this volume.

⁵⁰ *CosDam* 12 in Deubner, *Kosmas*, 131: ἵνα δὲ μὴ φαντασίαν τὴν τῶν ἁγίων παράστασιν νομίσαιεν τις, ὅπερ τῶν πάνυ λίαν ἀφρόνων (= Festugière, *Collections*, 124); *ibid.*, in Deubner, *Kosmas*, 132: καὶ μηδεὶς [...] ἀμφιβάλῃ ἢ ἀπιστήσῃ πρὸς οὐδὲν τῶν θαυμάτων ἢ σχημάτων τῶν ἁγίων (= Festugière, *Collections*, 125).

⁵¹ *CosDam* 3 in Deubner, *Kosmas*, 106: ἵνα μὴ φαντασία νομισθεῖται αὐτῶν παράστασις (= Festugière, *Collections*, 103–104).

found everywhere, *not only in activity, but in their very presence*'.⁵² Of course, the reverse proposition that the saints' miracles were only performed by them in appearance, not actuality, was precisely the allegation Eustratius rejected. Again, it seems compelling to identify these sceptics with the group Eustratius opposed and view the *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian* as a further reflection of the debated status of the saints' cult at Constantinople during the 590s.⁵³ Indeed, given the imperial patronage that Cosmas and Damian's cult attracted during the sixth century, any attack on the verisimilitude of the saints' ministrations at their shrine potentially held implications of a politically subversive kind.⁵⁴

With the hagiographical sources above, Eustratius's rebuttal of arguments against the reality of saintly ministrations from beyond the grave leaves the historian with the impression that Constantinople remained the venue for passionate debate about the function and meaning of the empire's heavenly patrons into the final decades of the sixth century. This is true even as the imperial government was increasingly identifying its authority in religious terms and Christian symbolism was increasingly being incorporated into court ritual; indeed, it should probably be seen as a symptom and consequence of this process. Crucially, instead of achieving 'cultural integration' or fusion, many of the sources that reveal Constantinopolitan society during the 580s and 590s seem expressive of extensive debate, tension and dissent. The government may have sought to buttress its authority by turning to saints' cults; but it is clear nevertheless that the plausibility of those cults and the legitimacy of the devotion offered to their subjects were themselves widely questioned in contemporary East Roman society.

⁵² *CosDam* 13 in Deubner, *Kosmas*, 134: τῆ πίστει τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων αὐτοὺς οἱ πάνσοφοι οὗτοι ἅγιοι ἀκολουθοῦντες πανταχοῦ οὐ μόνον τῆ ἐνεργείᾳ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ παρουσίᾳ εὐρίσκονται (= Festugière, *Collections*, 127).

⁵³ The early collections must have been composed before 626 when the saints' shrine was destroyed during the Avar siege: A.-M. Talbot, 'Metaphrasis in the early Palaiologan period: the *Miracula of Kosmas and Damian* by Maximus the Deacon', in *The Heroes of the Orthodox Church: The new saints, 8th–16th c.*, ed. E. Kountoura-Galake (Athens, 2004), 227–237.

⁵⁴ For Cosmas and Damian as imperially sponsored patrons of unity, see Booth, 'Orthodox and heretic', in this volume.

The Wider Implications of Scepticism towards the Saints

The later sixth- and seventh-century debate on the saints presents the historian first and foremost with a debate on intercession – whether and how it was possible, under what conditions and for what purposes. If we accept that Eustratius was first forced to defend the foundations of the saints' posthumous intercessory role at Constantinople during the early 590s, it is equally true that the controversy concerned more than merely the authenticity of the saints' miracles and apparitions. Also at stake, as we have seen, was the condition after death of the souls of the 'ordinary faithful' and the efficacy of the church's Eucharistic offerings on their behalf. As mentioned earlier, Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, which date from 593–594 at Rome, are closely involved with the nature of the saints' miracles and activity *post mortem*. Like Eustratius at Constantinople, moreover, Gregory perceived that any attack on the anthropology of the saints' cult implicitly undermined the foundations of the church's ritual care of the dead, an institution that embodied, perhaps even more than the saints themselves, the awesome mediatory role between the natural and supernatural worlds which East Roman emperors and their advisors increasingly wished to tap directly.⁵⁵

But it is worth pausing over the question of intercession, in particular. Commenting on this period, Averil Cameron has observed that '[i]ntercession [...] leads us to deeper conclusions about Byzantium in the late sixth century, in which [...] religion is perhaps as much a symptom and a social mechanism as a reality in itself'.⁵⁶ A story from Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* reflects, however, how problematic this notion of intercession could be. When Gregory related that an Italian monk had been able to hasten his departure for the next life through ardent supplication of a deceased holy man, Gregory's audience challenged this by arguing that such a version of events was incompatible with Augustine's doctrine of pre-destination.⁵⁷ How could the intercessions of the saints alter God's pre-destined plans? To allay their fears, Gregory cited the example of Isaac who prayed to God on account of

⁵⁵ For Eustratius and Gregory's defence of the offering of the Eucharist offered for the dead and its connections to the saints' cult, see Dal Santo, 'Gregory the Great'. For further reflections, see M. Dal Santo, 'Philosophy, hagiology and the early Byzantine origins of Purgatory', in *The Church, the Afterlife*, ed. Clarke and Claydon, 41–51.

⁵⁶ Averil Cameron, 'Theotokos', 106.

⁵⁷ Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 1.8.4 (SC 260: 72–74).

the fact that Rebecca was barren, notwithstanding God's promise of Abraham's many descendents (Gen 25:21). In Gregory's account, it was Isaac's prayers that brought God's pre-determined plans to fruition; there was no underlying conflict between saintly intercession and the notion of pre-destination. Despite Roman anxieties, in other words, Gregory asserted that there was no contradiction between the Latin Church's Augustinianism and the intercessory prerogatives claimed for the saints.

As we have seen, by the time Eustratius composed his apology in the 590s, saints' cults were an acknowledged, and increasingly important, prop for the imperial government's presentation of the empire's God-guarded (θεοφυλάκτος) status.⁵⁸ Yet the policies pursued by Justin II (565–578), Tiberius (578–582) and Maurice (582–602) in this regard in a sense only augmented the political and ideological value which the saints' cults acquired during the reign of Justinian (527–565).⁵⁹ As Cameron has demonstrated, as a patron of these cults, the emperor was claiming for himself a mediatory position between God and the empire. What is crucial, however, is that contemporaries contested this idea of intercession and possibly along with it the empire's and the emperor's special place in God's attention, by implication.

Posthumous intercession, the act by which heavenly benefactors secured the protection of the living, was always more than an issue of abstruse theology, disconnected from the business of governing the empire.⁶⁰ The condemnation of the 'Three Chapters' at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, which Justinian intended to restore his empire's divided Christian sects to unity, relied upon the *post-mortem* activity of souls and the Church's power to condemn the deceased, above all Theodore of Mopsuestia.⁶¹ Indeed, Eutychius of Constantinople, Eustratius's patron, was the very architect of the theology that enabled this policy of Justinian's.⁶² It rested upon a strong assertion of the Church's power 'to bind and loose' (Matt 16:19) beyond the grave, a notion which figures prominently in both Eustratius and

⁵⁸ Averil Cameron, 'Early religious policies', esp. 65–67; eadem, 'Elites', 15–18.

⁵⁹ Booth, 'Orthodox and heretic'.

⁶⁰ Averil Cameron, 'Theotokos', 99: 'The government [...] had much to gain in terms of social control from formalising the the cult of the Theotokos [...]'.
⁶¹ Cf. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, N.P. Tanner (ed.) (London, 1990), 109–110.

⁶² Averil Cameron, 'Eustratius's *Life of Eutychius*', 228–229; also, Allen, *Evagrius*, 203.

Gregory the Great's portrayals of the saints' powers.⁶³ In this way, the divisive controversy over the 'Three Chapters' can be seen as the political background to the disputed ability of the living to intervene in the world of the dead and vice-versa.⁶⁴ Justinian reasoned that the reconciliation of the Miaphysite Church was too politically significant to be thwarted by scruples over a minor theological point, but the anthropology which the anathematisation of Theodore required had been scarcely discussed when the council ended.⁶⁵ It was worked out only as the century wore on, revealing not only the Church's, but also the empire's vested interest in a vigorous afterlife for the human soul between God's throne room and its footstool in the imperial palace on the Bosphorus.⁶⁶ By the time of Constantinople's deliverance from the Avars in 626, the fate of the empire itself was believed to hang upon heavenly intercessors, the mythology of the Virgin's miraculous intervention assuming a primary place in the empire's official memory.⁶⁷ But as early as 533 some had sought to justify Justinian's decision to invade Vandal Africa on the grounds that St Laetus, an African martyr, had appeared to him in a dream and guaranteed the Roman success.⁶⁸

Yet the scepticism towards the saints' cult frequently revealed by texts from, or connected to, Constantinople during the later decades of the sixth century troubles the prevailing image in the historiography of a uniformly believing society. The reality was evidently more complex. Criticism of the saints' cult seems to point to the survival of a rationalist tradition capable of questioning the manipulation of Christian symbols and cult objects by the imperial government for

⁶³ Eustratius of Constantinople, *Vita Eutychii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani* = CCSG 25: 1644–1647; Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 2.23.6 (SC 260: 208–210).

⁶⁴ Constas, 'An Apology', 282: 'neither the church's friends nor her enemies could ever be allowed to perish completely'.

⁶⁵ On the council and its purposes, see now R. Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553, with related texts on the Three Chapters Controversy* (Liverpool, 2009), I: 1–108; but J. Meyendorff, 'Justinian, the Empire and the Church', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22 (1968) 43–60 remains a classic treatment.

⁶⁶ For the vigorous debate about the rights of the church over the souls of the deceased, see Price, *Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553*, 1: 178–181; M. Maas, *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Junillus Africanus and the Instituta regularia divinae legis* (with a contribution from E.G. Mathews, Jr) (Tübingen, 2003), 51–52, 58–60.

⁶⁷ Averil Cameron, 'Theotokos', 101–102.

⁶⁸ Evans, *Age of Justinian*, 127.

political ends.⁶⁹ But can we say more about the origins of the arguments of the saints' opponents? Nicholas Conostas has postulated a connection between the arguments Eustratius opposed and the Aristotelian Tritheist, Stephen Gobar, who was probably active in Constantinople during the 570s.⁷⁰ A disciple, Conostas suggests, of the great John Philoponus (c. 490–575), Gobar's querying of the logical foundation for the Church's care of the dead resonates with the defence of this practice found in Eustratius's treatise.⁷¹ Indeed, Gobar also raised problems regarding the date assigned to the celebration of the Virgin's Annunciation.⁷² In a historical context where the cult of the Virgin was being steadily drawn into imperial ceremonial as the capital's special protectress, Gobar's adverting to such discrepancies in the liturgical calendar account surely had subversive potential.

In its erudition and intellectualism, Gobar's critique points undoubtedly to elite circles, where it is now clear that a culture of *paideia* survived into the seventh century.⁷³ On the other hand, recent scholarship on the late sixth-century empire reveals a highly stratified society riven by religious, economic and political tensions.⁷⁴ That the imperial government had ever greater recourse to religious symbolism to overcome these tensions should not be doubted. What is open to question, however, is the extent to which the later sixth and seventh-century emperors achieved a cultural or political consensus around the

⁶⁹ On 'rationalists' at Constantinople in this period, see Haldon, 'Supplementary essay', in *The Miracles of St Artemios*, Crisafulli and Nesbitt (eds.), 45–46.

⁷⁰ A. von Harnack, 'The "Sic et Non" of Stephen Gobarus', *Harvard Theological Review* 16 (1923) 205–234; G. Bardy, 'Le florilège d'Étienne Gobar', *Revue des Études Byzantines* 5 (1947) 5–30 and 7 (1949) 51–52. This Gobar is not to be confused with either Stephen of Alexandria or Stephen of Athens: W. Wolska-Conus, 'Stéphanos d'Athènes et Stéphanos d'Alexandrie: essai d'identification', *Revue des Études Byzantines* 47 (1989) 5–89.

⁷¹ Conostas, 'Apology', 280–281. For an upbeat assessment of contemporary intellectual culture, see C. Wildberg, 'Philosophy in the age of Justinian', in *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Maas, 316–340.

⁷² Stephen Gobar §3 = Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 232 in A. von Harnack, 'The "Sic et Non" of Stephen Gobarus', *Harvard Theological Review* 16 (1923) 205–234 at 207. Gobar opined that this took place both in April and March. The result was that Christ's birth could be assigned both to 6th January and 25th December. For the background, see M. van Esbroeck, 'La lettre de l'empereur Justinien sur l'Annonciation et la Noël en 561', *Analecta Bollandiana* 86 (1968) 356–362.

⁷³ On the survival of an elite culture of *paideia* into the seventh century, see R. Leader-Newby, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity: Functions and meanings of silver plate in the fourth to seventh centuries* (Aldershot, 2004), 173–177, 204–208; also Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 221–222.

⁷⁴ Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 228–234.

cults of the saints, Virgin and True Cross. The initial rallying of many of the empire's elite inhabitants around these much-vaunted heavenly patrons seems to have been already questioned under Justinian. In his published works, Procopius appears critical of Justinian's unbridled ambition and his ambivalence towards the emperor's religious policies is equally clear,⁷⁵ while the theme of the emperor's duty to submit to the law was taken up again at the end of Justinian's reign by the anonymous author of a treatise *On Political Science*.⁷⁶ Gobar and the sceptics whom Eustratius rebutted could be thought of as the representatives of this elite secular tradition under Justin II, Tiberius II and Maurice, although their arguments rested on theology and anthropology, rather than political philosophy. Further evidence for this is suggested by Gobar's putative connections with Philoponus, who in his *De opificio mundi* has been hailed for rejecting both the notion of the emperor as God's image on earth and the divine sanctions frequently adduced in support of imperial authority, arguing instead that 'government among men is a work not of nature, but of men's free will.'⁷⁷ By boldly undermining the logical foundations of an aspect of Christian piety – the saints' cult – with which the emperor was increasingly identifying his own and the empire's survival, the rationalist arguments of Gobar and others will have been welcomed by anyone seeking to question the justification for an imperial autocracy decked with the trappings of Christian cult.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, history and philosophy at the end of antiquity* (Philadelphia, Penn., 2004), 165–221. For the fate of dissenting polytheists in Justinian's reign, see Evans, *Age of Justinian*, 65–71; cf. M. Maas, *John Lydus and the Roman Past: Antiquarianism and politics in the age of Justinian* (London, 1992), 67–78.

⁷⁶ On this text see D.J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity* (Oxford, 2003), 180–182; and now also Averil Cameron, 'Old and New Rome: Roman studies in sixth-century Constantinople', in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, ed. P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (Aldershot, 2009), 15–36 at 29–32. I thank Prof. Cameron for very kindly providing me with a copy of her article.

⁷⁷ F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and background* (Washington, D.C., 1966), II: 711–712. The text dates from 547–560 (and possibly 557–560): see L.S.B. MacCoull, 'The historical context of John Philoponus's *De Opificio Mundi* in the culture of Byzantine-Coptic Egypt', *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 9 (2006) 397–423.

⁷⁸ This backlash may be compared to that which greeted a similar attempt to manhandle the saints for political purposes in the Frankish empire of Louis the Pious (814–840): see G. Heydemann, 'Relics and Texts: hagiography and authority in ninth-century Francia', in this volume.

Conclusion

It was in the nature of the emperors' increasingly public manipulation of intercessory cults to exalt the imperial office above secular constraint or accountability to the law. To the extent, therefore, that contemporaries questioned the logical foundation of these intercessory cults, they implicitly undermined the emperors' exalted politico-religious claims. In short, the prominence of religious symbols in expressions of imperial ideology from the reign of Justin II points not to the successful integration of early Byzantine society, but to its increasingly fractious state. Indeed, if we take into account Theophylact's account of Maurice's actions at St Euphemia's shrine, then the debate surrounding the saints' cult was taken seriously enough for the emperor himself to intervene. But despite Maurice's vindication of Euphemia's miracles, it is noteworthy that the authority of saint and relic cults remained under a question mark into the seventh century.⁷⁹

It has been argued that the integration of late sixth-century society around intercessory cults, saints' relics and images endowed the empire with the cultural unity and political-ideological strength to survive the devastation caused by the Persians and Arabs during the seventh century. Yet, even with its heavenly benefactors, the God-guarded empire was never as secure as it seemed. As this paper has attempted to suggest, those benefactors themselves were alarmingly vulnerable. Peter Sarris has noted that, when the eastern field army rioted over pay at Edessa in 588, Maurice attempted to overawe the unruly soldiers through a demonstration of the sacredness of imperial authority, ordering the priests to display the holy Mandylion to the troops: Christ's image – 'not made by human hands' – was promptly stoned. In fact, it is telling that the unpacified soldiers then proceeded to destroy the emperor's own images.⁸⁰ This event among others points to the failed manipulation of religious symbolism by Justinian's successors to paper over increasingly severe social tensions in the Eastern Empire at the end of the sixth century.⁸¹ It scarcely needs

⁷⁹ For ongoing hesitation towards miracles, see also M.-F. Auzépy, 'L'évolution de l'attitude face au miracle à Byzance', in *Miracles, Prodiges et Merveilles au Moyen Âge: XXVè Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S., Orléans, juin 1994* (Paris, 1995), 31–46.

⁸⁰ Theophylact of Simocatta, *History*, ed. de Boor, 3.1.8–12 = *History*, trans. Whitby and Whitby, 73–75. See Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 234.

⁸¹ Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 221–222.

to be said that the empire's fiscally oppressed inhabitants remained material beings with priorities other than the religious and symbolic.⁸² Indeed, hardly a decade after the Virgin's victory against the Khagan's armies, a new political ideology was born at the intersection of the Near East's religious currents, one which, alarmingly for Byzantium, made the very *rejection* of post-mortem intercession and intercessors the cornerstone of its legitimacy. In words traditionally attributed to Muhammed: 'Pray if you will to those whom you deify besides Him. They cannot relieve your distress, nor can they change it. Those to whom they pray themselves seek to approach their Lord, vying with each other to be near Him.'⁸³ By the 690s and early 700s, as Byzantium teetered on the verge of a controversy about the saints' images, the Arab conquest of the Near East could easily suggest that the benefits of the saints' favours for Byzantium had been few indeed.⁸⁴

⁸² Thus, Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 234: 'Clearly, empty pockets made for bad Christians'.

⁸³ The Night Journey 17.52. Cf. Repentance 9.31: 'They [the Christians] make of their clerics and their monks, and of the Messiah, the son of Mary, Lords besides God; though they were ordered to serve one God only. There is no god but Him. Exalted be he above those they deify besides Him!' Citations from the Qur'an are from N.J. Dawood, *The Koran* (London, 2003). See also G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: from polemic to history* (Cambridge, 1999).

⁸⁴ For Justinian II's failed attempt to enlist images of the saints in an effort to reconquer the old Roman Near East from the Arabs at the end of the seventh century, see Mike Humphreys, 'Images of Authority? Imperial patronage of icons from Justinian II to Leo III', in this volume.

IMAGES OF AUTHORITY? IMPERIAL PATRONAGE OF ICONS FROM JUSTINIAN II TO LEO III

Mike Humphreys

But then they say, Make an image of Christ and of his Mother who gave birth to Christ, and let that suffice. What an absurdity! You confess clearly that you are an enemy of the saints! For if you make an image of Christ, but in no wise of the saints, it is clear you do not prohibit the image, but rather the honour due to the saints, something that no one has ever dared to do or undertake with such brazenness.¹

Thus John of Damascus fulminated against one iconoclast argument circulating during the reign of Leo III (717–741). Here, John posits the iconoclast dispute as fundamentally an attack on the cult of the saints. Similar ideas are contained in the accusations that Theophanes hurls at Leo:

Not only was the impious man in error concerning the relative worship of holy icons, but also concerning the intercession of the all-pure Theotokos and all the saints, and he abominated their relics like his mentors, the Arabs.²

The polemic against the iconoclasts would only gather pace, with 'Iconoclasm' being portrayed as the last great imperial heresy, an attack against all the central tenets of Orthodoxy – saints and the Virgin, their intercessory role, and their manifestations on earth, namely relics and icons.³ Leo III, and even more so his son Constantine V

¹ John of Damascus, *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 5 vols. (Berlin, 1969–88), III, Treatise 1: 19; trans. A. Louth, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY 2003), 32.

² Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883–5), 406; trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997), 561.

³ I use 'Iconoclasm' here as the narrative of heresy and oppression as woven by the iconophiles, remembered in the modern Orthodox Church, and used, often unthinkingly, by modern scholars. In fact it is a difficult word, beginning as an insult of the iconophiles and rarely used during the controversy; see J. Bremmer, 'Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes towards a Genealogy', *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008) 1–17. Moreover, as we shall see, there was in fact very little image-breaking involved. Therefore, I shall aim to avoid the word except when used in conjunction with a discourse expounded by the iconophiles.

(741–775), instead of being celebrated for their stalwart defence of the empire, are cast as cultural terrorists waging war on the empire's timeless traditions from within.

