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Edited by

Josef Lössl and Nicholas J. Baker-Brian

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Acknowledgments

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[Ps.-]Ambrose

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Digest.   *Digests (Pandecta) of Justinian*, ed. Th. Mommsen
and P. Krüger. 1868. Berlin: Weidmann; tr. A.
Watson *et al.* 1984. Philadelphia, PA: University of
Pennsylvania Press.

Dio Chrysostom

Or.   *Dio Chrysostom. Orations VII, XII, and XXXVI*, ed.
D. A. Russell. 1992, 62–88. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Diocletian   [Emperor]

Edict.   Ed. M. Giacchero. 1974. *Edictum Diocletiani…*, 2
vols. Genoa:
Istituto di Storia Antica e Scienze Ausiliare; tr. R.
Rees. 2004. *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy.* Edinburgh:
Edinburgh University Press, 139–146.

Diod. Sic.	Diodorus Siculus [= Diodorus of Sicily]
Bibl.	*Bibliotheca historica*, Book 1: Egypt, ed. C. H. Oldfather. 1933. LCL 279. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Diog. Laert.	Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 vols., ed. and tr. R. D. Hicks. 1925, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Dion. Hal.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus
Ant. Rom.	*Antiquitates Romanae. Roman Antiquities*, vols. 1–7, ed. and tr. E. Cary. 1937–1950. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Dionysius	Dionysius Sophista
Epist.	*Epistolae*, ed. R. Hercher. 1873. *Epistolographi Graeci*. Paris: Firmin Didot, 26–274.
Elagabalus	*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, vol. II, ed. and tr. D. Magie. 1924. LCL 140, 104–177.
Ephraem of Antioch	[= Ephraem of Amida, Patriarch of Antioch]
Ad Anatolium	Ed. R. Henry. 1965. *Photius. Bibliothèque*, vol. 4: *Codd.* 223–229. Paris: Les belles lettres.
Ephrem	[= Ephrem the Syrian; Ephrem of Nisibis]
Hymns on Paradise	*Hymnes sur le Paradis*, ed. and tr. R. Lavenant and F. Graffin. 1968. SC. Paris: Editions du Cerf.
Epiphanius	Epiphanius of Salamis
Pan.	*Panarion Haeresiarum*, ed. K. Holl and J. Dummer. 1915. 1985, GCS, 3 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs/Berlin: Akademie/De Gruyter; tr. F. Williams, 2 vols. 1984, 1997. Leiden: Brill.
Epistle of Barnabas	Ed. and tr. B. D. Ehrman. 2003. *The Apostolic Fathers II*. LCL 25, 1–84. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Epistle to Diognetus	Ed. and tr. B. D. Ehrman. 2003. *The Apostolic Fathers II*. LCL 25, 130–161; ed. and tr. C. N. Jefford. 2013. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Eunapius	
Lives	*Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, ed. and tr. W. C. Wright. 1921, LCL 134. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 319–566.
Eusebius	Eusebius of Caesarea

Chron.	*Chronicle/Chronicon*, ed. J. Karst. 1913, GCS 24. Leipzig: Hinrichs; see also below under "Jerome"
HE [= h. e.]	*Ecclesiastical History [= Church History]*, 2 vols., ed. and tr. Kirsopp Lake. 1926, 1959, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Life of Constantine	*Vita Constantini*, ed. I. A. Heikel. 1902. *Eusebius. Werke I*, GCS 9. Leipzig: Hinrichs; A. Cameron and St. Hall. 1999. *Eusebius. Life of Constantine*. Oxford: Clarendon.
Mart. Pal.	*History of the Martyrs of Palestine*, tr. W. Cureton. 1861. London: Williams and Norgate.
PE [= P.E.]	*Praeparatio Evangelica*, ed. K. Mras. 1954. *Eusebius. Werke VIII*, GCS 43.1–2. Berlin: Akademie; tr. E. H. Gifford. 1903. Oxford: Clarendon.
Tricennial Oration	*[= Oration in Praise of Constantine]. Oratio de Laudibus Constantini/Tricennatsrede an Constantin*, ed. I. A. Heikel. 1902. *Eusebius. Werke I*, GCS 9. Leipzig: Hinrichs; tr. H. A. Drake. 1976. *In Praise of Constantine*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Eustratius
Presbyter

Vita Eutychii	Ed. C. Laga. 1992. *Eustratii Presbyteri Vita Eutychii patriarchae Constantinopolitani*. Turnhout: Brepols.

Evagrius	[= Evagrius of Pontus; Evagrius Ponticus]
On Thoughts	*Sur les pensées*, ed. and tr. P. Géhin, C. Guillaumont and A. Guillaumont. 1998. SC. Paris: Editions du Cerf; tr. A. Casiday. 2006. London: Routledge.
Praktikos	*Traité pratique, ou, Le moine*, 2 vols., ed. and tr. C. Guillaumont and A. Guillaumont. 1971. SC. Paris: Editions du Cerf; tr. R. E. Sinkewicz. 2003. *Evagrius of Pontus. The Greek Ascetic Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Evagrius
Scholasticus

HE [= h. e.]	*Evagrius Scholasticus, Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen. 1995, GCS NF 4. Berlin: De Gruyter; tr. M. Whitby. 2000. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, TTH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Eznik of Kolb	[= Eznik Kołbacʻi]
Refutation of the Sects	= *De Deo*, ed. L. Mariès and C. Mercier. 1959, PO 23.3–4. Paris: Firmin Didot; tr. M. J. Blanchard *et al.* 1998. *Eznik of Kolb. On God*. Leuven: Peeters.
Felix	
Life of Guthlac	Ed. and tr. B. Colgrave. 1956. *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Firmicus Maternus	
Err. [prof. rel.]	*On the Error of Profane Religions*, ed. and tr. R. Turcan. 1982. *Julius Firmicus Maternus: L'erreur des religions païennes*. Paris: Les belles lettres.
Math.	*Mathesis*, ed. and tr. P. Monat, 3 vols. 1992–1996. Paris: Les belles lettres.
George of Pisidia	
Bellum Avaricum	ed. L. Tartaglia. 1998. *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia*. Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese.
Heraclias	*Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi I*, ed. and tr. A. Pertusi. 1959. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 240–307.
Exp. Pers.	*Expeditio Persica*, in: *Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi I*, ed. and tr. A. Pertusi. 1959. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 84–136.
George Synkellos	[= George Syncellus]
Chron.	*Chronography. The Chronography of George Synkellos*, ed. W. Adler and P. Tuffin. 2002. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Gildas	
De excidio Britanniae	*Gildas. De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, ed. and tr. M. Winterbottom. 1978. Chichester: Phillimore.
Gregory of Tours	
In gloria martyrum	Ed. B. Krusch. 1885. MGH. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum I. Hannover; Munich: MGH; tr. R. van Dam. 1988. *Gregory of Tours. Glory of the Martyrs*. TTH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Hist.	*Historia Francorum*, ed. W. Arndt and B. Krusch. 1884. MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum I. Hannover; Munich: MGH.
Miraculorum liber	*Miracula et opera minora*, ed. B. Krusch. 1969. MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum I.2. Hannover; Munich: MGH.

Heliogabalus	see *Elagabalus*.
Herodotus	
Hist.	*Historiae [= Histories]. Herodoti historiae libri V–IX*, ed. N. G. Wilson. 2015. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hippocrates	
On the Sacred Disease	Hippocrates II, ed. and tr. W. H. S. Jones. 1959. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 127–184.
[Ps.?-] Hippolytus	
Refutation [of all heresies]	*Refutatio omnium heresium*, ed. M. Marcovich. 1986. Berlin: De Gruyter; tr. F. Legge. 1921. New York: Macmillan.
Historia Augusta	Ed. and tr. D. Magie. 1921–1932. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
History of the Monks in Egypt	Ed. A.-J. Festugière. 1961. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes; Latin: E. Schulz-Flügel. 1990. *Tyrannius Rufinus. Historia monachorum*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Iamblichus	
On the Mysteries	*Jamblique. Les mystères d'Égypte*, ed. and tr. E. des Places. 1966. Paris: Les belles lettres.
Ibn Hishām	ʿAbd al-Malik, Sīrat rasūl Allāh, ed. F. Wüstenfeld. 1858–1860. Göttingen. Dieterich'sche Universitätsbuchhandlung; tr. A. Guillaume. 1955. *The Life of Muhammad*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
Irenaeus	
Against Heresies	*Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies*, 8 vols., SC 263, 264, 293, 294, 210, 211, 100, 101, ed. and tr. A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau. 1965–1982. Paris: Edition du Cerf.
Isocrates	
Busiris	[= *Discourse* 11]. Isocrates, *Discourses III*, tr. La Rue van Hook. 1945, LCL. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 100–133.
Jerome	[= Hieronymus Stridonensis]
[Hier.] Chron.	*Hieronymi Chronicon*, in Eusebius, Werke 7, ed. R. Helm. 1913, GCS 24. Leipzig: Hinrichs; see also above under "Eusebius"

Ep.	*Epistulae*, ed. I. Hilberg, 3 vols. 1910–1918, CSEL 54–56. Vienna: F. Tempsky; tr. J. Labourt. 1949–1963. *Lettres*, 8 vols. Paris: Les belles lettres.
De viris illustribus	Ed. and tr. A. Ceresa-Gastaldo. 1988. *Girolamo. Gli uomini illustri*. Florence: Nardini.
John bar Aphtonia	[= John of Edessa, founder of Qenneshre]
Historia	Ed. F. Nau. 1902. "Histoire de Jan Bar Aphtonia," *Revue de l'orient chrétien* 7, 125–126.
John of Beth Aphtonia	
Life of Severus	*Vie de Sévère par Jean de Beith-Aphtonia*, ed. M. A. Kugener. 1904. PO 2.3. Paris: Firmin Didot, 205–264.
John Chrysostom	
In Kalend.	*In Kalendas*, PG 48, 951–956; tr. S. MacDonald. 2010.
Terr. mot.	*De terrae motu. On the earthquake*, PG 50, 713–716.
Against the Jews	*Adversus Iudaeos. Eight homilies against the Jews*, PG 48; tr. P. W. Harkins. 1979. *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
John Climacus	
Ladder of Divine Ascent	Tr. C. Luibheid and R. Norman. 1982. New York: Paulist Press.
John of Ephesus	
HE [= h. e.]	*Ecclesiastical History = The third part of the Ecclesiastical History of John of Ephesus*, ed. E. W. Brooks. 1935–1936, CSCO 105f. Leuven: Peeters; tr. R. Payne Smith. 1860. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Life of Paul the Anchorite	*Lives of the Eastern Saints I*, ed. and tr. E. W. Brooks. 1923. PO 17. Paris: Firmin Didot, 111–118.
John the Lydian	Ioannes Laurentius Lydus
De mens.	*De mensibus*, ed. R. Wünsch. 1898. Leipzig. Teubner.
John Malalas	*Chronographia*, ed. J. Thurn. 2000. CFHB 35. Berlin: De Gruyter; tr. E. Jeffreys *et al.* 1986. *The Chronicle of John Malalas*. Leiden: Brill.
John Moschus	
Pratum	PG 87.3, 2852–3112.
John of Maiuma	[= John Rufus]

Opera	Ed. and tr. F. Nau. 1911. *Jean Rufus évêque de Maïouma. Plérophories. Témoignages et révelations contre le concile de Chalcédoine*, PO 8.1. Paris: Firmin Didot; tr. C. B. Horn and R. R. Phenix Jr. 2008. *John Rufus. The Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem and the Monk Romanus*. Atlanta, GA: SBL.
Jos. Styl.	Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite. *Chronicle*, tr. F. R. Trombley and J. W. Watt. TTH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press; ed. and tr. P. Martin. 1876. Leipzig: Hinrichs.
Josephus	[= Flavius Josephus; Josephus Flavius]
Ap.	*Contra Apionem [= Against Apion]. Flavius Josèphe, Contre Apion*, ed. T. Reinach. 1930. Paris: Société edition Les belles lettres; tr. J. M. G. Barclay. 2007. Leiden: Brill.
Ant.	*Antiquitates iudaicae*, ed. B. Niese. 1892. Berlin: Weidmann; tr. H. St. John Thackeray *et al.* 1930–1995. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 7 vols., LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Jewish War	*Bellum Iudaicum/The Jewish War*, ed. and tr. H. St. John Thackeray. 1997, 3 vols., LCL 203, 487, 210. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Julian	[Roman emperor; = "Julian the Apostate"]
Misop.	*Misopogon or Beard Hater*, in: *The Works of the Emperor Julian II*, ed. W. C. Wright. 1913, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Ep.	*Letters*, in: *The Works of the Emperor Julian, II*, ed. W. C. Wright. 1913, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Justin Martyr	
Apology	*Justin Martyr. Apologies*, ed. and tr. D. Minns and P. Parvis. 2009. OECT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Dial.	*Dialogue with Trypho. Dialogue avec Tryphon*, ed. and tr. Ph. Bobichon. 2003. Paradosis 47.1–2. Fribourg: Academic Press.
Justinian	
Nov.	*Novellae Constitutiones. Corpus Iuris Civilis III*, ed. R. Schoell and W. Kroll. 1954. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Koriwn
    Life of Maštocʿ   *Koriwns Biographie des Mesrop Maštocʿ*, tr. G. Winkler. 1994. OCA 245. Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute.

Lactantius
    Div. Inst.   *Divinae Institutiones*, ed. S. Brandt and G. Laubmann. 1890. CSEL 19. Vienna: F. Tempsky; tr. A. Bowen and P. Garnsey. 2003. *Lactantius. Divine Institutes*. TTH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

    De Mort. Pers.   *De Mortibus Persecutorum. The Deaths of the Persecutors*, ed. J. L. Creed. 1995. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

    De ira Dei   Ed. S. Brandt and G. Laubmann. 1897. CSEL 27. Vienna: F. Tempsky.

Legenda aurea   Ed. G. P. Maggioni. 1998. Florence: Società Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino.

Leo the Great
    Ep.   *Epistulae*, ed. E. Schwartz. 1932. ACO 2.1. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Letter of Aristeas   Ed. R. J. S. Shutt. 1985. In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. J.H. Charlesworth, 7–34. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Lex Frisionum   MGH Fontes Iuris XII, ed. K. A. Eckhardt and A. Eckhardt. 1982. Hannover: Hahn.

Libanius
    Ep./Or.   *Letters and Orations*, in: *Libanii opera*, ed. R. Förster. 1903–1927. Leipzig: Teubner; tr. A. F. Norman. 1969. 1977. 1993. *Libanius: Selected Orations*, 2 vols., LCL 451.452; *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters*, LCL 478. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Liber Pontificalis   Ed. L. Duchesne, 2 vols. 1886–1892. Paris: Boccard; tr. R. Davis. 2000. *The Book of Pontiffs*, 2nd ed., TTH Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Life of St. Antony   See "Athanasius, *Life of Antony*"

Life of the Kings   *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*. In *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, vol. 1, ed. S. Qauxch'ishvili. 1955. Tbilisi; cf. St. H. Rapp Jr. 2014. *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes*. Farnham: Ashgate, 105–260.

Life of Vakhtang	*Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali* [in Georgian], ed. A. Sardzveladze *et al.* 1986. Tbilisi: Mecniereba; tr. R. W. Thomson. 1996. *Rewriting Caucasian History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 153–251.
Livy	*Titi Livi Ab Urbe Condita*, vol. 1, ed. R. Maxwell. 1974; vol. 2, ed. R. S. Conway and C. F. Walters. 1919; vol. 3, ed. C. F. Walters and R. S. Conway. 1929; vol. 4, ed. R. S. Conway and S. K. Johnson. 1935; vol. 5, ed. A. H. McDonald. 1965. OECT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Lucian	
Revivisc.	*Reviviscentes sive Piscator*, in: *Luciani Opera*, tom. III, ed. M. D. MacLeod. 1980. Oxford: Oxford University Press; *Vitarum auctio sive Piscator*, ed. J. Itzkowitz. 1992. Leipzig: Teubner; tr, A. M. Harmon. 1919. *Lucian, volume 2*, LCL 54. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 450–512.
Peregr.	*De morte Peregrini*, in *Luciani Opera*, tom. III, ed. M. D. MacLeod. 1980. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 188–205; tr. A. M. Harmon. 1936. *Lucian, volume 5*, LCL 302. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 3–52.
De dea Syria	*Lucian, On the Syrian Goddess*, ed. J. L. Lightfoot. 2003. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Lover of Lies	*The Lover of Lies. Philopseudes*, in *Luciani Opera*, tom. II, ed. M. D. MacLeod. 1974. Oxford: Oxford University Press; tr. A. M. Harmon. 1960. *Lucian, volume 3*, LCL 130, 319–382.
Macrobius	
Saturnalia	*Macrobii Ambrosii Theodosii Saturnalia*, ed. R. Kaster. 2011. OCT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Majorian	
Novella	*Novellae Majoriani*, in: *Leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, ed. P. M. Meyer. 1905. Berlin: Weidmann; tr. C. Pharr *et al.* 1952. *The Theodosian Code and Novels* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Malal.	Malalas [see "John Malalas"]
Marcus Aurelius	
Meditations	*Communings with Himself*, ed. and tr. C. R. Haines. 1916. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Marinus

    Life of Proclus   *Marino di Neapoli. Vita di Proclo*, ed. R. Masullo. 1985. Naples: D'Aurio; tr. M. Edwards. 2000. *Neoplatonic Saints*, TTH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 58–116.

Mark the Deacon

    Life of Porphyry   *Marci Diaconi Vita Porphyrii Episcopi Gazensis*, ed. Soc. Phil. Bon. Sodal. 1895. Leipzig: Teubner; tr. G. F. Hill. 1913. *The Life of Porphyry Bishop of Gaza by Mark the Deacon*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Martin of Braga

    De corr. rust.   *De correctione rusticorum. On the reform of rustics*, PL 72; *Contro le superstizioni: Catechesi al popolo*, ed. M. Naldini. 1991. Florence: Nardini; tr. C. W. Barlow. 1969. *Iberian Fathers*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Melito

    On Pascha   *Melito of Sardis. On Pascha and Fragments*, ed. and tr. S. G. Hall. 1979. OECT. Oxford: Clarendon.

Mich. Syr.   Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* = *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, 4 vols., ed. and tr. J.-B. Chabot. 1899–1910.

Minucius Felix

    Oct.   *Octavius*, ed. K. Halm. 1867. CSEL 2. Vienna: F. Tempsky.

Miracula S. Demetrii   *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius et la pénétration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, 2 vols., ed. P. Lemerle. 1979–1981. Paris: ECNRS.

Miracles of St. Thecla   *Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle*, ed. and tr. G. Dagron. 1978. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes.

Mishnah   *The Mishnah. A New Translation*, tr. J. Neusner. 1988. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Mokcevay Kartlisay   Tr. C. B. Lerner. 2004. *The Wellspring of Georgian Historiography. The Early Medieval Historical Chronicle "The Conversion of Kartli" and the "Life of St. Nino."* London: Bennett and Bloom; St. H. Rapp. 1999. "Pre-Christian History in the Georgian Shatberdi Codex," *Le Muséon* 112, 79–128.

Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio	Ed. M. Hyamson. 1913. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Nemesius	
Nat. Hom.	*De natura hominis*, ed. M. Morani. 1987. Leipzig: Teubner; tr. R. W. Sharples and P. J. van der Eijk. 2008. TTH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Optatus	[Optatus of Mileve]
Against the Donatists	*S. Optati Milevitani Libri VII*, ed. K. Ziwsa. 1893, CSEL 26. Vienna: F. Tempsky; tr. M. Edwards. 1997. *Optatus. Against the Donatists*. TTH. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Origen	
On First Principles	*Traité des principes*, 5 vols., ed. and tr. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti. 1978–1984. SC. Paris: Editions du Cerf.
Against Celsus	Ed. P. Koetschau. 1899. GCS 2–3. Leipzig: Hinrichs.
Oros.	Orosius, *Historiarum adversum paganos libri vii*, ed. K. Zangemeister. 1882. CSEL 5. Vienna: F. Tempsky.
Ovid	
Met.	*Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. Tarrant. 2004. Oxford: Oxford University Press; tr. F. J. Miller, LCL, 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Palladius	
Lausiac History	*La storia lausiaca*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, tr. M. Marchiesi. 1974. Milan: Mondadori.
Panegyrici Latini	Ed. R. A. B. Mynors. 1964. Oxford. Oxford University Press; tr. C. E. V. Nixon and B. S. Rodgers. 1994. *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Papyri Oxyrhynchus	*POxy Oxyrhynchus Online*: www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk
Paul Helladicus	
Vita Theognii	Ed. I van den Gheyn. 1892. *Analecta Bollandiana* 10, 78–113.
Paulinus [of Nola]	
Carm.	*Carmina*, ed. G. Hartel. 1894. CSEL 30. Vienna: F. Tempsky; F. Dolveck. 2015. CCSL 21. Turnhout: Brepols; tr. P. G. Walsh. 1975. *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*. ACW. New York: Paulist Press.

Pelagius

    Ep. ad Dem.   *Epistola ad Demetriadem*, PL 30, 15–45.

Periplus Maris Erythraei   Ed. and tr. L. Casson. 1989. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Peter Chrysologus

    Sermons   *San Pietro Crisologo. Sermoni*, 3 vols., ed. G. Banterle, R. Benericetti *et al.* 1996–1997. Rome: Città Nuova.

Philo   [= Philo of Alexandria; Philo Iudaeus]

    De fuga   *De fuga et inventione*, in: Philonis Alexandrini Opera quae supersunt, vol. 3, ed. P. Wendland. 1962. Berlin: De Gruyter.

    Contemplative Life   *De vita contemplativa, in: Philonis Alexandrini Opera quae supersunt*, vol. 6, ed. P. Wendland. 1962. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Philostorgius

    HE [= h. e.]   *Ecclesiastical History. = Philostorgius. Kirchengeschichte*, ed. J. Bidez, rev. F. Winkelmann. 1981. Berlin: Akademie; tr. Ph. R. Amidon. 2007. *Philostorgius. Church History*. Leiden: Brill.

Philostratus

    Vita Apol.   *Vita Apollonii* [= *Life of Apollonius*], in: *Flavii Philostrati Opera* I, ed. C.L. Kayser. 1870. Leipzig: Teubner; tr. F. C. Conybeare, LCL, 2 vols. 1912. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

    Vitae Sophist.   *Vitae Sophistarum. Lives of the Sophists*, ed. R. S. Stefec. 2016. OCT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Phot.   Photius, *Bibliotheca*

    [Bibl.] cod.   *Photius. Bibliothèque*, 9 vols., ed. R. Henry. 1959–1991. Paris: Les belles lettres.

Plato

    Phaedo   *Plato. Phaedo*, ed. C. J. Rowe. 1993. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; tr. D. Gallop 1975. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

    Phaedr.   *Phaedrus*, in: *Plato, Opera*, vol. 2, ed. J. Burnet. 1922. OCT. Oxford: Clarendon.