Central to that charge, as John of Damascus saw it, was the notion that the Isaurians were hostile to the cult of the saints, and acted against it and associated practices, such as relics and monasticism. Modern scholars have responded variously to these iconophile accusations, yet most agree that these issues were important. Thus, Stephen Gero argued that Constantine V, if not Leo, deliberately attacked the cult of the saints, both in the arena of theology, denying the possibility of saints' intercession, and practically, moving against saints' relics and images.⁴ Even those who question Gero's problematic schema, often view the controversy as entwined with the fundamental debate over the saints, namely the legitimacy of various modes of intercession and access to divine power. For instance, Peter Brown explained the controversy as a centripetal reaction to the dissipation of power away from central and imperially controlled modes, such as the Church and Eucharist, to a multitude of uncontrolled and private mediators.⁵ For Brown, the icon was functionally the same as a holy man, just capable of vast reproduction; thus it posed the same danger as holy men and monks to the imperial church and as such created a backlash: 'iconomachy in action is monomachy'.⁶ Another layer of modern scholarship has persuasively argued that the very rise of icons, both popularly and theologically, was as an offshoot of venerating saints and their relics: thus Leslie Brubaker declaims: 'there is no "cult of the images" independent of the cult of the saints'.⁷

Therefore, is the Byzantine conflict over images expressive of dissent from the saints' cult? This author would argue that the controversy was never solely, or indeed predominantly, about saints, or indeed intercession, relics or monks. Both Constantine's *Enquires* and the Council

⁴ S. Gero, *Byzantine iconoclasm during the reign of Constantine V, with particular attention to the oriental sources* (CSCO vol. 384, Louvain, 1977), 143–164. For the same author's defence of Leo III from charges of attack on the cult of the saints see *idem*, *Byzantine iconoclasm during the reign of Leo III; with particular attention to the oriental sources*, CSCO 346, (Louvain, 1973), esp. 100–102.

⁵ P. Brown, 'A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy', *English Historical Review* 88 (1973) 1–34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ L. Brubaker, 'Icons before Iconoclasm?', in *Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, Settimane di Studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo 45 (Spoleto, 1998), 1215–1254 at 1252.

of Hiereia in 754 explicitly supported intercession, and the role of the *Theotokos* and the saints.⁸ Iconoclast monks existed, and indeed Constantine named one daughter after a famous ascetic nun.⁹ Marie-France Auzépy plausibly suggests that much of the virulent monastic rhetoric against iconoclasts, clearly evident in the sources, represents a deliberate rewriting to cast monks as the heroic defenders of images rather than as recipients of Isaurian patronage now damned by association with heresy.¹⁰ Relics are not mentioned in the limited account of Hiereia, and only once at Nicaea II which renounced Iconoclasm, and here there is no suggestion that iconoclasts had destroyed relics.¹¹ Theophanes gives just one, uncorroborated specific example of relic destruction, and this has been convincingly argued was the product of later story-telling rather than actual destruction.¹²

More importantly, all the accounts of attacks on monks, relics or the cult of the saints in general are recorded in the latter years of Constantine V's reign. Essentially the only evidence for even iconoclast scepticism under Leo III are the two passages quoted above, both highly tendentious. Theophanes was writing a century after the fact when the Isaurian dynasty was no more, with the deliberate intention of blackening the dynasty's reputation. Yet this is the only occasion he mentions the cult of the saints, relics or the *Theotokos* for Leo's reign, and it is clearly a litany of abuse rather than a catalogue of events. The aim is to present Leo as attacking the entire 'Orthodox Tradition.' The same process of discreditation was underway, at an early stage, in the writings of John of Damascus, which at least have the benefit

⁸ *Horos of the Council of Hiereia*, Mansi XIII, 348 E, 345 A–B; *Enquiries*, PG 100, 216B.

⁹ See 'Life of St Anthousa' in A. Talbot, *Byzantine defenders of images: eight saints' lives in English translation* (Washington, D.C. 1998), 13–20. For iconoclast monks see K. Ringrose, 'Monks and Society in Iconoclastic Byzantium', *Byzantine Studies* 6 (1979) 130–151.

¹⁰ Auzépy has written copiously about the rewriting of the period by iconophiles. For a collection of her articles on the subject, see M.-F. Auzépy, *L'histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris, 2007); especially interesting is the suggestion of originally iconoclast saints' lives being rewritten in 'L'analyse littéraire et l'historien: L'exemple des vies de saints iconoclastes', 329–340; originally published in *Byzantinosalvica* 53 (1992) 57–67.

¹¹ Canon 7 of Nicaea simply complained that some churches had been consecrated without relics; there is no regulation against relic destruction.

¹² Theophanes, 439–440. For a clear analysis of this and the whole issue see J. Wortley, 'Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm: Leo III, Constantine V, and the Relics', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982) 253–279.

of contemporaneity. Stripping away iconophile denunciation, the iconoclast charge was entirely focused on icons, not the cult of the saints. It is only with John's defence of icons that the cult of the saints becomes embroiled in the iconoclast controversy.¹³ Furthermore, the passage above gives an insight into the nebulous nature of iconoclast argument in this early stage, or at least what John had heard of it in Palestine, for it states that one argument was that only images of Christ and the Virgin were allowed, whilst elsewhere John makes clear that other iconoclasts argued that no icons whatsoever were permitted. The important point to grasp is that this was a debate over whether icons were a legitimate mode of worship and part of tradition, and not over the legitimacy of the Virgin, saints and relics. Certainly this was the case for imperial policy under Leo III.¹⁴

However, there is here insufficient space for a study into any role of the cult of the saints across the entirety of the controversy. This paper's aim is to elucidate the policy and action of Leo III and its origin. For to understand both the evolution of the controversy and the role of the emperors within it one needs to uncover the original elements of imperial policy and the context in which they arose. The iconoclastic dispute lasted for more than a century, with long antecedents and an even longer aftermath. The arguments on both sides were never monolithic nor immutable. Imperial policy, and even more so imperial action, shifted multiple times. Diverse discourses, including concerning the cult of the saints and also Christology, were woven into the debate, but we should not read back from ninth-century iconophile assumptions what the origins or central tenets of early iconoclast ideas and actions actually were. Leo III's attitude to images needs to be set within the context of his reign, and above the immediate political situation and concurrent strains of imperial ideology.

What, then, were Leo's aims? The fundamental basis for all Leo III's policies was the parlous state of the empire which he inherited in 717, and the continued life or death struggle with the Arabs that engulfed his reign. Nicephorus paints this bleak picture at Leo's accession:

¹³ For a sensible account of the evolving interaction between John and the iconoclasts, see T. Noble, 'John Damascene and the history of the iconoclastic controversy', in *Religion, culture, and society in the early Middle Ages: studies in honor of Richard E. Sullivan*, ed. T. Noble and J. Contreni (Kalamazoo, MI, 1987), 95–116.

¹⁴ This is also made clear from the *Liber Pontificalis* which does not mention any attack on relics or the cult of the saints *per se*, only on images of saints. See *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1955–7), Life 91: 23–24.

On account of the frequent assumptions of imperial power and the prevalence of usurpation, the affairs of the empire and of the City were being neglected and declined; furthermore, education was being destroyed and military organisation crumbled. As a result, the enemy were able to overrun the Roman state with impunity causing much slaughter, abduction and the capture of cities. For this reason also the Saracens advanced on the Imperial City itself.¹⁵

That Byzantium survived is largely due to the policies and skills of Leo and his Isaurian dynasty.¹⁶ Yet Leo is not remembered as a saviour, but the villain of Iconoclasm. This image reflects, naturally, the triumph of Leo's theological opponents, the iconophiles, who created, edited and interpolated the vast majority of the extant source material, often long after Leo's death.¹⁷ However, the scant contemporary evidence emanating directly from the Byzantine state, primarily numismatic and the 741 law-code, the *Ecloga*, present a fundamentally different picture.¹⁸ What then were Leo's policies concerning images, what specific state action was there, and what was the reason for those actions and policies? Moreover, Leo's policies did not spring *ex nihilo*, nor were they simply a product of Islamic pressure. A vital and under-explored element was Leo's reaction to the idiosyncratic and failed policies and espoused ideology of his last major predecessor, Justinian II (685–695, 705–711). Therefore, to explain Leo's activities it is necessary to engage extensively with Justinian II and the circumstances of his reign, and especially Justinian's incorporation of icons within a programme of imperial restoration, which provided the context of Leo's actions.

¹⁵ Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, ed. and trans. C. Mango, *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople* (Washington, D.C., 1990), 52, 121.

¹⁶ See the excellent recent summary of M.-F., Auzépy, 'State of Emergency', in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge, 2008), 251–291.

¹⁷ For an overview of the sources, see L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the iconoclast era (c. 680–850): the sources: an annotated survey* (Aldershot, 2001). For the Iconophiles editing and interpolating sources, see the various works of Paul Speck, in particular *Die Interpolationen in den Akten des Konzils von 787 und die Libri Carolini*, *Poikila Byzantina* 16 (Bonn, 1998).

¹⁸ See P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine coins in the Dumbarton Oaks collection and the Whittemore collection*, II.2 (Washington, 1968); III.1 (Washington, 1973). For an introduction, see P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C., 1999). For the *Ecloga* see *Ecloga. Das Gesetzbuch Leons III und Konstantinos V*, ed. L. Burgmann (Frankfurt, 1983); English translation: E. Freshfield, *A Manual of Roman Law: the Ecloga* (Cambridge, 1926).

The seventh century was an unmitigated disaster for Byzantium. From being the dominant power in western Eurasia during the reign of Justinian I (527–565), by Justinian II's accession in 685, Byzantium had been reduced essentially to an impoverished Anatolian rump, its richest provinces lost. Incessant raiding undermined what remained. Cities, and the classical culture they had fostered, shrank and almost disappeared. Increasingly insecure, long-distance links dwindled and mental horizons narrowed. Recurrent bouts of plague and natural disasters reduced population, resources and morale still further.¹⁹

The state's response was energetic, but crises came too quickly for anything more than a respite.²⁰ Yet the state's goal, even expectation, was that eventually an emperor would repeat Heraclius's feat and restore the empire, but there was never sufficient time before the next crisis intervened. A nadir of imperial prestige came with the 674–678 Arab siege of Constantinople. When, however, Constantine IV repelled the Arabs and forced Caliph Mu'awiya to pay a tribute, imperial prestige instantly rebounded.²¹ Indeed, the Caliphate itself was soon plunged into civil war. Conversely, imperial religious unity was restored at the Sixth Ecumenical Council, 680/1. This abandoned Monotheletism, an imperially sponsored Christological compromise formula originally aimed at winning Miaphysite support, whose abandonment created a rapprochement with the West, where the richest remaining provinces of the empire now lay.

Holding an Ecumenical Council brought other benefits for the imperial government, including the chance to appease divine wrath. In the Byzantine *mentalité*, divine dispensation appears as an omni-purpose explanatory tool. The empire and Christendom were coterminous, power and piety perceived as intrinsically linked. Defeat could only

¹⁹ The best account of these turbulent changes is J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the seventh century: the transformation of a culture*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, 1997). For a more upbeat, though still ultimately downcast, opinion on the seventh–eighth century economy see, A. Laiou and C. Morriison, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge, 2007), 23–89.

²⁰ For instance Heraclius campaigns or the establishment of the theme system; see J. Howard-Johnston, 'Heraclius' Persian campaigns and the revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630', *War in History* 6 (1999) 1–44. For the establishment and effects of the *Theme* system, see W. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, CA, 1997), 314–322; cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1968), 96–98.

²¹ See Theophanes, 355–356; 356 has the Avar Khan and other western princes immediately sending gifts and embassies of peace.

be conceived as God's punishment for sin.²² Since Monotheletism's adoption the state had suffered disaster. With orthodoxy restored the Arabs, it was hoped, would prove to be the reversible chastisement from God many believed them to be.²³

Thus, Justinian II inherited an empire more confident than it had been for decades. Justinian deliberately played up expectations. Taking advantage of the Second Fitna, the Islamic civil war c. 683–692, in 685 a Byzantine raid harassed deep inside Arab territory, while the Mardaites caused trouble inland.²⁴ The Caliph, 'Abd al-Malik, was forced to sign a humiliating treaty, while some of the Mardaites were transferred to bolster the defences and manpower of Anatolia.²⁵ Secure against 'Abd al-Malik, Justinian sent his *strategos*, and future usurper, Leontius to Armenia, formally under the control of 'Abd al-Malik's rival Ibn al-Zubayr.²⁶ This brought the strategically vital Transcaucasus, from where Heraclius had launched his strike on Persia, under imperial control. Furthermore, it brought added taxes and military manpower, both in short supply, and opened up the potential of Khazar support. Meanwhile, in 687 Justinian cleared the route to the second city of the empire, Thessalonica, transplanting thousands of Slavs to depopulated regions in Anatolia.²⁷ From these, according to the Chronicles, he raised an army of 30,000.²⁸ All this speaks of a concerted campaign both to strengthen the defences of the empire, and to garner the resources and strategic position to strike at the weakened Caliphate.

This was the setting for the Quinisext Council convoked by Justinian in 691/2.²⁹ From its name to its meeting place in the Trullan hall of the palace, where the Sixth Council was also held, Justinian was tying the council to those of Justinian I and his father, thus sharing in their prestige.³⁰ The Council gave Justinian the chance to portray himself as the Champion of Orthodoxy. Quinisext's focus was not dogma,

²² See Haldon, *Seventh century*, 324–375.

²³ See R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 524–526.

²⁴ Al-Baladhuri, *Kitâb futuûḥ al-buldân*; trans. P. Hitti, *The origins of the Islamic state* (London 1916), 220, 247; cf. Theophanes, 361, 363.

²⁵ Theophanes, 363.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 364.

²⁸ Theophanes, 366; cf. Nicephorus, 38.

²⁹ See G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone, *The Council in Trullo Revisited* (Rome, 1995).

³⁰ For excellent analyses of Quinisext and in particular the deliberate linking to the past see the various works of Heinz Ohme, and especially, 'The causes of conflict about

but matters of discipline and practice. There was little apparently new, but rather a recapitulation of existing, eastern practice.³¹ Its 102 canons exude an air of attempted control and regulation of all aspects of Church and society. Three canons are particularly pertinent for the development of Iconoclasm. Famously, canon 82 declared:

in order that the perfect should be set down before everyone's eyes even in painting, we decree that [the figure] of the Lamb, Christ our God, who removes the sins of the world, should henceforth be set up in human form on images also, in place of the ancient lamb.³²

Although referring to a specific iconographical schema, this canon became part of the iconodule argument for preferring figural images of Christ, which were held better to represent the reality of the Incarnation. Canon 73 ordained that the Cross should not be depicted on the floor, suggesting a growing wish by state and Church to protect and elevate certain symbols, especially the Cross. Finally, canon 100 forbade pictures that excited immoral pleasures. Together, these canons convey a clear concern with establishing correct religious art and halting production of incorrect art.³³ However, that concern was clearly marginal to matters of discipline, rite and suppressing 'pagan' and immoral practices.³⁴ By encouraging the ideal Christian life and suppressing incorrect practices, Justinian hoped to gain divine support, the prerequisite for imperial rejuvenation and reconquest.

The clearest ideological statement of Justinian's programme was on his coinage.³⁵ Here, for the first time, a bust of Christ was employed. Moreover it was on the obverse, while Justinian's bust was relegated to the reverse. Christ is given the title 'Rex Regnantium' King of those who rule, which 'implies He rules through the rulers of the earth, rather

the Quinisext council: New Perspectives on a Disputed Council' *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 40 (1995) 17–43.

³¹ See A. Louth, 'The Byzantine Empire in the seventh century', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, I: c. 500–c. 700, ed. P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 2005), 291–316 at 312.

³² Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council 691/2, Nedungatt, *Trullo Revisited*, 162–4; trans. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 1986), 139–140.

³³ See L. Brubaker, 'In the beginning was the Word: Art and Orthodoxy at the Council of Trullo (692) and Nicaea II (787)', in *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, ed. A. Louth and A. Casiday (Aldershot, 2006), 95–101.

³⁴ The minuteness to which Quinisext went in attempting to suppress improper behaviour is seen in Canon 71, that warns students to wear the correct clothing, and not to waste time at the theatre or sporting events.

³⁵ Grierson, *DOC*, II.2, 568.

than directly over each individual human being.³⁶ Justinian adopted the title *Servus Christi*, servant of Christ. This was not a lowly position. Rather, Christ and emperor stood as 'two sides of one whole, typifying visually the earthly sovereign's role as a deputy for the heavenly one.'³⁷ The message is clear and powerful. Justinian was the vicegerent of Christ, under whom he ruled the Christian *oikoumene*. That included the lands and peoples under Arab domination. Although undated, these changes are probably linked to canon 82 and seem to have been introduced c. 690,³⁸ the first shot in a 'guerre par les images' between the Byzantines and Arabs that was soon joined by real conflict.³⁹

The re-vamped coinage was an ideological challenge seen by Christians inside and outside the empire.⁴⁰ However, they also represented, in Breckenridge's words, a 'subtle transition from the previous iconography, in which Christian symbols were the instruments of the imperial power in achieving an essentially secular triumph, to a new conception, in which the emperor himself is but the instrument of the Divine Will in achieving Its own victories.'⁴¹ This may reflect a change in Byzantium's Symbolic Universe where the earthly emperor had ceded ground to the heavenly king. Heaven had become the source of authority, and the emperors endeavoured to establish themselves as, if not the sole, then the pivotal point of access to the divine. However, other mediators competed with the emperor, including, potentially, icons from the late sixth-century.⁴² If Brown is correct in identifying the icon as 'the back-stairs' to heaven, then icons could indeed repre-

³⁶ J. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* (New York, 1959), 51.

³⁷ C. Head, *Justinian II of Byzantium* (Madison, WI, 1972), 56.

³⁸ Breckenridge, *Justinian II*, 78–90; cf. M. Bates, 'History, geography and numismatics in the first century of Islamic coins', *Revue Suisse de Numismatique* 65 (1986) 231–262, esp. 254.

³⁹ A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin: dossier archéologique*, rev. ed. (Paris, 1984), 59–92 at 59.

⁴⁰ See discussion in M. Bates, 'Byzantine Coinage and Its Imitations, Arab Coinage and Its Imitations: Arab-Byzantine Coinage', *ARAM* 6 (1994) 381–403. For the continuing links between Byzantium and the Caliphate see H. Gibb, 'Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958) 219–233; and A. Beihammer, *Nachrichten zum byzantinischen Urkundenwesen in arabischen Quellen (565–811)* (Bonn, 2000).

⁴¹ Breckenridge, *Justinian II*, 91.

⁴² See for this dating of the rise of icons the highly influential E. Kitzinger, 'The cult of images in the age before Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954) 85–150.

sent a worrying centrifugal erosion of imperial and ecclesiastical control of the holy, forcing a centripetal response.⁴³

Yet, Speck and Brubaker have systematically undermined the source basis of traditional schema for the rise of icons laid down by Kitzinger, showing that many of the stories he cited were interpolated and moulded by later Iconophiles to give historical credence to their views.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the most popular icons, like the *acheiropoietos*, not-made-by-human-hands, Camuliana image, were accredited with miracles due to their roles as relics rather than as icons. Instead, Brubaker compellingly posits the crucial change in the function of icons, becoming 'a window through which one could reach the saint depicted', in the late-seventh century, linked to the dawning sense of the permanence of Islam.⁴⁵ Moreover, although some, particularly in Miaphysite communities far from the Arab-Byzantine border, had given up hope of imperial revival by the 680s, Justinian's ideology, and the predictions of Pseudo-Methodius, an originally Syriac Apocalypse circulating c. 690, of imperial victory give the sense that many were expecting an Heraclian-like restoration.⁴⁶ That icons were not perceived as a threat by the state is evident in the state's utilisation of icons as *palladia*, symbols of identity, authority, and increasingly protection.⁴⁷ Justinian's coinage was the apotheosis of this trend, the clearest articulation of the state's acceptance of icons.

Thus, when Justinian II met 'Abd al-Malik in battle at Sebastopolis 692/3, it was the culmination of seven years frenetic collection of resources – material, ideological and spiritual. Expectations, deliberately heightened, were for victory. Icons were brought in as part of the propaganda war. Yet, the resources of the empire were probably now too denuded to conquer the vastly larger and richer Caliphate. Moreover, the position and prestige of the emperor in Byzantine society, battered in the course of imperial disasters, were being slowly eroded, and the gains since 678 brittle. The disjuncture between both the empire's actual strength and Justinian II's ideology of reconquest was already cavernous by 692. Justinian had gathered and nurtured what

⁴³ Brown, 'Iconoclast Controversy', 23.

⁴⁴ Speck, *Interpolationen*; Brubaker, 'Icons before Iconoclasm?', esp. 1219.

⁴⁵ Brubaker, 'Icons before Iconoclasm?', 1251.

⁴⁶ Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*; ed. J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des pseudo-Methodius*, CSCO 540–541 (Louvain 1993).

⁴⁷ A. Cameron, 'Images of authority: elites and icons in late sixth century Byzantium', *Past and Present* 84 (1979) 3–35.

strength there was in a last gamble to make reality match the rhetoric. It was too late. The Marwanid reassertion of power was already too advanced, dooming Justinian to defeat more effectively than any failure of tactics or Slavic disloyalty.⁴⁸

Defeat plunged the Byzantines into civil war, with seven usurpations in twenty-two years, which the Arabs exploited to advance on Constantinople itself. With their empire on the verge of destruction, a crisis of faith ensued as Byzantines desperately sought to appease God.⁴⁹ This crisis was more complex than war and Islam alone. Islam nevertheless represented an especial threat to Byzantium, combining the military-political potential of a rival state with the ideological challenge of a competing monotheist religion.⁵⁰ By the 717–718 siege that threat was acute, both from the prospect of total military defeat, and the clearer articulation of the Arab polity as a peculiarly Islamic state.⁵¹ Whereas in the 680s the Byzantine state could live in self-denial, seeing Islam as a reversible chastisement from God, eighth-century Byzantium could not.⁵²

Although Byzantium would survive, the Arabs left behind a markedly different culture. By 717 the disasters that had befallen the Byzantines implied that their collective sin was grievous, and that the model of imperial, universal Christianity was untenable. The disjuncture between ideology and reality, cracking under Justinian II, was simply too great. If the Empire was to survive it required not only capable leadership, but also a rationalisation of defeat, and a new unifying creed. The Isaurian emperors provided that leadership and unifying focus. Icons were identified as the source of sin.

⁴⁸ Theophanes, 366; cf. Nicephorus, 38.

⁴⁹ See Theophanes, 390–391 for one particularly gruesome attempt by the people of Pergamum.

⁵⁰ See P. Crone, 'Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980) 59–95.

⁵¹ See esp. R. Hoyland, 'New documentary texts and the early Islamic state', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 69 (2006) 395–416; C. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik* (Oxford, 2005); G. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750*, 2nd ed. (London, 2000), 21–57. Specifically on 'Abd al-Malik's coinage reforms, see Bates, 'First century'. For the Dome of the Rock, see O. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, 1996) and the relevant articles in *Bayt al-Maqdis: Part One: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, ed. J. Raby and J. Johns (Oxford, 1992) and *Bayt al-Maqdis: Part Two: Jerusalem and early Islam*, ed. J. Johns (Oxford, 1999).

⁵² For Byzantine views of early Islam, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 523–544.

Why icons? Iconoclasm is latent in Christian thought.⁵³ Iconoclasts had appeared before, and scepticism concerning manifestations of the holy and religious images existed in the sixth and seventh centuries.⁵⁴ Yet although latent, and Christian attitudes towards images sometimes ambivalent, iconoclasm was not automatic in the eighth century.⁵⁵ Other sins could be, and were, blamed the empire's difficulties instead. Even after Leo's actions against the Jews and Montanists in 722 failed, 'iconoclasm' was never inevitable, as if all the other options were exhausted for finding divine favour.⁵⁶

The notion that iconoclasm was the logical extension of the Christological debates can also be discounted.⁵⁷ Certainly the controversy would become entwined with Christological discourses as both Iconophiles and Iconoclasts sought to position themselves within the theological traditions established by the preceding Ecumenical Councils. Yet, there is no evidence that Christology was the original cause of the controversy. It was only under Constantine V and at the Council of Hieria 754 that the iconoclast argumentation utilised Christological ideas, probably responding to the iconophile John Damascene.⁵⁸ 'Iconoclasm' is a possible extension of Christology, not an inevitable one.

Perhaps 'iconoclasm' was Kitzinger's endogenous backlash to the rise of icons. The crushing disappointment of Justinian's defeat and the ensuing turmoil seem fertile ground for popular trust to be placed in icons rather than the state. However, even if the 690s can be posited as a time of increased icon-veneration, Byzantine iconoclasts are

⁵³ See A. Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (London, 2000).

⁵⁴ For the most famous case of western Iconoclasm, see Pope Gregory the Great, *Second letter to Serenus*, *MGH Epp. II*, xi. 10, 269–272; trans. C. Chazelle, 'Pictures, books and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's letters to Serenus of Marseilles', *Word and Image* 6 (1990), 138–153. For continued scepticism see the various essays in this volume.

⁵⁵ A. Cameron, 'The language of images: the rise of icons and Christian representation', in *The Church and the Arts*, ed. D. Wood, *Studies in Church History* 28 (Oxford 1992), 1–42, esp. 4, asserts that 'Iconoclasm was a manifestation of an uncertainty' in the eighth century.

⁵⁶ Theophanes, 401. For the implied suggestion that iconoclasm arose, in part, because the other options had failed, see M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (Basingstoke, 1996), 159–161.

⁵⁷ Cf. P. Henry, 'What was the Iconoclastic Controversy About?', *Church History* 45 (1976) 16–31; A. Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The theology of icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*, *Studies in the History of Church Traditions* 122 (Leiden, 2005).

⁵⁸ Noble, 'John Damascene and the history of the iconoclastic controversy'.

only found in the 720s. Why should a generation pass before the first complaints are heard if ‘iconoclasm’ is simply a reaction to the growth of icon veneration? Even considering Brown’s theory that, ‘the iconoclast controversy was a debate on the position of the holy in Byzantine society’, one cannot answer this timing question.⁵⁹ A ‘centripetal reaction’ asserting ‘the unique value of a few central symbols... against the centrifugal tendency of the piety that had spread the charge of the holy onto a multiplicity of unconsecrated objects’ could have happened at other times.⁶⁰

It is no coincidence that suspicion of icons emerged when Byzantine society was under extreme external pressure from a rival creed and state, Islam, which by the early 700s was conspicuously associated with success and aniconic imagery.⁶¹ The evolution of the Islamic state and the success of Arab armies lit a pre-existing combustible mixture in Byzantium, while the response and involvement of its emperors gave the controversy its shape. Theophanes in particular links Leo’s actions with Yazid II’s supposed iconoclast decree of 721.⁶² Obviously, Theophanes portrays ‘iconoclasm’ in the worst possible light – an invention of heathen Arabs and Jews. Indeed, it has even been doubted that this decree actually existed.⁶³ Even if it did, there is no evidence that Leo would have known about it.⁶⁴ Even if he had, it is unlikely that Leo III, who spent his career fighting the Muslims, would have blindly copied the religious policies of his foes. Indeed Islamic image-breaking within the Caliphate was rare; rather, the focus of Islamic attacks on Christian imagery was the public display of the Cross.⁶⁵ Yet, the real threat of Islamic conquest deeply disturbed Byzantine society in the 720s, and it seems plausible that some at least connected Islamic success and their aniconic stance, especially as this reinforced long-standing

⁵⁹ Brown, ‘Iconoclast Controversy’, 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶¹ Whittow, *Making*, 159–161.

⁶² Theophanes, 401–402. For the growth of this story, see P. Speck, *Ich bin’s nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus*, *Poikila Byzantina* 10 (Bonn, 1990).

⁶³ For discussion, see R. Schick, *The Christian communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule* (Princeton, 1995), 215–217. For a collection of the sources, see A. Vasiliev, ‘The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9 (1956) 23–47.

⁶⁴ See G. King, ‘Islam, Iconoclasm and the Declaration of Doctrine’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985) 267–277.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Jewish criticism of Christian images.⁶⁶ This does not mean that we must lay the whole controversy at Islam's door. Without preceding internal transformations in the position of the icon, the shock of Islam would not have been as effectively felt in Byzantium as it was. The transformation of the icon's function into a (potentially dangerous) object with a direct link to the divine, suspiciously close to an idol, was a development since 680. Icons were drawn formerly into the symbolic arsenal of the state only under Justinian II. Once initiated, the Christian controversy over images acquired a momentum of its own and came to draw on multiple discourses.

Nevertheless, the immediate context for the controversy's outbreak was Islam and the Islamic state, Byzantium's paramount threat c. 720. The regenerated Marwanid Caliphate shattered the assumptions that underpinned Justinian's ideological system, and the religious images that expressed and supported it. Islam thus provided the constant heat that energised the imperial search for a new unifying, divinely-agreeable ideology that could stem the Muslim advance.

The final ingredient to this explosive mixture was the eruption of Thera in 726 which Nicephorus states as the cause of iconoclasm.⁶⁷ This is a totally plausible explanation and is devoid of the obvious propaganda elements in Theophanes. Moreover, such a violent demonstration of God's ire despite Leo's attempts at appeasement would surely have caused the emperor to search for other sins to crush. Yet, for all the drama of a volcanic eruption, the explosion at Thera remains a single event, one which in happier times might have been less important. It was the general context of imminent defeat that was the prime imperial concern of the 720s, and the concurrent advance of a Muslim army towards Nicaea, the site of the first Ecumenical Council.

What then did Leo do?

In this year [726] the impious emperor Leo started making pronouncements [λόγον ποιείσθαι] about the removal of the holy and venerable icons.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Crone, 'Iconoclasm'.

⁶⁷ Nicephorus, 60.

⁶⁸ Theophanes 404; trans. Mango and Scott, 558.

This phrase, λόγον ποιεῖσθαι, is maddeningly vague, ranging in meaning from 'to speak', to 'make public declarations of policy'.⁶⁹ Matters are made little clearer by comparison with other sources. Nicephorus has Leo *planning* and *expounding* his opinions.⁷⁰ Both imply no formal declaration, rather Leo raising the idea. Anastos though highlights the *Liber Pontificalis*, a contemporary source, which records an official edict.⁷¹ The *LP* was, however, written in Italy which was already rebelling against Leo, with the papacy consciously positioning itself as the champion of orthodoxy. One cannot therefore use the *LP* to conclusively establish the existence of a formal edict in 726, though it does confirm that the emperor was expounding his doctrine in his dealings with the pope.⁷² Despite the inconclusive evidence of the *LP*, it seems more probable that Leo only began talking against images, rather than anything more formal in 726.

The only specific case of physical iconoclasm recorded for Leo is the removal of the Chalke image.⁷³ However, as Auzépy has conclusively proved, in 726 the Chalke image did not yet exist.⁷⁴ The story of its destruction was only created following the iconodule triumph at the Council of Nicaea 787. The action is recorded in no eighth-century source, first appearing in the highly polemical *Vita Stephani*

⁶⁹ See M. Anastos, 'Leo III's edict Against Images in the Year 726–727 and Italo-Byzantine relations between 726–730', *BF* 3 (1968) 5–41, for debate and his own preference for the latter. Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, 'Les début de la querelle des images', *Mélanges Charles Diehl* (Paris, 1930) I: 235–255.

⁷⁰ Nicephorus, 60.

⁷¹ Anastos, 'Leo III', esp. 5–10. *LP* 91: 17.

⁷² This relationship is corroborated by Theophanes, 404.

⁷³ For the general importance of the Chalke and this incident in particular, see C. Mango, *The brazen house: a study of the vestibule of the imperial palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen, 1959).

⁷⁴ M.-F. Auzépy, 'La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalce par Léon III: propagande ou réalité?', *Byzantion* 60 (1990) 445–492. See also her discussion in eadem, 'Les Enjeux d'Iconoclasm', in *Cristianità d'Occidente e Cristianità d'Oriente (secoli VI–XI)*, Settimane di Studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo 51 (Spoleto, 2004), 133–135. L. Brubaker, 'The Chalke gate, the construction of the past, and the Trier ivory', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999) 258–285, supports this view and provides a convincing analysis of why and how the story was created surrounding the pre-eminent imperial symbol that was the Chalke Gate. Cf. J. Haldon and B. Ward-Perkins, 'Evidence from Rome for the image of Christ on the Chalke gate in Constantinople', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999), 286–296, but their arguments do not prove that there was an icon on the Chalke in the early eighth century.

iunioris, composed c. 809.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the contemporary *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai*, an idiosyncratic collection of reports on the monuments of Constantinople, create the impression of the Chalke as covered with imperial statues and portraits, and crosses, but not an icon of Christ.⁷⁶ Only in a later, tenth-century version is there an icon. The silence of contemporary sources on an event which, if true, would have been worthy of hostile comment, strongly implies that this sole iconoclast action of Leo III is a creation of iconophile propaganda. Contrarily, a letter of Germanus claims that Leo set up an image of the apostles and prophets venerating a cross.⁷⁷ Thus, the only contemporarily recorded action in Byzantine sources concerning Leo and images is that he set up an image, not that he cast one down!

Theophanes does, however, record another specific case of icon destruction. During the Arab siege of Nicaea, 727, 'a certain Constantine, who was equerry of Artabasdos, on seeing an image of the Mother of God, threw a stone at it and broke it.'⁷⁸ Although Theophanes presents this as an isolated, impious act, and the city's eventual salvation due to the intercession of the saints and their icons, this was not probably how it was viewed contemporaneously. Theophanes cannot hide that Nicaea survived following an iconoclast event. Moreover, this soldier was equerry of Artabasdos, Leo's chief lieutenant.⁷⁹ Such an event surely would have been conveyed back to Leo as evidence that iconoclasm was an effective policy, especially as it took place at Nicaea, the site of the first Ecumenical Council. Crucially, however, there is no indication that this action was directly part of any state campaign of image-breaking. The event is one of the few specific cases of actual iconoclasm reported by the chroniclers. Actual cases of physical image breaking that occurred were rare and extreme actions, which iconophiles wove into a literary trope of wide-scale destruction orchestrated by the state.

⁷⁵ *Vita Stephani iunioris*, ed. M.-F. Auzépy, *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre* (Aldershot, 1997) 10, p. 100; cf. Theophanes, 405.

⁷⁶ A. Cameron and J. Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* (Leiden, 1984). See for example §44. For later accretions concerning the Chalke icon see §5.

⁷⁷ PG 98 185A. For discussion see Auzépy, 'La destruction de l'icône', 446–448.

⁷⁸ Theophanes, 405; trans. Mango, *Art*, 152.

⁷⁹ Incidentally this is also possible evidence that Artabasdos supported iconoclasm during Leo's reign and that his rebellion against Constantine V had little to do with religious images.

The sources unite on the next event:

The impious Leo convened a *silentium* against the holy and venerable icons in the Tribunal of the Nineteen Couches, to which he also invited the most holy patriarch Germanus, whom he thought he could persuade to sign a condemnation of the icons. But Christ's courageous servant was in no way persuaded by Leo's abominable error: after expounding correctly the true doctrine, he resigned from the episcopacy.⁸⁰

That Germanus remained patriarch until this event in 730 indicates Iconoclasm's moderate beginnings and argues against the issuing of any formal decree in 726. Only in 730 did Iconoclasm become official state policy. Moreover, Leo's *silentium* was not a Church council, but rather a state meeting convened in the palace. Clearly, Leo did not believe his policy needed an ecumenical council to discuss it. We have no record of what was decided at this *silentium*, nor does anything concrete emerge after it, only Nicephorus's report that, 'From that time onward many pious men who would not accept the imperial doctrine suffered many punishments and tortures.'⁸¹ Yet neither Nicephorus nor Theophanes give any specific accounts of either persecution or widespread opposition to 'iconoclasm'.

This represents all of Leo III's specific actions regarding icons. Even though recorded by bitter opponents, it hardly constitutes much. There is no verified case of persecution. In Leo's remaining eleven years as emperor following 730, nothing is recorded concerning iconoclasm. This hardly strikes as a radical policy, or one that provoked widespread resistance. Extrapolating from iconodule apologetics, the Iconoclasts' principal charge was idolatry. In a society that conceived itself as a new Israel an obvious explanation of God's anger was old Israel's perennial sin. For an emperor portrayed as a new Solomon, emulating Hezekiah casting out idols made sense. How can we reconcile this rhetoric with the vanishingly small number of state-orchestrated iconoclast acts? Idols are not in themselves a grave threat. Idols are made so through idolatry, i.e. worship of them. It was incorrect practice and misplaced veneration that was wrong. Removal, rather than outright destruction, was an easier way to avoid this sin. Indeed, there need not be a correlation between official state policy and action. Enforcement would have been dependent on local support, given the limitations on the

⁸⁰ Theophanes, 409; trans. Mango and Scott, 565. cf. Nicephorus, 62; *LP* 91: 24.

⁸¹ Nicephorus, 62, p. 131.

pre-modern state. State policy may have been as moderate as condoning local initiatives, with little central action, but the sources are too scant to establish this.⁸² Moreover, statement of policy and the removal of figural images from state media may have been considered sufficient to propitiate divine wrath.

Furthermore, this motley record does not appear as Leo's preeminent concern. In the Chronicles, the Arab threat predominates, with a secondary focus on rebellions.⁸³ In 741, Leo published, with his heir, the *Ecloga*, a symbolic act of rulership invoking both Roman and Old Testament themes, ideologically strengthening the imperial office near the point of transition to a new emperor. Revealingly, images are not mentioned. The role and relative importance of 'iconoclasm' is best indicated by Leo's numismatic reforms. Leo introduced a new silver coin, the *miliaresion*, celebrating Constantine V's elevation to co-emperor in 720, which was aniconic with a cross-on-steps taking centre stage, thus emphasising the increased importance of the cross as a symbol of imperial, Christian victory, utilised instead of Justinian's icons.⁸⁴ Yet, on the *solidus*, the 'prestige coin *par excellence*', Leo employed neither icon nor cross, but placed imperial busts on the obverse and reverse.⁸⁵ This proclaimed the overriding importance of restoring imperial authority and establishing the dynasty. Appeasing God was one factor in this, and 'iconoclasm' one method, but not the only one.⁸⁶

To conclude, under Leo III state action regarding icons was moderate, indeed 'iconoclasm' is a misnomer given the limited evidence of physical destruction. The discourse does not seem to have included either relics or the cult of the saints.⁸⁷ Nor do figural images themselves

⁸² For example, Theophanes, 446, contains the most infamous account of persecution of monks under Constantine V, which incidentally does not mention icons, but it is represented as the work of the strategos Lachanodrakon, who only told Constantine afterwards, and then received imperial approval. Thus the most shocking case of persecution in the vehemently hostile Theophanes is not even directly ordered by the emperor!

⁸³ For example, although the Chroniclers link the rising of the Helladic theme, in 726, to iconoclasm, it seems more likely a revolt against Leo's increased taxation to fight the Arabs Nicephorus, 60; Theophanes, 405.

⁸⁴ J. Moorhead, 'Iconoclasm, the Cross and the Imperial Image', *Byzantion* 55 (1985) 165–179.

⁸⁵ P. Grierson, *DOC* III, 1, 19.

⁸⁶ Cf. Whittow, *Making*, 167.

⁸⁷ See Gero, *Leo III*, esp. 100–102; and Wortley, 'Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm'.

seem to be problematic, but rather the devotion shown to them. The extent to which the state went to regulate this malpractice or to confiscate icons is unknowable from the sources, but every indication is that it was limited, as was resistance to state policy. Furthermore, 'iconoclasm' was not the pre-eminent concern of the state, or the sole strategy for winning divine support. More important were the practical concerns of survival and warfare, and the linked ideological need to restore imperial authority. In that cause a new imperial imagery eschewed the icons that had failed to stop the Arabs, most patently under Justinian II, and re-focused attention on the Cross and the Imperial dynasty. Divine wrath was averted through denouncing, and, to an unknowable degree, acting against idolatry (which the development in the function of icons under Justinian II made the more plausible), in combination with other strategies to win God's favour against the rampant Islamic threat. Leo's image policy was part of a programme of imperial renewal, still incomplete at Leo's death in 741. However, the basic components of that programme had been established, as had the core of the state's policy towards icons. That programme was generally positive, emphasising the emperor, the dynasty, and the Cross, rather than a negative assault on icons, and its success helped not only to vindicate 'iconoclasm', but was essential to the survival of the empire in the face of defeat.

HAGIOGRAPHY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR POLITICAL
CLAIMS IN CAROLINGIAN NORTHERN ITALY:
THE SAINT SYRUS DOSSIER (BHL 7976 AND 7978)*

Giorgia Vocino

Repositories of the sacred, relics were important symbolic objects throughout the Middle Ages, considered arbiters of peace, stability and prosperity by the communities that possessed them.¹ No longer relegated to the domain of liturgists alone, the history of relics and their control engages historians in a variety of ways. The discovery (*inventio*) of the remains of a saint, their translation and the associated spread of a new cult, or the renewal of an outdated cult can each be investigated as actions endowed with dense political and economic significance. Despite the sometimes florid rhetoric of the 'genre', hagiographic writings – written saints' Lives (*Vitae*), accounts of relic translations (*Translationes*) and miracle collections (*Miracula*) – can provide, more or less hidden between the lines, valuable information for reconstructing the political situation that prevailed at the time of their creation.² Each was the product of specific historical circumstances. Hagiography can reveal historical hierarchies of places and persons,

* I have used the following abbreviations: (AASS) *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto urbe coluntur* (Antwerp-Brussels, 1643–1902); (BHL) *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, ediderunt socii bollandiani, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1898–1899); (MGH) *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*; (RIS²) *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (Città di Castello, 1900–).

¹ See above all P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981) and P. Brown, 'Relics and social status in the age of Gregory of Tours' in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982). On the political role of relics, see E. Bozoky, *La politique des reliques de Costantin à Saint Louis. Protection collective et légitimation du pouvoir* (Paris, 2006); S. Boesch Gajano, 'Reliques et pouvoirs', in *Les reliques. Objects, cultes, symboles*, ed. E. Bozoky and A.-M. Helvétius (Turnhout, 1999), 255–269; G. Tabacco, 'Agiografia e demonologia come strumenti ideologici in età carolingia', in *Santi e demoni nell'Alto Medioevo Occidentale (secoli V–XI)*, Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 36 (Spoleto, 1989), 121–153.

² A general overview of the different hagiographic writings can be found in the updated edition by R. Godding of the work by R. Aigrain, *L'hagiographie. Ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire*, Subsidia Hagiographica 80 (Brussels, 2000), esp. 125–192, and on the definition of the literary genre 'hagiography', *ibid.*, 206–246. On *Translationes* as a genre, see M. Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen*

the ties and relationships between various, often competing, authorities, exposing to the eyes of today's historian the numerous assertions and re-assertions of contested authority, claims to pre-eminence and counter-claims made by episcopal sees and monasteries alike during the Early Middle Ages.³ For a religious institution, possessing the relics of a powerful saint could serve to guarantee prosperity and economic survival thanks to its increased attractiveness to pilgrims. An ecclesiastical centre that could claim the possession of prestigious *pignora sanctorum* ('tokens of the saints'), especially those that were said regularly to dispense miracles, automatically attracted greater prominence, prestige and investment. A legal entity to which legacies and donations were often made over, the saint – tangibly present in his or her relics – was a recognised landowner and a legal personality possessing incontestable rights.⁴ Possessing the body or even only a few bone fragments of such a powerful patron saint could be very lucrative. In this perspective, politics and hagiography were intimately connected with each other, and the usefulness of hagiographical and liturgical texts for plotting the political activities of bishops and monasteries is evident.