    Theait.   *Theaitetus*, in: *Plato, Opera*, vol. 1, ed. E. A. Duke *et al.*, OCT. 1995. Oxford: Oxford University Press; tr. M. F. Burnyeat (after M. J. Levett). 1990. *The Theaitetus of Plato*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

Laws	*Plato, Nomoi/Leges/Laws*, ed. and tr. R. G. Bury. 1967–1968, 2 vols., LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Tim.	*Timaeus*, in: *Plato, Opera*, vol. 4, ed. J. Burnet. 1903, OCT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Crat.	*Cratylus*, in: *Plato, Opera*, vol. 1, ed. E. A. Duke *et al.* 1995. OCT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Republic	Ed. and tr. P. Shorey. 1969. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Symposium	Ed. and tr. T. Griffith. 1989. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Pliny	[= Pliny the Elder]
Hist. Nat.	*Historia naturalis. Natural History*, 10 vols., ed. and tr. H. Rackham, W. H. S. Jones and D. E. Eichholz. 1949–1954. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Pliny	[= Pliny the Younger]
Letters/Ep.	*C. Plini Caecili Secundi Epistularum Libri Decem*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors. 1963. OCT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Plotinus	
Enn.	*Enneads* = *Plotini Opera*, 3 vols., ed. H. R. Schwyzer. 1951–1973. Leiden: Brill.
Gnost.	*Against the Gnostics* [= *Plotinus, Ennead II 9 "Against the Gnostics"*], in: *Plotini Opera*, 3 vols., ed. H. R. Schwyzer. 1951–1973. Leiden: Brill; tr. A. H. Armstrong. 1966, LCL 441. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 224–300; N. Spanu. 2012. Leuven: Peeters, 1–51.
Plutarch	
Alex.	= Plutarch. *Lives*, vol. 7, 223–440, tr. B. Perrin. 1919. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Obsolesc.	*The Obsolescence of Oracles*, in: *Plutarch, Moralia* V, ed. and tr. F. C. Babbitt. 1936, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 347–501.
Nicias	= Plutarch. *Lives*, vol. 3, 207–310, tr. B. Perrin. 1916. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Porphyry [of Tyre]

Letter to Anebo	*Porfirio. Lettera ad Anebo*, ed. A. R. Sodano. 1958. Naples: L'Arte Tipografica.
On the Chaldaean Oracles	*De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*, ed. G. Wolff. 1856. Berlin: Springer.
Against the Christians	*Porphyrios. Contra Christianos*, ed. and tr. M. Becker. 2015. Berlin: De Gruyter.
To Gaurus	*On the Ensoulment of Embryos*, tr. J. Wilberding. 2014. ACA. London: Bloomsbury.
To Marcella	*Vie de Pythagore. Lettre à Marcella*, ed. and tr. E. des Places. 1982. Paris: Edition des belles lettres.
On Abstinence	*On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, tr. G. Clark. 2000. ACA. London: Bloomsbury.
On the Cave of the Nymphs	*Porphyrii philosophi Platonici opusula selecta*, ed. A. Nauck. 1887. Stuttgart and Leipzig. Teubner, 53–81, tr. R. Lamberton. 1983. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press.

Proclus

On Plato's Republic	*Procli Diadochi in Platonis rem publicam commentarii*, 2 vols., ed. W. Kroll. 1899–1901. Leipzig: Teubner.

Procopius [of Caesarea]

On the Wars	= *History of the Wars*, 5 vols., ed. and tr. H. B. Dewing. 1914–1928, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Secret History	*Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, vol. III.1, ed. J. Haury. 1905. Leipzig: Teubner, 1905; tr. A. Kaldellis. 2010. *Procopius. The Secret History*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
De bello Vandalico	= *History of the Wars 3–4*, vol. 2., ed. and tr. Dewing. 1914–1928.
De bello Gothico	= *History of the Wars 5–8*, vols. 3–5, ed. and tr. Dewing. 1914–1928.

Procopius of Gaza

Epist.	*Epistulae et Declamationes*, ed. A. Garzya and R. J. Loenertz. 1963. Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag.

Prudentius

Peristeph.	*Peristephanon*, in *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Carmina*, ed. M. P. Cunningham. 1966. CCSL 126, 251–389. Turnhout: Brepols.

Regula Magistri	Ed. and tr. A. de Vogüé. 1964–1965. *La Règle du Maître*, SC 105–107. Paris: Edition du Cerf.
Rimbert	
Vita Ansgari	*Vita Anskarii auctore Rimberto*, ed. G. Waitz. 1884. MGH. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum. Hannover; Munich: MGH.
Rufinus	
HE [= h. e.]	*Ecclesiastical History [= Church History]*, in: *Eusebius, Die Kirchengeschichte*, 3 vols., ed. T. Mommsen. 1903–1905, GCS 9. Leipzig: Hinrichs.
Sallustius	
De deis et mundo	*Saloustios. Des dieux et du monde*, ed. and tr. G. Rochefort. 1960. Paris: Les belles lettres.
Salvian of Marseille	
De gubernatione Dei	Ed. and tr. G. Lagarrigue. 1975. *Salvien. Oeuvres 2*, SC 220. Paris: Edition du Cerf.
Sayings of the Desert Fathers	Ed. and tr. B. Ward. rev. ed. 1984. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications; for specific editions see CPG 3, 5560–5615; see also PG 65, 71–440.
Sen. Rhet.	Seneca Rhetor [= Seneca the Elder], *Controversiae et Suasoriae*, 2 vols., ed. M. Winterbottom. 1974. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Shābuhragān	*The Two Principles of the Shābuhragān*, ed. and tr. D. N. MacKenzie. 1979–1980. "Mani's *Šābuhragān*." *BSOAS* 42, 500–534; 43, 288–310.
Socrates	[= Socrates Scholasticus]
HE [= h. e.]	*Ecclesiastical History [= Church History] = Sokrates, Kirchengeschichte*, ed. G. C. Hansen. 1995. GCS NF 1. Berlin: De Gruyter; tr. A. C. Zenos, NPNF.
Sozomen	
HE [= h. e.]	*Ecclesiastical History [= Church History] = Sozomenos, Kirchengeschichte*, ed. J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen. 1995, GCS NF 4. Berlin: De Gruyter; tr. E. Walford. 1855. *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen*. London: Bohn.
Strabo	
Geogr.	*Geographiká. The Geography of Strabo*, 8 vols., ed. H. L. Jones. 1917–1932, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Suetonius

    Nero   Ed. B. H. Warmington. 1999. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press.

Sulpicius Severus

    Life of St Martin   *Vie de saint Martin*, 3 vols., ed. and tr. J. Fontaine. 1967–1969, 2nd ed. 2004ff., SC 133–135. Paris: Edition du Cerf.

    Chron.   *Chronica*, ed. K. Halm. 1866. CSEL 1. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1–105.

Suda   *Suidae Lexicon*, 3 vols., ed. E. Portus and L. Kuster. 1705. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Suda online at www.stoa.org/sol

Symm.   [= Q. Aurelius Symmachus]

    Rel.   *Relationes*, in: *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt*, ed. O. Seeck. 1884, repr. 2001. MGH AA 6.1. Berlin: Weidmann; Munich: MGH; tr. R. H. Barrow. 1973. *Prefect and Emperor: The Relationes of Symmachus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tabari

    Hist.   *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari*, tr. Th. Nöldeke. 1879. Leiden: Brill.

Tacitus

    Ann.   *Annales / Annals*, ed. C. D. Fisher. 1963, OCT. Oxford: Oxford University Press; tr. M. Hutton and R. M. Ogilvie. 1914–1937, LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

    Germania   = *De origine et situ Germanorum liber*, ed. A. Önnerfors. 1983. Stuttgart: Teubner, tr. J. B. Rives. 1999. *Tacitus: Germania*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

    Hist.   *Historiae*, ed. C. D. Fischer. 1963. Oxford: Clarendon; tr. C. H. Moore. 1929–1931. *Tacitus. Histories*, 2 vols., LCL Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tatian

    Or.   *Gegen falsche Götter und falsche Bildung. Tatian, Rede an die Griechen*, ed. H.-G. Nesselrath. 2016. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Tertullian

> *On idololatry*   *De idololatria*, ed. and tr. P. G. van der Nat *et al.* 1987. Leiden: Brill.

> *Prescription*   *Prescription against Heretics/De praescriptione haereticorum*, ed. R. F. Refoulé. 1954. CCSL 1. Turnhout: Brepols; tr. P. Holmes. 1869. ANF 3.

> *Apology*   *Q. S. Fl. Tertulliani Apologeticum*, ed. E. Dekkers. 1954. CCSL 1. Turnhout: Brepols; tr. S. Thelwall. 1869. ANF 3.

Testament of Solomon   Ed. C. C. McCown. 1922. Leipzig: Hinrichs; tr. D. C. Duling. 1983. *In The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha I*, ed. J. Charlesworth, 935–987. New York: Doubleday.

Theodore of Petra

> *Opera*   Ed. H. Usener. 1890. *Der hl. Theodosius: Schriften des Theodoros und Kyrillos*. Leipzig: Hinrichs.

Theodore Lector   [= Theodorus Anagnostes]

> *HE [= h. e.]*   *Ecclesiastical History [= Church History]. Theodorus Anagnostes, Historia Ecclesiastica, Kirchengeschichte*, ed. G. C. Hansen. 1995. GCS NF 6. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Theodore Syncellus   *Homilia de obsidione Constantinopolis*, ed. L. Sternbach. 1900. Cracov: Rozprauy Akademii Umiejftnosci, uydzjal filologicyy, ser. II, vol. XV, pp. 1–38.

Theodoret   [= Theodoret of Cyr]

> *HE [= h. e.]*   *Ecclesiastical History [= Church History]. Theodoreti Cyri Historia Ecclesiastica, Kirchengeschichte*, ed. G. C. Hansen. 1998. GCS NF 5. Berlin: De Gruyter; tr. J. B. Jackson. 1892. NPNF II.3.

> *Historia religiosa*   PG 82; *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, 2 vols., ed. and tr. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen. 1977–1979. SC 234.257. Paris: Edition du Cerf.

Theophanes   [= Theophanes Confessor]

> *Chron.*   *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor. 1885. Leipzig: Teubner; tr. C. Mango and R. Scott. 1997. *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Theophanes of Byzantium

> *Hist.*   *Historici Graeci Minores I*, ed. L. Dindorf. 1870. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 446–449; *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum IV*, ed. L. Müller. 1851. Paris: Firmin Didot, 270–271.

Theophyl. Sim.	Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor. 1887. Leipzig: Teubner; tr. M. and M. Whitby. 1986. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Thuc.	Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 4 vols., tr. Ch. Forster Smith. 1919. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Valerius Maximus	*Memorable Doings and Sayings*, 2 vols., ed. and tr. D. R. Shackleton Bailey. LCL. 2000. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Virgil	P. Vergilius Maro
Aeneid	*P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors. 1969. OCT. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Vita Aniani	*Vita Aniani episcopi* Aurelianensis, in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici*, ed. B. Krusch. 1896. MGH. Scriptorum rerum Merovingiarum tomus III. Hannover; Munich: MGH.
Vita Symeonis Jun.	Ed. P. van den Ven. 1962. *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521–592)*. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes.
Vita Syriaca Symeonis	*Syriac Life of Simeon*, ed. R. Doran. 1992. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 101–198
Xenophon	
Hellenica	2 vols., tr. C. L. Brownson. 1919. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Zacharias	[= Zacharias of Gaza]
Life [of Severus]	*Sévère, Patriarche d'Antioche: textes syriaques*, ed. M.-A. Kugener. 2008. PO 2.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907); tr. L. Ambjörn. 2008. *The Life of Severus by Zachariah of Mytilene*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.
Zacharias	[= Zachariah Rhetor; Zacharias Scholasticus]
HE [= h. e.]	*[= Ecclesiastical History]. Historia Ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, ed. and tr. E. W. Brooks. 1953, 1965, CSCO, 83–84. Leuven: Peeters.
Zosimus	*[Nea historia = New History]. Zosime. Histoire nouvelle*, 3 vols., ed. and tr. F. Paschoud. 1971–1989. Paris: Les belles lettres.

List of Abbreviations

ACA   *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*. London: Bloomsbury
ACO   *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*. Berlin: De Gruyter
ACW   Ancient Christian Writers
ANF   *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
ANRW   *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. H. Temporini
         and W. Haase. 1972–. Berlin: De Gruyter.
APF   *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*
ARG   *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*
BHG   *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, 3rd ed., 3 vols., ed. F. Halkin.
         1957. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes.
BHL   *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, 2nd
         ed. with supplement, 3 vols., ed. H. Delehaye. 1911. Brussels:
         Société des Bollandistes.
BHO   *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis*, ed. P. Peeters. 1910. Subsidia
         Hagiographica 10. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes.
BJRL   *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
BMGS   *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BSOAS   *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BT   Babylonian Talmud
ByzZ   *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CCSG   *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*. Turnhout: Brepols.
CCSL   *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*. Turnhout: Brepols.
CH   *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A.-J. Festugière and A. D. Nock. 1945–
         1954. Paris: Les belles lettres.
CIC   *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, ed. Th. Mommsen and P. Krueger. 1870.
         Berlin: Weidmann.
CIL   *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische
         Akademie der Wissenschaften.

CJ   *Codex Justinianus*, ed. P. Krueger. 1877. Berlin: Weidmann.
CMC   *Cologne Mani Codex*, ed. L. Koenen and C. Roemer. 1988. *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex*. Opladen: Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
CPG   *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, ed. M. Geerard, F. Glorie *et al.* 1974ff. Turnhout: Brepols.
CPL   *Clavis Patrum Latinorum*, 3rd ed., ed. E. Dekkers *et al.* 1995. Turnhout: Brepols.
CSCO   Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL   Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSHB   Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
DOP   *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
FrGrHist   *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Leiden: Brill.
GCS   Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
HE   Historia ecclesiastica
HTR   *Harvard Theological Review*
IG   *Inscriptiones Graecae*. Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
ILS   *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 3 vols., ed. H. Dessau. 1892–1916. Berlin: Weidmann.
JAAR   *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAC   *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JAJ   *Journal of Ancient Judaism*
JANER   *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*
JAOS   *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JECS   *Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JHI   *Journal of the History of Ideas*
JLA   *Journal of Late Antiquity*
JLARC   *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture*
JÖB   *Jahrbuch der österreichishen Byzantinistik*
JPS   Jewish Publication Society
JRA   *Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS   *Journal of Roman Studies*
JSNT   *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JTS   *Journal of Theological Studies*
JWH   *Journal of World History*
LIMC   *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, ed. H. C. Ackermann, J.-R. Gisler. 1981ff. Zürich: Artemis.
MGH AA   *Monumenta Germaniae Historia Auctores Antiquissimi*
NETS   *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright. 2007. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

NHC	*Nag Hammadi Codex* I–XIII, tr. M. W. Meyer. 2009. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures.* New York: HarperOne.
NHMS	*Nag Hammadi and Manichaean studies*
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
NTS	*Novum Testamentum Supplements*
OCA	*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*
OCT	Oxford Classical Texts
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OLA	*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*
OLD	*Oxford Latin Dictionary*
PAB	*Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge*
PG	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne. 1857–1866. Paris.
PGM	*Papyri Graecae Magicae. The Greek Magical Papyri*, tr. H.-D. Betz. 1986. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
PL	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne. 1844–1855. Paris.
POxy	Papyri Oxyrhynchus
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*
PS	Paulus, *Sententiae*. In *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Digesta, Pauli Sententiae*, ed. A. Watson. 1985. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RIB	*The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, ed. R. G. Collingwood, R. B. Wright *et al.* 1965ff. Oxford: Clarendon; online: https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*. 1941–. Paris: Editions du Cerf.
STAC	*Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity*
StPatr	*Studia Patristica*
Suppl. Epigr. Graec.	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. 1923–. Leiden: Brill.
SVF	*Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, ed. H. F. A. von Arnim. 1903–. Stuttgart: Teubner.
ThesCRA	*Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*. 2004–. Los Angeles, CA: Paul Getty Museum.
TS	*Texts and Studies*
TTH	*Translated Texts for Historians*
TU	*Texte und Untersuchungen*

VigChr	*Vigiliae Christianae*
WUNT	*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*
ZAC/JAC	*Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der älteren Kirche*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*
ZRG	*Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*

Map 1 The Western Mediterranean and the Celtic and Germanic North and West ca. sixth century CE; created by Kirsty Harding

Map 2   The Nile, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Arabia; created by Kirsty Harding
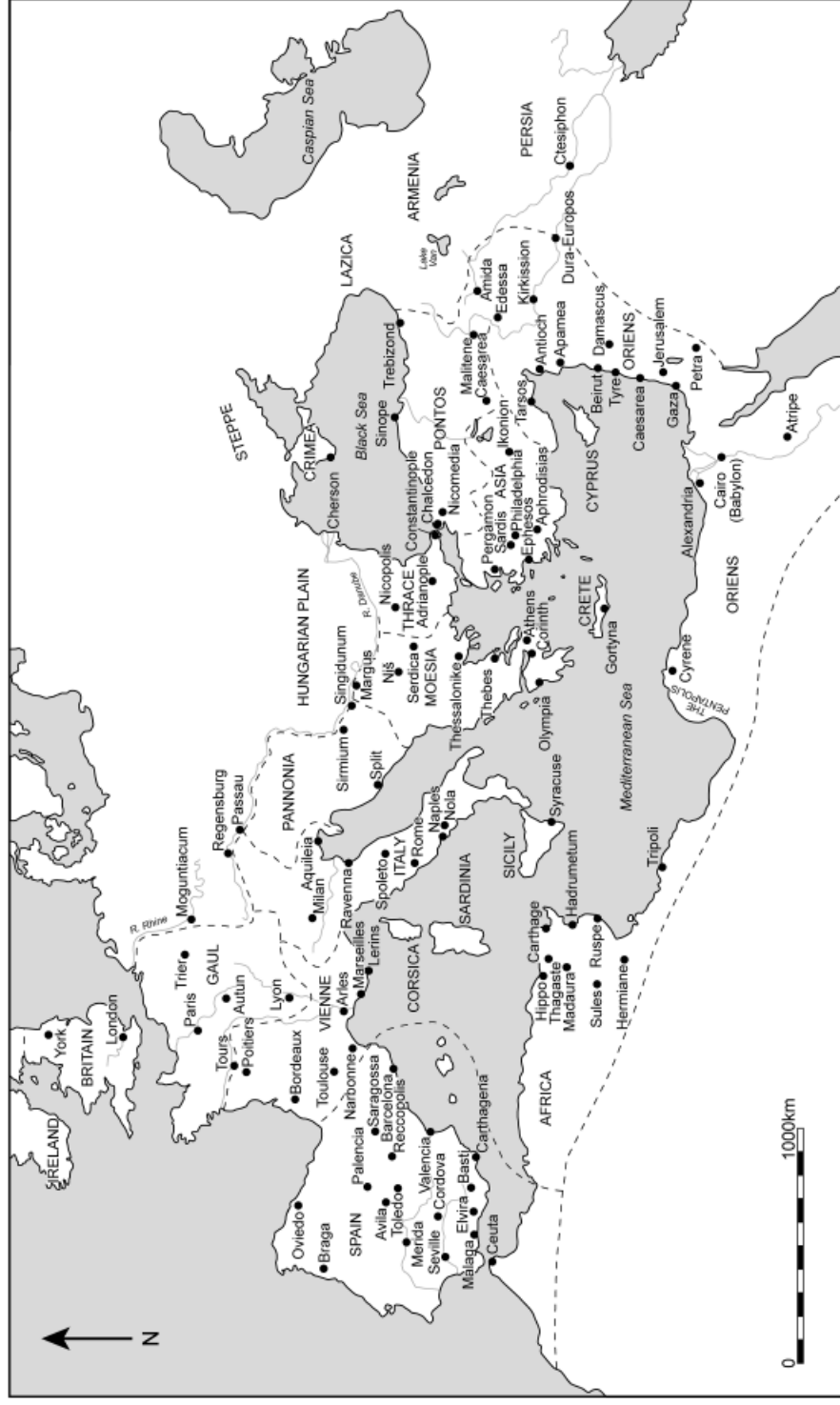
Map 3 Cities, regions and borders of the later Roman empire; created by Kirsty Harding
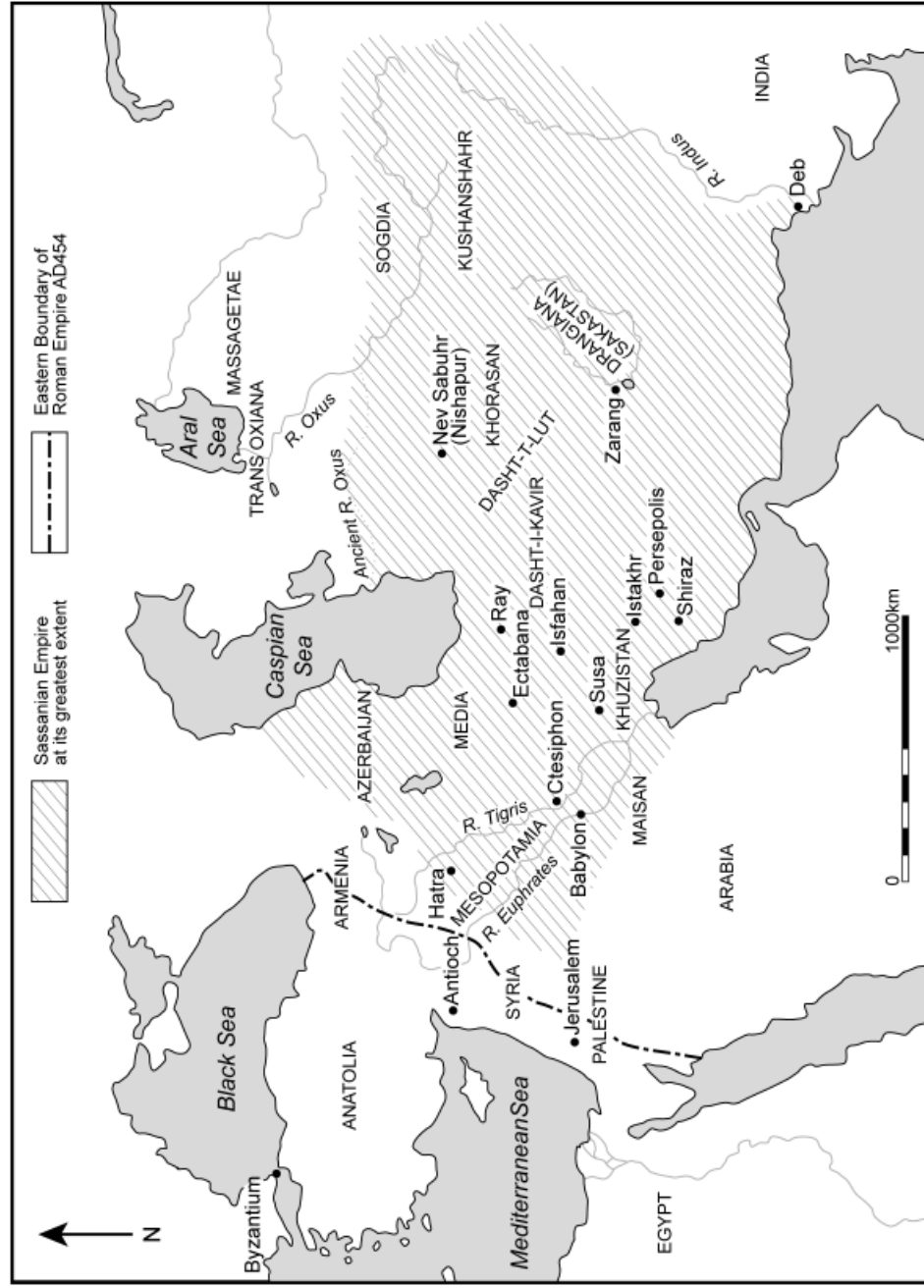
Map 4 The Sassanian empire: places, regions, and borders; created by Kirsty Harding
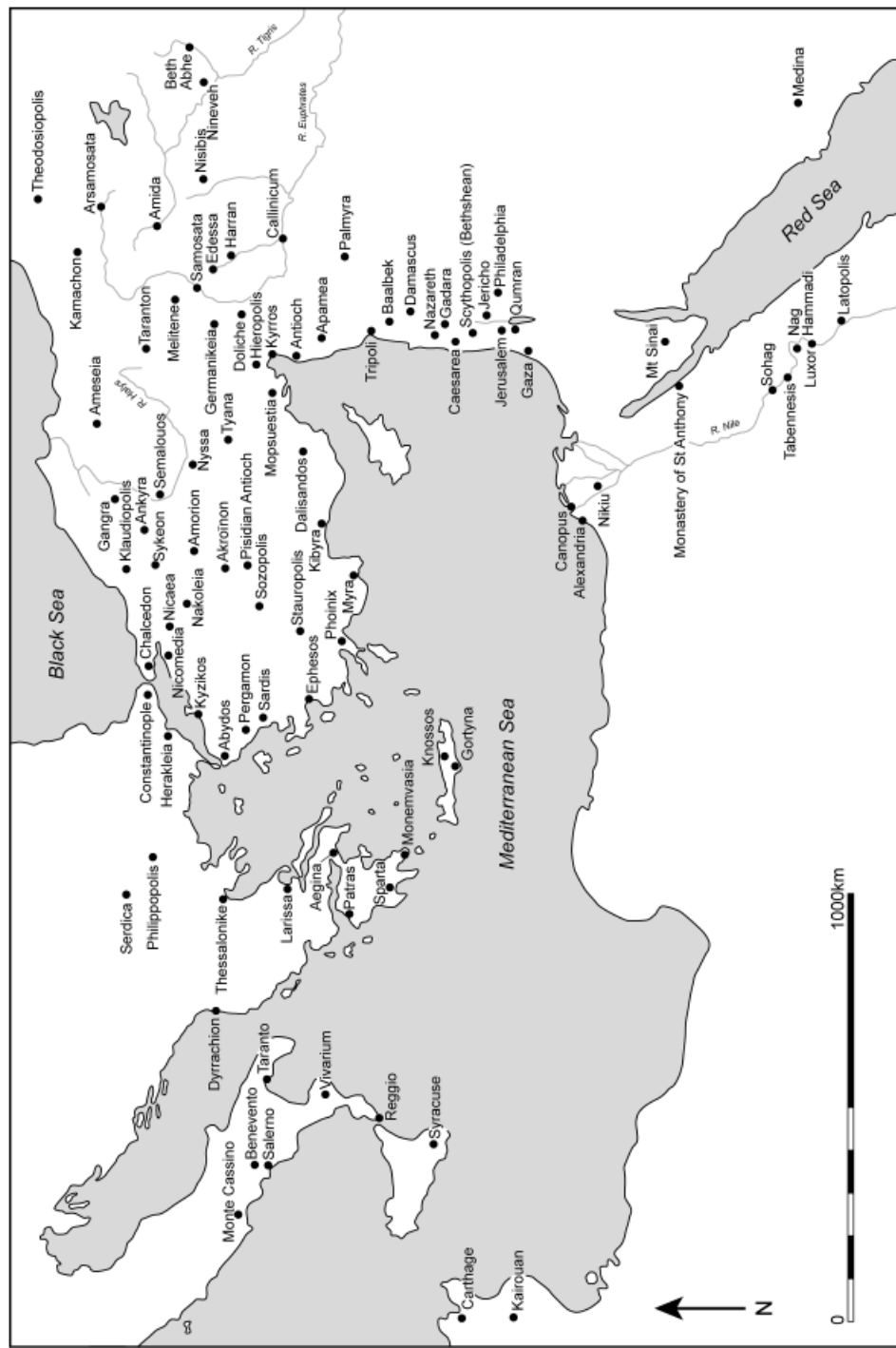
Map 5 The "Greek east" with Southern Italy, Syria, Egypt, and Palestine; created by Kirsty Harding