Following the conquest of Pavia (774), Charlemagne carefully imposed the Frankish administrative system upon the former Lombard kingdom, as part of his effort to create a uniform network of power across all the territories under his rule.⁵ Charlemagne, the new King of the Franks and the Lombards (*rex Francorum et Langobardorum*), installed in Italy his elder son, Pippin (781–810), as king, and appointed his trusted men in other key positions of political power.⁶

des Reliquienkultes, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge occidental 33 (Turnhout 1979).

³ For an analogous use of hagiography as an instrument to plot local political history in Merovingian Gaul, see P. Fouracre, 'Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography', *Past and Present* 127 (1990) 3–38.

⁴ On the legal status of relics, see N. Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints. Formation coutumière d'un droit*, (Paris, 1975), esp. 271–312. On saints as 'present in their relics', see P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 86–105.

⁵ For an overview on the making of the Carolingian Empire over the different conquered territories, see R. McKitterick, *Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians, 751–987* (London, 1983). On the transition from Lombard to Carolingian kingdom, see P. Delogu, 'Lombard and Carolingian Italy', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, II: c. 700–c. 900 (Cambridge, 1995), 290–319; C. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400–1000*, esp. 47–63.

⁶ For a still valuable overview of the counts and bishops appointed in Italy by Charlemagne, see E. Hlawitschka, *Franken, Alemannen, Bayern und Burgunder in Oberitalien, 774–962* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1960).

Having obtained power through Charlemagne's favour, the king's new men on the ground confirmed and legitimated their respective secular or ecclesiastical authority through the customary instruments – and relics translations were certainly one such instrument.⁷

Initially, Pavia was undoubtedly penalized for its stubborn resistance to the Frankish army – and no diploma has been found to date that confers favours on any religious foundation in the city, numerous and prestigious though they may have been.⁸ Even the coins that have been found and dated to the end of the eighth century reveal Charlemagne's decision to favour Milan over Pavia.⁹ The 'punishment' of the formerly proud Lombard capital probably lasted for at least one whole generation. It was only with Lothar (817–855), Charlemagne's grandson, that Pavia regained its previous importance and prestige. Indeed the Frankish king undertook a policy of urban rehabilitation aimed at 'relaunching' the city that he had chosen as his residence in Northern Italy.¹⁰ Significantly, it was precisely at that time that the decision was made to translate the body of St Syrus.¹¹

The relics of St Syrus, first bishop of Pavia, were transferred by Bishop Donumdei probably in the second quarter of the ninth century.¹² The translation proceeded from the church of the Milanese

⁷ On the role of relics translations, see M. Caroli, 'Bringing Saints to cities and monasteries: Translationes in the making of sacred geography', in *Towns and their territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G.P. Brogiolo, N. Gauthier and N. Christie, (Leiden, 2000), 259–274.

⁸ A. Settia, 'Pavia carolingia e postcarolingia', in *Storia di Pavia, II: L'alto medioevo* (Milan, 1987), 75.

⁹ Of the golden tremissis minted by Charlemagne immediately after the conquest, no fewer than twenty-three coinages were struck in Milan and only one in Pavia: *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum, V: Lombardia* (Rome, 1914), 2–5; and *IV: Lombardia: Zecche minori* (Rome, 1913), 466.

¹⁰ On Lothar's rule in Italy, see J. Jarnut, 'Ludwig der Fromme, Lothar und das Regnum Italiae', in *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis The Pious*, ed. P. Godman and R. Collins (Oxford, 1990), 349–362.

¹¹ See the important contribution to the study of Pavia's patron saint by A.M. Orselli, 'La città medievale e il suo santo patrono. (Ancora una volta) Il "campione" pavese', in *idem., L'Immaginario religioso della città medievale* (Ravenna, 1985), 245–327.

¹² For a brief introduction to the bishops of Pavia in the early Carolingian period, see D.A. Bullough, 'I vescovi di Pavia nei secoli ottavo e nono: fonti e cronologia', in *Pavia capitale del regno. Atti del 4° Congresso Internazionale di Studio sull'Altomedioevo* (Spoleto, 1969), 317–328. The dating of the poorly documented years of Donumdei's episcopacy remains controversial. A.M. Orselli opts for an approximate period between 829/30 and 840/1, but admits that this is speculative: Orselli, 'La città', 255 n. 7. This hypothesis is inverted by M.P. Billanovich, 'San Siro: falsificazioni, mito, storia', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 29 (1986) 1–54. She identifies *Donumdei* with the last Lombard bishop of Pavia, Theodore, who died soon after the Frankish siege.

martyrs, Sts Gervasius and Protasius, situated just outside the town walls, where Syrus's remains had lain for the previous five centuries. The translation terminated at the cathedral dedicated to Saint Stephen, which will later be known as St Syrus' cathedral.

Whoever he was, Bishop Donumdei appears to have been the only figure of civil authority that played anything like a leading role in the translation, at least according to the translation's written account, the *Translatio sancti Syri* (BHL 7978).¹³ This was probably drawn up only a few years after the event. The relevant Carolingian legislation on relics was extremely specific. At a synod of Frankish bishops that met at Mainz, 813, it was decreed that no relic translations could take place without authorisation by the king or a synod gathering all the local bishops.¹⁴ Across the Frankish empire, royal authorisations were traditionally mentioned and publicised in hagiographic reports, practices that increased following Charlemagne's crowning as emperor at Christmas 800. This was not the case, however, in Pavia or any other town in northern Italy. The absence of any reference to Lothar in the *Translatio sancti Syri* would be even more surprising if the decision to transfer Syrus's body were part of the urban rehabilitation policy – based mainly on an important campaign of church foundations and donations – that Lothar pursued.

Indeed, the lack of any mention of the Carolingian authority *in loco* would be further problematic if we accepted the assumption by Prelini, the late nineteenth-century editor of the *Translatio sancti Syri*, who was convinced that authorship of the text was to be attributed to Dungal.¹⁵ An Irish monk who had attended the palace school at Aachen, Dungal was a man of letters in Charlemagne's entourage who had been in Pavia since at least 825, as confirmed by the Olona

Bishop Adeodatus (830–841) is also proposed by L. Tammaro, 'Le fonti della "Translatio sancti Syri"', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 39 (1996) 27–45.

¹³ The text is published in C. Prelini, *San Siro primo Vescovo e Patrono della città e Diocesi di Pavia: studio storico-critico*, 2 vols. (Pavia, 1890), 234–268.

¹⁴ MGH, *Concilia* (Hanover and Leipzig, 1906), II: 272: *Ne corpora sanctorum transferantur de loco ad locum. LI. Deinceps vero corpora sanctorum de loco ad locum nullus transferre praesumat sine consilio principis vel episcoporum sanctaeque synodi licentia*. On Frankish church councils, see J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983); R. McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789–895* (London, 1977), esp. 12–14 on the Synod of 813.

¹⁵ Prelini, *San Siro*, 577.

Capitulary.¹⁶ Young clergymen from the major towns of northern Italy went to Pavia to study and work with Dungal as one of the most prestigious intellectual authorities in Carolingian Italy.¹⁷ If the *Translatio Sancti Syri* were written by Dungal, one would expect that some reference would have been made to the Frankish king, especially given that Lothar often stayed in Pavia and was the patron who commissioned his literary works. Recent historiography is much more cautious regarding the authorship of the text, but even if not Dungal himself, the hagiographer was evidently familiar with Dungal's work and had had the opportunity to read his writings in Pavia. We will return to this point later.

When reading the *Translatio sancti Syri*, one is immediately struck by the prestige and honour associated with Syrus's relics which directly benefited the episcopal see and the town that housed this treasure. The relics were recognised as performing many miracles that took place during the relics' relocation to the cathedral – the divine scent emanating from the holy body, the healing of paralytics, the lame, dumb, blind, demon-possessed and the punishment and successive forgiveness of a disrespectful ploughman. The honour and miraculous power connected with possessing the body of the first bishop of Pavia are portrayed as embracing the entire community of Pavia, as the beneficiary and guardian of such a powerful *virtus*. According to the *Translatio*, the mastermind behind the relic translation was Bishop Donumdei, a name, it bears repeating, that does not appear in any of Pavia's bishop lists.¹⁸ Maria Pia Billanovich proposes the identification of Donumdei with Theodore, the bishop who doggedly opposed the Frankish siege

¹⁶ See the Olona capitulary in MGH, *Legum, sectio II, Capitularia Regum Francorum* (Hanover 1883), I: 326–327: *primum in Papia convenient ad Dungalum de Mediolano, de Brixia, de Laude, de Bergamo, de Novaria, de Vercellis, de Tertona, de Aquis, de Ianua, de Aste, de Cuma*.

¹⁷ On Dungal's biography and activity, see the introduction by P. Zanna, *Responsa contra Claudium. A controversy on holy images* (Florence, 2002) XV–CXXVI; M. Ferrari, 'Dungal', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani XLII* (Rome, 1993), 11–14; eadem, 'In Papia convenient ad Dungalum', *Italia Medievale e Umanistica* 15 (1972) 1–52; J. Contreni, 'The Irish in the Western Carolingian Empire', in *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. H. Löwe (Stuttgart, 1982), II: 758–798; and C. Leonardi, 'Gli Irlandesi in Italia', in *Die Iren*, II: 746–757.

¹⁸ Information regarding the succession of Pavia's bishops can be gleaned from the *Cronica de corporibus sanctis civitatis ticinensis* = RIS² XI (Città di Castello, 1903), I: 55–57 which was very probably drawn up in 1236 and from Opicino de Canistris, *De laudibus civitatis ticinensis* = RIS² XI, I: 1–54.

of 773–774 and ensured Pavia’s safety and protection until his death.¹⁹ In addition to the common etymology of the two names, Theodore-Donumdei, it is possible that the hagiographer who composed the *Translatio* at the beginning of the ninth century omitted designating Theodore as the bishop who translated Syrus’s remains because Theodore had become a victim of a *damnatio memoriae*, linked to his fierce opposition to the Frankish conquest. Despite these intriguing possibilities, however, no definitive evidence has been found confirming Donumdei’s identity with Theodore. The hagiographer’s decision to provide a deliberately enigmatic name is certainly of the spirit of a text that avoids attributing the prestige of the translation to anyone specifically, whether a Frankish *comes* or a Lombard bishop.

Moreover, the absence of any reference to Frankish authority is not peculiar to the *Translatio sancti Syri*. In the nearby town of Brescia, the remains of St Philastrius, bishop of the town by the end of the fourth century, were translated in 838. Here again, the Bishop Rampertus of Brescia apparently acted without royal authorisation; instead, episcopal authority gained the full prestige of the relic translation, a prestige Bishop Rampertus shared with Brescia itself. The *Translatio sancti Philastrii* is preceded by a list of all the bishops who ‘celebrated mass on the altar where the remains of Philastrius lay’.²⁰ Such an introduction is not only a unique case in the ‘genre’ of the *Translationes*, but also a remarkable document for Brescia’s ecclesiastical history, providing important clues for identifying the *Translatio*’s purpose. By reconstructing an uninterrupted episcopal line that united Philastrius to the ninth-century present, the hagiographer, perhaps Rampertus

¹⁹ *Cronaca di Novalesa*, ed. G.C. Alessio (Turin, 1982). 157 (edition with parallel text in Italian).

²⁰ *Historia de translatione beati Philastrii*, ed. M. Bettelli Bergamaschi in ‘Rampertus vescovo di Brescia (sec. IX) e la *Historia de Translatione beati Philastrii*’, *Ricerche Storiche sulla Chiesa Ambrosiana*, 5 (1975), Milan, 125–137 at 125: *Triginta autem Brixenses sunt episcopi, quos meminimus, qui in altari nomini beati Philastrii dicato, et super caput eiusdem posito, preces missarum celebraverunt et diem transitus eius venerantes, ab omni terreno opere Brixiensem populum abstinere iubentes, reverenter honoraverunt. Hi sunt, tertius ab eo et secundus a Gaudentio, Paulus deinde Theophilus et Silvinus et Gaudiosus; Optianus et Vigilius et Titianus; item Paulus, Cyprianus et Herculianus, Honorius, Rusticianus et Dominator. Itemque Paulus, Paterius et Anastasius, Dominicus, Felix et Deusdedit. Item Gaudiosus, iterum Rusticianus, Apollinaris, Andreas, Theodaldus, Vitalis et Benedictus, Ansoaldus, Cunipertus, Anfridus et Petrus, venerabilis memoriae episcopi. Quorum ordine et meritibus novissimus ego Rampertus indignus Brixiensis sanctae ecclesiae episcopus [...].*

himself, celebrated the 'glorious past of the Church of Brescia'.²¹ As we shall see, common cause between local authorities and past glories embodied in the relics of locally-venerated holy men characterises the background of the *translationes* of Pavia, Brescia and Verona alike.

In Lucca, the chief town of Lombard Tuscia, a bishop was again the only protagonist of another relic translation, according to the *Translatio sancti Reguli*.²² No Frankish authority was present at the transfer of the saint's relics, or at least the text does not hand down any memory in this regard. Yet, a Frankish *comes* had been installed in Lucca since the town's conquest.²³ Probably around 778–781, Regulus's remains were transferred to Lucca from a peripheral area of the diocese, where the incumbent Bishop John (783–800) and his entourage owned vast plots of land, which they were about to take back under their direct control at that time.²⁴ Transferring Regulus's relics within the town walls sealed the success of this re-appropriation of Church property by the urban clergy and the diocesan elites. Thus, at the time when the manorial system was taking root in northern Italy, with the corresponding introduction of *beneficia* into the management of rural property, Lucca elites turned to the relatively new hagiographic 'genre' of *Translationes* in order to legitimate their alienation of Church lands.²⁵ As with hagiography from the central territories of the Carolingian Empire (Austrasia and Neustria), the account of Regulus's translation was imbued with significant political meaning.²⁶ Since no reference

²¹ Bettelli Bergamaschi, 'Rampertus', 137.

²² *Translatio sancti Reguli episcopi*, AASS Sept. I, 238–240.

²³ H. Schwarzmaier, 'La società lucchese nell'Alto Medioevo e gli archivi ecclesiastici di Lucca', in *Lucca archivistica storica economica: Relazioni e comunicazioni al XV Congresso Nazionale Archivistico (Lucca, ottobre 1969)* (Rome, 1973), esp. 180–183.

²⁴ The whole dossier (from 740 to 826) about the rural policy of the urban élites of Lucca is thoroughly analysed in S.M. Collavini, 'Da società rurale periferica a parte dello spazio politico lucchese: S. Regolo in Gualdo tra VIII e IX secolo', in *Un filo rosso. Studi antichi e nuove ricerche sulle orme di Gabriella Rossetti in occasione dei suoi settant'anni*, ed. G. Garzella and E. Salvatori, Piccola biblioteca Gisem 23 (Pisa, 2007), 231–247.

²⁵ S.M. Collavini, 'Da società rurale periferica'. On the rise of the manorial system, see Chris Wickham, 'The other transition: from the ancient world to feudalism', *Past and Present* (1984) 3–36; idem, *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European social history, 400–1200* (London, 1994), 99–118 and 229–256.

²⁶ On the Carolingian longing for the possession of holy bones and objects, see P. Riché, 'Les Carolingiens en quête de sainteté', in *Les Fonctions des Saints dans le Monde Occidental (III^e–XIII^e siècle)*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome 149 (Rome, 1991), 217–224. On the Frankish translations of Roman martyrs, see Julia M.H. Smith, 'Old Saints, New Cults. Roman Martyrs in Carolingian Francia', in *Early*

was made to the Frankish authorities, the function of the *Translatio* probably stemmed from local political aims, viz. the re-assertion of control over Lucca's periphery by Bishop John and the town's elites.

A different situation obtained in Verona, whence proceeds a unique case in northern Italian hagiography. In *Historia elevati corporis et miraculorum sancti Zenonis*, the two figures described as the protagonists in the transfer of the relics of St Zeno, bishop and martyr in Verona at the end of the fourth century, were actually King Pippin (781–810), son of Charlemagne, and the Frankish Bishop Ratoldus (803–840). Contrary to all contemporary expectation, however, the two most powerful representatives of Frankish political authority in Verona conspicuously failed in their attempt to manhandle the saint's relics:

Once the church was built of polished marble and the saint's tomb was constructed, the king together with the bishop, having assembled all the clerical orders, mollified the Saint with pious prayers lest he be angered and opened the burial chamber with great trepidation. But they got so frightened that nobody dared to touch the bones. For some divine and dreadful thing breathed out from there, which inflicted terror. So they immediately closed the tomb again.²⁷

Only the heaven-sent help of a local hermit unblocked the situation, allowing the translation to take place. If we accept the *Historia's* version of this event, the translation embodies an exceptional failure on the part of the ruling Frankish authority with respect to the sacred, a source of power to which the Franks were acutely sensitive.²⁸

Medieval Rome and the Christian West. Essays in Honour of Donald Bollough, ed. eadem (Leiden, 2000), 317–334. A specific case of political translation in Carolingian Austrasia could be the well known translation of St Hubert's relics from Liège to the monastery of Andagne in 825 studied by A. Dierkens, 'La christianisation des campagnes de l'empire de Louis le Pieux. L'exemple du diocèse de Liège sous l'épiscopat de Walcaud (c. 809–c. 831)', in *Charlemagne's Heir*, ed. Collins and Godmann, 309–329. For a study of three famous accounts of relics translations and the analysis of the role of the hagiographers, see Gerda Heydemann, 'Relics and texts: Hagiography and authority in ninth-century Francia', in this volume.

²⁷ *Historia elevati corporis et miraculorum sancti Zenonis*, AASS Apr. II, 74: [...] *et aedificata ecclesia de politis marmoribus et tumulo fabricato, Rex cum Praesule, congregatis omnibus sacris ordinibus, Sanctum piis orationibus demulcentes ne iis irasceretur, cum ingenti timore cubiculum aperuerunt. Sed adeo perterriti facti sunt, ut nullus tangere ossa praesumeret. Quia quoddam divinum et terribile inde exhalabat, quod incutiebat horrorem: mox igitur clausuerunt sepulcrum.*

²⁸ Rosamond McKitterick has underlined the Franks' appreciation of the symbolic and political meaning of relics: McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 330: '[...] saints' cults [...]

Pippin selected Verona as the capital of the Carolingian Italian Kingdom, as the anonymous Veronese author of the *Versus de Verona*, a poem praising the town, did not omit to underline.²⁹ He subsequently launched development policies – above all, donations to local churches – just as Lothar would do in favour of Pavia a few decades later.³⁰ But recent studies have dated the *Historia* to the eleventh or even to the twelfth century.³¹ Thus, the meaning of the *Historia* as a narrative of Frankish failure should be explored in light of the complex web of relationships which existed between the city of Verona (represented by the cathedral chapter) and its Carolingian past. The tension between an eleventh- or twelfth-century present and the memory of Carolingian rule spawned a series of mystifications and falsifications which Cristina La Rocca has cleverly unmasked.³² Nonetheless another fundamental writing can help us in unveiling the political importance attached to saints and relics in Verona at the time of the *elevatio* of St Zeno. The celebrated *Versus de Verona*, a sort of ‘virtual tour’ of Verona’s glories, especially its sanctuaries and holy monuments with references to the city’s saints and bishops, has also been dated to the early ninth century. The foundation of the monastery of Saint Zeno must also be dated to shortly after 800.³³ Holy monuments, including saints’ relics, were an important means for the town’s elites to demonstrate Verona’s prestige, which deserved equal recognition

are a practical manifestation of the acceptance of the power of the saints and thus the role of the divine in Frankish affairs. [...] Relic translations and their collections [...] played an important political role as part of the “cultural glue” within the new Frankish empire as a whole. They formed a link between Christian past and future, and between things temporal and things eternal [...].’

²⁹ *Versus de Verona*, MGH *Poetae Latini Aevi Karolini* I (Berlin 1881), 122: *Magnus habitat in te rex Pipinus piissimus / non oblitus pietatem aut rectum iudicium. Qui cum bonis agens semper cunctis facit prospera.*

³⁰ Cf. V. Fainelli, *Codice diplomatico veronese. Dalla caduta dell’Impero Romano alla fine del periodo carolingio I* (Venice 1940) n. 73, n. 74, n. 75, n. 76, n. 77, n. 78, n. 80, n. 81, n. 84, n. 88, n. 89, n. 92, n. 93, n. 94, n. 96, 90–118. For an historical overview of the early medieval Veneto, see A. Castagnetti ‘Dalla caduta dell’Impero Romano d’Occidente all’Impero Romano Germanico (476–1024)’, in *Il Veneto nel Medioevo. Dalla ‘Venetia’ alla Marca Veronese*, ed. A. Castagnetti and G.M. Varanini (Verona, 1989), 1–80; G.M. Varanini, ‘Aspetti della società urbana nei secoli IX e X’, in A. Castagnetti, *Il Veneto*, 199–236.

³¹ G.P. Marchi, A. Orlando, M. Brenzoni, *Il culto di San Zeno nel veronese*, (Verona, 1972), 35; G.B. Pighi, *Traslazione e miracoli di S. Zeno: Storia scritta da un monaco zenoniano del XII sec. Introduzione e versione*, (Verona, 1977).

³² C. La Rocca, *Pacifico di Verona: il passato carolingio nella costruzione della memoria urbana*, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo (Rome, 1995).

³³ Cf. V. Fainelli, *Codice diplomatico veronese*, n. 74, 92–94.

with the other episcopal towns of northern Italy. Indeed, the *Versus de Verona* – which took up the genre of the Roman *itineraria* with their topographical presentation of the local saints – were certainly written during King Pippin's stay in Verona, i.e. between the year of his second campaign against the Avars (796) and his death (810).³⁴ They owe much to the *Versus de Mediolano civitate*, which J.Ch. Picard described as 'un poème qui est un pladoyer qui cite comme témoins les monuments et les institutions', written in Milan c. 739 or little after, and before 744.³⁵ The Milanese *Versus* were without doubt the model of the *Versus the Verona*, for which further evidence can be found in the unique ninth-century copy of the *Versus de Mediolano Civitate* which survives in the Capitulary Library of Verona.³⁶

Thus, hagiography could serve as a literary vehicle for pursuing political claims, claims that remained at local diocese level in the case of Lucca, but which otherwise involved the upper hierarchy of the main episcopal towns of the former Lombard kingdom in northern Italy. The hopes nurtured by those who transferred the remains of a town's saintly patron were not merely, or even primarily, concerned with liturgy or with the expectation of a display of the miraculous through divine *virtus*. Rather the translation of the relics and the production of a text relating such an event constituted a precious instrument for communicating local political ambitions against Frankish overlordship and for asserting the claims made by the different urban communities for a more prominent role in the new Italian Kingdom. This aspiration was expressed both by emulating the sacred politics pursued by neighbouring episcopal towns and by competing with the claims they made through relic translations. Tension and conflict were as much between towns as they were between the towns' Lombard elites and the Frankish newcomers. Policies and practices that manipulated the hierarchy of the saints among northern Italian towns and sought to recast the region's sacred geography constantly accompa-

³⁴ See J.C. Picard, *Le souvenir des évêques. Sépultures, listes épiscopales et culte des évêques en Italie du Nord des origines au X siècle* (Rome, 1988); idem, 'Conscience urbaine et culte des saints. De Milan sous Liutprand à Vérone sous Pépin Ier d'Italie', in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés IV^e-XII^e siècles, Actes du Colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris (2-5 mai 1979)* (Paris, 1981), 455-469. The texts are edited by G.B. Pighi, *Versus de Verona, Versum de Mediolano Civitate* (Bologna, 1960). See also MGH, *Poetae latini aevi carolini*, I (Berlin, 1881), 24-26, 118-120.

³⁵ J.C. Picard, 'Conscience urbaine', 455.

³⁶ Cod. Cap. XC ff. 25-27. See A. Spagnolo, *I manoscritti della Biblioteca capitolare di Verona* (Verona 1996) 163-166.

nied attempts to redesign the balance of political power and prestige within the region.

Omitting reference to Frankish authority seems to imply a covert challenge to the Frankish conquest or the Franks' marginal influence in local political life in northern Italian towns. Indeed, the textual omission of Frankish political authorities is a striking feature of the *translationes* composed in the Italian Kingdom after 774. In Austrasia and Neustria, the heart of the empire, and in the newly conquered territories of Saxony and Bavaria, between 800 and 850 translations were generally performed by both laymen and clergymen seeking to obtain royal patronage, as, for example, with Einhard, the celebrated historian of Charlemagne, and with Rodoin, provost at St Médard of Soissons. Einhard tried hard to make the Roman saints he obtained for his monastery of Seligenstadt (830), Peter and Marcellin, recognized as patrons of the kingdom by the emperor Louis the Pious.³⁷ For his part, in order to obtain the relics of the Roman martyr Sebastian, Rodoin first asked the influential archchaplain Hilduin, abbot of St-Denis and St-Médard, for permission to obtain relics for St-Médard: Hilduin gave his permission and made Rodoin the executor of the action, but subsequently sent the provost to the emperor to gain ultimate authorisation.³⁸ Rodoin went to Aachen *ad iudicium expetendum* and obtained there the imperial seal for his mission in Rome (827).³⁹

Texts of this kind reflect the readiness of the authors to publicise royal favour when it was granted. In cases where the relics belonged to a Roman martyr, royal authorisation also had to be harmonised (sometimes spuriously) with preceding papal permission, something which was also purposefully underlined in the sources.⁴⁰ In Carolingian lands

³⁷ MGH *Epistolae* V, n. 10, 113.

³⁸ Odilo, *Ex translatione s. Sebastiani*, MGH *Scriptores* XV, 381: *tuae religionis locum, quantum datur intellegi, nos subrigere et extollere plurimum persuadere conaris. Nec improbo votum tuum, neque tuae petitionis dissention. Imo totum ingenium, in quantum Deus annuerit, spondeo, teque hujus negotii executorem esse decerno. Iudicium tamen nobis ex hoc Imperiale expetendum est. Cui si fuerit laudabile, tunc consequenter erit immutabile.*

³⁹ Odilo, *Ex translatione s. Sebastiani*, 381–382.

⁴⁰ Many examples could be quoted. The author of the *Translatio Sancti Hermetis* insisted on the double authorisation, the first by Louis the German (822–876) and the second by the Pope Leo IV (847–855), granted for the translation of the body of the martyr to Salzburg, which was all the more prestigious on account of the extreme difficulty in obtaining it: *Translatio sancti Hermetis*, MGH *SS* XV, 410: *Quod ille [the pope] primo rennuens, postea vero divino conpunctus amore perpendens et considerans, quod petitio supradicti venerabilis archiepiscopi recta et iusta esse videbatur, inito*

north of the Alps narratives of relic translations highlighted a harmonious relationship between local elites and Carolingian royal authority, usually for the purpose of legitimating the translation and the social authority claimed through it by its instigator. In other peripheral territories, such as Saxony and Bavaria, translations followed the same model.⁴¹ This emphasised a vertical flow of power from sovereign to local elite. In the Carolingians' Italian territories, however, a contrasting situation prevailed. The translating authority, which was always a bishop, manipulated relic translations to pursue a 'balance of prestige' between local authority and the representatives of Frankish overlordship, on one hand, and competing regional bishops and their sees, on the other. In respect of the latter, the sources reflect the horizontal and often conflicting relationships that existed between northern Italian bishops in neighbouring episcopal centres.

In northern Italy, the prestige of an episcopal see and the town it represented seems to have been primarily asserted by comparison with Milan and St Ambrose. A double relationship of emulation and opposition is clear in the case of Brescia and Verona, while in Pavia, as we are about to see, an important point of comparison existed in the form of Aquileia. For Lombardy and the Veneto, Ambrose was undoubtedly the most prestigious model of sanctity available.⁴² His Life, written by the deacon Paulinus of Milan before 415 on the initiative of St Augustine, remained throughout the Early Middle Ages one of the best-known and copiously copied hagiographic writings in Northern

consilio cum senatu Romano et optimatibus suis, dedit ei ex auctoritate beatissimi Petri principis apostolorum corpusculum sancti et gloriosi martyris Christi Hermetis.

⁴¹ On the hagiography of Carolingian Saxony, see H. Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen. Über Kommunikation, Mobilität und Öffentlichkeit im Frühmittelalter* (Stuttgart 2002); I. Wood, 'An absence of saints? The evidence for the Christianisation of Saxony', in *Am Vorabend der kaiserkrönung. Das Epos 'Karolus Magnus et Leo papa' und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799*, ed. P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johaneck (Berlin, 2002), 335–352; on Bavaria, C. Rohr, 'Hagiographie als Spiegel des Machtverhältnisse? Ardeo von Freising und die Gesta Hrodberti', in *Tassilo III. von Bayern: Grossmacht und Ohnmacht im 8. Jahrhundert*, ed. L. Kolmer and C. Rohr (Regensburg, 2005), 89–101; G. Bühner-Thierry, *Evêques et pouvoir dans le royaume de Germanie. Les églises de Bavière et de Souabe (876–973)*, (Paris 1997).

⁴² On the memory of Ambrose in Northern Italy, see J.C. Picard, *Le souvenir des évêques*, 605–632; E. Cattaneo, 'La devozione a Sant'Ambrogio', *Ricerche sulla Chiesa ambrosiana* 4 (1973–1974), 85–110; P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur Saint Ambroise, vies anciennes, culture, iconographie*, (Paris 1973).

Italy.⁴³ In the ninth century, when the Church of Milan became the 'Ambrosian Church', making Ambrose its patron, a new Life was written – a cento of passages borrowed from the *Vita sancti Ambrosii* by Paulinus, treatises by Ambrose himself and the *Historia Tripartita* by Cassiodorus. It survives in a sole ninth-century manuscript, suggesting the undiminished appeal of the previous Life.⁴⁴

In the *Translatio sancti Philastrii*, Philastrius bishop of Brescia, is openly presented as Ambrose's 'colleague'.⁴⁵ In the case of Syrus in Pavia, however, Pavia's relationship with Aquileia and Rome is strongly emphasised, suggesting Pavia's unease with or rejection of Milanese claims. The *Vita sancti Syri* (BHL 7976), probably written only a few decades before the *Translatio*, connects Syrus with Hermagoras, legendary first bishop of Aquileia, traditionally said to have been directly consecrated by St Mark the Evangelist, himself sent to northern Italy by no less than St Peter.⁴⁶ The hagiographer clearly intended to suppress Pavia's traditional dependence on Milan, whose archbishops consecrated Pavia's bishops at least until the early 700s. How seriously this problem was considered can be inferred from the *Liber Pontificalis*. During Constantine's pontificate (708–715) the Archbishop Benedict of Milan travelled to Rome to demand confirmation of his right to consecrate the bishop of Pavia, a right that was

⁴³ Paulinus Mediolanensis, *Vita S. Ambrosii*, ed. M. Pellegrino, in Paolino di Milano, *Vita di S. Ambrogio, Verba Seniorum* (Rome, 1961). On the hagiographer Paulinus, see A. Paredi, 'Paulinus of Milan', *Sacris erudiri* 14 (1963), 206–230.

⁴⁴ For the text of the Carolingian *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, see A. Paredi, *Vita e meriti di S. Ambrogio. Testo inedito del secolo IX illustrato con le miniature del salterio di Arnolfo*, (Milan, 1964); P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur Saint Ambroise* (Paris, 1973), 51–121.

⁴⁵ *Historia de translatione sancti Philastrii*, ed. Bettelli Bergamaschi, 135: *Qualem eum in Arrianorum nefandae procellae temporibus sanctissimae memoriae Ambrosius Mediolanensis episcopus esse intellexit, qui sibi eum collegam habebat?*

⁴⁶ *Chronica sancti Syri*, ed. N. Everett, 'The Earliest Recension of the Life of S. Sirus', in *Studi Medievali* 43 (2002) 922: [...] *ecce enim a fonte luminis inaeestimabilis claritas procedens per beata pectora derivata, Ticinensis populi animos circumfulsit ita a Christo in Petrum, a Petro in Marcum, a Marco vero in Armagoram, ab Armagora in beatissimos viros Syrum atque Iuentium transcurrit*. On the legend of St Mark evangelist at Aquileia, see the numerous contributions collected in A. Niero (ed.), *San Marco: aspetti storici ed agiografici*, (Venezia, 1996), especially the contributions by G. Cuscito, 'La tradizione marciana aquileiese come problema storiografico', 587–597, and R. Grégoire, 'Riflessioni sull'agiografia marciana, 411–427 and S. Tavano, San Marco nell'Adriatico prima di Venezia', 51–61.

currently being exercised by the Pope.⁴⁷ It is known that Syrus lived in the second half of the fourth century, but the author of the *Vita sancti Syri* unashamedly set his Life during time of Emperor Nero (54–68). Thus, he depicted Syrus as a contemporary of the Milanese martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius, Nazarius and Celsius, fragments of whose relics Syrus and his associate and successor Iventius actually acquired in the fourth century and brought to Pavia.⁴⁸ Supplanting the bishop of Milan and placing Syrus in an earlier historical period carried important political ramifications in the ninth century. The connection proposed by the Pavia hagiographer between Pavia, Aquileia and Rome, confirmed by contemporary Roman consecration of Pavia's bishops, connected the city to Sts Mark and Peter respectively, and thus provided Pavia with a prestigious, alternative history for the origin of its episcopacy, a history which obviated all reference to the uncomfortable claims of the archbishopric of Milan.

Despite the inevitable *topoi* of the genre, therefore, the *Vita sancti Syri* – like other hagiographical writings from northern Italy during the first Carolingian age, both *Vitae* and *Translationes* – offers a good example of how hagiography's features could be skilfully harnessed to pursue the political goals of ninth-century episcopal centres. Such texts became a means for expressing towns' political claims and for fixing them for ever on parchment.

However, politics is but one perspective from which to view the several purposes of ninth-century northern Italian hagiography. During the first half of the ninth century, religious life in Carolingian Italy was shaped in important ways by a religious controversy over the role of images and relics.⁴⁹ The *Translatio sancti Syri* asserted the validity

⁴⁷ *Liber Pontificalis*, XC Constantinus, MGH *Gesta Pontificum Romanorum* I, 225: *Venit autem et Benedictus, archiepiscopus Mediolanensis, orationis voto, et suo se pontifici praesentare. Altercavit vero et pro ecclesia Ticinense, sed convictus est, eo quod a priscis temporibus sedis apostolicae eiusdem Ticinensis ecclesiae antistes ad consecrandum pertinebat atque pertinet.*

⁴⁸ Iventius took part in the synods of Aquileia (381) and Milan (390) presided by Ambrose as attested in the acts: G.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova*, t. III, (Florence, 1759), cols. 599–615 and 664–667. He probably obtained these relics at this Council, where Ambrose carefully distributed portions of the martyrs' bodies to the attending bishops: See F. Savio, 'La Leggenda di s. Siro primo vescovo di Pavia', *Giornale Ligustico*, Anno XIX, Fascicolo XI–XII (1892), 408–409.

⁴⁹ On the image controversy, see M. McCormick, 'Textes, images et iconoclasme dans le cadre des relations entre Byzance et l'Occident carolingien', in *Testo e immagine nell'Alto Medioevo (Spoleto, 15–21 aprile 1993)*, Settimane di Studio del Centro italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo 41 (Spoleto, 1994), 95–158 as well as D. Appleby,

and legitimacy of the cult of relics, the hagiographer acting as the spokesperson for the religious – and we can expect also urban – community he represented.⁵⁰ In his *Translatio*, the hagiographer insisted that the *virtus* present in relics had miraculous power, fulminating on several occasions against opponents of the relic cult. These included the sceptical position adopted by the fifth-century priest, Vigilantius of Calagurris, who rejected the saints' ability to intercede for the faithful and intervene with miracles for their benefit.⁵¹ Vigilantius composed a treatise condemning the cult of saints and other religious practices supported by the Church as superstitious, sparking a violent response by Jerome.⁵² Of course, polemical references to the Vigilantius's beliefs in the *Translatio sancti Syri* probably do not reveal a renewed intention to combat the positions of a critic who lived four centuries earlier, but rather contemporary ninth-century criticism of and dissent towards the saints' cult.

Indeed, Dungal, the famous schoolmaster, composed his masterwork, *Responsa contra Claudium*, in Pavia shortly after 825. Emperor Louis the Pious (813–840) and his son Lothar commissioned the *Responsa* in order to refute the iconoclastic arguments contemporaneously made by Bishop Claudius of Turin (817–827). Dungal clearly illustrated the two opposite and contending positions about saints' relic cult at the beginning of his *Responsa*:

Concerning saints' shrines, which are visited seeking their intercessions and to venerate their relics, they [Claudius and his followers] are also at odds. Many claim that it is a good and pious habit to visit martyrs'

'Holy Relic and Holy Image: Saints' Relics in the Western controversy over images in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries', in *Word and Image* 8 (1992) 333–343.

⁵⁰ The hagiographer used the pronoun 'Nos' when talking about his convictions on relics cult: *Translatio sancti Syri*, ed. Prelini, par. 5: *Nos igitur Sanctorum veneremur reliquias*. He probably referred to the monastery of San Piero in Cielo d'Oro in Pavia, one of the most important religious foundations in Pavia, the one where Dungal worked and established his own *scriptorium*. It is likely that the hagiographer was a monk of the same monastery.

⁵¹ *Translatio sancti Syri*, par. 3, par. 4, par. 5: [...] *ne taciti aliqua videamur obiectione vigilantiana reprehendi, quae penitus nihil, inter Sanctorum cineres ac ossa communia interesse blasphematur. [...] Vigilantianus sycophanta putrido poterit ore conferre. [...] Nos igitur Sanctorum veneremur reliquias, ut ad contemplationem atque communionem maioris, idest animae, portiois pertingere mereamur.*

⁵² See D.G. Hunter, 'Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: ascetics, relics and clerics in late Roman Gaul', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999) 401–430. Vigilantius' text was known only by virtue of the fragments that had survived in Jerome's *Contra Vigilantium*.

basilicas. It is there where, paying due honour to the saints' merits, their sacred ashes and holy bodies [...] are kept as if venerable vessels acceptable to God [...]. Everywhere, by the saints' intervention, physical as well as spiritual sufferings are healed instantly and in great number, by the working of the divine hand and by the splendour of grace. But they [Claudius and his followers] oppose this, saying that saints help no-one, and they can aid nobody by their intercession, as they know absolutely nothing of what is done on earth; that nobody should vouch any grace of reverence to their relics, no more than to most vile animal bones, or other ordinary soil.⁵³

The *Translatio sancti Syri*, moreover, clearly displays familiarity with Dungal's arguments.⁵⁴ The hagiographer undoubtedly knew Dungal's work,⁵⁵ and his invectives against Vigilantius are certainly linked to the positions Claudius had recently adopted in the ninth century.⁵⁶ Although the *Translatio sancti Syri* was probably written a decade or two after Dungal's refutation of Claudius, the cult of relics was still controversial and the hagiographer did not hesitate to highlight its legitimacy. This was an issue of fundamental importance for episcopal centres around 800, given their heavy investment in saintly relics in order to promote, support and vindicate a town's position in the

⁵³ Dungal, *Responsa contra Claudium*, ed. P. Zanna, *Responsa*, §§7–9, 4: *de memoriis sanctorum causa orationis adeundis, et reliquiis eorum adorandis obnituntur: aliis affirmantibus bonam et religiosam esse consuetudinem basilicas martyrum frequentare, ubi eorum sacri cineres et sancta corpora, quasi quaedam venerabilia vasa a Deo acceptabilia, in quibus omnigena pro fide Christi tormenta sunt usque ad mortem perpassi, cum honore eorum meritis congruo condita habentur, ubique ipsi intervenientibus corporales ac spirituales cotidie langores divina operante manu et gratia coruscante, copiosissime et praesentissime sanantur: alii vero resistunt dicentes sanctos post obitum nullum adiuvere, nullique posse intercedendo succurrere, nihil eorum dumtaxat scientes, quae in terris geruntur, illorumque reliquias nullum alicuius reverentiae gratiam comitari, sicut nec ossa vilissima, quorum libet animalium, reliquamque terram communem.* English translation by P. Zanna, *Responsa*, p. 5, with modifications.

⁵⁴ Dungal, *Responsa contra Claudium*, ed. P. Zanna, *Responsa*, §§46–47, 30 and §171, 126: *Taliter autem Eunomius et Vigilantius haeretici, eorumque sectatores solent catholicos blasphemare, vocantes eos idolatras et mortuorum hominum cultores, sicut et pagani exstiterunt, eo quod reliquias martyrum pro Christo patientium venerantur. [...] Adfirmat [Claudius] enim reliquias, id est ossa hominum quamlibet sanctorum ossibus peccorum, vel verius lignis et lapidibus aliate quapiam terra non esse reverentiora.*

⁵⁵ The study of the sources of the *Translatio* (cf. L. Tammaro, *Le fonti*, quot.) not only reveals the unquestionable debt of the author of the hagiographic report to patristics, and Ambrose in particular, but also shows an undeniable coincidence of sources between the *Responsa* and the *Translatio*.

⁵⁶ Claudius of Turin, *Apologeticum*, ed. P. Zanna, *Responsa*, 274: *Certe si adorandi fuissent homines, vivi potius, quam mortui adorandi esse debuerunt: id est ubi similitudinem Dei habent, non ubi pecorum, vel quod verius est, lapidum, vel lignorum vita sensu et ratione carentem.*

sacred hierarchy of the saints and the earthly sees that venerated them as representatives of the urban community entrusted with the task of prevailing over rival towns.

The *Translatio sancti Syri* closely reflects the cultural and intellectual milieu of the first half of the ninth century, being engaged in the struggle against the iconoclastic dissent towards the cult of saints and their relics. It reveals that Pavia was also involved in the turmoil of this debate. As in all the towns of northern Italy, Pavia received, absorbed and redeployed the new hagiographic genre of the relic translation narrative, extensively exploited in both the central areas of the Empire and in newly conquered lands. In Italy, however, *Translationes* were not used to promote and publicise the relations of local governments with the new Frankish emperors and their lay and ecclesiastical entourage. The kings, their families and the close circle of the Carolingians do not appear as protagonists in the promotion of the sacred. They were not the instigators of translations, nor did they serve as authorities legitimating relic transfers – and even less do they appear in the sources as the beneficiaries of the translations narrated.

Towns were the main hubs of the political network of Northern Italy. Similar hagiographic reports do not seem to have been written in Italian monasteries, unlike the rest of the Empire where texts created in monastic *scriptoria* were predominant. Nor did texts regarding the figures of sainted abbots or aristocratic families aimed at promoting the patron of individual monastic foundations arise south of the Alps in this period.