Introduction

Nicholas J. Baker-Brian and Josef Lössl

Studying Religion in Late Antiquity

Despite tendencies in some recent scholarship to downplay the role of religion in Late Antiquity (e.g. Ward-Perkins 2005: 169–183) a strong case remains for seeing religion as central to apprehending the defining features and broader historical significance of the period (for a nuanced approach contrasting with that of Ward-Perkins, see Clark 2004: 1–15 and 2011: 41–77). One of the principal aims of the present volume is to reinforce this association by clarifying both established and recent trends in scholarly assessments of the religions of Late Antiquity, and also to showcase new approaches and ideas in a period that is now at the forefront of historical studies (Lizzi Testa 2017). The majority of chapters in this volume employ what has come to be known as the "long Late Antiquity" (Cameron 2002; Marcone 2008; for reactions to this periodization and the idea of a "short Late Antiquity," see Lizzi Testa 2017: xxxiii–xxxviii; and Inglebert 2017: 215–227), an expression that demarcates a historical span stretching from the second century to the eighth century of the Common Era (exemplified by Brown 1971). Indeed, the influence of religious history lies squarely behind the establishment of this chronology (see Thomas Hunt in Chapter 1 of the present volume, for the broader debates). The acknowledgment of Islam as a religion of Late Antiquity—based in part on the "durability" (see Aziz Al-Azmeh in Chapter 16) of the influence of eastern Roman imperial structures on the identity and concerns of the early Caliphates—has expanded

both received chronologies and geographies for thinking and speaking about the post-classical world in its various ideological guises (Cameron 2003), as opposed to regarding Islam's emergence as marking a definite break with the heritage of the classical past (see the pertinent remarks by Johnson 2012: xv; and Lizzi Testa 2017: xxix–xxx). Late Antiquity is widely recognized as a period of major significance in world history (see Humphries 2017) where, in contrast to the concerns that had previously framed the study of the later Roman period (e.g. the decline of the western empire; cf. Díaz 2017), it is cultural matters that now lie front and center in the formulation of "the new Late Antiquity" (Ward-Perkins 2005: 176–183). Religion as a cultural form is regarded as a key precipitant in transforming events, identities, and attitudes of the time. During Late Antiquity religion was both everywhere and nowhere—as it was in other periods of the ancient world—in the sense that there were very few borders to delimit it (Lincoln 2012: 73; see also Rüpke 2014: 35–51). Critics who bemoan the "sacralization" of Late Antiquity do so because it appears to place the focus solely on cultural continuity instead of societal decline brought about by the collapse of polities (seemingly) as a result of external threats, beyond imperial frontiers (Ward-Perkins 2005; in response, see Brown 2013: xxx–xxxii; also, Howard-Johnston 2010: 517–530). Yet attentive analyses of the formation and development of the religions of Late Antiquity indicate that older ideas about "decline" are superficially (at least) reinforced in some locations of the late antique world, but also ramified by the complex processes involved in reimagining religious identities and societal habits in worlds with narrowing horizons (see Tom O'Loughlin in Chapter 4 of this volume).

The overall impression of the contributions in this volume, however, is that Late Antiquity is a moveable feast. It is a period that stimulates a range of highly creative scholarship largely as a result of an ongoing (and admittedly essentializing) discourse about which historical typologies may be said to characterize Late Antiquity. Indeed, as the case of Judaism in this volume demonstrates (Chapter 12), received judgments about the transformative features traditionally associated with later stages of the period are being appropriated in order to recast the chronological parameters for Judaism's place in Late Antiquity, which in turn is having an influence on hitherto settled ideas about periodization. It is an indication of the dynamic nature of late antique studies that the two religions—Judaism, and Islam—previously marginalized by Christocentric ("Patristic") preoccupations of the post-classical period and subjected to orientalizing approaches, are now at the forefront of late antique scholarship and are reshaping trends in research in increasingly imaginative ways (see Chapters 8, 12, and 16 by Zellentin, Patmore, and Al-Azmeh, respectively). As the following chapters illustrate

then the study of the religions of Late Antiquity is an inclusive endeavor: no one religion has precedence over another. Furthermore, the contributions in this volume demonstrate that no one region or empire can now stake a claim to being the center of the late antique world. The current prioritization of religion in the study of Late Antiquity does not, therefore, represent a revival of earlier paradigms such as the "Age of Faith" (Ward-Perkins 2005: 172) for which the only context is religion itself. Rather, the chapters presented here integrate the study of religion alongside research into *inter alia* ancient imperial systems, trade, education, social networks, concepts of embodiment, health and medicine, and popular culture. The chapters in this *Companion* thereby collectively acknowledge the unique role taken by religion as a system of culture in the period, a role concerned with "informing, inflecting, integrating, stabilizing, even (at times) controlling and determining all [other systems]" (Lincoln 2012: 73). Numerous contributions in this *Companion* also discuss the influence that the study of the religions of Late Antiquity has had on the formation of the academic disciplines of theology, religious studies, classics, ancient history, art history, and medieval history. The chapter by Thomas Hunt (Chapter 1), which follows this introduction, surveys the role that the academic study of Late Antiquity has played in the emergence and development of humanistic discourses about religion(s). In light of the discussions covered in this *Companion* then, it is apparent that the chronological, geographical, and conceptual boundaries of Late Antiquity will continue to shift for very many more years to come.

The Structure of this Volume

The present volume is organized into three main sections. Part I ("Historical and Geographical Approaches") comprises a series of chapters surveying the principal geographical divisions of the late antique world. It includes a number of chapters that survey familiar divisions, for example, Tom O'Loughlin's chapter on the Latin west (Chapter 4) and Dirk Krausmüller's chapter on the Greek east (Chapter 6). Both of these chapters adopt fresh approaches to studying these regions by considering the role that various types of elites played in reifying religious identities in the period: in the case of O'Loughlin's chapter the role played by the ecclesiastical elites of the western Roman empire, and in Krausmüller's chapter the case of the provincial elites of Palestine. A selection of chapters also push beyond these established mental geographical limits and take as their starting point recent work that has reimagined traditional conceptions of cultural boundaries, with regard in particular to rethinking the notion of the "east" in Late Antiquity (cf. Reed 2009).

Therefore, readers will find chapters which begin by conceptualizing late antique Syria as the eastern starting point for historical journeys proceeding even further east, and which utilize the so-called "Silk Road" as a heuristic tool for evaluating the expansion of religious cultures. The chapters by James M. Hegarty (Chapter 10) and Max Deeg (Chapter 11) incorporate respectively the roles played by the Indian sub-continent and China in shaping the late antique world. Furthermore, the major contributions of the so-called "barbarian" and "client" cultures of the period to the religious profile of Late Antiquity are discussed in detail; for example, in the case of the Celtic and Germanic tribes of northern Europe in the chapter by Bernhard Maier (Chapter 5), and in the case of the Armenian and Georgian cultures of the Caucasus—or rather, "Caucasia"—in the chapter by Nikoloz Aleksidze (Chapter 7). Two chapters in Part I also offer historical contexts for the emergence and development of late antique religions in the Mediterranean region. The political and religious influence of the Hellenistic era on Late Antiquity is discussed by Josef Lössl (Chapter 2), and Mark Humphries' chapter (Chapter 3) evaluates the Roman imperial background underpinning the destinies of late antique paganism and Christianity (Chapter 3). The monumental importance of the ancient "Middle East" in shaping the nature of late antique religion form the basis for the chapters on Arabia by Holger Zellentin (Chapter 8) and the Nile territories by Paul Dilley (Chapter 9).

Part II ("Traditions and Identities") delves deeper into the predominant religions of Late Antiquity. Hector M. Patmore (Chapter 12) considers the features that made Judaism in Late Antiquity distinct from the Second Temple period through a case study of the Book of Esther and its reception in the rabbinic culture of the time. The role of Rome in shaping emic conceptions of Christianity in late antique sources is analyzed by Augustine Casiday (Chapter 13). Casiday's chapter demonstrates that the memory of Roman Christianity remained culturally and theologically valuable to Christians beyond the limits of the Roman empire in creating a largely singular religious identity during the period's later centuries. Rival claims to theological truth in the form of *gnosis* are surveyed by Timothy Pettipiece (Chapter 14) in a chapter that highlights the important testimony of late antique Gnostic texts and traditions as alternatives to both the reformulation of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, and the efforts by proto-orthodox Christians at integrating their religion into late antique society. The emergence of the Gnostic-orientated religion of Manichaeism in Mesopotamia is analyzed by Nicholas Baker-Brian (Chapter 15). The self-conscious foundation of Mani's religion is discussed in the context of the nascent Sasanian empire and the ambitions of its rulers for governing late antique Iran in the third century. The place of Islam in Late Antiquity is

solidified by Aziz Al-Azmeh's chapter (Chapter 16). The context for the emergence and consolidation of Islam in Arabia is central to this chapter's analysis as it traces the development of proto- or paleo-Islam from its local environs to its place within a settled polity under the Umayyads and its distillation into its "classical" form. Claudio Moreschini offers a historical and thematic overview of Hermetism (Chapter 17). Moreschini's chapter cuts a swath through the complexities of Hermetic theosophy and outlines the principal theological and anthropological features of Hermetic teachings, in addition to briefly considering the reception of Hermes in later medieval and early modern philosophy. The paradox of paganism in Late Antiquity is evaluated by Jan Stenger (Chapter 18). The complex fluidity of pagan identity and pagan survival is analyzed, in addition to which Stenger also discusses recent shifts in scholarship toward an appreciation of the coalescence (rather than conflict) between pagans and Christians in the period. Daniel King's chapter on late antique philosophy (Chapter 19) considers the principal actors in the reformulation of ancient philosophical schools and their teachings in the period. King draws attention to the "religious turn" in philosophical thought and practice, and demonstrates that it was not simply confined to "pagan" philosophy but was also central to the interests of the intellectual elites of the Christian Church reaching its apogee in the fifth century, and in turn influencing the scholastic preoccupations of early Islamic philosophy. The final chapter in Part II is concerned with locating astrology in the religious landscape of Late Antiquity (Chapter 20). Hannah Mace's chapter begins by defining astrology as a religious practice and surveys both theological and legislative responses to astrology and its practitioners in the later Roman empire. Mace's chapter concludes by offering a contextual analysis of one of the very few astrological texts from the period, Firmicus Maternus' *Mathesis*.

Part III ("Themes and Discussions") comprises chapters introducing current trends in late antique scholarship on religion. Lucy Grig's chapter (Chapter 21) takes as its starting point the influential concept of "lived religion" and examines religious rituals as instances of popular culture. Grig discusses the personal dimension of calendrical ritual in shaping the lives of religious adherents, in addition to highlighting the importance of holidays and festivals in bringing about religious change during the period. The chapter on asceticism by Hannah Hunt (Chapter 22) presents a comparative treatment of ideas relating to embodiment and religious practice in Late Antiquity. Hunt draws out a selection of key ascetic practices including discussions about motionlessness and sleep deprivation in order to highlight the transformative role of asceticism on the religious self. Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe introduces the numinous world of demons and demonologies in

Late Antiquity in her chapter (Chapter 23). Lunn-Rockliffe surveys a range of sources dealing with both good and bad demons, and focuses on the ways in which believers negotiated and managed their experiences with demons, how they lived with and "thought with" demons in quotidian terms, and how "thinking with demons" also had a place in philosophy and medical thought. The rising prominence of health and medicine in the study of religion in Late Antiquity is the concern of Heidi Marx's chapter (Chapter 24). Marx draws attention to the continuities linking the classical and the late antique periods in the administration of healthcare as a religious obligation, but also cogently demonstrates that late antique religions contributed toward the self-fashioning of medical professionals as experts. She concludes by arguing that Late Antiquity represented a time of development in medical knowledge and the organization of healthcare in opposition to earlier judgments about it being a period of decline. The ambivalence of religion as an interpretive tool for coping with disasters precipitating the collapse of society is analyzed by Mischa Meier in his chapter on "Religion, Warfare, and Demography" (Chapter 25). The sacralization of civic life in the eastern Roman empire during the 500s, as a response to the near-continuous reality of war and natural disaster, is discussed in detail by Meier in the context of the contrast between the politicized reaction to the fall of Rome in 410 CE and the resurgence of religion as a heuristic tool for coping with the disasters of the sixth century. Guy G. Stroumsa considers the central role played by the religions of Late Antiquity in the development of scriptural and canonical cultures (Chapter 26). Stroumsa surveys the role of texts in lending definition to emergent religious identities in the period, alongside discussing the concomitant effect of the scriptural movement on practices of reading that became transformed from the traditional, educative apprehension of text into a meditative and interpretive occupation. The rush to view Late Antiquity as dominated by scripture is tempered by Stroumsa in his identification of the continued importance of the role of orality in late antique religious life. Mar Marcos assesses the role of censorship of religious literature in the context of the religious conflicts of Late Antiquity (Chapter 27). Marcos highlights the continuity in attitudes toward censorship displayed by pagan and Christian Roman emperors to religious groups deemed a threat to the social order, and she situates the legislative response of Christian authorities—emperors, bishops, and monks—to heretical groups and their texts within the broader strategies of alterity pursued against non-orthodox parties during the fourth and fifth centuries. Emma Loosley (Chapter 28) begins her chapter on visual culture by looking at the evidence for late antique art in Dura Europos in Syria. The blended history and frontier status of Dura is reflected in the cohabitation of artistic imagery in the religious buildings of

the town. Loosley valuably reconsiders received assumptions about the aniconic nature of late antique art in the context of heightened distinctions between the public and private, and the religious and secular spheres. The final chapter (Chapter 29) in Part III surveys the prominence of music and dance as forms of religious expression in Late Antiquity. Clemens Leonhard sifts a wide variety of mostly Christian and rabbinic Jewish poetic and liturgical sources, including the hymns and odes of Gnostics and Manichaeans, in order to highlight the complex attitudes toward religious music and performance in evidence during the late antique period. His chapter comes as a healthy reminder about how little is, or indeed can be, known of so many aspects of cultural and religious life in Late Antiquity. For although there was evidently a prolific creativity in terms of audible and visible performances across many late antique religions, the tunes, melodies, and movements expressed in the performances are no longer audio-visually accessible. Their study, therefore, is restricted to a very limited (textual and pictorial) source basis, and a cautious, critical, approach is required to avoid too far-reaching conclusions.

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CHAPTER ONE

Religion in Late Antiquity—Late Antiquity in Religion

Thomas E. Hunt

Introduction

Religion, wrote Daniel Dubuisson, is a construct of the West and provided the "nucleus around which the West has constructed its own universe of values and representations" (Dubuisson 2003: 39). During the military and political upheavals of the Reformation and in the wake of encounters with non-European societies, people living in Europe constructed an object called "religion" and then began to study it (Kwok 2012: 288–290). The category of "religion" was critical to the articulation of European modernity and it therefore denotes a cluster of concepts that are not easily transferred into pre-modern societies. Dubuisson himself, however, locates the roots of "religion" in the writings of the Church Fathers (Engler and Miller 2006: 167). Late Antiquity and religion are bound together.

"Late Antiquity" was born of a revolution in methods. The term "Late Antiquity" was first systematically applied by the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (Riegl 1889: XV; 1901). He deployed the term *Spätantike* to mean a specific period defined by particular artistic sensibilities, heavily influenced by the classical tradition and yet distinct from it (Marcone 2008: 11–12). Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, he insisted that Art History could be counted as a true *Wissenschaft* because it adhered to the same cycles of discovery and research that marked, for example, Philology (Olin 1994: 107).

His work was shaped by two themes. First, he showed that artistic critique could be applied to objects traditionally overlooked by historians of art (Rampley 2009: 446). Second, he argued that the work of art was generated through *Kunstwollen*. This technical term has a long and complicated reception, but it was used by Riegl to express how the artist was shaped by the formal conventions of her time (Elsner 2002: 359–360). By examining the artifact, he argued, it would be possible to infer conclusions about the wider culture that produced it (Cordileone 2014: 286). At the beginning of his *Die Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, he argued that the traditional model of late Roman decline into barbarism could be reimagined through a close examination of the everyday items produced in the later empire (Riegl 1901: 7). Through applying a new conceptual vocabulary to overlooked sources, he was able to show how "barbarians" renewed late Roman art. After this methodological innovation, the *Spätantike* could be identified as a discrete period of creative innovation and its distinctive forms could be studied (Elsner 2002: 362–363).

At the opening of *Die Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* Riegl declared that he was venturing forward into a "dark continent on the map of art-historical studies" (Riegl 1901: 2). The language is telling. He was an imperial adventurer, hoping to open up historical and cultural territories previously unknown to the Viennese of the cosmopolitan imperial center. The goal of Riegl's *Wissenschaft* was to bring to that center a better notion of the history of the world and the place of Austria–Hungary in that history. Anxieties around civilizational decline, imperial power and cultural reproduction shaped Riegl's Late Antiquity, marking it out as "rhetoric of modernity" (Giardina 1999: 157–159). Like all "modernities," it has an underside of empire and coloniality (Mignolo 2007: 465). It is from these antipodes that it is possible to frame the deeper connections between, on the one hand, the study of religion and, on the other hand, the study of Late Antiquity.

The Study of Religion

The small town of Loudun sits in western France roughly equidistant between Tours and Poitiers. In 1632 a group of nuns cloistered in this town began to act strangely. Judging this behavior to be symptoms of demon possession, the townsfolk and the Church hierarchy began a series of exorcisms, trials, and interrogations. In his analysis of these events Michel de Certeau showed how they were the product of numerous tensions already present in the cords of prestige and power that bound together the society of seventeenth-century France (de Certeau 2000). He noted that the

involvement of clergy, physicians, and lawyers in this process was motivated not by compassion for the nuns, but by concerns to maintain their own cultural authority through the application of their specialized knowledge. Similarly, he points out, the modern historian deploys their own knowledge to explain the odd behavior of the nuns. Loudun should make the historian cautious, for conversation about "other times and other places … has critical effects. It reflects back on the historian's presuppositions, relativizing them and our investments in some version of the present order of things" (Seed 2014: 12). De Certeau's analysis highlights the ways in which historians deploy terms to explain human behavior that their subjects would never use. Instead, these concepts are created by scholars through comparison and analysis. "Religion" is such a concept, created through an "act of second order, reflective imagination" through which the familiar and unfamiliar can be explained (Smith 1982: xi).

For de Certeau, the Loudun possessions reveal tensions within French society and the way those tensions manifested themselves in people's encounter with the world. Confronted by the writhing bodies of the nuns, the residents of Loudun sought to explain their behavior by situating them against other examples of demon possession. In so doing, they were able to integrate this unusual, unsettling behavior into a much larger conceptual universe, drawing on abstract notions of good and evil, cosmology, and the material presence of the demonic in everyday life (de Certeau 2000). Similarly, "religion" is not an objective concept, but is a particular category that has been developed in order to compare and analyze human behavior. As such, "*there is no data for religion*. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study" (Smith 1982: xi), a concept created to give meaning to the material products and behaviors of the humans being studied. To approach religion from such a constructionist position is not to deny that something called "religion" exists. It certainly does and its effects can be seen in the world around us (not least on the shelves of libraries and in books like this one) (Engler 2004). Contemporary explanations of the events at Loudun reveal unspoken but powerful forces in French society of the seventeenth century. In a similar way, the naming of some human behavior as "religious" reveals wider cultural assumptions about human beings that can be mapped and studied (Broucek 2015: 115–116). Seventeenth century explanations for the nuns' behavior were influenced by the power, prestige and ambition that shaped French society at the time. Similarly, twenty-first century historians' accounts of the past are shaped by contemporary structural and social pressures. Recognizing that "religion" is produced through scholarly activity demands that scholars conduct that activity responsibly (Engler 2004: 300).

When people from Europe began to sail across the Atlantic in the six-teenth century they encountered a "New World." The novelty of this world lay not only in its terrain but also in its people, who behaved in ways unfamiliar to the Europeans. As they sought to understand this new world, they drew on concepts and terminology from the old. When a Jesuit missionary-scholar from Spain called José de Acosta observed behavior that he considered to be a "deed," a "rite," or "idolatry," he explained this behavior through terms like "custom," "superstition," and "religion" (*religión*). Acosta took a term that often denoted someone entering a life bound by order and rules (a *religio* in Latin) and applied it to explain human behavior in this new world (Biller 1985: 355–360; Smith 1998: 170). In this encounter Acosta explained particular sets of actions through the term "religion." His analysis of human behavior is an attempt to understand and give meaning to the new data accrued from living in the new world (Smith 1998: 275). Three things are happening as he does this. First, *religión* is being applied to explain things unknown before. It is not native to this context but is a category "imposed from the outside." Second, Acosta is claiming that the actions of people in the new world are the same, in some way, as the actions of people in the old. This universal category of activity is what he labels "*religión*" (Smith 1998: 169). Finally, as it is applied in this new world so the meaning of the word *religión* changes. Confronted with the strangeness of God's creation, Acosta tries to express himself in conceptual language that strains under this novelty (Jennings 2010: 84–85). He utilizes the language of the old world as he seeks to describe the new, but in so doing he transforms that language, revealing the old in a different light (Stroumsa 2010: 15). This ethnographic endeavor would come to embed itself into encounters between European and non-European peoples, binding itself to "the cultural imaginary of empire" (Kwok 2012: 288).