Instead, hagiographical writings were widely employed as a tool for pursuing political claims by the towns in the Italian Kingdom. As with Pavia, which is a representative rather than isolated case, towns were attempting to consolidate their prestige against the more powerful and traditionally more prestigious episcopal seat represented by Milan. The settlement in Italy of the Carolingians provided the conditions for new attempts to change and adjust the balance between ecclesiastical authorities established in the centuries of Lombard domination. Milan was chosen by the new sovereigns as the leading centre of the Italian kingdom: here Charlemagne's daughter, Gisla, had been baptized in 781 by the archbishop Thomas, while the recently founded monastery of Saint Ambrose became the necropolis of the Italian Carolingian kings. The Milanese *doctor* Ambrose was accepted by Charlemagne in the number of the patron saints of the Carolingian *regnum* and the fourth-century capital of the Roman empire seemed to have finally

recovered its lost rank.⁵⁷ For the local ecclesiastical elites the presence of the Frankish kings and their men meant an appetizing opportunity to renegotiate their position in the hierarchy of episcopal towns in northern Italy: the prestige of the saint – and by reflex that of the town which owned his relics – rested on the ability of the hagiographer to propose the local patron and the local ecclesiastical elites as the most glorious and so the most deserving of political, social and cultural primacy. By entering into the iconoclastic dispute with Claudius of Turin – in which Dungal, the most respected schoolmaster and monk of the Pavia school, had played an outstanding role – the Pavia hagiographer also seized the opportunity to provide additional support to Pavia's claims, as the town sought to secure a more prominent position in the hierarchy of northern Italy's towns.

In the aftermath of the Frankish conquest, urban communities in northern Italy were in search of a 'champion', a symbol to represent a town's aspirations. The choice fell on the local patron saint, the town's founding bishop, as its contemporary defender and principal authority, the guarantor of its safety. Through this process, the dynamic hierarchy of northern Italy's towns came to overlap with the symbolic, yet parallel, hierarchy of the town's patron saints, but neither hierarchy, earthly or heavenly, was conflict-free.

⁵⁷ MGH *Diplomata Karolinorum* I (Hannover, 1906), n. 164.

RELICS AND TEXTS: HAGIOGRAPHY AND AUTHORITY IN
NINTH-CENTURY FRANCIA*

Gerda Heydemann

Unde timendum ne fiat in nobis, quod in multis iam gentibus actum legimus. Nequaquam igitur dixerim sine causa miracula sanctorum longe diu in Christo quiescentium nuper coruscasse, quanta et qualia numquam sunt audita a seculo facta uno in tempore ad reliquias sanctorum, quia omnino, quasi in gallicinio, sancti hoc in regno huc illucque delati, se invicem excitarunt quasi ad concentum cantus, ut daretur intelligi, quod nostra infidelitas iuxta Apostolum id exigeret, quia signa non fidelibus, sed infidelibus, ipso teste, verissime dantur [...].¹

When Paschasius Radbertus commented retrospectively on the political crisis of the Carolingian empire during the reign of Louis the Pious, he did so with a sharp eye for the discursive and social function of relics in Carolingian politics. In the passage from the second book of his *Epitaphium Arsenii* cited above, the miracles performed at relic shrines are understood as belonging to a mode of communication. The divine *signa* are meant to alert to their moral shortcomings those who would otherwise refuse to listen.

This perception of miracles as an indicator of the state of public affairs, and as a means of mediation between the spheres of the divine and the human, is something of a commonplace in Carolingian politics. For example, the *Annales regni Francorum* for the year 826 record

* I would like to thank Dana Polanichka for kindly helping me with the English translation of this paper.

¹ Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, ed. E. Dümmler, 'Radbert's Epitaphium Arsenii', *Abhandlungen der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 2 (1900) 1–98 at 61–62 = *Charlemagne's Cousins: Contemporary Lives of Adalhard and Wala*, trans. A. Cabaniss (Syracuse, N.Y., 1967), 150: 'We should therefore fear lest what has happened to many nations also befall us. But not without reason, I would say, have the miracles of saints long since asleep in Christ recently been gleaming. Never before in history have such great deeds been accomplished at one time by the relics of the saints. Everywhere the saints brought into this realm from hither and you have aroused each other in symphony of song as at cockcrow, so that it may be understood that this was necessitated by our faithlessness; for signs are, according to the Apostle, most truly vouchsafed not to believers, but to unbelievers.' I have amended the translation where appropriate.

the famous translation of the relics of the Roman martyr, Sebastian, organised by the arch-chaplain Hilduin of St. Denis.² Given the *Annals'* entries for the 820s, which record famines, crop failures, and military defeats in a way Paul Dutton has described as 'ordering of disorder', the arrival of such famous relics could have conveyed a sense of hope and uninterrupted divine favour.³ Although Radbertus' somewhat more pessimistic interpretation of such events differed from that of the *Annals*, and was of course written from hindsight, his comments point to a shared understanding of miracles and relics, and of their functions within a text.

Certainly, the saints' role as mediators between divine and human had a long history from late antiquity onwards, as did the political use of saints' cults.⁴ The reign of Louis the Pious (814–840) arguably witnessed, however, a remarkable intensification of interest and efforts concerning relic cults among members of the intellectual and political elite. This interest was accompanied by an increase in the production of written accounts of relic translations, and by a high amount of publicity and ostentatiousness.⁵

In 827, Einhard brought the relics of the Roman martyrs Marcellinus and Peter to Francia. His use of the martyrs as vehicles for critical commentary on the political situation of the realm is the most spectacular example of employing prestigious relics as trump cards in political

² *Annales regni Francorum* a. 826, ed. F. Kurze, *MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol* [6] (Hannover, 1895), 171–172.

³ P. Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln-London, 1994), 87.

⁴ See above all P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); cf. the comments in P.A. Hayward, 'Demystifying the Role of Sanctity in Western Christendom', in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P.A. Hayward (Oxford, 1999), 115–142; N. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley, 1994), 209–237; for Merovingian contexts, see P. Fouracre, 'The Origins of the Carolingian Attempt to Regulate the Cult of Saints', in *The Cult of Saints*, ed. Howard-Johnston and Hayward, 143–165; C. Leyser, 'The Temptations of Cult: Roman Martyr Piety in the Age of Gregory the Great', *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000) 289–307.

⁵ M. Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*, *Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge occidental* 33 (Turnhout, 1979), 94–99.; J.M.H. Smith, 'Old Saints, New Cults: Roman Martyrs in Carolingian Francia', in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald Bollough*, ed. eadem (Leiden, 2000), 317–334; P. Geary, *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1990), 35–41; idem, 'The Ninth-Century Relic Trade – A Response to Popular Piety?', in idem, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994), 177–193.

discourse.⁶ In the *Translatio Marcellini et Petri*, Einhard described how the archangel Gabriel appeared to a blind man called Alberich at the shrine of the saints in the winter of 828, revealing instructions addressed to Louis the Pious for the reform of the troubled empire; shortly thereafter, the confessions of the demon Wiggo defined what had gone wrong in previous years. Einhard edited two *libelli* containing these divine messages, which were discussed at the court meetings that winter.⁷

In subsequent years, Einhard's text became the model for a number of translation narratives.⁸ Renewed interest was not limited to Roman martyrs, however, but also bestowed upon Gallo-Roman and Frankish saints. In the wake of the crisis of 833, Hilduin of St Denis and Louis worked together to connect the identity of St Denis to that of Dionysius Areopagita, thus making him the first and foremost missionary into Gaul. This joint venture had clear political implications far beyond the obvious advantages that the possession of such prestigious relics presented for Hilduin. The dedication of the revised version of the *Passio Dionysii* to Louis could serve to underline the recently re-established good relations between Hilduin and the emperor, and it may have been part of an attempt to provide a particular patron for the future king Charles the Bald.⁹ Both Roman and Frankish saints were transferred to different political contexts. Accounts of relic translations into Saxony formed part of the discussions about the integration and in-depth Christianisation of the Saxons.¹⁰

⁶ Einhard, *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH SS 15, 1* (Hannover, 1887), 238–264; English = P. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier: The Complete Einhard*, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 2 (Peterborough, 1998), 69–130. For a new interpretation of the reign of Louis the Pious and an elaborate analysis of the modes of political discourse in the 820s and 830s, see now M. de Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge, 2009). I would like to express my thanks to the author for supplying me with a manuscript of the work prior to publication. For the political context, see furthermore *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. P. Godman and R. Collins (Oxford, 1990); E. Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* (Darmstadt, 1996).

⁷ Einhard, *Translatio* 3.13–14 (Waitz, 252–254).

⁸ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 118–124.

⁹ Hilduin, *Passio Dionysii*, PL 106, cols. 23–50; G. Brown, 'Politics and Patronage at the Abbey of Saint-Denis: The Rise of a Royal Patron Saint', unpublished DPhil. thesis (Oxford, 1989); R. Loenertz, 'La légende parisienne de S. Denys l'Aréopagite: sa genèse et son premier témoin', *Annalecta Bollandiana* 69 (1951) 217–237.

¹⁰ H. Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie bewältigt Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen durch Karl den Großen', in idem, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Sigmaringen,

These are but a few examples of the various efforts to use relic cults as resources for power and authority at the time of Louis the Pious. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these efforts were conducted within a field of debate and contention, and in a context of competition between various actors and cult centres. Einhard's transfer of his saints was a reaction to Hilduin's translation of Sebastian, and the two courtiers thereafter fought about the possession of the bodies of Marcellinus and Peter. Einhard also needed to negotiate the place of the Roman relics within a network of already established cults, for example at St Bavo in Ghent, where he was lay abbot.¹¹ Hilduin, in turn, had to employ all his rhetorical skills to refute doubts about the identity of the relics of St Denis with the Areopagite in the *Passio Dionysii* and the dedicatory letters accompanying it.¹² Relics, therefore, were not simply trump cards in public discourse, but increasingly becoming the object of discussion themselves. This was also due to the theological debates evolving around the cult of relics.

Relics played an important role in the revival of the image controversy in the West during the 820s. In the treatises written by Jonas of Orléans and Dungal of Pavia to counter the iconoclastic policy of bishop Claudius of Turin, they reacted harshly against Claudius's criticism of pilgrimage, the veneration of the cross, and relic cults.¹³

1987), 289–323; H. Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen im 9. Jahrhundert: Über Kommunikation, Mobilität und Öffentlichkeit im Frühmittelalter*, Beihefte der Francia 48 (Stuttgart, 2002).

¹¹ Einhard, *Translatio* 4.8–14 (Waitz, 258–262).

¹² Hilduin, *Epistola* 19 to Louis the Pious, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH EE* 5 (Berlin, 1899), 328–335.

¹³ P. Boulhol, *Claude de Turin: un évêque iconoclaste dans l'occident carolingien. Étude suivie de l'édition du Commentaire sur Josué*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Serie Moyen Âge et Temps Modernes 38 (Paris, 2002), 115–149; A. Boureau, 'Les théologiens carolingiens devant les images religieuses: la conjoncture de 825', in *Nicée II, 787–1987: Douze siècles d'images religieuses. Actes du colloque international Nicée II, tenu au Collège de France, Paris, 2–4 octobre 1986*, ed. F. Boespflug and N. Lossky (Paris, 1987), 247–262; D. Appleby, 'Holy Relic and Holy Image: Saints' Relics in the Western Controversy over Images in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries', *Word and Image* 8 (1992) 333–343; idem, 'Sight and church reform in the thought of Jonas of Orléans', *Viator* 27 (1996) 11–33; M. van Uytvanghe, 'Le culte des saints et la prétendue "Aufklärung" carolingienne', in *Le culte des saints aux IX^e–XIII^e siècles. Actes du colloque tenu à Poitiers, 15–17 septembre 1993*, ed. R. Favreau, *Civilisation médiévale* 1 (Poitiers 1995), 151–166; J.-M. Sansterre, 'Les justifications des reliques dans le haut Moyen Âge', in *Les reliques: objets, cultes, symboles. Actes du colloque international de l'Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale (Boulogne-sur-Mer) 4–6 septembre 1997*, ed. E. Bozóky and A.-M. Helvétius, *Hagiologia* 1 (Brepols, 1999), 81–93; P. Riché, 'Les Carolingiens en quête de sainteté', in *Les fonctions des saints dans le*

Claudius's views had presented a serious challenge to established practice, and provoked reflection on its theological foundations and pastoral utility. Attempts to reaffirm the legitimacy of relic cults were complemented by an effort to tighten episcopal and royal control over cults. Increased anxiety and doubts are reflected not only in theological treatises, but also in many hagiographical texts. Even the author of the 826 entry of the *Annals* on the translation of Sebastian included a vehement argument against contemporary reluctance to believe in the great miracles performed at Sebastian's shrine.¹⁴ Many texts of the period reveal a profound sense of anxiety concerning the risks involved for one's salvation when dealing with relics, and concern for the ways to distinguish true relics from false. What was at stake was legitimate control over cults, as well as the power to define, and the right way to speak about, relics.¹⁵

There is nothing self-evident in the successful use of relics as resources for establishing discursive authority. Rather, relics themselves necessitate discourse.¹⁶ It is this combination of the political and social importance of relic cults on the one hand, and their intrinsic ambiguity on the other, that should make us think about the relationship between relics and texts in the Frankish empire of Louis the Pious, a relationship that is of crucial importance with regard to questions of authority. In what follows, I would therefore like to discuss three hagiographical texts that allow us to explore the diverse aspects of this relationship formulated as part of the attempt to 'textualize' the symbolic capital of relics and to overcome the difficulties and risks that came with writing texts on relics.

My first example is the *Vita et Translatio Huberti*, written by Jonas of Orléans between 825 and 831 at the request of bishop Walcaud of

monde occidentale (III^e-XIII^e siècles), Collection de l'École française de Rome 149 (Rome 1991), 217-224.

¹⁴ *Annales regni Francorum* a. 826 (Kurze, 171-172).

¹⁵ See, for example, two letters written by Agobard of Lyon and his successor, Amolo, to fellow bishops concerning relics of doubtful authenticity. Both authors strongly emphasise the importance of ecclesiastical control over cults and allocate the power of definition in such matters to experts, that is, bishops. See Agobard of Lyon, *Epistola* 12, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH EE Karolini aevi* 3 (Berlin 1899), 206-210; Amolo of Lyon, *Epistola* 1, ed. E. Dümmler, *ibidem*, 363-368. Cf. Geary, *Furta sacra*, 28-32. For the repercussion of such discussions in Northern Italy, see the contribution of Giorgia Vocino in this volume.

¹⁶ P. Brown, 'Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), 222-250.

Liège, who translated Hubert's relics from Liège to the monastery of Andagne in 825.¹⁷ This transfer is closely connected with Walcaud's reform projects within his diocese.¹⁸ Jonas' *Vita* is the reworked version of an older Life of the saint, dated to the middle of the eighth century, to which he appended his own account of the translation of 825.

As one of the most eminent advisors to Louis the Pious, Jonas is renowned for his various contributions to the reform endeavours of the 820s.¹⁹ He was central to the re-conceptualisation of the function of bishops and their relationship with the other *ordines* of the empire, and was deeply involved in the controversies over ecclesiastical property. Moreover, at the time of writing the *Vita et Translatio*, he was working on his treatise *De cultu imaginum* against Claudius of Turin.²⁰ It is therefore no surprise that Jonas took the opportunity of rewriting the *Vita Huberti* to position himself with regard to the debates of his time. His text is an argument in favour of the pastoral utility of relic cults under episcopal control, a point of view that David Appleby has established as Jonas' major contribution to the debate on images and relics.²¹ In the *Vita*, Jonas also formulated a model of the episcopal office and its ideal fulfilment that was intended as a contribution to contemporary debates, as conducted, for example, at the synod of Paris in 829.²² Building on the narrative of Hubert's exemplary career as a bishop, Jonas formulated a powerful image of the bishops' role

¹⁷ Jonas of Orléans, *Vita secunda et Translatio S. Huberti*, AASS Nov. 1, 806–818.

¹⁸ A. Dierkens, 'La christianisation des campagnes de l'empire de Louis le Pieux. L'exemple du diocèse de Liège sous l'épiscopat de Walcaud (c. 809–c. 831)', in *Charlemagne's Heir*, ed. Collins and Godmann, 309–329.

¹⁹ R. Savigni, *Giona di Orleans: una ecclesiologia carolingia* (Bologna, 1989).

²⁰ PL 106, cols. 305–388.

²¹ Appleby, 'Sight and Church Reform', esp. 18–21 and 27–33; idem, 'Holy relic', 338–339; Boulhol, *Claude de Turin*, 156–163.

²² On these discussions, see De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 170–184; eadem, 'Sacrum palatium et ecclesia: l'autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790–840)', *Annales* 58 (2003) 1243–1269; eadem, 'Ecclesia and the Early Medieval Polity', in *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11 (Vienna, 2006), 113–132; S. Patzold, 'Redéfinir l'office épiscopal: les évêques francs face à la crise des années 820/30', in *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Crises et renouvellements*, ed. F. Bougard, L. Feller and R. Le Jan (Turnhout, 2006), 337–359; A. Dubreucq, 'Le pouvoir de l'évêque au IX^e siècle: étude sur le vocabulaire du pouvoir', in *Hommes de pouvoir: ressources et lieux de pouvoir, V^e–XIII^e siècles*, ed. E. Magrou-Nortier, *Aux sources de la gestion publique* 3 (Lille, 1997), 97–110; H.-H. Anton, 'Zum politischen Konzept karolingischer Synoden und zur karolingischen Brüdergemeinschaft', *Historisches Jahrbuch* 99 (1979) 55–132.

within the order of the Christian empire in his account of the translation of 825.²³ By establishing a close link between the relic translation and the politics of reform in his text, he was negotiating both the meaning of the translated relics and his own position as a bishop. The *Vita Huberti prima* was a very suitable resource for such an endeavour.²⁴ Important concerns in this text are the virtues of a bishop, the relationship between the bishop and his community, and the rightful use of ecclesiastical property. Adapting the *Vita prima* to the interpretative frame of the 820s in order to provide a model for contemporary bishops nevertheless required considerable caution and effort. It is impossible within the limits of this article to discuss in detail all of the strategies through which Jonas appropriated and adapted the *Vita prima*.²⁵ In the present context, it is sufficient to note that while Jonas updated the vocabulary and added a substantial amount of theoretical reflection to the account, he nevertheless tried to invest his suggestions with the authority of an older text. In the dedicatory letter to Walcaud, he claimed to have merely rephrased and corrected the text of the *Vita prima*, without altering its contents, and he refused to accept the position of author of the *Vita et Translatio*.²⁶ In his retreat behind the authority of the ancient text, Jonas went so far as to comply with the sudden change in point of view that occurs in c. 8 of the *Vita prima*. During a miracle account, the narrative voice suddenly switches to the first person, and the narrator relates his own experiences as an eyewitness to the event. Jonas followed this change and even enhanced its effect: '[Here is] what happened to me, *who have written this [account]*, during the same shipwreck.'²⁷

Jonas also drew on the *Vita prima*'s authority for negotiating the status of Hubert's relics. This is above all visible in the accounts of the two elevation rituals, shortly after Hubert's death in 743, and in the context of the translation to Andagne in 825. Compared to the

²³ See Jonas, *VH* c. 29, 817.

²⁴ *Vita Huberti episcopi Traiectensis*, ed. W. Levison, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 6 (Hanover, 1913), 471–496.

²⁵ I have discussed these strategies more fully in G. Heydemann, 'Text und Translation: Strategien zur Mobilisierung spiritueller Ressourcen im Frankenreich Ludwigs des Frommen', in *Zwischen Niederschrift und Wiederschrift*, ed. R. Corradini et al. (forthcoming) with fuller bibliography on both *Vitae Huberti*.

²⁶ Jonas, *VH*, Epistola dedicatoria, 806: *Sed neque compilatoris vel nomen vel officium mihi debeat imputari, quasi qui alienum opus verbaque pervaserim.*

²⁷ Jonas, *VH* c. 10, 811: *Mihi quoque, qui haec scripsi, in eodem naufragio tale quid accidit.* My emphasis. Cf. *Vita prima* c. 8 (Levison, 487–488).

description of the 743 elevation in the *Vita prima*, Jonas subtly shifted the emphasis of the narrative, turning the story into a powerful demonstration of the pastoral efficiency of a relic cult, which he argued exerted a particularly strong impact upon its audience wherever the saint enjoyed close links with the community's past.²⁸ Jonas placed even more emphasis than the *Vita prima* on the miracle of corporeal integrity, albeit for different reasons. He added comments stressing the difference between Hubert's holy body and that of 'ordinary' mortals, and securing the understanding of this miracle as an anticipated fulfilment of the promise of resurrection and as a sign for the power of intercession.²⁹ Jonas thus reacted to fundamental issues in the controversy about relic cults and to doubts expressed by some contemporaries not only as to the spiritual usefulness of relic cults but also concerning the shrine as the privileged place of the presence of a saint.

In the account of the translation of 825, Jonas went out of his way to demonstrate that the ritual of 825 had been the model of a correct relic translation. He described in great detail the official channels through which the request for translating the relics went, as a process perfectly in line with the decrees of the Council of Mainz (813).³⁰ Even so, he once again had to discuss the status of Hubert's relics. Drawing on Bishop Walcaud's testimony, Jonas stressed the lack of any sign of corruption in Hubert's body, again discussing the theological foundations and the likelihood of such a miracle even in recent times. To disperse his readers' doubts about Hubert's incorrupt body, Jonas referred to the description of the elevation of 743 in the preceding text.³¹

In order to employ the parallels between the two elevation rituals as a means of establishing the authenticity of the miracle, the subtly reworked text of the *Vita* had to be accepted as a reliable account of the events of the eighth century by Jonas' readers. This is emblematic

²⁸ Cf. Jonas, *VH* c. 25 with *Vita prima* 19. Jonas strongly emphasises that contrition and penitential attitude are the effects of witnessing the miracle, and that the function of such a miracle is to underline the exemplary role of the saint for his community. Cf. Appleby, 'Sight and Church Reform', 18.