The power of "religion" to regulate the colonial encounter shaped the development of the discipline of Religious Studies. Dialogue between Protestants and Catholics had been continuing since the Reformation (Stroumsa 2010: 5–6) and historical scholarship of the eighteenth century had drawn comparison between ancient phenomena and contemporary religions (Said 1978: 117). By the late nineteenth century this critique of religious practice had extended beyond Europe to encompass a comparative analysis of the world's religions. This comparative enterprise was founded on a more-or-less explicit assertion that "religiousness" was a universal human trait, a position that developed from Protestantism and that was essentially theological (Fitzgerald 2000: 32–43; although see the critique offered by Broucek 2015: 104–105). Together with other cultural products like travel literature, novels, scientific papers, and art, this scholarship on religion was a

tool by which European people imagined and articulated the difference between themselves and those other peoples over the sea (Jennings 2010: 84–85; Said 1993). The developing scholarship on religion emerged through recognition of geographical differences, but it also articulated temporal difference. Through the designation of some religions as "primitive," the colonial difference was extended through time as well as space (Mignolo 2007: 470). Academic scholarship on religion therefore functioned as part of the larger cultural apparatus by which "vast … domains [were turned] into treatable and malleable entities" (Said 1978: 115) and difference could be given value (Mignolo 2002: 71).

As the world was described through the shaping of disciplinary knowledge, so European societies began to change. The marking of colonial difference outside European societies precipitated the delineation of differences within them (Foucault 2003: 60–62). As religion emerged as a subject of study—shaped by wider notions of spatial and temporal difference—so European people framed some aspects of their own lives as religious while naming others non-religious or secular (Masazuwa 2005: 20). This was not merely a stripping of religion from the world (Taylor 2007: 26). Rather, it was a sustained transformation in the way that people understood the world and their place in it, including their obligations and relationships (Taylor 2007: 159–162). Human experience of the world was thus reordered. People reimagined their encounters with others, their own bodies, and their sensory experiences (Asad 2011: 51–52). Emerging from this new epistemological order, the "secular" stood in opposition to the religious, being the space of universal rationality, science, civil society, economic activity, and the dynamic operation of the nation state (Fitzgerald 2000: 5–6). In contrast, religion could be imagined as archaic, innate, and distinct from the everyday. A universal distinction was made between the world as it was understood in religion and the world as it really was, objectively observed.

The growing scholarship naming and comparing "religion" ushered in further changes. When religion was imagined as innate to humanity, those non-European peoples who did not have a religion recognizable to Europeans could be designated as less human (Maldonado-Torres 2014: 641). Other models of religion distinguished between Christianity and "primitive" religions (Smith 1998). By these designations European supremacy in global production and population could be scientifically explained as a product of innate superiority. Colonial adventures could therefore be justified (Dussel 2002: 183–185). At the same time, religious concepts provided the grammar by which European peoples began to speak the language of nationalism. This further legitimized the power of the nation state, first in Europe and then in its (former) colonies (Peterson and Walhof 2002: 2–7). The development of

a distinction between the secular and the religious runs parallel to Europe's rise to global material supremacy (Mignolo 2002: 59). The identification and classification of religions was always a process tightly bound into the developing power of European nation states.

Scholarship on religion was part of the process by which new sciences like philology or anthropology (and, eventually, art history) made sense of the world. This epistemological transformation was tied to a vision of religion that saw it as both universal and distinct from the secular. Acosta's identification of *religión* shows how knowledge about religion came to govern what could be meaningfully said about the world (Foucault 1970: 138–144; Said 1978: 119–122). This process of explanation was also implicated in the material transformation of the world through the actions of capital. Comparison of human behaviors allowed the racial classification of human bodies (Maldonado-Torres 2014), facilitating the functioning of imperial administrations, the circulation of wealth, and the subjugating of people (Chidester 1996). New knowledge shaped the disciplinary systems by which human bodies were ordered (Foucault 2003) and the expansion of these disciplinary systems in turn opened up new areas of research for the scholarly disciplines:

> The expansion of Western capitalism implied the expansion of Western epistemology in all its ramifications, from the instrumental reason that went along with capitalism and the industrial revolution, to the theories of the state, to the criticism of both capitalism and the state. (Mignolo 2002: 59)

When scholars of religion say things like "there is no data for religion" (Smith 1982: xi) what they mean is that there are no objective "facts" on which scholarship can rest; rather, the very act of identifying something as "religious" is already theory-laden (Engler 2004: 298). When Acosta, for example, wrote of the behavior of other human beings he called that behavior *religión*. In so doing he made implicit statements about the nature of human beings and about *religión*. He also implicated himself and his subjects into a wider network of geo-political power that stretched from Spain to the New World and back into the past (Masazuwa 2005: 180). This network was critical in the establishment and maintenance of both the epistemological and the material order of European empires.

Given the significance of "religion" in the formation of these epistemological and material regimes, together with their ongoing influence over our lives, scholars of religion have come to focus less on what religion is than on "what the definition includes and what it excludes – how, by whom, for what purpose, and so on. And in what historical context a particular definition of

religion makes good sense" (Asad 2011: 39). Religion is so deeply bound to other ideas like the secular, the market, or the liberal state, that it comes to seem natural, universal, and given. It is not. Translating words or ideas from pre-modern societies (for example) as "religion" glosses over the differences between that society and the scholar's own world (Nongbri 2013). The concept works to mystify people's behavior, to reorder the world, and to disguise the play of power in a social situation (Fitzgerald 2000: 14–15). To put it another way, using a word from Althusser, religion is interpellative; it offers a classification by which people are constituted as thinking, acting subjects (Althusser 1971; McCutcheon 2015: 131–132). As such, the discipline of religious studies has been critical to modern practices of discipline and governance, either through providing a framework for subjectification (McCutcheon 2003) or through cooperating with the state's regimes of surveillance and management of its citizens (Asad 2011: 36). Seen in this way, study of religion ought to address itself to the various shifting ideologies and institutions that enable "religion" to be identified, formalized, and reproduced.

Although this is the general consensus across the Religious Studies spectrum (Schaffalitzky de Muckadell 2014: 495–496), the continued debate indicates that more theoretical work remains to be done (Engler 2004). Attempts to critique or nuance this constructionist model of religion have focused on the distinction between the "raw materials" of scholarship and the interpretive construct provided by the scholar (Benavides 2000: 116). Constructionists have been accused of being crypto-realists, working with a fixed understanding of religion which they refuse or are unable to acknowledge (Schaffalitzky de Muckadell 2014). Equally, to say religion is merely a construct does not mean it is analytically useless; all aspects of human society are constructs. While the concept of religion might have emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, there are now groups of people that identify themselves as a religion. "The fact that 'religion' is socially constructed does not imply that it does not refer to a thing (namely, a social thing) and therefore it does not imply that the term is analytically useless" (Schillbrack 2012: 101). If scholars choose not to apply the term "religion" when it is not a native category, then many other analytical tools are also lost. Concepts of culture, class, and gender would likewise be suspect and the term "religion" has an ambiguous usage even in societies that do use it (Broucek 2015: 101–103, Schillbrack 2012: 102). Continuing debates about the theoretical validity of the term "religion" reveal the historical roots and "ideological trajectories" of the field (Engler 2004: 309).

Colonial encounter and imperial venturing brought people from Europe into contact with other peoples. Contemporary academic research in the humanities was deeply influenced by this process, not least because new human

sciences were developed to make sense of the data produced from these encounters. Religion and its study emerged from this combination of material greed, humane curiosity, and institutional power. "Religion is the creation of the scholar's study" because the scholar's pen is moved by this trinity. Understood as a universal, innate in human behavior, religion became a means to order knowledge about the world. The language of natural religion and secular human science obscured the cultural and historical contingency of this study. As it is so deeply bound up in the material transformation of the world through imperial governance and capitalism, the study of religion is also the study of how institutional power subjugates and governs people. The responses to the possessions at Loudun show this process in action, but are also a reminder that the student of religion remains implicated in these networks of ideology and subjectification as they explain and interpret human behavior.

Scholars' Studies and the Creation of Late Antiquity

Conscious of his approaching death, the elderly Augustine, bishop of Hippo, asked for some psalms to be copied and pasted onto the wall of his bed-chamber. With his close companions he made plans for the continued care of his church and its possessions, especially the libraries that he had amassed there and in his own private study. This little story reminds us that our understanding of Late Antiquity is contingent on the evidence we have at our disposal, evidence that is marked by the twin actions of preservation and erasure (Muehlberger 2015). Archives like the one Augustine left behind are collected for posterity, for the future, as a prosthesis to stand in the place of that which is lost through the ravages of passing time (Derrida 1996: 36). In his works, says Augustine's biographer, the bishop continued to live. While Augustine's writings were copied again and again, in new libraries and under unfamiliar hands, other writings were lost. The study of Late Antiquity began as a study of archives like the one collected by Augustine and passed on so carefully to others. As with the invention of religion, this scholarly labor was an attempt to make sense of the scholar's own world. In this way, "Late Antiquity," like religion, is the creation of the scholar's study. In particular, it was Augustine who was to be the early focus of scholarly labor.

   The study of Late Antiquity began in attempts to make sense of either the religious or the political formation of post-Reformation Europe. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, texts by Augustine and other "Fathers" were used either to support or refute Protestant or Catholic readings of Church history (Wood 2013: 10–11). By the Enlightenment,

historical studies of religion were explicitly addressing contemporary anxieties. In this period, Christian study of ancient Israelite religion drew connections to contemporary Judaism in order to resolve the perceived ambiguous place of Jewish people in modernity (Grafton 2009: 182–183; Stroumsa 2010: 42–49; Sutcliffe 2003). Contemporary anxieties about religion and politics also shaped Enlightenment histories of Late Antiquity. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts like Hotman's *Franco-Gallia* (1573/4) had already argued that late antique and medieval history was important to understand contemporary politics (Wood 2013: 11–12). This trend continued in the Enlightenment. Influenced by his own distaste for religious enthusiasm, Gibbon's analysis of the late Roman empire was a demonstration of the dangers of religious passion to political communities (Wooton 1993). For de Volney, writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, an encounter with the ruins at Palmyra acted as the centerpiece in his defense of revolutionary change in Europe (Hell 2010). Although there were notable exceptions, like Tillemont and Gibbon, before the nineteenth-century studies of Late Antiquity generally traced the origins of either the political or the religious tensions in contemporary Europe.

This divide in the historiography between religion and politics persisted into the nineteenth century. During the Catholic revival of the nineteenth century, the late antique period was mined for theological inspiration and exemplars of piety. Work by historians like Frédéric Ozanam argued that the Christian Church preserved the fruits of Roman civilization for later generations (Wood 2013: 140–144). Near contemporary scholarship championed by liberal Protestants in Germany focused on situating the texts produced by the early Church within their wider contexts, a methodological approach that was to bear fruit in the United States (Clark 2011). At the same time, study of Late Antiquity or the early Middle Ages was also influenced by nineteenth-century nationalism. Around the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, for example, the question of the Germanic invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries became more acute in the historiography. Historians struggled to ascertain the precise nature of the invasion's violence as well as its institutional, social and racial legacies for France and Germany (Wood 2013: 154–198). Significant methodological advances (in philology, for example) were often shaped or received by nationalist concerns. Nineteenth-century scholarship on Late Antiquity followed one of two routes. Either it was influenced by the enthusiasms of Catholic and Protestant piety, or it responded to the deep currents of European nationalism.

The division between "Church history" and the political history of the late Roman empire began to be broken down after 1945. Studies of Augustine, for example, placed his work within a longer history of literary history (Vessey

2015: 455–458). Other scholarship addressed itself particularly to the divide in historiography between Church and political history. The clearest example of this process in action is in the work of Arnaldo Momigliano. An émigré from Mussolini's Italy, Momigliano established himself in post-war British scholarship through a number of studies that offered re-evaluations of intellectual history. In these essays he made extensive use of the resources available to him at the Warburg Institute in London, the library of which was richly stocked with work on art and material culture (Christ 1991). His usual method in these studies was to hold together two opposing themes and, in the process of an argument that drew on both textual and material sources, demonstrate how these apparent contradictions might be overcome to offer a new vision of the problem (Grafton 2009: 235). Nowhere is this clearer than in the collection of papers assembled at a conference at the Warburg in 1958, subsequently published as *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (1963). In the editorial forward to this collection and in his own contribution, Momigliano argued succinctly and persuasively that the study of the late Roman world must attend both to the religious and to the political realms. Methodological innovation was a recurring theme in his work, and in his later life he would urge younger Italian historians to travel to France, the UK, and the US to learn how to use sociological methods in their own studies (Momigliano 1971). In conjoining both the social and the institutional in his depiction of the Mediterranean world of the late fourth century, he focused attention not on abstract institutions like "Empire" or "Church" but on the lives and actions of people. Through setting up and resolving apparent antinomies, Momigliano was able to deploy a new palette as he rendered the familiar landscape of the late Roman world.

While Momigliano reframed the historiographical divide inherited from the nineteenth century, students of the late Roman world also reshaped the study of literature. Philological work by Courcelle, Henry, and others had shown the richness and sophistication of fourth- and fifth-century Latin texts, particularly Augustine's collection of writings. Archeological discoveries in North Africa also forced a reappraisal of this literature. Increasingly attuned to the partiality of the literary record, a new generation of historians situated these texts within the wider context of the material traces of fourth and fifth century North African Christianity. Two biographies of Augustine published in the late 1960s—by André Mandouze and Peter Brown—show the fruits of this labor. Although different in form and explicit intent, both demonstrated how the writings collated in Augustine's library emerged from the material, social, and cultural background of fourth- and fifth-century North Africa (Brown 1967; Mandouze 1968; Vessey 2015). Developing his work in the 1970s and 1980s, Brown drew on social historians like Evelyn

Patlagean, on intellectual historians like Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, and on anthropologists like Mary Douglas (Brown 2003). Brown used these methodological resources to depict the complex play of change and continuity that unfolded in the society of the late Roman Empire. In particular, models which emphasized civilizational decline were revised in favor of accounts of cultural transformation unfolding over long periods of time and broad sections of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Brown's identification and articulation of "Late Antiquity" therefore combined a focus on the social and cultural context of the late Roman world with a challenge to the historiographical boundaries of chronology and geography. The development of the concept of "Late Antiquity" was rooted in the archeological discoveries of the 1940s and 1950s and the new sense that they gave of the hinterland of literary artifacts.

Late Antiquity as a distinct field of study emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as historians began to perceive the limits of the historiography and pushed beyond received methodologies. The following generation of historians would develop this focus on the social and cultural circumstances of Late Antiquity. For example, the incorporation of gender critique combined with an increasing sensitivity to the textuality of late antique documents led to a number of re-assessments of late antique religion and its study, mirroring developments in other historical disciplines (Clark 1998, 2001, 2004: 178–181; Cooper 1996). In the 1950s and 1960s, archeological and material evidence reshaped the field. By the mid-1990s new methodological approaches had transformed the picture of Late Antiquity, drawing it into conversation with literary and critical theory. Contributions by Clark and others toward this linguistic turn continue the tradition of examining the textuality of late antique documents that gave birth to the field of Late Antiquity itself (Clark 2004).

Some recent studies have noted that the new "orthodoxy" of Late Antiquity risks distorting our picture of the late ancient world; viewed from the late 2010s, Late Antiquity is clearly a product of modernity, shaped by the ideological presuppositions of twentieth-century academia (James 2008). The broad model of continuity and transformation that Brown and others developed has been challenged through recourse to archeological evidence (Ward-Perkins 2005). These revisions of Late Antiquity are timely reminders that its study—as with all academic scholarship about the past—is an exercise governed by "ideological systems" (Clark 2001: 426). We should be careful, however, to avoid the notion that a pristine reconstruction of past societies is possible. Descriptive accounts of ancient societies seek to describe through using the classifications of the cultures being studied; redescriptive accounts use categories "foreign" to that society to organize, compare, and analyze human behavior (Smith 2004: 29–32; Nongbri 2008: 442–443). Terms like

"religion" or "Late Antiquity" are redescriptive categories and their application in "the scholar's study" does not produce or recreate the culture that they describe (Frankfurter 2015).

Nevertheless, particular ways of describing late antique society show clearly the ways that scholarship is shaped by its social and cultural context. For example, the suggestion that the religious environment of Late Antiquity was a "marketplace" in which people, like pliant consumers, chose particular religions, is clearly modeled on late modern notions of economic exchange and liberal freedoms (Elsner 2003). As the arguments about the nature and study of "religion" demonstrate, academic practice and the generation of knowledge is always structured by ideological commitments. Not least of these is the commitment to integrate "religion" as a central component of the lives of people in the late antique past. Late Antiquity is a "rhetoric of modernity" and as such is constituted around and through its relationship to religion. "Late Antiquity," like "religion," is interpellative, constituting subjects through their commitment to particular ways of naming the past and the place of religion in human societies.

When Smith suggested that religion was the product of the scholar's study, his intention was to urge students of religion to recognize the ways in which religion as a category of human behavior was generated through the scholar's own acts of comparison and redescription. In a similar fashion, "Late Antiquity" emerged from a particular redescription of society in fourth and fifth century North Africa. Integrating literary and philological examinations of texts into a developing body of archeological scholarship, the biographies of Augustine published in the late 1960s marked a break in historiographical tradition already foreshadowed in the work of Momigliano. The malleability of the late antique text formed a key element of the development of late antique studies in the 1990s and early 2000s. At the heart of the late antique project is a desire to connect literary texts to the social and cultural life of people in the Mediterranean around the second to the eighth centuries. The religious character of these textual survivals meant placing religion at the heart of Late Antiquity. Born in the decades after the Second World War, Late Antiquity was a "rhetoric of modernity" (Giardina 1999: 158–159). As with modernity itself, religion provided the nucleus around which Late Antiquity was constituted.

Recent and Future Trends

A number of recent trends in the methodology of late antique studies show some ways in which the field is adapting to the challenges of studying human behavior in the past. A turn toward examining the sense-world of late antique

people, informed by a theoretical commitment to the body as socially constructed, has emphasized the multiplicity of religious practices in the ancient world. Innovative engagement with native categories of thought, particularly focusing on grammar, has produced impressive results. Text-centered methodological approaches continue to be shaped by critical theory, with particular interest in uncovering networks of imperial power, knowledge production, and difference. The re-evaluation of Late Antiquity as a category of academic inquiry continues as scholars have focused on the wider questions of the relationship between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Finally, the growing methodological sophistication of the digital humanities is leading to significant contributions. Whether they focus on the late antique past, or on the representation of that past in secondary sources, these studies continue the reflexive examination of religion in Late Antiquity.

In a recent introductory chapter to the *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, Talal Asad suggested that the examination of belief ought to be complemented by "ethnographies of the human body" that model the "architecture of the senses" (Asad 2011: 51). Focusing on this sensory architecture allows one to map ways in which the bodily senses are experienced in a world that always exceeds human control and understanding (Asad 2011: 54). Asad's remarks mirror some recent shifts in discussions of embodiment in the late antique world. Developing from a focus on the body as the site of discursive practices of discipline (Brown 1988; Foucault 1988; Shaw 1998), a large literature has examined late antique sensory experience. These texts have tended to be shaped by interdisciplinary studies of literature, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and cultural history (Ackerman 1990; Classen 1993; Wolfson 1994) or have positioned themselves as part of an ongoing theological examination of sense and spirituality (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011). These studies have integrated "religious" ways of seeing into a wider late antique sensory world, showing how particular smells, sights, or noises came to be attached to particular experiences, both intellectual and affective (Frank 2000, 2001; Harrison 2013; Harvey 2006; Neis 2013). Focusing on the sensory architecture of late antique people has integrated late ancient religious practice more fully into the late ancient world while also showing the diversity of such practices (Harvey 2015). It also models a kind of religious behavior apart from claims about belief.

These studies of the senses are part of a wider attempt to approach religion through the native categories of human experience in Late Antiquity. Studies of sight in the late ancient world have tended to draw on the concept of *ekphrasis* to explain the connections between the world as sensed and the world as represented (Frank 2000; Neis 2013). In so doing, practices redescribed as religious are integrated into a wider late antique textual culture.

Drawing on the connections between material culture and literature (Roberts 1989), as well as studies of the material and ideological conditions of education (Bagnall 2009; Kaster 1988), recent studies have shown how the production and consumption of late antique texts became imbued with religious meaning (Chin 2008; Krueger 2004). Situating Christian textual practices (exegesis; heresiology; hagiography) within the wider context of Late Antiquity breaks down the polemical distinction between Christian and non-Christian textual practices (Young 1997). It also shows how it was these very models of textuality that provided the conceptual and material tools to construct Christianity as something separate and distinct from non-Christian things (Boyarin 2004; Jacobs 2012). Chin, for example, approaches the construction of Christianity through grammatical education. In so doing, she marks an important distinction between the categories of thought native to her subject (letters; words; sentences; canons) and the redescription of that subject with reference to poststructural critical theory (Chin 2008). These works build on the linguistic turn in historical studies, showing how representations of the world in late antique texts have social, cognitive, and material consequences (Jacobs 2004: 9) while also recognizing the partial and contingent nature of their own scholarly work (Clark 2004: 157).

Shifts in the methods through which late antique religions have been identified have led to new ways of conceptualizing the period. Recent evaluations of early Islam have demonstrated the way in which Islam either conforms to or is paradigmatic of specific late antique forms of religiosity (Al-Azmeh 2014: 1–41; Cameron 2015). These studies re-evaluate both the emergence of Islam and the shifting theological and social patterns of thought in Christianity and Judaism in the eastern Mediterranean during the sixth and seventh centuries. Situating Islam within the wider scope of a long Late Antiquity is not new, but earlier scholarship on Islam's relationship to late antique society tended to position as derivative of the "Judeo-Christian" world or as emerging complete and distinct from the deserts beyond Europe (Cameron 2015: 250). Situating Islam firmly within the development of Late Antiquity is also a more-or-less explicit claim to situate Islam within the history of Europe itself. A recent book on the Qur'ān, for example, subtitled "A European Approach" (*Ein europäischer Zugang*), directly engages with the way that Islam has been constituted as Europe's Other both historically and in more recent scholarship (Neuwirth 2010). This pattern in late antique scholarship is mirrored by the growth in academic study of the Abrahamic religions and the centrality of Late Antiquity to the development of the figure of Abraham (Stroumsa 2013, 2015). While countering iniquitous discourses around the dangers of Islam, the concept of "Abrahamic religions" emerges from a long history of supersessionism and religious polemic that

ought to be recognized and acknowledged (Hughes 2012). The question of what constitutes "late antique" "religion" has become more obviously ideologically charged and future attempts to reframe the periodization must recognize this.

Riegl's identification and analysis of the forms of late antique material culture was an attempt to situate Art History as a legitimate *Wissenschaft*, which was itself based on a methodological transformation. Despite this and other methodological innovations, the material products of academia have remained relatively recognizable until recently: books, journal articles, translations, critical editions and so on. The application of digital technologies, however, brings methodological transformations and also changes the nature of academic labor. This is most obvious in two ways. First, in analysis of texts. Extensive text corpora, digitized during the past few decades, produce large blocks of data. Close analysis of these data can allow identification of common authorship and networks of influence, as well as analysis of form and genre (Zeldes and Schroeder 2015). It also, however, remaps the contours of academic work, challenging traditional models of editing, peer review, ownership, and access to data (Baumann 2015). Second, the construction of gazetteers of late antique places integrates cartography and geography into late antique studies. A gazetteer and map project called *Pleiades*, which focuses on the ancient Mediterranean, has been expanded to take in the classical Islamic world, mirroring shifts in the concept of Late Antiquity (Jackson *et al.* 2016). Gazetteers like this enable the stable identification of places and the connections between places and people. The fruits of these data are visible, for example, in the "Migration of Faith" project, which catalogues prosopographical data on clerical exiles and visualizes these data through *Pleiades* (2014). These large collaborative projects based on open data show how digital humanities can challenge existing models of ownership, publication, disciplinary structure, and collaboration.

From its deployment in the work of Alois Riegl, the late antique has always been a fecund site of methodological innovation. The intersection of religion and Late Antiquity poses a number of methodological and theoretical challenges that are now being confronted in scholarship. The question around the representative character of both primary and secondary sources demands continued theoretical engagement with the nature of textuality and the redescriptive processes by which academic knowledge is created. This focus on textuality is complemented by an increasingly nuanced understanding of human life as affective and embodied, a theoretical position that has underpinned much of the study of the sensory architecture of late antique people. Academic scholarship, like all aspects of human social life, traces ideological trajectories. Discussions of late antique religions that recognize and seek to address the ideological hinterland behind the construction of categories like

"Abrahamic," "Islam," "Christianity" and so on are exciting developments that will recast the history of scholarship. Such approaches would take seriously the material and ideological conditions that govern the production of knowledge about late antique religion.