²⁹ Jonas, *VH* c. 25, 816: *ita ut quamquam de resurrectionis redintegratione veracissime a Salvatore dictum et fideliter a fidelibus constat susceptum: capillus de capite vestro non peribit, tamen et hoc tempore in hujus sancti viri corpore videretur impletum*. See A. Angenendt, 'Corpus incorruptum: Eine Leitidee der mittelalterlichen Reliquienverehrung', *Saeculum* 42 (1991) 320–348.

³⁰ Jonas, *VH* c. 30–32, 817; cf. *Concilium Moguntinense* a. 813 c. 51, ed. A. Werminghoff, *MGH LL Concilia* 2 (Hannover-Leipzig, 1906), 272.

³¹ Jonas, *VH* c. 33, 818.

of the difficulty Jonas faced in rewriting the *Vita Huberti*. His appropriation of the *Vita Huberti prima* rested on both his claim to have written a text that was not of his own making, and on the careful adaptation of the text to its new contexts, which was brought about not least through interjections and additional comments to the older text. To use Hubert's relics and the hagiographical traditions of Liège in order to affirm his position in discussions about the social function of relic cults or the *ministerium* of bishops meant that Jonas needed to balance the reinterpretation of narrated events in light of contemporary concerns and the need to leave the authority of the older text untouched.

Like the *Vita Huberti*, Radbertus' *Passio Rufini et Valerii*, written around the middle of the ninth century, is the ré-écriture of an older version of the life of the saints, usually dated to the eighth century.³² But as we shall see, Radbertus differed from Jonas not only in his definition of the relation between the earlier *Passio* and his own text, but also in his envisaging of a very different relation between relics and texts.

The two saints suffered near Soissons, at the hands of the Roman prefect of the province Rictiovarus, under Diocletian (284–305). The *Passio* opens with a somewhat ideosyncratic synopsis of the Roman-Christian past as a historical background to the story of the martyrs. Radbertus praised the gradual spread of Christianity throughout the Roman world, the growing numbers of Christians in high political and military ranks, and the prosperity of a consolidating *ecclesia* guided by faithful and honourable churchmen in the period before Diocletian. But there soon followed decline, which Radbertus described in words borrowed from Eusebius-Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical history*.³³ Depraved morals and corrupted discipline led to envy, lying and strife among both *principes* and the *populus*. These moral failures and the worldly

³² Paschasius Radbertus, *Passio Rufini et Valerii*, PL 120, cols. 1489–1508. The earlier version is edited as *Passio Rufini et Valerii*, AASS Iun 2, 796–797; W. Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter 3: Karolingische Biographie, 750–920 n. Chr.*, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 10 (Stuttgart, 1991), 304–308.

³³ Cf. Radbertus, *Passio*, cols. 1492C–1493B and 1493D with Eusebius-Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.1.6–9 and 8.2 respectively, ed. T. Mommsen, *Eusebius Werke* 2 (Leipzig, 1908) 739–743 = *Life and Works of Rufinus with Jerome's Apology against Rufinus*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3, trans. W.H. Freemantle (Oxford and New York, 1890).

and dishonest behaviour among the clergy provoked God's anger against this second Israel. Divine anger manifested itself, according to Radbertus, to such an extent that the prophecy on the fate of the terrestrial Israel (Lam 2; Ps 88. 40) could be seen to apply to the Christian Church.

These passages on the 'Golden Age' and the analysis of the subsequent crisis of the *ecclesia* feature many of the keywords of ninth-century political discussions.³⁴ That this was a deliberate choice rather than mere coincidence seems very likely given Radbertus' familiarity with a typological mode of interpretation of the past. In his *Epitaphium Arsenii*, written to commemorate his former abbot Wala, the characters of the recent past are referred to by aliases mostly derived from a biblical or late antique past. This technique, which was informed by the practice of biblical exegesis, served to create an additional layer of meaning by providing loose historical parallels.³⁵ A similar sense of overlap between past and present, I would suggest, underlies much of the text of the *Passio Rufini et Valerii*. In his preface, Radbertus stressed that the hagiographer's task was to produce a *historia sanctorum*.³⁶ It is important to note the moral implications of this definition of hagiographical writing. While remaining firmly situated within the context of the reign of Diocletian and third-century Roman Gaul, the story of Rufinus and Valerius was meant to offer lessons on faith, doctrine, and virtue to Radbertus' ninth-century audience.

Another remarkable feature of the *Passio* is the subtle way in which Radbertus exploited the convention of the genre of martyr acts. This is visible, for example, in his approach to the traditional dispute about the pagan gods that took place during the saints' trial before the Roman official. Radbertus most likely drew inspiration for his account from the *Passio Sebastiani*, where considerable space is devoted to this subject.³⁷ But compared to the *Passio Sebastiani*, let alone the old *Passio Rufini et Valerii*, Radbertus took the discussion considerably

³⁴ This is observed by Berschin, *Epochenstil*, 307, who does not, however, comment on the use of Eusebius-Rufinus. On the reception of the latter Carolingian period, see R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004), 218–244.

³⁵ On this text, see D. Ganz, 'The "Epitaphium Arsenii" and the opposition to Louis the Pious', in *Charlemagne's Heir*, ed. Godman and Collins, 537–550; De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 102–111.

³⁶ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1490A.

³⁷ *Passio Sebastiani* 13, PL 17, cols 1021–1058, at 1040–1041.

further. Drawing on Lactantius' *Divine Institutions*, which he also at times quoted verbatim, Radbertus did not restrict himself to refuting the pagan cults as a vain superstition. He also put a strong emphasis on the moral depravity of the gods, listing violent struggles for power among family members, and adultery and sexual debauchery among their deeds, and he passionately deplored the repercussions such 'divine' role models had on the maintenance of social order in the human world.³⁸ Close attention was given to the gods as *simulacra* or statues, which Radbertus described as man-made and created from stone, wood or metal, lacking reason, sense and life, and therefore incapable of intervening in human affairs.³⁹ Another concern, also present in the *Passio Sebastiani*, which Radbertus repeatedly emphasised throughout the text was that worship of these *simulacra* does not help the cause of the empire, or promote the well-being of its rulers and citizens.⁴⁰ Quoting Seneca (with Lactantius as an intermediary), he denounced the rites and gestures performed in front of the *simulacra* as vain efforts to secure supernatural support from mortal beings incapable of administering aid to humans.⁴¹

This exceptionally sophisticated engagement with the pagan cults, with its focus on the correlation of public cult and the well-being of the *res publica*, could well have evoked thought on contemporary practice, and the presence of some shared concerns and vocabulary connects the description of pagan *simulacra* to the ninth-century debate on image worship. A critical stance towards the superficiality of outward gestures of veneration squares well with the views Radbertus expressed in his preface. While in the *Vita Huberti*, Jonas negotiated the authenticity and the meaning of Hubert's relics, the *Passio Rufini et Valerii* was not a text designed to lend meaning to the particular relics concerned. The preface was instead devoted to an elaborate discussion of the spiritual value of relics in general.⁴² Radbertus systematically contrasted relics and texts, carefully weighing their respective utility as a means to salvation. The Lives of the saints, he argues, render *materia*

³⁸ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1501B–D.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, cols. 1498C, 1499D–1502B.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Passio Sebastiani* c. 23, 1056, where the emphasis lies, in contrast to Radbertus, on the efficacy of Christian prayers for rulers and empire.

⁴¹ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1502A; cf. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 2.2, ed. S. Brandt, CSEL 19 (Vienna, 1890), 101 = *Divine Institutes*, trans. A. Bowen and P. Garnsey, *Translated Texts for Historians* 40 (Liverpool 2003), 121–122.

⁴² Radbertus, *Passio*, preface, cols. 1498C–1491B. Berschin, *Epochenstil*, 305–306.

salutis to believers; studying them in the form of a written text prompts the spiritual advancement of the audience. Saints' Lives preserve the immortal memory of good deeds; they serve to strengthen faith and to provide instruction. They thus belong to the heavenly sphere of the spirit. By contrast, relics are mortal, corruptible, and material; they are associated with the body and with original sin, and pertain to the inferior sphere of the flesh. Radbertus therefore lamented the undue preoccupation with the material and outward aspects of the cult of relics. Although he was wary of denying the saints' power of intercession or the venerability of relics as vehicles of God's miraculous power, his attitude towards their salvific function remained somewhat reserved, and he clearly expressed the superiority of texts over relics.⁴³ He put a strong emphasis on the fact that it is through texts, rather than through relics, that the saints are rendered present to the believer. Reading or listening to texts is the prime road to spiritual progress and salvation.⁴⁴

This view stands in sharp contrast with numerous translation narratives, all of which lack reference to the earthly life of the saints concerned. When he discussed the chronology of the saints' lives and the questions of precedence with regard to Hilduin's Dionysius, Radbertus moreover made it perfectly clear that he considered rivalry about prestigious relics foolish and ridiculous: 'We should therefore not discern the merits [of the saints], since we do not confer the honours, nor should we fight about [the value of] martyrs' crowns awarded for struggles we are in no position to judge'.⁴⁵ In more general terms, the *Passio* is a response to ninth-century debates about the 'tools of salvation', a debate centred around the role of images, relics, the cult of the cross and the eucharist for spiritual advancement and salvation.⁴⁶ Throughout the *Passio*, Radbertus emphasised the movement away

⁴³ Radbertus, *Passio*, preface: *Quae [historiae sanctorum] quanto majora sint quam vestis aut pulvis corporum, quanquam sanctorum, facile comprehendit quicumque prudenter advertit*. For Radbertus' view of the human body's part in salvation, see D. Appleby, 'Beautiful on the Cross, Beautiful in His Torments: The Place of the Body in the Thought of Paschasius Radbertus', *Traditio* 60 (2005) 1–46.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of Augustine's views on the cult of the martyrs against the background of competing concepts of imitability and inimitability of the saints in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, see P. Brown, 'Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity', *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000) 1–24. Cf. below, note 56.

⁴⁵ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1495A.

⁴⁶ D. Ganz, 'Theology and the Organisation of Thought', in *New Cambridge Medieval History*, II: c. 700–c. 900, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), 758–785 at 773.

from material tokens towards purely spiritual contemplation of the divine. It is in the context of this broader discussion that Radbertus' attitude towards relics as material tokens needs to be understood.⁴⁷

Like Jonas, Radbertus took the opportunity of writing hagiography to comment on contemporary events and debates. The incorporation of a large amount of theological material into his account placed the text of the *Passio* in a line with the homiletic and educational function of martyr acts such as the *Passio Sebastiani*.⁴⁸ Radbertus both exploited and expanded these narrative traditions, and he invested a great deal of learning and cultural competence in his creation of a *historia sanctorum*. In contrast to Jonas, he did not tie the authority of his own text to the replication of an older version of already established prestige. Tellingly, Radbertus stated in the preface that whoever preferred to read the older *Passio* should feel free to do so.⁴⁹ While Jonas' power to speak rested on his claim to an ancient textual tradition and was also the effect of his episcopal office, for Radbertus it was based on the very act of writing about saintly lives. This rather self-confident authorial posture, and his strategy in writing the *Passio*, correspond to his strong sense for the power of words, both as oral *admonitio* and as a written instruction.

Saints as a vehicle of *admonitio* for rulers and members of their entourage leads me to my final example, Einhard's *Translatio Marcellini et Petri*, which has received more attention from modern historians than any other translation narrative of the period.⁵⁰ This is above

It is worth mentioning that after its completion in 840, Jonas re-dedicated his treatise against Claudius to Charles the Bald.

⁴⁷ For example, Radbertus formulated a well-balanced conclusion on the efficacy of miracles as a 'means to salvation', arguing that their impact on human minds cannot be measured independently of the individual's spiritual condition: See Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1507B.

⁴⁸ K. Cooper, 'Ventriloquism and the Miraculous: Conversion, Preaching, and the Martyr Exemplum in Late Antiquity', *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church*, Studies in Church History 41 (Woodbridge, 2005), 22–45.

⁴⁹ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1491B, borrowing Jerome's words in the prologue to his edition of the book of Joshua; cf. Berschin, *Epochenstil*, 305 note 477.

⁵⁰ M. Heinzelmänn, 'Einhard's *Translatio Marcellini et Petri*: Eine hagiographische Reformschrift von 830', in *Einhard: Studien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. H. Schefers (Darmstadt, 1997), 269–298; J.M.H. Smith, "'Emending Evil Ways and Praising God's Omnipotence': Einhard and the Uses of Roman Martyrs', in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, ed. K. Mills and A. Grafton (Rochester – New York, 2003), 189–223; eadem, 'Einhard: The Sinner and the Saints', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003) 55–77; De Jong, *Penitential*

all due to the spectacular way in which Einhard used the prestige of his Roman saints to air commentary on the political situation of the late 820s. In contrast to Jonas or Paschasius, Einhard could not count on the authority of an ecclesiastical office, or locate his comments within a venerable textual tradition. Instead, the *admonitio* Einhard addressed to Louis the Pious and his court was firmly bound to the authority of the relics of Marcellinus and Peter, at whose shrine the archangel Gabriel appeared, and whose power compelled the demon Wiggo to speak out.

Modern scholars have often stressed the exceptional character of Einhard's text, which results, among other things, from the marked presence of Einhard's authorial *ego* within his own text, which was unique among similar texts in the early Middle Ages. This authorial presence, I shall argue, is above all due to Einhard's problems with defining and defending the position from which he wrote. These problems become apparent already in the curiously negative definition of the addressees of his text, as well as in the preface.⁵¹ It can be read not only as a subtle attack on Einhard's rival Hilduin, but also as a bid for acceptance of both author and text by asserting almost defensively the continuity of his work with a series of valuable texts whose authors were driven by laudable motives.

This defensive tone is characteristic for the greater part of the *Translatio*. This was due to the need not only to legitimize the theft of the relics, but also to strengthen his own position as a participant in the discussions on the state of the realm in 828/29 and thereafter.⁵² The story of the blind man Alberich and his vision of the archangel Gabriel disguised as St Marcellinus may serve as an example. This vision resulted in the production of a *libellus* containing instructions for the reform of the empire that was subsequently submitted to Louis the Pious in the winter of 828/29. The *Translatio*'s account is characterised above all by keeping the contents of the heavenly guidelines

State, 67–72 and 157–164; H.-R. Seeliger, 'Einhard's römische Reliquien: Zur Übertragung der Heiligen Marcellinus und Petrus ins Frankenreich', *Römische Quartalschrift* 83 (1988) 58–75.

⁵¹ Einhard, *Translatio*, Preface (Waitz, 239): *Veris veri Dei cultoribus et Ihesu Christi domini nostri sanctorumque eius non fictis amatoribus Einhardus peccator*. On the preface, see Heinzelmann, 'Reformschrift', 293–296.

⁵² For the context of the political discourse at Louis the Pious's court in the 820s, see De Jong, *The Penitential State*, esp. 112–184; cf., with different emphasis, Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, 53–122.

a secret, and by the constant reiteration of two points: the *libellus* contains divine commandments, and it was written and delivered to the king by God's order.⁵³ Einhard's constant re-use of words reflecting the divine command to speak (*iubere, praecipere, divina voluntas, auctoritas*) wove for him a fabric of authority. Reporting the words of angels and intermediaries who told Einhard the story, enabled him to repeatedly summarize the events. At the same time, this technique served to preserve Einhard as a narrator at the centre of the audience's attention, since the point of view remained that of the author throughout the account. This 'rhetoric of divine order' corresponds to the way in which Einhard presented his messages as divinely inspired time and again in the *Translatio*. From this resulted the notion that his writing was an obligation. At the end of the preface to Book III, which opens the sequence of miracles worked by the saints in Francia, Einhard discusses the principles governing the organisation of his material in the following miracle accounts, an organisation that aimed at leaving not a single miracle unmentioned.⁵⁴ There are a number of passages in the text that define the content of the narrative as something that needs to be written down and the act of narration as an imperative, even if the events defy human language.⁵⁵ This is reminiscent of Augustine's demand to keep the records at the saints' shrines as complete as possible. The underlying notion is an understanding of the spiritual benefit believers obtain from being told these stories, and, more importantly, an understanding of miracles pertaining to God's salutary actions on earth.⁵⁶ It is this definition of his text as an account of sacred events that gave Einhard the range to write as he did. Significantly, the reason he gave for including the story of Gabriel in the *Translatio* was that it was followed by a miraculous lighting of candles that was interpreted

⁵³ Einhard, *Translatio* 3.13 (Waitz, 252–253).

⁵⁴ Einhard, *Translatio*, Praeface to Book III (Waitz, 248): *neque mihi silendum est, nec tamen ita ut fuit plene dici atque enuntiari potest. Dicendum tamen est, ne res ad Dei laudem maxime pertinens quasi per desidiam silentio suppressa videatur.*

⁵⁵ Ibid. 2.8 (Waitz 247); cf. also 4.15 (Waitz, 262); 3.20 (Waitz, 258).

⁵⁶ Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 22.8 (Dombart/Kalb 823–824). See M. Heinzelmann, 'Die Funktion des Wunders in der spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Hagiographie', in *Mirakel im Mittelalter. Konzeptionen, Erscheinungsformen, Deutungen*, ed. idem et al., Beiträge zur Hagiographie 3 (Stuttgart, 2002), 23–61. For the literary and political context, see C. Leyser, 'Homo pauper, de pauperibus natus: Augustine, Church Property, and the Cult of Stephen', *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005) 229–237.

as a miracle worked by the saints and thus demanded written commemoration.⁵⁷

Yet, it was necessary to ensure the status of the written text as an authentic narrative about God's intervention in this world through his saints. For example, the Gabriel-story had to be accompanied by a complex web of interrelated stories that supported its credibility.⁵⁸ But it is not only this highly political miracle that required efforts to establish its authenticity. At the centre of the strategies developed to this end was Einhard as a protagonist of the story, who was given much room for reflection on the symbolic meaning of certain miracles and, more importantly, who testified to the truth of the narrated miracles through his presence. Einhard's role as an eyewitness was complemented by his function as a narrator, which enabled him to limit the range of possible interpretations of the miracles as well as organise his material. In the first part of the prologue to Book III, Einhard discussed the difficulties caused by relating miracles he had *not* seen with his own eyes, and he fervently affirmed his belief in events related to him by others.⁵⁹ The account of the healing of Alberich, the intermediary transmitting Gabriel's message, shows the weight that was given to Einhard as a personality within these strategies. While Einhard usually stuck to the point of view of a third-person narrator and used reported speech for relating episodes which he had not himself witnessed, he introduced this story with a break from his usual mode of representation. Although he had not been present when the miracle had happened, Einhard claimed that his trust in the truth of what he had heard was so strong that he narrated it *as if* he had seen it with his own eyes.⁶⁰

Thus, in his double function as an eye-witness and as narrator, Einhard was responsible for ensuring the status of his text as a truthful narrative of sacred events. The success of these efforts depended on

⁵⁷ Einhard, *Translatio* 3.13 (Waitz, 253).

⁵⁸ See Einhard, *Translatio* 3.6; 3.12; 3.17.

⁵⁹ Einhard, *Translatio*, Preface to Book III (Waitz, 248): [...] *ex his quae scribere disposui maior pars ad notitiam meam aliorum relatione perlata est. Quibus tamen ut fidem haberem, ex his quae ipse vidi et coram positus agnovi tam firmiter mihi persuasum est, ut sine ullo dubitationis scrupulo vera esse crederem quae ab his dicebatur qui se illa vidisse testati sunt [...].*

⁶⁰ Einhard, *Translatio* 3.6 (Waitz, 250): *verbis eorum quorum hac relatione mihi compertum est non minus quam propriis oculis credere possum; ideoque non ut auditum, sed potius ut a me ipso visum, incunctanter ac sine ulla dubitatione proferre decrevi.*

the acceptance of this construction by his readers. This dependence on the readers' cooperation was exactly what made his position a very vulnerable one. In the final lines of his text, which take up themes of authority and motivation to write that were developed in the general preface, Einhard defended himself against 'uncooperative readers'.⁶¹ In a parallel movement, he rebuffed attacks on both the text and its author as blasphemous and motivated by envy, by calling such attacks a sure sign of the attacker's lack of love for God and men. Thereby, the person of the author was closely tied to the content of the narrative that was defined as true (*aut a nobis aut fidelium veraci relatione comperta*). Einhard's takeover of the function of the author rested on his personal integrity and on the spiritualisation of this function – a clever response to Einhard's many problems with his position as the author of the *Translatio*.

In many ways, the *Translatio* can be read as a discussion of the legitimate way of writing texts on relics. The attempts to define the relationship between the author and the narrative are also a part of the strategies to textualise the spiritual capital of the relics. This was especially painstaking at a time when the legitimate use of relics and legitimate control over cults were very much contested. That Einhard was counting on the mutual reinforcement between the text as an account of sacred events and the status of its author meant that his position was not without risks. If it took huge textual efforts to secure this fragile position, it was nevertheless one which corresponded to Einhard's social standing and resources.⁶²

Approaching the three hagiographical texts discussed above with an eye toward the relationship between relics and texts can remind us that the authority of relics ought not be taken for granted, and that the meaning of particular relics needed to be negotiated through texts. Comparison of the ways of speaking about relics developed by the

⁶¹ Einhard, *Translatio* 4.18 (Waitz, 264): *Haec sunt, quae de innumeris sanctorum virtutibus, aut a nobis visa aut fidelium veraci relatione comperta, litteris ac memoriae mandare decrevimus; quae Christi amatoribus ac martyrum eius veneratoribus ad legendum grata fore non ambigo; quoniam nihil eis videtur impossibile, quod ut fiat, Deo omnipotenti placuerit; incredulis autem ac sanctorum gloriae derogantibus, quia fastidiosa esse non dubito, ne omnino legere velint, censeo suadendum, ne forte vilitate nostri sermonis offenso, blasphemiam et invidentiam devitare non valeant, ac sic Deum et proximum, quos amare iubentur, se odisse declarent.*

⁶² Cf. D. Ganz, 'Einhardus peccator', in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. P. Wormald and J. Nelson (Cambridge, 2007), 37–50.

three authors reveals the caution and effort required for using relics as resources for authority in political and theological debates during the reign of Louis the Pious (or for refusing to use them in such a way). All three endeavours are subject to constraints due to the need to reflect on the legitimacy of relic cults. The risks that came with writing texts on relics also relate to differentiated strategies regarding the relationship between author and text discernable in the three texts. While, in the case of both Jonas and Einhard, the construction of the figure of the author is central to establishing the authority of the relics concerned, Radbertus developed his position from scepticism against the spiritual efficacy of relics, in contrast to which the writing of a *historia sanctorum* was all the more important. In this sense, although the three texts connect to specific discussions and concerns, all of them are part of a common discourse on a truly Christian social order, in which saints and their relics formed an element that was as important as it was hazardous.

CONCLUSION: AN AGE OF SAINTS? POWER, CONFLICT AND DISSENT IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

Matthew Dal Santo and Phil Booth

In the final chapters of his *L'Église de l'Antiquité tardive* (1963) Henri-Irénée Marrou described the sixth and seventh centuries of the Christian era as an 'age of saints', the crowning glory – and saving grace – of early medieval Christianity in the Latin west.¹ The hoary saints of these wild centuries – bishops, monks and missionaries, many all three – went on to convert the barbarians to Catholicism and laid the foundations of medieval Europe in such a way that ensured it would be an essentially Christian society. In this the saints were aided by the general willingness of the populations in which they worked to credit the supernatural. Even Christianity's great nemeses, magic and superstition, were in some sense useful friends in the 'Conversion of Europe': their prominence ensured that all agreed that powerful, invisible forces played an important role in determining man's individual and collective destinies. Like the monk Paulinus at the court of the Northumbrian king, Edwin, all the saints had to do was to persuade their audiences that the real arbiter of the supernatural world was the Christian God.² Once the claims of the Christian God were accepted, of course, it was a short step to asserting his representatives' authority over every manifestation of the supernatural and the spiritual.

Since Marrou, various influential studies of both the saint and his or her accompanying literature have ensured that holy people and their miracles have remained centre-stage in accounts of late antique 'Christianisation'. In one of several influential contributions on 'the

¹ H.-I. Marrou, *L'Église de l'Antiquité tardive: 304–603* (Paris, 1963), 247–260, esp. 247: 'Notre première impression, à nous modernes, serait peut-être de trouver que ce bon peuple a eu souvent la canonisation facile, mais son geste traduit l'étonnement admiratif de ces âmes simple en face de la vertu qui, à ses yeux, et par contraste avec le désordre ambiant, ne peut s'expliquer que par une effusion de l'Esprit: les temps étaient peu propices à l'éclosion d'une vocation moyenne, les textes du moins ne nous font connaître que des cas extrêmes et opposés, des criminels ou des saints.' These comments serve only to demonstrate the remarkable refinement in the scholarly treatment of sainthood the past decades have witnessed.

² The story is in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 2.13.

holy man' in late antiquity, Brown presented the solitary ascetic as 'an arbiter of the holy', an agent of cultural change capable not only of absorbing the numerous competing discourses which surrounded him, but also – quite crucially – of reducing them to order.³ Elsewhere, Brown argued in his classic series of lectures on *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christendom*, western bishops harnessed the nascent cult of saints as a new focus for their communities. Relic translations between leading Christians established bonds of international *amicitia*, while the liturgical celebrations which accompanied their worship at the local level expressed the new cohesiveness of a broad Christian Church. The saints themselves shattered ancient divisions between living and dead, town and country, elite and lay, and offered to their clientele new, 'clean' forms of supernatural power and dependence which ensured their success – and that of their episcopal representatives – throughout the western provinces of the Roman empire.

In her own work on the Christianisation of the Roman empire, Averil Cameron has in contrast focussed less on the ascetic or saint as an historical agent than on the the important place that saints' *Lives* as texts occupied among the discursive strategies which Christianity manipulated in its 'take-over' of the collective imagination of the late antique (in particular eastern) Mediterranean. Such *Lives*, Cameron argues, contributed to the creation of a restrictive 'totalising discourse' which 'sprung from a situation of openness and multiplicity', but which produced 'a world with no room for dissenting opinion'.⁴ In the west, too, Robert Markus has pointed to the crucial role which monks

³ P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), 55–78. For the holy man as a reflection of evolving structures of power under Diocletian and his successors, see also idem, 'The rise and function of the holy man in late antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 80–101, repr. in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), 103–152; idem, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (New York, NY, 1978), esp. 58–59. For the saints' cult as building upon patterns of late antique elite culture, see P. Brown, 'The saint as exemplar in late antiquity', *Representations* 2 (1983) 1–25; idem, *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity: Its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), 50–68.

⁴ Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley, CA, 1994), 222. For the linkage of ascetic discourse and historical change see also ead. 'Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity', in *Asceticism*, ed. V.L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (Oxford, 1995), 147–161; but cf. the later comments in ead. 'How to Read Heresiology', in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism and Historiography*, ed. D.B. Martin and P. Cox Miller (Durham, NC, 2005) 193–212, at 206.

and their literature assumed in the gradual triumph of the Christian faith and its monolithic 'biblical culture', a process characterised (as for Cameron) in an apparently almost total 'draining away' of the secular, a narrowing down of cognitive options (for Markus, 'epistemological excision'), in short, 'de-secularisation'.⁵ For both, therefore, the process of Christianisation was also one of homogenisation, a process in which Christian saints (whether living or dead; actual or textual) assumed a prominent if not decisive role.

These grand accounts of late antique change must by necessity leave much by the wayside. They start from a basic question – 'How and why did Christianity become the dominant religion of the ancient Mediterranean? – and therefore adopt a teleological perspective which assumes the completion of a process, and which proceeds to explore the strategies through which it was achieved. In an excellent recent monograph Kim Bowes has highlighted the significant limitations of such an approach:

The problem in these histories lies not so much in the stories they tell as in what falls outside their tacitly unidirectional trajectories, namely non-conformity with the developing consensual Christian community, or community non-success. Typically, dissenting elements in these stories were placed under the headings of paganism and heresy, their marginalisation reinforcing the primacy of consensus as social-historical paradigm. Indeed, 'Christianisation' is frequently framed as the effort to either eradicate or enfold these 'others'.⁶

Bowes' book seeks to redefine the dominant models for understanding both religious and social change in the late antique Mediterranean through focusing on the hitherto hidden world of private worship, a world in which powerful aristocrats challenged a still nascent episcopal power through the promotion of domestic asceticism, the establishment of private churches with their own private clerics, and the sponsoring of extra-ecclesiastical saints' cults, bringing with them ingrained traditions of religious independence resistant to the increasingly centralising imperatives of the local episcopate. These aristocrats, however, were 'not necessarily pagans, heretics, or rebellious malcontents, but very much part of the Christian community'.⁷ Bishops, Bowes

⁵ R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1995), 16, 226.

⁶ K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), 10f.

⁷ *Ibid.* 11.

emphasises, were not as successful as their own narratives suggested, and '[e]ven the likes of Augustine and Ambrose were confronted with limited financial resources, uncooperative elites and imperial bureaucrats, and a systemic inability to translate theological dictates into real-world practice'.⁸ 'Christianisation', she argues, 'imagined as the formation of 'a' community, through a uni-directional convertive process, typically does not acknowledge this kind of [private] practice nor integrate it into histories of late antique religiosity.'⁹ In contrast, her subject matter 'describes a somewhat different late antique Christianity than we have come to know, one more deeply riven by its own internal fissures and challenged by unexpected agents'.¹⁰

This volume began from similar, though not identical, observations. Our focus too is upon the 'internal fissures' which constantly rent the Christian community – fissures generated too by 'unexpected agents'. Richard Payne's contribution on Sasanian Iran, for example, criticises the tendency of ecclesiastical historians 'to privilege the patriarchal perspective of our canonical and historiographical sources', and thus to place bishops centre-stage as the principal agents in the establishment and expansion of the cult of saints. Like Bowes, he points instead to substantial evidence for the involvement of lay elites in the foundation of Christian martyrs shrines, and to the considerable tensions which such activities produced in their relations with ecclesiastical authority. The martyrologies composed by bishops, however, attempted to mitigate these communal tensions through the symbolic construction of their own distinctive visions of communal unity and, in their acknowledgement of local lay patrons, point to brief moments of negotiated consensus in a relationship otherwise marked by competing visions of authority and community.

In contrast to Bowes, however – who, it should be noted, too readily concedes the Council of Chalcedon (451) as 'a watershed in the growth of episcopal hegemony'¹¹ – we have here examined not only the co-existence of conflicting Christian ideologies and their rival representatives, but also the manner in which such ideologies were received, re-appropriated and resisted by the audiences to whom they were addressed. If the dominant paradigms for understanding Christianisa-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid. 218f.

¹¹ See *ibid.* 223.

tion are (as both Bowes and Payne suggest) too limited in their appreciation of elite non-conformity, then an equally significant problem, we have suggested here, is their failure to account for the *reception* of Christian culture in the population at large (both elite and non-elite). Phil Booth, for example, here argues that the liturgical authorities at the Constantinopolitan cult of saints Cosmas and Damian attempted to exploit that cult as a vehicle for the expression of imperial religious policy; but he also argues that that same attempt was conducted against the background of – and, indeed, enabled by – a situation in which individual cults, whatever their ‘official’ doctrinal position, were frequented by Christians of various doctrinal inclinations, Christians who could imbue the saints with a variety of competing, often contradictory, meanings, despite the desperate attempts of Christian authorities to make rigid otherwise fluid doctrinal boundaries and identities.

Models which present the ascetic or saint as a significant agent of Christianisation, or which prioritise written discourse in explaining cultural change, can ignore the role of individual Christians in re-casting the roles which elites expected them to play. They often presume too-simple a view of the average Christian subject as a passive receptacle of elite culture and, furthermore, ignore the significant evidence for conflict or dissent within their own paradigmatic texts (saints’ *Lives*, miracle collections, etc.). If, however, Christians were able to question the fundamental tenets on which Christian belief was founded; if they were able to appropriate the culture of their leaders for their own devices; and if they were therefore able to challenge the premises on which elite social power was increasingly constructed; then not only does the concept of ‘Christianisation’ become more problematic; but late antiquity itself becomes more complex and, ultimately, more interesting.

This does not mean, of course, that late antique Christians were not superstitious; nor that their resistance to the claims of Christian authorities drew from ‘pagan survivals’ or ‘rational’ epistemologies (even if such epistemologies persisted amongst intellectuals). It means simply that those Christians were far less credulous than their leaders would often admit.¹² As Peter Turner’s contribution to this volume

¹² As Brown himself confesses when he admits that ‘the society that turned to Christian holy persons was more niggardly than our hagiographic sources might lead us, at first sight, to suppose, in lavishing credulity upon them’: *Authority and the Sacred*, 273. Cf. P.A. Hayward, ‘Demystifying the role of sanctity in Western Christendom’, in

emphasises, precisely because late antique people expected supernatural signs from God or the gods and believed with such commitment in the miracles performed by holy people, they developed complex rules for adjudicating the authenticity of any given display of supernatural authority. In certain situations, therefore, it was equally possible for them to attribute to an alleged 'miracle' or display of supernatural power an entirely different, even profane, aetiology, one that fully excluded the explanatory power of the divine.¹³ As Turner reminds us, a consistent feature of spiritual literature in late antiquity is the constant need to establish – and not merely to assert – the truth of supernatural phenomena, and late antique intellectuals, both pagan and Christian, used various, complex strategies to do so.

Indeed, in some recent work the willingness of late antique populations to believe uncritically in holy persons and their miracles has increasingly been challenged. French scholars in particular – Gilbert Dagron, Marie-France Auzépy, Vincent Déroche – have contributed important essays on doubt as the perennial *pendant* of belief, and have drawn attention to sustained intellectual traditions of non-Christian modes of explanation, as well as the frequent expressions of dissent rebutted in Christian hagiographies and homilies. Others, too, have questioned the levels of credulity which populations in general were prepared to lavish on Christian claims to mediate the supernatural (if not challenging a belief in 'the supernatural' itself).¹⁴ Thus Chris

The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the contribution of Peter Brown, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P.A. Hayward (Oxford, 1999), 115–142.

¹³ See P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1979), esp. 3.42 in I: 74. Cf. G. Dagron, 'Quand la terre tremble...', *TM* 8 (*Hommage à M. Paul Lemerle*) (1981) 87–103.

¹⁴ G. Dagron, 'Le saint, le savant, l'astrologue: étude de thèmes hagiographiques à travers quelques recueils de « Questions et réponses » des V–VII^e siècles', in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés, IV–XII^e siècles: actes du colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris (2–5 mai 1979), Centre de recherches sur l'antiquité tardive et le haut moyen âge, Université de Paris X* (Paris, 1981), 143–156; idem, 'L'ombre d'un doute: l'hagiographie en question, VI^e–XI^e siècles', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992) 59–68; M.-F. Auzépy, 'L'évolution de l'attitude face au miracle à Byzance', in *Miracles, Prodiges et Merveilles au Moyen Âge: XXV^e Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S., Orléans, juin 1994* (Paris, 1995), 31–46; V. Déroche, 'Tensions et contradictions dans les recueils de miracles de la première époque byzantine', in *Miracle et Karama: Hagiographies Médiévales Comparées*, D. Aigle (ed.), Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études Sciences Religieuses 109 (Turnhout, 2000), 145–166; idem, 'Pourquoi écrivait-on des recueils de miracles? L'exemple des miracles de saint Artémios', *Les Saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance*, pp. 95–116 in *Les Saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance: textes, images et monuments*, Jolivet-Lévy, C., Kaplan, M. and Sodini, J.-P. (eds.), Byzantina Sorbonensia (Paris,

Wickham's excellent recent account of the world left behind after the dissolution of the western empire, *The Inheritance of Rome*, emphasises that 'the miraculous was a normal part of the early medieval world', and 'there was little doubt about it', but at the same time points to the fact that it was 'incredulity, not (or not only) excessive credulity, that marked peasant inferiority in this period in the eyes of literary elites.'¹⁵ Similarly, Julia Smith's sophisticated cultural history of early medieval Europe, *Europe after Rome*, points 'everywhere' to 'deeply rooted assumptions that human affairs were but one aspect of a much vaster cosmic order',¹⁶ but at the same time seeks to capture the range of options which remained available for medieval people to interpret and respond to their world, emphasising that 'Christianity monopolized neither explanations of disaster nor available remedies. In places where it was of recent introduction, the validity of the new religion might itself be at issue.'¹⁷ The writing of the cultural history of religion in late antiquity, however, rarely begins from such perspectives, if the resultant account even includes them at all. Indeed, after the sixth century resistance and diversity are barely acknowledged, as though the unstoppable force of 'Christianisation' (whether by the *fiat* of Justinian's zealous lawmakers or at the baptismal font in the hands of the west's *engagés* bishops) brought an end to dissent in all its forms. Christian discourse certainly sought to be totalising, but whether it actually was there is reason – and evidence enough in the sources – to question.

This volume, therefore, has attempted to explore both the construction of the dominant paradigms of imperial, episcopal and ascetic culture, invariably at the expense of rival traditions, rival authorities

1993), 95–116. See also J. Haldon, 'Supplementary essay', in *The Miracles of St Artemios: A collection of miracle stories by an anonymous author of seventh-century Byzantium*, V.S. Crisafulli and J.W. Nesbitt (eds.) (Leiden, 1997), 33–73 at 45–46; idem, "'Tortured by my conscience". The *Laudatio Therapontis*: a neglected source of the later seventh or early eighth centuries', in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in honour of Averil Cameron*, H. Amirav and B. ter Haar Romeny (eds.) (Leuven, 2007), 263–278.

¹⁵ C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A history of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2009), 179.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

¹⁷ J.M.H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A new cultural history, 500–1000* (Oxford, 2005), 76. For an important point of reference for recent work on the saints' cult, the principal subject of this volume, see J.M.H. Smith, 'Early medieval hagiography in the late twentieth century', *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992) 69–76.

(often labelled 'heterodox' or 'heteroprax', and thus placed upon the margins); *and* the reception of that same culture amongst the audiences before whom it was articulated. Thus Collin Garbarino and Philip Wood's contributions both explore the strategies through which prominent bishops – Athanasius of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo and John of Ephesus – attempted to construct 'normative' paradigms of Christian behaviour which sought to eliminate from the religious landscape rival authorities or groups who might challenge their own social position. Garbarino here explores how, in the face of Donatist opponents with a taste for extreme forms of martyrdom, Augustine created a new model which emphasised the martyr not as sacrifice but as witness. Augustine thus presented the Donatist martyrs as deviant, while opening up the possibilities of martyrdom to his own congregation, despite the lack of persecution. Wood's paper too examines how two disparate Christian bishops constructed, through their hagiographies, 'normative' paradigms of ascetic behaviour which established the boundaries of the 'orthodox' group, and presented their opponents as both heterodox *and* heteroprax, while drawing on very different attitudes to the ascetic and canonical past (attitudes determined by the respective contexts of fourth-century Egypt and sixth-century Mesopotamia). Both papers, therefore, emphasise the real conflicts of meaning which surrounded two prominent aspects of Christian culture (martyrdom and asceticism), while underscoring the extent to which such meanings became sites for the construction of episcopal authority.

In the same manner, Peter Kritzing, Giorgia Vocino and Gerda Heydemann's papers all focus on the phenomenon of relic translation as a medium for the expression both of episcopal power within local communities *and*, at the same time, episcopal resistance to the claims of alternate authorities, in particular emperors and kings. Kritzing demonstrates how Ambrose of Milan, in the wake of a successful demonstration with the emperor Valentin II, used the infamous *inventio* of saints Gervasius and Protasius, and their subsequent *translatio* to the new basilica Ambrosiana, as an (illegal) imitation of the imperial *adventus*, with himself at its centre as '*episcopus triumphans*'. Giorgia Vocino, too, emphasises how the patronage of cult sites and the translation of relics came to be an integral element of 'ecclesiastical resistance' to the Carolingian takeover of northern Italy following Charlemagne's liquidation of the Lombard state in 776. With Kritzing, she emphasises how bishops often manipulated the saints' cult to recast the sacred topography, and collective memory, of their sees in

ways that enabled them to mould powerbases independent of secular elites. For her part, Heydemann demonstrates the considerable disquiet which the same practice of relic translation was eliciting in Carolingian Francia. Heydemann foregrounds three separate *apologiae* for the translation and veneration of saints' relics by various members of the Carolingian establishment, and draws attention not only to the political deployment of relics in the Carolingian empire, but also to the various textual strategies which imbued those same relics and their cults with meaning. Her article, furthermore, embeds the well-known, but often skirted over, criticism of the saints' cult made by Claudius of Turin in the deeper cultural dynamics of the high Carolingian imperial era, revealing many of the political considerations that were at play in the court's promotion of certain cults.

As Peter Sarris emphasises here, the same process of creeping episcopal ascendancy, of which relic translations were such a conspicuous element, progressed simultaneously with the establishment of the Church as a serious landowner, and therefore the implication of its leaders in exploitative agrarian relations. This fact, Sarris argues, had profound implications for how Christian congregations perceived their Christian leaders, and complicates any concept of Christianisation which points to the importance of the benign forms of patronage offered through Christian saints and their terrestrial representatives. Sarris draws attention to the considerable evidence for peasant resistance to the Church as an oppressive landowning institution, and argues that resistance to Christian monks, bishops and clergy (and with them their doctrines) extended far beyond the circles of dissident theologians or intellectuals, progressing hand-in-hand with the increasing entrenchment of Christian institutions within social and economic relations.

Precisely because the cults of holy persons (martyrs, saints and monks) became vehicles for the construction of social power, those same sites were also those around which resistance could be most visibly and effectively organised. Mike Humphreys' paper, for example, demonstrates how the prominence of religious images (of Christ, the Virgin and the saints) in Justinian II's propaganda for a vaunted, but failed, Byzantine reconquest of the Near East, served to provoke a backlash against images themselves when that failed reconquest failed to materialise. Matthew Dal Santo too traces the attempts of sixth- and seventh-century Byzantine emperors and churchmen to exploit the cult of saints as arenas for the legitimisation of their own temporal power,

but as a conjunct to that same process points to the considerable (but hitherto unacknowledged) resistance which that attempted exploitation elicited in the form of a debate about the plausibility of the saints' post-mortem miracles. Departing from Eustratius of Constantinople's *On the State of Souls after Death*, he attaches special importance to the sceptical voices aired during this debate as indicative of criticism by contemporaries of the autocratic nature of imperial authority in the empire of Justinian's successors, precisely in that period when some would place a supposed realisation of an integrative and undifferentiated Christian cultural hegemony.

In conclusion, it will be obvious to the reader that while this volume has sought to challenge aspects of the existing paradigm for the study of Christianity in the late Roman and early medieval worlds, it does not – and does not pretend to – offer a coherent alternative framework. The editors nevertheless hold the modest hope that it might make some small contribution to the ongoing deconstruction of the place of ecclesiastical and ascetic elites within the process of Christianisation, and do more to sensitise historians to the considerable evidence that exists for conflict, dissent and doubt in their various forms as genuine and widespread experiences in late antique and early medieval Christianity. The challenge for historians is to explain the social and religious changes which swept over the post-classical Roman world in a manner which does not relegate moments of conflict to the demands of grand narrative, and which acknowledges the mass of ordinary individuals as cultural agents in their own right, able to create, to question and to refute. Much more remains to be done.

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