Conclusion

The words "Late Antiquity" and "religion" are familiar companions, but as Gil Anidjar has pointed out, such companiable conjunctions are often haunted by the (physical, epistemic, colonial) violence of joining (Anidjar 2002: 10). "Late Antiquity" developed in the second half of the twentieth century in a collection of academic studies that described the social behaviors of people in the past. One of the ways in which this behavior was explained was through the application of the anthropological and sociological category of "religion." "Late Antiquity" was produced when sociological definitions of religion were applied to explain human societies far away in time. A volume entitled *Religion in Late Antiquity* is one that names this originary joining. "Religion" is a concept created as people from Europe struggled to make sense of their world and so it is deeply indebted to the ways that these people were shaped by the past, particularly late antique texts (Engler and Miller 2006: 167; Stroumsa 2010: 58–59). To put it another way, the anthropological or sociological category of "religion" was produced when late antique texts were used to explain human societies far away in space. A volume named "Religion in Late Antiquity" also names the late antique in religion.

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FURTHER READING

Smith (1998) offers a crucial introduction to the history of "religion" as a category of analysis in early modernity. This can be complemented by Stroumsa (2010). The importance of the idea of religion and "the secular" to the emergence of modernity is traced in careful detail in Taylor (2007). Studies by Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (2002, 2007), as well as classic work by Said (1973, 1993), show how the production of knowledge is determined by the wider economic and ideological conditions of colonialism. Clark (2004) and Wood (2013) are important introductions to shifts in historiography and their importance for the study of pre-modern past, while the "Introduction" of Chakrabarty (2000) outlines the links between historiography and colonialism. Good, brief, and provocative methodological reflections on "Late Antiquity" can be found in Muehlberger (2015) and the other posts in that Blog Forum. The intersection of colonial structures and the theorizing of religion is also traced by Masazuwa (2005).

PART I

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES

CHAPTER TWO

Religion in the Hellenistic and Early Post-Hellenistic Era

Josef Lössl

Introduction

The significance of this chapter lies not only in the fact that many aspects of religion in Late Antiquity can only be understood against the background of the Hellenistic and Post-Hellenistic framework. In a certain sense Late Antiquity is still part of this framework. Aspects of Hellenistic religion continue in Late Antiquity and develop into new forms. This includes civic cults, which existed even before the Hellenistic period, the worship of living persons as well as the elevation of deceased rulers and benefactors to divine status, and at the same time a tendency to understand gods in human terms (e.g. through Euhemerism). It also includes a widening of the horizon through the emergence of supra-regional Greek empires and the Roman and Persian empires, and increased interaction with the religions of Egypt and the Near East. In addition, it is not only the practice of religion, but also its "study," its philosophical understanding, the tendency in Late Antiquity to define religion on a rational basis and to try and understand and practice it on such a basis, which originated and first developed during the Hellenistic period.

Classical Greek and Hellenistic Religion

It is necessary to acknowledge at the outset of this chapter that "religion" is a modern category and may as such not have been recognizable to inhabitants of the Hellenistic age (Potter 2007: 407; see also Chapter 1 in this volume). Quite possibly, all socio-economic and political transactions in ancient communities including the building of temples, the buying and selling of priesthoods, communal rituals such as sacrifices, processions (within families as well as in civic communities), certain conventions of setting up monuments for living, dead, and imaginary persons and animals, and many other such practices can easily be analyzed and discussed without ascribing to them a distinct "religious" dimension. As Tim Whitmarsh (2015) has only very recently underlined once more, any form of human action that can be identified as such (i.e. as human) can be interpreted as a denial of the existence of gods, or vice versa, as an assertion of the unchallenged dominance of the human being. The very existence of the human being, and especially the conscious development of a cult of the human being—one could call it "humanism"—can in fact be interpreted as practiced atheism. As human beings assert themselves as themselves, that is as humans, rather than, say, mere "mortals," or "fallen," "inadequate," or "incomplete" gods, they practically deny the existence or efficacy of gods and make the act of worshipping gods look puzzling, if not outright ridiculous—always keeping in mind that this very act of "worshipping" too is essentially human.

Both aspects seem to emerge side by side in the Hellenistic age, widespread cultic practice of worshipping gods and of grappling with the puzzling experience of being human by resorting to myth and all sorts of "religious" and esoteric practices, and, at the same time, treating this kind of sentiment and behavior with certain doubts and irony, and sometimes with outright contempt and militant rejection (as in the case of Whitmarsh's ancient atheists).

In phenomenological terms the practice of religion as well as its rejection are two aspects of human self-manifestation. All current approaches to ancient Greek religion can be seen from this angle, whether it is the communal or "political" expression of religion ("*polis* religion"), "theology," or "personal religion" (cf. Kindt 2009; Instone 2009). The reduction of religion to political activity, the rationalization of religion in theology, or the dealing with religion by applying psychological techniques, emotion management, or esoteric practices (e.g. astrology), all call into doubt the practice of religion, though that is *all* they do. They accompany the ongoing practice of religion, but they do not eliminate it. Greek religion progresses in Antiquity and is accompanied by a running commentary of

reflection—expressed in textual and other sources—which at the same time asserts—and thereby affirms—and questions—and thereby continually, but never terminally, undermines—its validity.

One of the first questions that arises in this respect is whether there ever was such a thing as Greek religion in Antiquity, considering the cultural differences within the Greek world and the strong identity provided by each individual *polis*. Herodotus is sometimes cited as an early advocate of the idea that "religion, more specifically the temples of the gods and the sacrifices … [were] part of what constitute[d] a common Greek identity" (cf. *Hist.* 8.144.2; Kindt 2009: 365). And indeed there were common elements such as the worship of "a large number of mostly anthropomorphic gods" (Kindt 2009: 366) with the twelve Olympian gods at the core. Polytheism has also been cited by Tim Whitmarsh as a defining characteristic of ancient Greek religion (2015: 22–35). And the fact that these elements were mirrored in political and social structures that were largely common to all Greek *poleis*, too, confirms Herodotus's point. But even if we look at generic elements—sacrifices, libations, the swearing of oaths, the celebration of liminal events and the like occur in virtually all religions (cf. Burkert 1985)—or at features that indeed did differ strongly between various parts of the Greek world (Price 1999), or at inconsistencies within beliefs and practices of various forms of Greek religion (Versnel 1990–1993), we do so against the background of a common Greek matrix. An important aspect here is also a common language, which is Greek in not just a linguistic, but also in a semiotic, sense, a system of signs that enables those living within it to see and interpret the world in a common way, though also limiting their ability to translate their experiences into other forms of expression (Gould 1985). It was this aspect that was greatly expanded in the Hellenistic period and contributed to the continuation of Hellenistic religion as a form of Greek religion.

This is not to say that Greek religion is not related to any other cultural tradition, or that it is Greek in an essentialist sense. There are common anthropological features that link Greek religion structurally to humanity in general (Kindt 2009: 369) and historically to pre-history (Burkert 1983), to the Ancient Near East (Burkert 2004) and to Egypt and Africa (Bernal 1987–2006). What can be said (and has been said) of Hellenistic religion, namely that it developed in the context of a fusion of cultures (Droysen), or that it owes itself to more ancient forms of religion from Africa and the Ancient Near East (Préaux 1978), at least in the sense that it developed further and progressed as it encountered these traditions, can already be said of religion in the classical and even in the archaic age (Lane Fox 2008). These characteristics do not take anything away from its "Greekness," they rather constitute it along with all the other characteristics that are typical for Greek religion.

Continuing Features of Classical Greek Religion

If the notion of an overarching Greek culture was already strong at a time when there was still a great variety of diverse and barely connected Greek communities scattered around the ancient world, it certainly became a lot stronger after 334 BCE, the year in which Alexander the Great crossed into Asia Minor and embarked on his conquest of the Persian empire. Although himself a Macedonian, Alexander was conscious that he promoted Greek culture, but he also realized that in the context of conquering the east this meant a transformation of Greek culture under the influence of the cultures that were encountered in the conquests (cf. Plutarch, *Alex.* 332ab; Green 2007: 21, 54–56). Alexander's extraordinary career and his style of ruler-ship, that of a warrior monarch, which persisted under his successors after his death in 323 BCE, generated new forms of worship, the veneration of living persons and especially of rulers (Chaniotis 2007).

At first, however, little seemed to change. Greek *polis* religion continued much as it had before (Potter 2007: 408–413). Priesthoods were bought and sold. Male priests took care of male, female priests of female deities. In order to carry out their duties priests had to be ritually pure, that is, neither polluted by sexual activity nor "accursed" by violent crime or some other "dark" aspect. Ritual processes were underpinned by mythical narratives. Both varied not just from city to city but from temple to temple, even for the same deity. Temples and temple land belonged to the deity, but not the priests. They were appointed by civic authorities and therefore responsible to them, not to their "religion." Thus they were not religious leaders in the sense in which, for example, late antique Christian bishops were going to be. Their reward was in kind, money, and certain civic privileges (front seats in the theater, free lunches), and they were appointed for fixed terms. Their activities were often mundane, but that did not affect the sacredness of the temples themselves or "the belief that the divinity could be physically present in the shrine" (Potter 2007: 411).

Decisions on how to worship, or which gods to worship were not reached on the authority of the priests but by certain conventional "spiritual" mecha-nisms: oracles, sacrifices, horoscopes, dreams, miracles, or various types of prophecies. Those who controlled these processes were not priests appointed to local shrines but other types of "religious experts." Some cities, for exam-ple, obtained an oracle from Delphi to determine which gods should be worshipped within their jurisdiction (*Suppl. Epigr. Graec.* 45, 911–913). In other cases the dream of a ruler forced the introduction of a new shrine; for example, the temple of Serapis in Delphi owed itself to a dream of Ptolemy I (Nock 1930: 50–54; Potter 2007: 412). Animal sacrifices, both for private

and public purposes, were procured by sacrificers, who also investigated and divined the condition of the sacrificed animals. A diseased animal meant a bad omen.

Divination and other forms of "spiritual advice" was provided by a wide variety of "divinely inspired" "professional consultants" (Potter 2007: 413). Divine inspiration could express itself in ecstasy, as in mantic seers (*mantis*, from *mainomai*, "I rave"), who bore witness to the supra-rational nature of the deity (Burkert 1985: 112–113), or in the ability to pronounce "prophecies" and/or interpret prophecies, oracles, portents, or other manifestations of the divine in various ways, some more, some less dramatic. There are indeed inherent links between prophecy and poetry and the corresponding hermeneutic techniques, "criticism" and exegesis (Lössl 2007). The terms *prophetes*, *thespiodos*, and *chresmologos* refer to slightly different ways of pronouncing and/or interpreting prophecies. An *astrologos* could interpret the constellations of the night sky, an *oinopolos* the flight of birds.

Knowledge of all this wisdom and these techniques was not only kept and handed down by guilds (Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Schäfer 2002), it was also written up in books. Some of these books had the reputation of being very old and not all of them were of Greek origin (Potter 1994: 10–11, 2007: 413). The cults of Isis and Serapis, for example, originated in Egypt, astrology in Babylon. But temples and cult associations for these deities were spread all over the Hellenistic (and later, the Roman) world, and astrology, which originated in India, but came into the Greek world via Babylon, was practiced everywhere (see Chapter 20, this volume).

The religious character of astrology must be considered in this context. Although astrology was criticized by some as fatalistic (cf. e.g. Tatian, *Or.* 8–11) and therefore, in a sense, as areligious, it was in fact practiced in a religious way, with reference to a deity. For example, in a Greek magical papyrus (PGM 13.708–11 Preisendanz; Betz 1986: 189) an astrologer's client is advised "not to break into screams and tears" if the horoscope looks bad, but instead "to ask the god to change its course; for this god has the power to do everything" (Griffiths 2005: 3901).

New Developments and Encounters in Hellenistic Religion

As indicated earlier, one of the new political features of the Hellenistic age was the rise of monarchies and the decline of the city states. This process had started before Alexander and it had already affected *polis* religions across Greece, but especially former imperial powers such as Athens. Nevertheless,

at the local level *polis* cults continued to function much as in classical times (Mikalson 1998) and as far as the prestige of certain cities was concerned, rather than being built on military strength such prestige could now also be gained if a city were home to a venerable, ancient, popular cult. In fact, since apart from a few exceptions (most notably the Attalids' connection with Zeus at Pergamon; cf. Potter 2007: 414) the prestige of monarchs usually had no civic base, cities were useful for monarchs as objects of patronage. They thus gained a new and even stronger, because more universal, role than that which they had had before. Their catchment had expanded to the ends of the earth, almost like Alexander's empire. By virtue of their shrines they had become sacred places and were more and more respected as such. They became places that could grant asylum, a practice that is seen as a characteristic of the period (Rigsby 1996; Potter 2007: 414). One should also not forget here that many new cities sprang up during the Hellenistic era, some of them (like Alexandria and Antioch) becoming equal to the greatest of the more ancient cities (like Athens), and the shrines of non-Greek cities such as Jerusalem in Palestine or Hierapolis in Syria could be honored and admired far and wide in similar ways (cf. Polybius *apud* Josephus, *Ant.* 12.136 on the significance of Jerusalem and its temple; Lucian, *De dea Syria*, on Hierapolis and the Syrian goddess; Potter 2007: 424–425; Lightfoot 2003).

Another new development was the practice to erect shrines to rulers, usually after their death (as in the case of the Attalids of Pergamon or the Macedonian dynasty), but in some cases while the monarchs were still alive, as in the case of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. One can see a gradual development here, and a civic context that remained throughout: outstanding individuals could be honored by a stele with an inscription bearing their name placed inside a temple and honored with prayers and sacrifices. Around 333 BCE Aristotle was honored in this way in the temple of Apollo in Delphi (Potter 2007: 416). Before Alexander was first divinized during his visit in Egypt in 331 BCE his father Philip had "received divine honors at Eresos and Ephesos" and "appeared as the thirteenth god in a procession at Pella on the last day of his life" (Potter 2007: 417). Both living and deceased benefactors (*euergetai*) were honored in cultic ways. They were thus treated as both humans and gods. It was this combination that turned out to be typically Hellenistic. Even non-Greek religions such as Buddhism and Judaism were affected by it. Buddhism, for example, entered its iconic phase in the first century BCE in northern India arguably influenced by the encounter with Greek culture. Among the earliest anthropomorphic depictions of the Buddha from the first century CE are statues that seem to betray the influence of Greek heroic sculpture (cf. Foltz 2010: 45–46). The theological question regarding the relationship between "God" and "Man" was discussed

in the context of Judaism and contributed to the emergence of Christianity around the same time. Although Judaism remained an-iconic, as did Christianity, at least for some time (Strezova 2013), divine–human persons were worshipped in both religions. The king-priest Melchizedek, for example, is addressed as God in one of the Dead Sea scrolls (11Q Melch.) and in the early Christian Epistle to the Hebrews the belief in the divinity of Christ is explained with reference to the divine "order of Melchizedek" (cf. Hebrews 6:17 and 7:15–22). Late antique Christian heresiologies list the heresy of the Melchizedekians, as whose crime they identify precisely the elevation of a human ruler and priest to the status of a divine power and person (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 55).

Zoroastrianism, too, was affected by anthropomorphism. On the one hand Persian rulers continued to build Persian temples in the Achaemenid heartland (southeastern Iran) "as if the Greeks had never been" (Potter 2007: 422), centered around a stele on which a sacred fire was maintained (*atestgah*), nothing else. On the other hand, there were also temples, with the same basic structure, that admitted foreign elements. The temple of Masjid i-Solaiman, for example, hosted artifacts that dated back and could be directly linked to the Egyptian Pharaoh Tuthmose III (fifteenth century BCE) and the Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon (seventh century BCE). During the second century BCE it was expanded (in the old Mesopotamian style) also to host shrines to Athene Hippia and Herakles. For a time the three cults, Zoroastrian, Athenian, and that of Herakles, seem to have run in parallel. At some point, however, the Greek gods were replaced with Persian deities, Anahita and Verethragna. But while the cult of these gods had previously been an-iconic, it had now, under the influence of the intermittent Greek period, become anthropomorphic. To be sure, the Persians worshipping at Masjid i-Solaiman did not worship Herakles but Verethragna, but Hellenistic Greek Herakles-worship seems in the meantime to have influenced Persian Verethragna-worship in such a way that the latter was now conducted using a man-like statue of the deity (Potter 2007: 423).

Regarding the encounter between Greek and other religious traditions the concept of syncretism is sometimes invoked (cf. Potter 2007: 419), the idea that one religion influences another thereby changing it or, pejoratively speaking, "watering it down." However, in order to understand better what was going on in the encounter between Greek and other cultures during the Hellenistic period, it may be better to distinguish between the way a religious tradition was perceived by those who had inherited it and the way in which this tradition was presented to the outside in the new, multicultural, context. For example, a temple excavated at Ai Khanoum on the Oxus in Baktria that dates from the time of Greek rule, displays Greek and Persian

elements, but seems to have been above all built in "Mesopotamian style" (Potter 2007: 419–420). It seems to have contained a colossal statue of Zeus, but also an image of Kybele and many other objects of Mesopotamian origin. The worshippers in this temple were most probably not a mixture of Greeks, Mesopotamians, and Baktrians, but Baktrians who used the elements of Greek, Mesopotamian, and Persian religion for a type of worship that was entirely their own, though, of course, now different (in its expression) from the form of worship which they had practiced before that period.

Similarly, when the Buddhist ruler Aśoka exchanged messages with Ptolemy II expressing himself in Greek and using the "language of the Delphic maxims" (cf. Potter 2007: 421) he did not subscribe to Delphic "theology." He merely formulated his own religion in those terms. In a similar way, when in the late tenth century CE Melkite Christians began to translate their theological works into the Islamic Arabic of the Abbasid period, they remained of course Christian (and Orthodox), despite the fact that their entire theological terminology in Arabic was "borrowed" from Islamic theology (Tokay 2008). They merely used that language to express themselves—and their religion—according to the cultural standard of their time.

From a Greek perspective, of course, it may have looked as if the Baktrians—or, for that matter, Aśoka—had learned to revere the gods of the Greeks (cf. Plutarch, *Obsolesc.* 328d). In reality Aśoka resorted to Greek merely "to express Indian thought" and "as a vehicle for communication with his subjects" (Potter 2007: 421). By the same token, when Greek scholars engaged in religious ethnography, they, too, were far from developing a synthesis of their own religion with the Asian religions that they encountered. Klearchos, the pupil of Aristotle, who was believed to have brought the Delphic Maxims to the temple of Ai Khanoum, is also reported to have declared that the Gymnosophists, who could have been Jain ascetics (Deeg and Gardner 2009: 5), were descended from the Magi, while the Jews, he argued, were descended from the Brahmins (cf. Diog. Laert. 1.9; Josephus, *Ap.* 1.179; Potter 2007: 421).

Nevertheless, what we have here are the beginnings of a study, however biased and dilettantic, of other cultures and religions, which also found its pendant in studies of members of other cultures and religions who wanted to present the histories of their own cultures and religions in their own terms, but who did so nevertheless in Greek. One could draw comparisons here with certain types of post-colonial literature from the twentieth century, for example, the works of Frantz Fanon or Edward Said, which were also written in French and English (rather than Arabic). Among the most well known of these "anti-Greek" but nevertheless Hellenistic works of religious history were the *Babyloniaka* of Berossus (fl. ca. 290 BCE) and the *Aigyptiaka* of Manetho (fl. ca. 280 BCE). Hellenistic Judaism, too, produced a whole series

of Jewish historians, Alexander Polyhistor, Demetrios, Artapanos, Eupolemos, and many others (Sterling 1992; Lössl 2010b: 554). Characteristically, these authors were ignored by the Greek historians, their works are largely lost, and they could be all but forgotten today, had not their baton been picked up by early Christian apologists, but above all by the first century CE Jewish historian Josephus, who excerpted many of them for his very own monumental *Jewish Antiquities*. As David Potter (2007: 422) has pointed out: Greek historians had no concern for studying the religious histories of other peoples from their perspective, for example a Babylon, as that of Berossus, distinct from Assyria and Persia. And yet, the Hellenistic era did generate conditions in which non-Greek cultures could express themselves and contribute to a genuinely pluralistic religious landscape, one that was no longer dominated by a Greek version of events only.

Still, these examples indicate that the religious pluralism of the Hellenistic world was not exclusively an harmonious one. There were religious tensions and conflicts. In some cases, as we have already seen, these may have been more subtle, or at least no longer as obvious to a present-day student as they might have been in their day, in other cases they are more obvious and "in-the-face." Potter (2007: 424) names three cults for which the latter applies, the cult of Kybele in Pessinous in Galatia, the cult of Atargatis (not Atartagis) in Hierapolis in Syria, and the cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem. These three cults are related. Yahweh had affinities to the Aramaic deity of Hadad, who was jointly worshipped with Atargatis at Hierapolis, while Atargatis was often assimilated to Kybele. None of the three, however, was readily assimilated with any of the Olympian gods and the followers of the three cults could be violently militant in resisting any attempt by Hellenistic rulers to encourage or force assimilation. All three cult centers were essentially "temple states." They were ruled by priest kings and dedicated elites and had means of raising money (taxes) and troops to defend their interests. The fact that their elites were open to acquiring Greek education and elements of Greek lifestyle and used the Greek language as a means of expression, even to the extent that they translated their sacred writings into Greek and read and interpreted them in the new medium, does not mean that they were prepared in any way to compromise or develop a syncretistic religion. This is blatantly obvious in the case of the Yahweh cult of Jerusalem throughout the period from ca. 200 BCE to 135 CE (cf. Lössl 2010a: 43–74 and Chapter 12, this volume). But even the many Jewish communities in the diaspora were connected with Jerusalem through the idea of the temple as the center of worship. This connection could be maintained by pilgrimage and financial contributions (temple tax). The worshippers of Kybele and Atargatis seem to have had very similar relationships to their cult centers (cf. Potter 2007: 425), and it is

significant that the Romans later tried to exert control over these cults by establishing, for example, a center of Kybele worship in Rome (in 203 BCE), or to force Jews (after 70 CE) to pay the temple tax to the Capitoline Jupiter rather than to Yahweh in Jerusalem (Goodman 2007: 454).

This kind of "competitive" behavior of cultures and religions, too, seems to have been a new feature emerging during the Hellenistic era. Egyptians, Babylonians, and Jews writing alternative histories to counter the dominant Greek accounts; followers of Atargatis collecting money far and wide and sending it back to Hierapolis (Potter 2007: 429); followers of Yahweh being suspected of going out of their way to attract foreigners to their religion as far afield as Egypt, Rome, and Persia (Dickson 2003). Even if the phenomenon of Jewish proselytizing did not yet amount to "mission" in the sense of early Christian activities (Feldman 1996: 288–446, 331–341), it seems to have been suspicious enough in the eyes of many non-Jews (e.g. Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans) to make Jews the target of anti-Jewish bias, or worse (Schäfer 1997: 106–120). It was features like these which were to become stronger in the first few centuries of the Common Era.

New Developments in the Early Post-Hellenistic Era

Yet again, the most obvious political feature of this new era was the Roman empire, which by 31 BCE had superseded the last remaining Hellenistic state. Although much, especially in *polis* religion, will have continued as before (since classical times), the new, more universal, political structures will inevitably have introduced new features that changed all religion so that some elements will eventually have disappeared in their entirety, or changed beyond recognition. Thus, David Potter (2007: 429) writes that if a group of Athenians had fallen asleep in 336 BCE and woken up in 100 BCE, they would have found many of the old *polis* cult structures intact. Obviously, there would have been new, less familiar features, too, such as the veneration of a monarch, or a hierarchy of powers—such as a local or regional potentate besides the Roman super-power, for example—or the addition of a foreign, exotic deity with an affinity to the local deity, or a combination of local deities (cf. Mikalson 1998: 111–112). But similar scenarios can still be imagined for much later (see e.g. Horster and Klöckner 2012 for Athens from the Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity). For example, when the Roman emperor Julian came to Antioch in 362 CE, he was still able to visit the main temples of the city and attend a sacrifice at the shrine of Apollo at Daphne (cf. Julian, *Misop.* 346, 361–362; Amm. Marc. 22.14.4; Downey 1961: 383–387).

Admittedly, by then the old cults were in serious and, judged from hindsight, terminal decline. Temple buildings were despoliated, derelict, ruined, or outright destroyed. Civic support was lacking. But from Julian's perspective—which was shared by many of his contemporaries—much could still be achieved by powerful and good-willing benefactors. Essentially, the shrines were still in place, and there were priests who still knew how to go about their business, more than 600 years after the city had been founded and its religious infrastructure first been developed. (In fact, some of Antioch's shrines were built on sacred sites that date back to Persian, Babylonian, and even older times.) There had long been a rhetoric of decline. Plutarch of Chaeronea, for example, had written about *The Obsolescence of Oracles* in the first century CE (cf. Griffiths 2005: 3905–3906). But his account did not suggest anything that could not be addressed by vigorous reform. Religion clearly was subject to change. But this did not always have to mean change for the worse. It could also mean change for the better.

This rhetoric of change can also be found in another well known document from the period. Probably in 112 CE, Pliny the Younger, in a letter to his emperor Trajan, which he wrote as governor of Bithynia and Pontus in Asia Minor, speaks of shrines in that country having been neglected and deserted and trade in sacrificial meat nearly gone to its knees because of people's lack of interest in traditional religion (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.10). One feels almost reminded of Julian's experience in Antioch exactly 350 years later. However, Pliny speaks of the past, and he emphasizes that things have changed. Under his rule temples have been restored and religious activity recovered. He ends his letter by saying that a great many people could be reformed if they were given the opportunity to repent (Humphries 2006: 210–224 at 213). The purpose of his depiction of decline and recovery is therefore to highlight his success as a governor. Still, it remains interesting that he depicts the religious landscape in his province in such a dynamic way and that he can credibly paint a rather bleak picture of decline, which is followed by one of recovery and reform.

One key factor in this process of religious change from the later Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity, which really cannot be overestimated, was the close interaction of the practice of religion with philosophical reflection on religious practice and on the history of religious practice. And "philosophical" is here meant in a very broad way comprising the whole of "higher education" from schools of grammar and rhetoric to the leading philosophical schools of their day. As Peter van Nuffelen has observed in his recent study, which is about the first two centuries CE, "philosophers interpreted traditional religion and appropriated it as a source of authority for their philosophical project" (2011: 4). As a consequence, not only was religion thereby

becoming more "illuminated" by rational inquiry, but also the other way round, philosophy became open to "trans-rational" aspects of religion, transcendent deities, miracles, demonic influences upon the physical world etc. As J. Gwyn Griffiths has put it, alluding to 1 Corinthians 1:22: it was not only Jews who demanded signs, while the Greeks were seeking wisdom, it was also the other way round (2005: 3903). A philosopher such as Philo of Alexandria, for example, who flourished in the first half of the first century CE, subjected the Jewish religion to a systematic Middle-Platonist understanding, while a Greek philosopher such as the above-mentioned Plutarch, who lived just a generation after Philo, for example in his work on *The Obsolescence of Oracles*, but also elsewhere, took the existence and active interference of low-level, "irrational" (i.e. not necessarily "evil," but rather, "naughty") demons in the course of history very seriously (cf. van Nuffelen 2011: 157–175 at 166).

Other thinkers, such as the Augustan poet Ovid (43 BCE–17/18 CE) and the second-century African Platonist Apuleius of Madaura (ca. 124–170 CE), addressed the topic of change and transformation in works entitled *Metamorphoses.* Apuleius's work, the only Latin novel that is extant in its entirety, is better known under its alternative title *The Golden Ass.* In it a young man, Lucius, from Corinth, gets himself mistakenly, by a botched application of magic, changed into a donkey. He experiences many strange and testing adventures but is eventually given back his humanity by the goddess Isis, in the context of the spring ritual known as the "ship of Isis" (Apuleius, *Met.* 11.16–19). The novel then tells in some detail and seemingly with a great deal of reverence of Lucius's initiation into the mystery cult of Isis (11.20–27) and into the priesthood of the *pastophoroi* ("shrine bearers") who serve both Isis and Osiris at Rome (11.28–30). The entertaining and ribald tone of the novel suggests an ambivalent attitude to religion on the part of both the author and narrator (Lucius). Lucius, who is depicted as taking religion seriously, perhaps too seriously, witnesses (both as a human and a donkey) much hypocrisy and bigotry among his contemporaries. A lot of the comical potential of the novel results from these combinations. But at the center of the novel stands the question of what makes a human human, and the end of the novel suggests that in the pursuit of this quest religious ritual (in this case the initiation into the cult of Isis and Osiris) plays an important role (cf. van Nuffelen 2011: 90–96).

A real-life protagonist perhaps of the fictional Lucius was Apollonius of Tyana in Cappadocia, who lived in the first century CE but was immortalized in an account of his life written by the sophist Philostratus in the early third century CE. Philostratus depicts Apollonius as a trained philosopher and sophist who traveled to the ends of the earth (Babylon, India, Egypt,

Ethiopia) but was at the same time an inspired ascetic, performing miraculous acts of healing, magical disappearances, and even the raising of dead people. It is the combination of philosophical enlightenment and religiously motivated asceticism that is typical for this new attitude to religion in this period. It even seems that it was considered a culminating phenomenon that made this period superior to previous periods. For example, in his *Life of Apollonius* 1.2 Philostratus writes that as a philosopher (i.e. one striving for wisdom) Apollonius was superior even to Pythagoras himself. Precisely in his super-human excellence he was also a figure of divine character and thus a mediator of a specific type of combination of humanism and religion typical for that period (cf. Flinterman 2009).

The Second Sophistic and the Emergence of Christianity

This new culture, which was characterized by an intellectual turn of religion and a religious turn of intellectual culture during the early post-Hellenistic period, is also sometimes referred to as "Second Sophistic." At some level it was mainly a literary-rhetorical phenomenon (cf. Bowersock 1969). More recently, however, it has been increasingly recognized as an entire "value system and mindset" (Lechner 2011: 51). Sophists were rhetorically and philosophically highly trained and acclaimed orators who through their excellence attracted followers and pupils and thus gained public recognition and authority (Bowersock 1969: 8–14). Their own status and that of the educational system which produced them was elitist, but their wider impact was not. Broad swathes of the population benefited from their displays and were entertained and inspired by them. Their activities have to be situated in contexts of euergetism practiced by super-rich elites in civic centers. The construction of structures such as the Nymphaeum in Olympia, the Asklepieion in Pergamon (Lechner 2011: 51), the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias, the Panhellenion in Athens, or the imperial *fora* in Rome (Nasrallah 2010: 76–170) popularized their ideas and ideals so that they inspired also the less educated strata of society. By the way in which these cultural monuments were publicly inaugurated and regularly celebrated (including, for example, by rhetorical displays, which could be both entertaining and edifying), but also through the visual art that was displayed, these projects had a very wide and deep societal and cultural impact. This was not a culture reserved for educated elites only, but one that could both inspire and exercise, and thereby educate, people of all walks.

Not all of these people may have fully identified with this culture, or felt at home in it, although they may have shared many of its fundamental values. One such group were the early Christians. In an oration that can be dated in the 170s and situated in Antioch, Tatian, a Christian sophist, embarks on an extended rant against objects of Greek art, mainly sculptures, some of which can be identified as pieces displayed in the Theater of Pompey on the Campus Martius in Rome, while others were known in other parts of the Greco-Roman world, for example, the widely known and frequently copied Aphrodite of Knidos, originally created by the Athenian sculptor Praxiteles in the fourth century BCE (Tatian, *Or.* 33–34; Nasrallah 2010: 241–246). Not all Christian reactions were like this. Tatian singled out depictions that in his view were lewd or monstrous, such as Glaukippe, who was known for having given birth to a monstrous child, or Phryne, a famous courtesan in fourth-century BCE Athens, who was rumored to have been the model of Praxiteles's Cnidian Aphrodite. There are other Christian reactions to civic monuments that are far more positive. For example, in Acts 17:22–28, which probably dates from the early second century, Saint Paul (Paul of Tarsus) is reported to have visited Athens in the mid-first century CE. In the manner of a sophist Paul is said to have addressed the Athenians in an oration, not entirely without success, or so it seems, as some among his audience are said to have become his followers, including a councilor named Dionysius. But what is also interesting in this account is that Paul is said to have made reference in his speech to an inscription that he claimed he had seen displayed in a shrine and which was dedicated to an "unknown god" (*agnostos theos*). It was this god, Paul said, which he was proclaiming, and then went on with his speech. This was a typically "sophistic" way of addressing an audience (cf. Lössl 2014: 78–82). Dio Chrysostom, for example, did something quite similar when around 100 CE he held his *Olympic Oration* (*Or.* 12) on the origin of the idea of God in front of Pheidias's statue of Zeus (Lechner 2011: 60).

The first-century Christian teacher Paul of Tarsus, whose letters, written in Greek, represent the earliest extant written evidence of Christianity, may be a good example for the link that exists between early Christianity and the Second Sophistic (Winter 1997) and for the Second Sophistic as a context of early Christianity. It would be wrong to think of the Second Sophistic only as a phenomenon of the second and third century CE. Philostratus, who coined the expression at the end of the second century (in his *Lives of the Sophists*: 480–481), even tended not to understand it in chronological terms at all, but in thematic terms: the ancient sophistic, he argued, was philosophical and discussed abstract topics such as justice or the universe. The "new" sophistic, which really should not be called "new," but "second," because it is also old (i.e. it too goes back to the fifth century BCE), discusses

themes related to history, or persons involved in history such as rich and poor persons, princes and tyrants (cf. Bowersock 1969: 8). But this distinction is not fully convincing. Representatives of the Second Sophistic, too, discuss philosophy besides history—and a lot more (like music, art, poetry etc., and, of course, religion). The link between philosophy and rhetoric is characteristic for all types of sophistic. But Philostratus was right in that there was a continuity in the sophistic tradition. What we now understand as the Second Sophistic was only a culmination of that tradition. A further culmination came with what has been called the "Third Sophistic" in the fourth to sixth centuries CE (cf. Quiroga 2007).

These reflections are relevant in view of situating writers as early as Paul of Tarsus and Philo of Alexandria in the context of the sophistic tradition, as Bruce Winter tried to do (1997). In the spirit of what we said at the beginning of this section Winter tried to expand the reach of sophistic culture beyond the very small groups of elite sophists and their audiences as they are discussed, for example, by Bowersock (1969). Sources such as the writings of Philo or Paul, other early Christian or Jewish writings, papyri such as those listed by Winter and many others suggest a broader culture of rhetorical education whose beneficiaries participated in that common culture that made up what has been called "the world of the Second Sophistic" (Borg 2004). Winter was critical of the fact that many studies dealing with the Second Sophistic ignored the Christian contribution to that culture, and fifteen years later Lechner (2011) still noted only a slight improvement. Whatever the reasons are for this neglect in modern scholarship, in Antiquity there was definitely snobbery involved in relegating Christians, but also many other members of less privileged social groups with educational aspirations, to oblivion. This attitude was mirrored by a lower class contempt for "high" education and those who aspired to it (Knapp 2011: 50–51). Nevertheless, despite the mockery that they may have had to endure from their peers as well as from members of the higher social orders many people of lower social backgrounds seem to have had such aspirations. For example, when in Acts 4:13 two of Jesus' followers, the apostles John and Peter, address the public outside the Jerusalem Temple, bystanders are surprised that two such "illiterate and simple" men can deliver such an impressive speech, and more than 100 years later (in the late 170s CE) the Platonist philosopher Kelsos (Celsus) still refers to some of the Christian teachers, who are active in Rome, as coming from the very lowest strata of society, men working in leather and wool factories, who cannot get rid of the nasty smell that is attached to their trade but nevertheless manage to get a hold on young men and women from well-off families (cf. Lössl 2015: 371 and 376; and more generally Lechner 2011: 70–73).

The Second Sophistic is thus a complex phenomenon, comprising an immense plurality of aspects and facets, many of them contradictory, but with humanity—and its contradictory and mystifying nature—ultimately at the center. For example, there was a strong focus on the human body in the Second Sophistic, but this included not only an admiration and veneration of athletics, idealized physical beauty, sensuality, and health as expressed in sports, arts, performance etc., but also interest in the ugly, the monstrous, any type of physiognomy, the rejection of all physical aesthetics, and retreat to an inner contemplation of the essence of beauty (cf. Lechner 2011: 57–58; Swain 2007). But whatever one's stance on this confusing array of discourses, it had to be put in words and performed as speech. The study of language, its grammar, its rhetoric, its literary qualities, and its potentials in conveying content, was therefore vital for the sophist. The tools of that discipline were grammar books, dictionaries, rhetorical hand- and textbooks, collections of model speeches, and encyclopedias. No aspect of human life should be left out. Birthdays, funerals, inaugurations of buildings and institutions, arrivals and departures of important personalities, festivals, all these events were marked by elaborate rhetorical displays. The purpose of rhetoric in that culture was to humanize life by rhetoricizing it.

And it was not only the "classical," Attic, Greek language that was important here, although it certainly was for members of the elites, top-ranking sophists, and members of courts and city councils (cf. Lechner 2011: 62–64). These groups were relentlessly competitive and their linguistic refinement went frequently over the top. But Greek rhetoric was also performed at "lower" levels and addressed to wider social groups, not just members of the elites. Some sophists, like Lucian, or Tatian in his oration, even mocked the sophistic obsession with highly strung "Atticicity" and suggested that it was in danger of producing its own barbarisms and becoming alienated from the very culture it purported to serve and to sustain (Lucian, *Revivisc.* 19; Tatian, *Or.* 26; Lössl 2012: 211–218).

Religion was an important dimension of this culture. Dio Chrysostom's *Olympic Speech* (see above) was on the surface a comparison of the art of Pheidias with the poetry of Homer, but at a deeper level it was also a philosophical argument for the practice of religion. Aelius Aristides's exegesis of myths, his concern for the correct way of venerating the gods, his "sacred reports," and his miracle stories were despite their often exaggerated and posing nature very probably authentic expressions of a religious attitude (Lechner 2011: 60). In Aristides's case this culture of a rhetorical religiosity was centered around the Asklepieion at Pergamon. This included a shrine, which was a center of worship and healing, as well as a theater, a library, and teaching and recreational facilities. It was the center of a network of sophists

led by Aristides, but also a place filled with memorabilia, statues, busts, inscriptions, and foundations, accessible to the multitude, that reminded of absent and deceased "members" of that network, many of whom were treated like divinities (Lechner 2011: 61). Vice versa, gods (as in this case Asclepius) were treated like human members of such networks, brotherly fellows, comrades, or experts whom one could consult for help in medical or personal matters.

This is a very personalized, humanistic approach to religion, which nevertheless represented a real revival of classical religion, not a mere parody. In fact, it has been argued that the idea of classical religion as something that happened several hundred years earlier and as something that was distinct from the present was only invented in the time of the Second Sophistic (Schmitz 2007), which must therefore be considered a very creative and innovative period as far as religion and the culture surrounding it is concerned. A work such as Pausanias's famous *Description of Greece*, which dates from this period, reflects that intense public interest in the cultural and religious past of Greece as it was still accessible in present-day architectural sites. Pausanias's work seems to have been used as a guide by "pilgrims" or, perhaps better, religious tourists, classically educated people (*pepaideumenoi*) who visited the many classical temples and places strewn across Greece with the aim of experiencing their very own kind of divine–human encounter (cf. Rutherford 2001; Galli 2010).

And what they visited were not old ruins of a bygone era, but live cultural centers that were continuously renovated and newly developed, among them sites mentioned earlier, such as Athens, Olympia, Marathon, Delphi, Corinth, Rome, Antioch/Daphne, and others (Lechner 2011: 64). What happened there may be comparable not so much to present-day tourists visiting ancient ruins, but to the crowds that visit great cultural and popular musical festivals, or sports events such as the Olympic Games. It may be worth considering this perhaps in the light of both the demise of athletic games at the end of Antiquity (Remijsen 2015) and of the revival of the Olympic Games at the end of the nineteenth century (Sloterdijk 2013). Lechner (2011: 65–66) mentions in this context specifically the examples of Herodes Atticus' sponsorship of new athletic stadia in Athens and at the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, new theaters at Athens and Corinth, and the Nymphaeum at Olympia, the latter a monumental fountain that revolutionized the hitherto notoriously scarce water supply at that site and thus led to a dramatic increase in visitor numbers. According to Lucian (*Peregr.* 19) the notorious cynic philosopher Peregrinus Proteus (who eventually made a show of killing himself by jumping onto a funeral pyre) delivered an oration in front of the main basin of that fountain, in which he scorned the benefactor (Herodes Atticus, who

remains unnamed in the speech) for undermining Olympic values; for in the past people had to suffer thirst and often died while attending the games, but now they could indulge in drinking as much water as they liked; and Peregrinus, Lucian adds, made a spectacle of drinking great amounts of water himself while delivering that speech (*Peregr.* 19; cf. Lechner 2011: 68).

Lechner (2011: 69) suggests that we could easily imagine Christian "preachers" delivering speeches in front of that font, in a similar way perhaps to Saint Paul delivering a speech on the Areopagus. On the other hand, as we already mentioned, Christian attempts at getting through to a wider public were very much painted into a corner by more influential sophists and philosophers such as Celsus, Lucian, Marcus Aurelius, Fronto, or Galen. Nevertheless, Lechner continues (2011: 74–75), by buying into the educational program of the Second Sophistic, Christians accrued more and more cultural capital during the second century and used it not only to improve their image among non-Christian contemporaries, but also to tighten their internal church structures both locally and globally. It was not least in the context of the "worldwide" context of the Second Sophistic that by the end of the second century at the latest the Christian Church too began to understand itself to be "catholic", that is, universal (Lössl 2010a: 19; Edwards 2009). In the third century this understanding would provide the foundations for the doctrinal and institutional thinking that would shape what was to become in the fourth and fifth centuries the Christian Church of Late Antiquity.

The "Crisis of the Third Century" CE and the Transition to Late Antiquity

But we must not mistake the appearance of Christianity in the context of the Second Sophistic as equivalent to its dominance. Christians during that period were aspiring to higher education, as is attested by their literary remains as well as by the relatively high number of extant epitaphs dedicated to Christian teachers, mostly grammarians (cf. Markschies 2007: 47–75). However, for a long period they retained the image, given to them by a snobbish intellectual establishment, of pathetic upstarts, banausic would-be philosophers (Lechner 2011: 70–73: "Philosophische Witzfiguren"). As we shall see in the remaining chapters of this volume, the religious landscape of Late Antiquity remained as diverse as it had been throughout Antiquity. Classical Greco-Roman religion was going to recede, but this recession was a varied and prolonged process, which was far from over at this stage, that is, at the end of the second and in the early third century, but was still going to

continue for another 400–500 years. During that period Greco-Roman culture was to experience further developments, which would reshape it and keep it alive in new forms for centuries to come.

The period toward the end of or following that of the Second Sophistic, which is variously dated from the last decade of the second to the last two decades of the third century (ca. 190s–280s) has in the past sometimes been referred to as the "crisis of the third century," an expression that has more recently been questioned (cf. Hekster and Zair 2008: 83–88). David Potter (2004: 215–262) has more specifically referred to the "failure of the Severan empire" (i.e. the structure of government that was established by Severus from 193 CE onward and lasted until the revolt of Postumus in 260 CE) and the "emergence of a new order" in the decades that followed. There clearly were major upheavals at the end of the Antonine period and during the time of the Severan dynasty, not just with respect to volatile government, emperors out of control, violent successions, purges, civil wars, and military disasters in frontier areas, but there were also major changes and transformations in the area of culture and religion.

Septimius Severus, emperor from 193 to 211, was of Punic (Phoenician) origin. He therefore had links to Africa as well as to the east (Syria). This manifested itself also in his attitude to religion. He was especially associated with "eastern" divinities and religious traditions. For example, he was said to have received a prophecy from Zeus Belus in Apamea that he would be emperor, and, once emperor, to have developed an excessive interest in astrology (Potter 2004: 108). His son and successor Caracalla is said to have surrounded himself with astrologers and "participated in the rites of the moon goddess" (Potter 2004: 146) near Carrhae two days before his death in April 217. The most notorious Severan emperor however was Elagabalus, who succeeded Caracalla from 218 to 222, after a brief interregnum. "Elagabal" was in fact the name of the god whose priest Elagabalus had been as a boy in his hometown Emesa. When emperor, he installed the deity in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter (Potter 2004: 154), ultimately with the aim to replace Jupiter, and continued to serve as his priest. The way in which he performed the relevant rituals and certain parts of the rituals (involving sexual acts) struck the Romans as foreign and offensive, and they reacted against it.

It is not entirely clear to what extent this version of events is factual and to what extent it is a construction by later historians, who depicted Elagabalus as an oriental deviant and sexual pervert. Martijn Icks (2012) has pointed out that Elagabalus was probably not that different from other Severan emperors, whose Phoenician (Syrian and African) background seems not to have been perceived as offensively foreign by Romans in their own time. Later sources like the *Historia augusta* (cf. *Heliogabalus* 3.5) remain

ultimately inconclusive. They depict Elagabalus' attitude to religion on the one hand in syncretistic terms (e.g. he is supposed to have worshipped Christ alongside other gods, similar to his successor, see *Alexander Severus* 29.2), on the other hand it seems that what they describe were no longer merely peaceful additions to the Pantheon but a violent and destructive invasion and suppression of traditional religion, a new kind of exclusivism or super-sessionism.

Against the background of developments such as these it seems that the exposure of the culture of the Second Sophistic, as outlined above, to the real cultural "other" present within the Greco-Roman world led to real and violent cultural clashes. The traditionalist mentality of the Second Sophistic, which continued with the Hellenistic attitude of interpreting all cultures from a Greek perspective, had yet to catch up with these developments (Potter 2004: 217). This took time. While the centers of power were shaken to the ground by the above-mentioned events, sophists continued to be active in cities and towns. The realization that the foundations of these civic centers themselves were affected, including their Hellenic identity, and that a transformation of major proportions was underway, dawned only gradu-ally. Perhaps the emerging phenomenon of Neoplatonism could be seen as one manifestation of this process. Its protagonist Plotinus, who lived from 204 to 270 CE, came from Egypt and was active in Rome, though he had also traveled in Persia. Neoplatonism was also adopted by Christian thinkers, for example by Origen, also an Egyptian, who lived from 185 to 254 CE.

What Plotinus's philosophy reflects, for example, in his work against the Gnostics (cf. Spanu 2012), is an engagement with those "alien" religious elements in second- and third-century Hellenic intellectual and religious cul-ture (Burns 2014). Gnosis, a Jewish–Christian phenomenon that had emerged during the second century, was a movement that blended eastern religious influences with popular Greek philosophy. Influenced by the cul-ture of the Second Sophistic it was also rejected by mainstream culture, even within Christianity. At the same time it exerted considerable influence. Plotinus, for example, rejected certain aspects of its teachings, as did many of his Christian contemporaries, for example Origen, but he was also influenced by them, for example in his attitude toward the supra-rational and the transcendent.

Another way in which gnosis influenced and shaped the development of religious and intellectual culture in the third century is exemplified in Mani, the founder figure of Manichaeism, who lived from ca. 216 to 274 CE. Originally from Mesopotamia, he was largely active in the Persian empire of Shapur I, where he not only continued and developed philosophical and spiritual teachings, but also styled himself as a key prophetic figure, perhaps

even referring to himself as "seal of the prophets," a phrase later ascribed to the prophet Muhammad (Stroumsa 2015: 87–89), who had come to proclaim the ultimate, one and only true religion.

Thus coming back to Elagabalus: While his case of attempting to replace Jupiter with Elagabal in Rome was extreme, it highlights a tendency that was to continue throughout the third century. There were also infrastructural circumstances that supported this tendency. The "Severan empire" (Potter) was strongly relying on an efficient military apparatus, which swallowed increasing amounts of money. It had therefore a tendency to attempt to become more centralized and to make government more efficient (Potter 2004: 239). This also included tendencies at harmonization in areas of culture and religion. Already in 212 CE, for example, Caracalla had handed Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire. Thus, by "linking, ever more closely, the survival of the empire with that of the emperor" (Potter 2004: 139) he had at the same time contributed to an undermining of the status of the towns and cities and their civic traditions. Rather than bringing about greater unity and harmony such measures tended to cause tensions and conflicts. And it did not matter how emperors tried to go about such measures. For example, when in 244 CE Philip the Arab became emperor in a time of confusion and extreme military crisis, he was keen to present himself as a Roman in the traditional sense, very much in contrast, for example, to Elagabalus, and very much in contrast also to his own cultural background. Rather than importing his Arabic culture to Rome (as Elagabalus had done with his Syrian (Emesan) culture and religion), Philip imported Roman culture to his home region Arabia by reconstructing his home city Chahba in a western, Italian, style, renaming it Philippopolis. However, as David Potter has put it, "Philippopolis appears to have been no more welcome in the Arabian environment than the Emesene god had been at Rome." Its construction was accompanied by prophecies of doom and ruination, as was Philip's endeavor to honor Rome with lavish millennium celebrations in 248 CE (Potter 2004: 238). This was very different from the responses to civic donations in the second century, which we discussed in the previous section.

In 249 CE Philip was toppled and succeeded by Decius, who began his reign with a decree that was aimed at making each inhabitant of the empire perform a ritual act of worship on behalf of the emperor in exactly the same way, supervised and certified by local religious and civic authorities (Rives 1999; Potter 2004: 241–244). From what we have seen so far this decree fits well with the general style of government during the Severan empire characterized by attempts at harmonization and homogeneization. It was certainly not aimed primarily at seeking out and tripping up Christians, a great number

of whom felt compelled to refuse to comply with the order and thereby risk severe punishment and death. Nevertheless, the decree of Decius, which incidentally also dates exactly in the middle of the third century, has been seen as a turning point and a clear indicator of religious change and transformation in the Roman empire.

While the classical Greek framework, extended by an emerging classical Latin culture and the phenomenon of a Greco-Roman empire, was still visible and alive, new elements had now begun to become more and more prevalent: religions that could no longer be seamlessly integrated into the classical pantheon, philosophical attitudes that were influenced by such religions (a new attitude to supra-rationality, transcendence, and, ultimately, monotheism), a more "existential", individualistic attitude to religion emphasizing personal faith, individual identity, and exploration of individual destiny. This went hand in hand with a decline in the value of citizenship tied to specific cities and regions in the context of an empire that increasingly tried to assume that role but could not fulfill it in all its aspects. In this context, for example, Christian Church membership could assume a more important role, expecially since the Christian Church also developed a notion of its own universality. This became especially poignant in the aftermath of the Decian persecution when leaders of the Christian Church seem to have been far more efficient in sanctioning their members who had breached church discipline and sacrificed to the gods than imperial officials were in prosecuting those Christians who had refused to sacrifice (cf. Lössl 2010a: 201–204). This universalism combined with attempts at stricter social control did not amount to a form of late antique totalitarianism, contrary to what may sometimes have been suggested in the past. The late antique empire (or Church) did not have the means to implement anything that might resemble a modern totalitarian system (cf. Edwards 2009: 6–7), and it was, and remained, from the Antonine period right into Late Antiquity, a law-based society as well. The Severan jurist Ulpian, who lived from ca. 170 to 220 CE, once referred to the law as "true philosophy," and, in that sense, as religion (*Digest*. 1.1.1; Harries 2004: 7). Still, there certainly was also a tendency toward increased imperial autocracy and a willingness to understand the institution of an imperial autocratic monarchy as sacrosanct, or divine. A prophetic figure like that of Mani finally, who operated effectively in both the Roman and the Persian empire and proclaimed himself explicitly as prophet of the ultimate and true religion, albeit not (yet) in terms of a radical monotheism, indicates that there was a new dynamics at work that had the potential to go beyond anything that could still be framed in terms of classical and Hellenistic Greek culture and religion.

Thus by the middle of the third century many characteristics that were going to define religion in Late Antiquity were already fully visible and their development well underway. At the same time, as this chapter has hopefully shown, at least in outlines, this later period retained a striking continuity with the Hellenistic period, a continuity that was to last for several more centuries to come.

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FURTHER READING

Textual sources for the study of religion relevant for the period and areas covered in this chapter differ vastly. Only some general hints and examples can be given here. They include, from the earliest periods, epic poetry (e.g. Homer, Hesiod), historical sources (e.g. Herodotus), dramatic works (Sophocles, Euripides), "scientific" (e.g.

geographical, chronological, medical, and similar) literature, philosophical literature (van Nuffelen 2011: 242–245), Jewish literature such as the Septuagint (Rahlfs 1935), Philo, or the Dead Sea scrolls (Garcia Martinez and Tigchelaar 1999), early Christian literature including the New Testament (Moreschini and Norelli 2005), Gnostic and Manichaean literature (Robinson 1988; Gardner and Lieu 2004), and large bodies of inscriptions (see the lists in Erskine 2007: xxiv–xxviii, Potter 2004: xxi–xxii; Beard *et al.* 1998). For religious iconography from the classical period see the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (LIMC); for religious practices the *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum* (ThesCRA); on religious change in the Hellenistic period, Mikalson (2006) can be recommended. Many sources are also available online. The list in the front matter (pp. xxiii–l) contains, in alphabetical order, a key to the abbreviations used for sources cited in this chapter, editions used and recommended, and secondary literature cited. Naturally, this represents only a limited selection of relevant authors, texts, and collections.

CHAPTER THREE

Christianity and Paganism in the Roman Empire, 250–450 CE

Mark Humphries

Introduction

Superstition shall cease; the madness of sacrifices shall be abolished. For if any man in violation of the law of the deified Emperor, Our Father [i.e. Constantine I], and in violation of this command of Our Clemency, should dare to perform sacrifices, he shall suffer the infliction of a suitable punishment and the effect of an immediate sentence.

(*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.2)

In 341, with these apparently uncompromising words, the Christian emperor Constans (337–350 CE) commanded his official Madalianus to restrict the worship of the ancient gods. This law is preserved in a fifth-century compilation of imperial legislation that speaks loudly of its hostility toward traditional cults (Hunt 1993; Salzman 1993) and offers a window into a world that seems utterly at odds with the religious dynamics of earlier Roman history. One of the most striking features of that earlier world was its capacity to absorb new cultures and, with them, new gods. It is no exaggeration to say that much of what we know about the pantheons of Iron Age Europe arises from their assimilation into Roman religious habits in the empire's provinces. As native gods were adopted by the Romans, so they became subject to Roman forms of worship: this included the setting up of votive inscriptions from which we know the names of a range of deities, such as Antenociticus

on the northern frontier of Britain (*RIB* 1327–1329). Some of these local cults spread far beyond their homelands, such as the mother deities of the Pannonians (*Matres Pannoniarum*) attested at Lyons in Gaul in the 190s (Mócsy 1974: 232–234, 250). A similar adaptability can be seen in the east, this time building on Hellenistic foundations (see Chapters 2 and 6). Thus at Baalbek in Lebanon, Semitic Baal, having already been assimilated to Greek Zeus, became the Roman Jupiter Heliopolitanus. These varied mutations also lent the religious profile of the Roman world considerable local diversity, as individual provinces and communities preserved their own local gods alongside those of Rome's pantheon (Rives 2007: 54–87).

Such religious diversity is emblematic of the flexibility that was crucial to Rome's success as an imperial power. This is not to say that Roman religion did not have its limits, but when the Romans took action against a cult, non-religious factors can be seen to have played a significant role. The restrictions imposed on the cult of Bacchus in 186 BCE owed much to concerns about the threat posed to social cohesion by unregulated meetings of cult members (*ILS* 18). In the late first century BCE, misgivings about the more exotic features of the cult of Cybele—such as the outlandish attire and practices of its priests—were plainly informed by worries about appropriate Roman deportment, and could be accommodated by having cult personnel from the goddess's native Asia Minor operate alongside a Roman-style priesthood (Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.19). Around the same time, the expulsion of Egyptian cults from Augustan Rome owed much to a general suspicion of Egypt in the generation that fought against Antony and Cleopatra (Takács 1995). When it comes to strictly religious criteria, the Romans could be remarkably indulgent. Not only did they accept that exotic and unRoman elements of the cult of Cybele were a necessity, but even a staunch conservative like the historian Tacitus could acknowledge that Judaism, however repugnant he found it, deserved toleration because it was the Jews' ancestral religion (*Hist.* 5.5).

How different is the religious history of the later empire, with its apparently characteristic intolerance. With the advent of Christian emperors, survival became increasingly precarious for that diverse assemblage of traditional cults we call "paganism" (a term I will use here simply for its convenience; for the difficulties inherent in the term, see Jones 2014: 2–7). But why should paganism die out under Christian emperors when Christianity had flourished under pagan ones, notwithstanding episodes of persecution? Since the time of the European Enlightenment, there has been a tendency to regard intolerance as somehow symptomatic of a monolithic mindset that was part and parcel of Christian monotheism (Drake 1996: 7). In the greatest Enlightenment meditation on this theme, Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, paganism is presented as having been largely

crushed in the fourth century through the enactments of Christian emperors from Constantine I to Theodosius I (*Decline and Fall*, chapter 28).

This chapter will contest these long-held assumptions. First, it argues that the roots of late antique religious intolerance can be found earlier, in the period before Constantine, and that it arose from an increasingly close dependence of the Roman state on religious ideology in times of crisis. Second, it contends that any assumption that paganism could be crushed simply at the order of the emperor is a considerable distortion of a more complex reality. While the Christianity of emperors from Constantine onward (with the exception of the pagan Julian) is certainly an important factor in late antique religious history, it is not the only context to keep in mind when tracing religious change: equally important are the various constraints that limited the effectiveness of imperial pronouncements on religious matters. It was one thing for an emperor to wish to prohibit this or that religious custom; but it was entirely another matter for that wish to be translated into practice.

Hearing Both Sides of a One-Sided Narrative

In February 303 CE, on the cusp of his twentieth year on the throne, the emperor Diocletian (284–305), encouraged by his junior co-emperor the Caesar Galerius, issued a law ordering the destruction of Christian churches and scriptures. This enactment, together with three others issued over the next year, inaugurated an eight-year-long purge of Christians that was to be remembered as the "Great Persecution," and which seemed to represent the single most concerted effort by the pagan Roman state to obliterate Christianity. That image is almost certainly exaggerated (Humphries 2009: 14–19): in spite of the lurid tales of suffering and martyrdom that circulated afterward, the number of Christians killed might not actually have been very large. Moreover, the sense in which the "Great Persecution" appears to represent a climactic crescendo of anti-Christian action by pagan Romans is surely accentuated by its immediate sequel, in which Constantine (306–337) emerged as a Christian and a defender of the Church. But even if this "Great Persecution" was not in fact so great as legend and narrative contrivance would have us believe, it was still, in many ways, a shocking event.

One of our chief witnesses to the events of 303 and after is the contemporary Christian, bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (died 339), two of whose works, the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Martyrs of Palestine*, chronicle its impact in detail. It is clear that the persecution caught even Eusebius, with his keen interest in the interwoven histories of Christian Church and Roman state, off guard. Indeed, he had begun composing his *Ecclesiastical History*

before Diocletian acted, and at a time when it already seemed as if the Roman empire and Christianity had reached some sort of accommodation after the persecutions of the emperors Valerian and Gallienus in the 250s and 260s. The apparent *volte face* of Diocletian and his colleagues in 303 therefore demanded explanation. For Eusebius, pondering the question from within the Church, the answer was to be found in the cosmic battle between good and evil, between God and the Devil that informs his whole understanding of human history. He saw thirty years of peace as having led Christians into moral slackness (*HE* 8.1.7). As such, Diocletian's persecution could be regarded as much an instrument of God's intervention in human affairs as the subsequent conversion of Constantine. Everywhere Eusebius looked, he felt he could discern the hand of God guiding human history so as to facilitate the expansion of Christianity. This meant that he regarded not only the emergence of Constantine as God's champion as a sign of God's work in the world, but also other events: thus he could argue that the achievement of the *pax Romana* under Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE) similarly manifested God's will, since it provided the peaceful circumstances in which the preaching of the Christian gospel could flourish (*Tricennial Oration* 16.4).

In sum, Eusebius made Roman persecution of Christianity conform to an avowedly Christian conception of history. But this is an analysis that allows little room for understanding how persecution had a logic from the pagan point of view, or why the imperial authorities acted as they did. Indeed, we need to be sensitive to the extent to which our whole understanding of early Christian history, not least our understanding of the faith's interactions with Roman officialdom, is dominated by the perspective of Christian authors, particularly Eusebius, but also other writers like his contemporary Lactantius, like the mid-third-century bishop Cyprian of Carthage, and the composers of accounts of martyrdom that stress Christian resilience in the face of pagan perfidy (Moss 2013). From the pagan side, by contrast, the evidence is much slighter. In the early second century, Tacitus and the biographer Suetonius mention a purge of Christians at Rome in 64 CE under Nero, but do so in order to highlight the emperor's capricious tyranny (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16). Their contemporary and acquaintance Pliny the Younger has left a record in his correspondence with the emperor Trajan (98–117) of his interrogation of Christians while he was governor of Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96–97). While it is clear that Pliny regarded the Christians with disdain and felt they should be punished for their stubborn adherence to an eccentric superstition, his reaction to Christianity was mainly one of perplexity. After Pliny, we have no fully preserved pagan accounts of Christianity that explain why persecution might

occur. Such writings surely existed: the third-century Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry wrote a work *Against the Christians* that was influential on the thought world of Roman political elites just before the "Great Persecution," but we know of it only from excerpts preserved in later Christian writings that sought to discredit it (Digeser 2012). Therefore, in order to understand the sort of religious mentality that ushered in persecution we need, on the one hand, to read against the grain of Christian sources that risk distorting the motivations of the persecutors, and, on the other hand, to piece together such scraps of information as we have from the pagan side (including pagan texts excerpted by Christian authors) that shed light on the impulses that moved the authorities.

From Decius to Diocletian: The Formation of a Persecuting Society

It is easy to assume from Christian sources that Christianity was ever at the receiving end of imperial repression. Indeed, Eusebius had made such oppression a central theme of his *Ecclesiastical History* (*HE* 1.1.3). Examined more closely, however, the evidence suggests that until the mid-third century, episodes of persecution were short-lived, intermittent, and localized. This is largely to be expected. Christianity's spread across the empire was patchy, meaning that some areas, such as Asia Minor and North Africa, had substantial Christian communities, while others, such as the Balkans or northern Gaul, had barely any; hence persecution arose predominantly in those areas where Christians were sufficiently conspicuous as to attract the hostile attentions of their non-Christian neighbors. Similarly, the localized—as opposed to empire-wide—nature of early persecutions reflects how the Roman empire functioned: without a developed bureaucracy, there was little scope for the implementation of overarching governmental policies in a modern sense; rather, administration worked through a complex set of negotiations between the empire's representatives (governors, soldiers, fiscal agents) and provincial elites, mainly local aristocracies based in towns and cities (Garnsey and Saller 1987: 20–40). As long as they paid their taxes and did not foment rebellion, provincial communities were free to run their own affairs: the potential for repressive policies, including persecution, to provoke unrest would have restrained the hand of the imperial administration. Yet when local communities *did* opt to persecute Christians in their midst, the apparatus of the state soon became involved, as governors were appealed to on account of their apparent legal monopoly on capital jurisdiction (Garnsey 1968).

   And then, in the middle of the third century, this changed. The architect of this shift was the emperor Decius (249–251), who ordered that all subjects of the empire offer sacrifice to the traditional gods. This action is not only narrated by Eusebius (*HE* 6.1), but is also attested by more than 40 papyrus certificates called *libelli* found in Egypt that record individuals sacrificing in compliance with the imperial order. The episode demands explanation, both in terms of what Decius was trying to achieve, and why he should have embarked on such a novel policy.

   To comprehend the Decian persecution, we need to understand the challenges facing the empire at this time and the place of religion in imperial society. Decius himself did not last long as emperor, being killed in battle against the Goths after less than two years on the throne. His fall from power, however, is indicative of the wider upheavals confronting the empire in the third century. The fifty years between the murder of Alexander Severus in 235 and the elevation of Diocletian in 284 were some of the most unstable in Roman history, with more than twenty individuals laying claim to the position of emperor, and often securing it through bloody civil war. The main impulse for this instability was increased pressure on the empire's frontiers, as more formidable enemies, such as the Sasanid Persians in the east or the Goths and Alamanni in Europe, scored victories over Roman forces and struck deep into imperial territory. In these circumstances, emperors needed to be effective generals to survive; if they were not, they risked being overthrown. The absence of political stability and frontier security bred other threats: between the late 250s and early 270s, the empire threatened to split apart; meanwhile, the immense pressure on the empire's resources, especially the need to pay the troops, led to a rapid debasement of the precious metal content of the coinage, a factor that seems, in some regions at least, to have provoked serious inflation. In short, the empire seemed to be fighting for its very survival.

   While modern accounts stress political upheavals, frontier vulnerability, and economic malaise in causing the imperial crisis, Romans at the time viewed the roots of their difficulties differently. From the beginnings of their imperial expansion in the fourth and third centuries BCE, the Romans had regarded the goodwill of the gods as essential for their state's success (Gordon 2008: 84–86): in his great epic of the Augustan age, the poet Virgil made Rome's patron deity Jupiter promise Aeneas, ancestor of the city's founders, that his descendants would enjoy an "empire without limits" (*Aeneid* 1.279). The state's ruling elite sought to maintain the favor of the gods through pious observances such as the performance of public sacrifices and the building of temples. If the state faltered, it was a sign that the gods were displeased. And if that was the case, then urgent displays of piety were the only way to avert disaster.

Such demonstrations could take various forms. One was to direct ostentatious worship toward Rome's ancestral gods: thus, part of Augustus' strategy for healing a wounded Republic was his restoration of Rome's temples. Equally, however, instability and danger could provoke religious innovation. Already in the middle Republic, moments of crisis prompted the Romans to shore up their store of divine goodwill alongside that derived from the traditional gods by introducing new deities and their worship, such as Aesculapius from Greece or Cybele from Asia Minor; this trend continued into the principate with the establishment at Rome of cults such as that of Syrian Baal and Sol Invictus in the third century (Liebeschuetz 1978). But periods of religious anxiety could also encourage a search for scapegoats who had offended the gods: the burial alive of Vestal Virgins who betrayed their vows of chastity provides a notorious example (Beard *et al.* 1998: 1.51, 137). By the third century CE, Christians could fall victim to such religious anxieties. A letter to Cyprian of Carthage from bishop Firmilian of Caesarea in Cappadocia recalled how in the reign of Alexander Severus (222–235) an earthquake had prompted local pagans to persecute Christians in their midst (Cyprian, *Letters* 75.10). This tendency was so pronounced as to draw a lampoon from the African Christian Tertullian: "If the Tiber rises so high it floods the walls, or the Nile so low it doesn't flood the fields, if the earth opens, or the heavens don't, if there is famine, if there is plague, instantly the howl goes up, 'The Christians to the lion!' What, all of them? To a single lion?" (*Apology* 40).

Precisely this constellation of religious responses to crisis can help to explain the actions of Decius. An inscription from Aphrodisias in Asia Minor preserves a letter from Decius thanking the city for offering sacrifices and prayers for the good of his reign (Reynolds 1982: 141). The emperor's demand that *all* citizens of the empire should sacrifice to the gods manifests a similar concern, but it was surely also designed to identify Christians who, through their unwillingness to participate, could be regarded as offending the gods and thus jeopardizing the state (Rives 1999). Moreover, in addition to reflecting imperial anxieties, the Decian persecution seems to have occurred at a moment when Christians were suddenly much more visible in the empire's population. Precise figures for Christians at any moment in Antiquity are lacking, but efforts to estimate them on the basis of steady growth from the first century suggest that the third century will have seen an enormous jump of numbers espousing Christianity (Hopkins 1998). If pagans like Decius were looking to identify individuals who denied the gods' efficacy, the presence of a visible Christian population refusing to offer sacrifice presented an obvious answer.

In the end, stability was gradually restored to the empire, above all by Diocletian, whose more than twenty years on the throne represented the longest reign of any emperor since Antoninus Pius (138–161) more than a century earlier. Like his predecessors, Diocletian emphasized that the restoration of order was achieved not just by his own efforts and those of his fellow emperors, administrators, and troops, but also through the cooperation of the gods. Imperial monuments stressed the connection between piety and imperial success. At Thessalonica, an arch was erected to celebrate the victory of the Caesar Galerius over the Persians: it depicted the Caesar being crowned with victory by Jupiter's eagle; another panel showed Diocletian and Galerius performing sacrifice at an altar. A fragment of a monument set up in Rome in 303 similarly shows an emperor offering sacrifice, this time surrounded by a throng of gods. Everything Diocletian did reflected this sympathy between heaven and earth: when, at Antioch in the winter of 301–302, he enacted a law that sought to impose maximum tariffs for essential goods and services, the rhetorical preamble noted that the emperors had achieved security and order "through the gracious favor of the gods," and that this divine favor now demanded that the imperial peace "be surrounded by the necessary defences of justice" (Humphries 2009: 19–27).

The regime that implemented the "Great Persecution," therefore, was one painfully conscious that its success depended on divine sanction. We may speculate that such concerns informed their decision to embark on a purge of the Christians, even if not one of the persecution edicts of 303–304 survives to confirm this, but other documents exist that hint strongly in this direction. One is a letter (dated to either 297/8 or 302) from Diocletian in response to a request from the proconsul of Africa for guidance on how to deal with a new religious group, the Manichaeans, who seemed to be rejecting the order established by Rome's gods. Diocletian's response was uncompromisingly severe: since the Manichaeans' pernicious superstition threatened the very survival of the empire, they deserved the most severe punishments—burning alive, condemnation to the mines, and the confiscation of property that would condemn not just themselves but also their descendants to poverty (*Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio* 15.3). Even if hostility to the Manichaeans was given an extra edge by the religion's origins in Persia, we may readily imagine that the injunctions against the Christians, which prescribed similarly severe punishments, were equally grim. That much is implied by the extant letter issued in April 311 by Galerius, as he finally succumbed to a gruesome wasting illness and decided to rescind the edicts of 303–304 (cf. MacMullen 2014: 508–514). If Galerius now called for the persecution to end, he was nevertheless concerned to justify why it had been

implemented in the first place. It was, he said, undertaken for the good of the empire:

> Among other measures which we are constantly formulating for the advantage and benefit of the state, we had formerly desired to set all things right in accordance with the ancient laws and public order of the Romans, and to provide that the Christians too, who had abandoned the teachings of their own fathers, should return to a sound mind. (Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 34.1 = Eusebius, *HE* 8. 17)

The emperors who initiated persecution in the third and early fourth centuries thus were motivated by logical impulses to preserve their empire. Their actions reflected a long tradition of religious responses to worldly uncertainties that can be seen stretching back into the earliest periods of Roman history. Yet that is not to say that there were not significant shifts in attitude over time. In particular, the persecutions mounted by Decius and Diocletian seem to reflect a hardening of religious attitudes, particularly in terms of the meaning of *superstitio*. This word seems at first to have been used as a faintly derogatory term for low-level or excessive religious activity that was somehow distinct from official Roman cult (described by terms such as *religio* and *pietas*). Over time, the term came to be attached to other non-official cult activity in the form of foreign or provincial cults—a coinage that enjoyed official usage, such as when Antoninus Pius used it to describe provincial religious observance, in connection with the swearing of oaths (*Digest.* 12.2.5.1). It was gradually this conception of "superstition" as a foreign or alien cult that came to dominate, so that by the third century CE it could be used as a short-hand for unacceptable credulity opposed to Roman religious activity. It was in this way that the word was used in the context of religious repression, for example, of the Manichaeans; this usage of *superstitio* was to have a long future ahead of it, as it was eventually transferred to pagan cults by Christian emperors, as we have seen in Constans' law of 341 (Gordon 2008: 93; cf. Salzman 1987: 173–175). But what is clear above all, is that the roots of this religious tendency, and of the intolerance that flowed from it, did not find a new beginning in the age of Constantine; instead, it was inherited from his predecessors.

The Constantinian Moment

A year after Galerius' deathbed declaration of toleration, political tensions in the western Roman empire erupted into civil war. Constantine, emperor in the northwestern provinces (Britain, Gaul, and Spain) since 306, invaded

Italy to wrest control of it from his rival Maxentius (emperor in Italy and Africa since 306). Over the summer of 312, Constantine asserted his emperorship over northern Italy and then turned south toward Rome, near which, at the Milvian Bridge, their armies met in battle on October 28. By dusk on that fateful day, Maxentius was dead, and Constantine was master over the whole of the western empire. Like emperors in the past, Constantine ascribed his military success to divine assistance, but on this occasion, the heavenly aid was held to have come from a new source: the God of the Christians. Twelve years later, when Constantine seized control also of the eastern empire from another rival Licinius (308–324), he similarly ascribed his victory to the Christian God's intercession (Lenski 2016: 56–60).

In the aftermath of his victories in 312 and 324, Constantine gave ample demonstration of the gratitude he felt toward his cosmic ally. In 313, he and Licinius (embarking on a period of uneasy alliance) reaffirmed Galerius' proclamation of religious toleration in a ruling commonly, if erroneously, known as the "edict of Milan" (Eusebius, *HE* 10.5; Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 48). Around the same time, he sought to ensure the good governance of God's community on earth—the Church—by convening councils of bishops at Rome in 313 and at Arles the following year in an attempt to resolve the Donatist schism, a painful rift that had engulfed the North African churches as a result of differing responses by local Christians to the edicts of the "Great Persecution" (Shaw 2011: 66–106). If these councils proved to be inconclusive, they did not dissuade Constantine from adopting similar tactics later in his reign. Following his defeat of Licinius, he convened an impressively large Church council to the Bithynian city of Nicaea in 325 to deliberate some central questions of Christian belief and practice, such as the composition of the Trinity and the correct date on which to celebrate Easter. Alongside these remarkable (and, to later generations, symbolic) interventions came others that, if apparently more mundane, were no less significant. Constantine issued laws that granted legal privileges to the Church, for instance by giving an imperial guarantee to any legacies that a dying Christian might wish to bequeath to the Church, even if that meant denying the claims of others, such as family members, who might have expected to benefit from such testaments (*Cod. Theod.* 16.2.4). Wealth also flowed to the Church directly from the emperor's own resources, as he sponsored the construction of church buildings in cities such as Rome, Antioch, and his new foundation of Constantinople (formally dedicated on May 11, 330), and at sites in Palestine like Bethlehem and Jerusalem associated with Jesus Christ's ministry on earth (Lenski 2016: 192–194). A very clear indication of the favored position of the Church in Constantine's empire is the many privileges he conferred on Christian bishops (Lenski 2016: 197–206): they could

intervene, if the litigants agreed, as arbitrators in legal disputes (*Cod. Theod.* 1.27.1); they could manumit slaves (*Cod. Theod.* 4.7.1); and they were exempted from compulsory public services, and the financial obligations that went with them, in their cities (*Cod. Theod.* 16.2.2), while at the same time being granted use of the imperial public post to assist them in attending councils (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.6).

What can this have portended for the empire's ancient cults and their priests and devotees? For Eusebius of Caesarea, above all in his laudatory biography of Constantine, the Roman empire was thoroughly transformed as the emperor took action against pagan cult (Bradbury 1994). But even if Christianity, by virtue of the exclusivity demanded by its solitary God, seemed to hint that toleration was no longer the obvious outcome, the picture of Constantine's dealings with traditional cults is curiously mixed and difficult to rationalize into a single, straightforward narrative. In some places, for instance, temples certainly were swept away: such was the case of a temple of Aphrodite in Jerusalem, but this was to allow for the construction of a massive church over the site of Christ's crucifixion, meaning that location was a significant factor in this temple's fate; in other cases, however, the logic is not always clear (Watts 2015: 48–50). The responses of pagans to such actions seem to have been diverse. If a recent re-dating (Wilkinson 2009) of some epigrams by the Alexandrian poet and scholar Palladas to the age of Constantine is accepted (they were previously dated to the end of the fourth century), then they provide evidence for pagan anxiety at a very early stage in the new Christian empire. In one, Palladas writes disconsolately: "Surely we are dead and only seem to live, we Hellenes, having fallen into misfortune, pretending that a dream is in fact a way of life. Or are we alive while our way of life is dead?" (*Anthologia Palatina* 10.82). But not all pagans regarded the rule of the Christian emperor so bleakly: the Athenian grandee Nicagoras, an initiate of the Eleusinian mysteries, toured Egypt and wrote a graffito in the ancient tomb of the Pharaoh Rameses VI in which he "gave thanks to the gods and to the most pious emperor Constantine" (Watts 2015: 51). Perhaps more surprising is Constantine's response (preserved in an inscription) to an application from the central Italian city of Hispellum toward the end of his reign for permission to be renamed "Flavia Constans" in his family's honor, and that it should be embellished with a festival and a temple dedicated to the ruling dynasty. Even if Constantine, in acceding to these requests, ordered that the temple should not be "polluted with the deceits of any contagious superstition"—which presumably means a prohibition on sacrificial rituals—his response to Hispellum stands at odds with the image of the vigorous proponent of Christianity presented to us by Eusebius. It perhaps makes most sense to regard Constantine's rescript to the people

of Hispellum amid the more pragmatic, quotidian dealings of the emperor with his subject cities (Lenski 2016: 114–130). This presents a messier reality than we might expect from Eusebius' grand vision of an emperor bent on converting the empire, but it is a salutary reminder that the emperor's ambitions needed to negotiate the interests of his subjects.

Constantine's actions, therefore, defy easy categorization, and it is difficult to make them conform to some sort of new beginning in Roman history, religious or otherwise. In fact, Constantine makes more sense as a transitional figure. It should never be forgotten that his intellectual formation took place in the context of Diocletian's reign: it should occasion no surprise, therefore, if his pronouncements on religious matters should sound somehow conventional, for all their insistence on devotion to the God of the Christians. For example, within two years of his victory at the Milvian Bridge, Constantine wrote to a Christian civil servant in Africa asking him to encourage local churchmen to participate in the council the emperor was convening at Arles to resolve the Donatist dispute. For his part, Constantine felt that it was not right that the Church should be divided against itself, not least because of how this might be regarded by God himself:

> I think it in no way right that such disputes and altercations should be concealed from us, when they might perhaps arouse the Highest Deity not only against the human race, but also against myself, to whose care He has by His celestial nod committed the regulation of all things earthly, and might decree something different if so provoked. (quoted in Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, appendix 3 (CSEL 26: 206))

What is striking here is the similarity between Constantine's language and that of his pagan predecessors, who had insisted that the success of the empire depended on "gracious favor of the gods" (e. g. Diocletian, *Edict.* 1.134). The focus of Constantine's cosmic devotions might now be the Christian God; but his motivations were entirely traditional.

Viewed in this light, the apparent contradictions of Constantine's actions toward Christianity and paganism emerge as more readily comprehensible. His actions, and the motivations underpinning them, evolved over a long reign, and, as the case of Hispellum in contrast to the emperor's prohibitions on paganism suggests, could respond to varied impulses and circumstances in different ways. This much is certainly true of his attitudes in matters of Christian theology. On the point of his death in 337, he was baptized at last by bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, an individual who twelve years earlier had found himself condemned at the council held under Constantine's direction at Nicaea: the emperor, plainly, could change his mind. This is a reminder

that we need to locate Constantine firmly in his specific historical context. Viewed from this perspective, many of his religious actions are entirely commensurate with what we might expect of an emperor of this era; in particular, they resemble those of his immediate predecessors, such as Diocletian and Galerius. Like them, he saw his reign on earth established as a gift from heaven, and that divine assistance might be withdrawn at any moment should Constantine fail to show sufficient gratitude to his divine patron. And just like those earlier emperors, Constantine's capacity to impose his religious preferences on his subjects was constrained by what an emperor could realistically achieve within the parameters of imperial government. In other words, Constantine's religiosity was firmly rooted in the expectations and possibilities of the late third and early fourth-century world he inhabited.

Toward a Christian Empire? From Constantine to Theodosius II

If the Constantinian era presents its own challenges to a straightforward narrative of religious change, the same is true of the century that follows. For this period it might seem that we have a unique window into the processes by which paganism was suppressed in the collection of anti-pagan laws preserved in the *Theodosian Code*. This compilation of imperial law was put together at the behest of the emperor Theodosius II (408–450) between 427 and 438; its very conception reflected the history of the Christian empire, as is shown by the chronological limits of the laws contained in it, which begin with Constantine and finish with Theodosius (Hunt 1993). The final book (book 16) of the code, moreover, is devoted to laws pertaining to religious matters, and the overriding impression given by the work is of a charter for the religious life of the empire in the Theodosian period. This extends also to its laws dealing with correct Christian faith, which define it as the orthodoxy championed at the councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431); effectively, the anti-Nicene faith that had been dominant for much of the fourth century is excluded from the *Code*'s presentation of recent religious history (*Cod. Theod.* 16.5; Hunt 1993: 156–157).

The penultimate title of book 16 of the *Code* contains twenty-five laws against pagan worship, arranged in chronological order, beginning in the 320s and finishing in 435. We should resist the temptation to regard these laws as presenting a straightforward narrative of Christianity's increasing dominance. Nevertheless, they do attest to a gradual hardening of attitudes. While Constans in 341 had threatened rather vaguely that "suitable punishments" should be found with which to punish anyone who persisted

in offering sacrifice to the gods (cf. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.2), the sanctions came to be defined more specifically, in terms of the heavy fines imposed on officials who failed to implement anti-pagan legislation. The rhetoric against *superstitio*, which had formerly been directed against non-Roman cult, was now aimed at pagan worship. Moreover, the notion that such unauthorized religious activity was inimical to the interests of the state resulted, in a law of 392, in pagan cult activity being equated with "treason (*maiestas*)" (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12.1). By the time of the code's compilation, the ambitions of the law were even harsher: the final anti-pagan law included in it (dated November 14, 435) called for the destruction of temples and the defacing of cult images with the sign of the Cross; moreover, anyone who mocked the law could expect punishment by death (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.25).

Such rhetorical intransigence in the law is matched by episcopal pronouncements, such as Ambrose of Milan's warning in 384 to the western emperor Valentinian II (375–392) not to permit the restoration of pagan rituals to the Senate House at Rome (*Letter* 73 Zelzer), or Peter Chrysologus of Ravenna's protests in the fifth century that circus spectacles on New Year's Day were besmirched by the presence of images of the gods (*Sermons* 155). But if the stern import of the law and its episcopal cheerleaders is not in doubt, it is much less clear how vigorously and how uniformly such condemnations of pagan practice could be imposed. In some places, paganism proved difficult to root out, as is famously the case with Rome (Cameron 2010). Even if tensions between pagans and Christians began to manifest themselves increasingly in terms of violence from the late fourth century onward (Brown 1992: 114), it is often hard to pinpoint the exact date and circumstances in which temples across the empire were abandoned and their cult activities ceased, except for celebrated examples such as the destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 392, which is the subject of a controversial narrative by the church historian Rufinus (*HE* 11.22–30). Moreover, the simple tale of a mounting tide of anti-pagan intolerance needs to take account of the interruption provided by the reign of Julian (361–363), who attempted to restore the fortunes of the traditional cults. Almost everything that Julian did was controversial, and the same is true of trying to make sense of it today. The success of his pagan restoration is easy to exaggerate (not least because Christian rhetoric, both at the time and afterward, did precisely that), but it is possible that by seeking to systematize and regularize pagan religiosity in an effort to make it more robust, Julian might have given Christians a more clearly identifiable "paganism" against which to direct their hostility (Smith 1995).

This chapter will finish with some considerations of that variable activity. For now, however, it needs to be borne in mind that an assault on paganism was not the only front on which Roman emperors saw themselves as waging

religious conflict. From Constantine onward, the suppression of branches of Christianity deemed to be schismatic or heretical became a chief imperial concern. For example, when his son Constantius II (337–361) sought to impose his authority on the western provinces in the mid-350s after a period of civil war, the religious policies about which we hear most concern his oppression and exiling of bishops loyal to the creed of Nicaea such as Hilary of Poitiers and Eusebius of Vercelli (Barnes 1993: 109–120). By contrast, notices of his actions against paganism are scarce, which perhaps suggests haphazard action by him: at Rome, for instance, we are told that he removed the altar of Victory from the Senate House, but left other aspects of public cult, such as the subsidies for the Vestal Virgins, intact (Symm., *Rel.* 3.6–7). In time, definitions of what made the ideal Christian prince came to highlight this duty to extirpate heterodox Christianity. Thus, in 378, bishop Ambrose of Milan urged the emperor Gratian (375–383) to crush Arian heresy if he wanted God to assist him in his struggle against the Goths (*de Fide* 1–2; cf. Humphries 2010). A half-century later, bishop Nestorius of Constantinople promised Theodosius II victory over the Persians if he would purge the world of heretics; the plea was *too* successful, for when Theodosius did take action against heresy at the Council of Ephesus in 431, Nestorius found himself ejected from his bishopric (Socrates, *HE* 7.29.5; Millar 2006: 39–44).

In addition to confrontations between pagans and Christians, or orthodox and heretical Christians, local profiles of religious diversity could encourage other forms of conflict. Since Hellenistic times, pockets of Judaism had been widespread across the Mediterranean, first in the east, later in the west. Where Jews and Christians came up against each other, the encounters could be vituperative, even violent. In late fourth-century Antioch, John Chrysostom preached a bitter stream of anti-Jewish sermons—although these had as much to do with John's concerns about preserving the spiritual integrity of the city's Christian population as they did with naked anti-Semitism (Sandwell 2007: 63–90). The conflict between Jews and Christians could involve emperors, but not always in a straightforward narrative of Christian triumphalism. In 387 or 388, a riot at the eastern frontier settlement of Callinicum led to a Christian mob destroying the local synagogue. When news reached the ears of Theodosius I, he ordered that the local Christians pay for the damages: his laudable aim, it seems, was to restore harmony to a volatile local situation, lest violence beget further violence (Brown 1992: 108–109). Yet the decision provoked Ambrose of Milan, in whose city the emperor's court was resident, to inveigh against a Christian ruler having the temerity to force fellow Christians to compensate the Jews (Ambrose, *Letter* 74 Zelzer). This reaction shows the level of disconnection

between the bishop's episcopal self-righteousness and Theodosius' concern to maintain civic order across his empire.

In other words, it is important not to be misled by the rhetorical intransigence of texts like the laws in the *Theodosian Code*, or the high-handed declarations of churchmen, into thinking that the empire after Constantine was characterized by a concerted assault on paganism that was determined to wipe it out. Looked at more closely, the position of pagans (and other non-Christians) in the Christian Roman empire presents considerable variation, even if the general tendency was toward greater favor to the Church (or whatever part of it rejoiced in the definition of "orthodox") and intolerance to the rest.

Paganism, Christianity, and the Limits of the Possible

For paganism to be extirpated by law required a degree of control over individuals that the Roman state never possessed. Just as the implementation of persecutions of Christians under pagan emperors often depended on the willingness of local communities to become involved (see above p. 65), so too the religious ambitions of Constantine's successors depended on local cooperation. At times, Christian officials (and others) pursued their anti-pagan agenda with an enthusiasm that might have exceeded what the state envisioned (and which resembled the vigor with which, in times past, pagan officials had persecuted Christians). In the late 380s, for instance, the Antiochene rhetor Libanius sought to persuade Theodosius I to rein in the excesses of particularly zealous Christian agents, like the praetorian prefect Maternus Cynegius, who had exceeded his brief and colluded with unscrupulous monks in the destruction of temples in Egypt and Syria (Libanius, *Or.* 30.44–47). But at least until the years around 400, resistance and opposition to state-sponsored suppression of pagan cult were deemed possible. In 384, therefore, the pagan senator Symmachus sought to persuade the western emperor Valentinian II (375–392) to restore to the Senate House in Rome an altar of the goddess Victory. His arguments in favor of this arrangement were wholly traditional—that acts of traditional piety had long preserved the empire's good fortunes, and that no emperor could afford to abandon such ritual arrangements (Symm., *Rel.* 3). It was only by proving such arguments to be false that Symmachus' self-appointed opponent, Ambrose of Milan, could hope to sway the emperor.

The awkward fact is that aspects of paganism retained their vitality long after Christian writers would have wished them defunct. Moreover, in some

cases this occurred with the apparent complicity of Christian emperors. According to the late pagan historian Zosimus, Valentinian I (364–375: Valentinian II's father) could be persuaded by the governor of Greece, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, to rescind an order that forbade the celebration of various mystery religions because to impose it "would make life for the Greeks not worth living" (Zosimus 4.3.2–3). While Zosimus likely exaggerates the governor's ability to moderate the emperor's ruling (Watts 2015: 140–141), there can be little doubt that this Praetextatus was a devoted pagan: inscriptions from Rome record him serving in a number of traditional priesthoods and restoring the Porticus of the Dei Consentes on the ramp leading up from the Forum to Capitoline Hill (Cameron 2010: 49, 139–140). The employment of a distinguished pagan in a significant provincial command reflects, in part, how the Christian Valentinian I was celebrated for his religious tolerance (Amm. Marc. 30.9.5). But even emperors whom we associate with more intemperate views could find their ambitions thwarted by the continued importance of pagan sites and habits. Thus Constans, whose seemingly uncompromising law of 341 began this chapter, could issue an altogether more circumspect directive to the prefect of Rome, Catullinus, in the very next year:

> Although all superstition must be utterly rooted out, we nevertheless decree that temple buildings located outside city walls should remain intact and unviolated. For since some plays, circus spectacles, and athletic contests originate from these temples, it is not expedient to tear down places where traditional amusements of the Roman people are celebrated. (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3)

Such a provision reflects how the structures and frameworks of paganism, which had been central to Roman society and culture for centuries, were so embedded that they could not easily be ripped out. Thus, while Christian authors like Jerome might sneer that Rome's temples had, by 400, become dilapidated and abandoned (*Letters* 107.1), efforts were made by later emperors like Majorian (457–461) to maintain their fabric as "ornaments" of the eternal city (Majorian, *Novella* 4). It is a striking realization that possession of Rome's temples remained in the hand of Christian emperors until very late indeed: when Pope Boniface IV (608–615) sought to convert the Pantheon into a church of the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs, he had to apply for permission to the emperor Phocas (602–610) at Constantinople (*Liber Pontificalis* 69).

In other words, while rhetorical pronouncements could articulate the notion that the Roman empire should become Christian, the reality on the

ground was altogether messier, as the persistence of pagan pockets within society or particular pagan festive habits imposed practical limits on what it was possible for Christian emperors to achieve. This helps to explain some of the peculiarities of late antique religious history, such as the persistence of pagans in high office late into the fourth century and beyond (Barnes 1995; Salzman 2002), or the regional variation of the rate at which Christianity can be seen to dominate urban spaces across the empire (see Chapters 7–12). Yet such disparity across time and space should not really occasion much surprise, since it is but a late ancient reflection of the myriad variation that had been a hallmark of the religious history of the Roman world since its outset.

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FURTHER READING

Recent years have seen considerable advances in the scholarship of pagan–Christian interactions in Late Antiquity, not least in terms of greater sensitivity to the rhetoric of texts that express intransigent intolerance. Thus, for instance, the Christian construction of pagan persecution has been neatly dissected by Moss 2013, while contributions from Rives 1999, Gordon 2008, and Digeser 2012 have done much to emphasize the "logic" of pagan religions in their attitudes to groups like Christians. Indeed, the publication of Beard *et al.* 1998 signaled a significant shift toward a more sympathetic understanding of Roman religiosity that has been followed by others, such as Rives 2007. Late paganism in the Christian empire should now be accessed through the contributions of Cameron 2010 and Watts 2015. That Christians were not solely concerned with the repression of pagans is well described in Shaw 2011. As for what was actually possible, an understanding of the workings of Roman law is indispensable: see Hunt 1993, Bradbury 1994, and Harries 1999; meanwhile, Lenski 2016 does an excellent job of locating Constantine's policies in the context of imperial interactions with cities. It is also important to appreciate variations between different regions of the empire: for a model local history, see Sandwell 2007. Of course, much remains unknown, not least in terms of the relative strengths of paganism and Christianity: Barnes 1995 and Salzman 2002 reach different conclusions on the basis of similar bases of evidence.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Latin West in the Period of Transition from "the Late Roman Empire" to "Early Medieval Europe": Consolidation and Innovation

Tom O'Loughlin

The Latin West?

The notion of "the Latin west" has been coined by modern scholars to cope with the political, social, religious, and linguistic complexity of the period between the time when "the Roman empire" was still a recognizable and significant political reality based around the Mediterranean and a later situation when it was possible to speak about western European cultural and political realities functioning primarily in relation to one another. The notion is also, fundamentally, relational: to speak of "the Latin west" implies an awareness of "the Greek east," and while the use of Latin may be distinctive of a culture, indeed the glue that held a wide diversity of western European cultures somehow together, it is also an acknowledgment that many of the cultural pillars of that Latin west—such as its Bible, the institution of monasticism, and much of its liturgy—were imported from Greek and the Greek world. "Latin" as a qualifier directly reminds us of the other dimension of

Christian religious culture with its Greek inheritance (and, in turn, the latter's inheritance from Hebrew and Syriac), while it implies the contrast with the new languages of west—be they the languages of new peoples (such as the Germanic languages) or existing languages now being used in a Christian context (such as the Celtic languages). While these languages, the vernaculars, were never given parity of esteem in Late Antiquity—"vernacular" is in origin a derogatory term referring to the servants' speech—they gradually began to assert a distinctive influence (often centuries before we have surviving texts in these languages) on western European religious culture and theological thought.

The time span implied by "Latin west" is just as fuzzy. Conceivably it covers the period from Constantine's division of the empire into two parts—based on Rome and Constantinople—until the fall of the eastern empire in the fifteenth century, but for cultural historians it usually covers a far shorter period. Its *terminus a quo* being the time when it is no longer reasonable to speak of "the Greco-Roman world" and its upper limit being a, more or less, self-confident western Europe: often linked to the time of Charlemagne. In terms of religion—and in the context this is linked to Christianity, in some form, being the dominant religious expression—it is even more restricted. The characteristic forms of medieval Christianity can be found by the beginning of the seventh century, in the Spain of Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636), and these point to a different world to what is implied by "Late Antiquity." Moreover, at this point we encounter another of the meetings of intellectual tectonic plates; this time in the domain of scholarship and the junction between what is studied as "patristics" and investigations into "medieval thought." In a pattern going back to the sixteenth-century Reformation the date of Augustine of Hippo's death, 430, has been taken as the end of a golden age of theology. In his wake came a host of lesser figures unworthy of their inheritance, confused in their theology if not full-blown heretics (often labeled as "semi-pelagians"), who were so wedded to works (such as monasticism) and distractions (such as relics) as to mark a new, darker age. They were, in this perspective, the initiators of a long period of corruption that ended only with Protestantism. Late Antiquity ended abruptly, and was followed by writers who were not intrinsically worthy of study (Smith 1990). The pattern can still be found in many academic curricula in theology today: the next module, chronologically, after that devoted to Augustine is that devoted to the Reformation (or, occasionally, Aquinas). This distinction among theologians also fitted, if somewhat awkwardly, with another cultural divide between the urbane classical period and the ruder medieval world—a period of waiting for a rebirth of culture and learning, and it was from the perspective of that Renaissance that the intervening time was studied.

For both groups there was "Late Antiquity," which was still valuable, and the "Latin west" worthy of but antiquarian interest. More generally, while the evaluation of the literary products of the period became a matter of theological contest between Christian Churches, there was a tacit agreement that little of real value was written until at least the time of Anselm (ca. 1033–1109) and that it was a time of confused obscurity.

This chapter will use a still different set of parameters. Augustine wrote, even though conscious of the sack of Rome in 410, within a mental geography that spanned the Mediterranean, but whose awareness of what was happening in western Europe (Gaul and the lands of the Rhine) receded rapidly as one moved inland from the shore of the Mediterranean. Moreover, he wrote with a definite sense of the continuity of his culture, though now Christian, with that of Roman authors, such as Cicero, and with the tradition of Greek thought—as can be seen in the way he challenges criticisms of Christianity in his *City of God*—which represented for him not just his culture, but human culture apart from revelation. By contrast, the next generation of writers, typified by Eucherius of Lyons (d. ca. 450) saw themselves as successors, working within a paradigm where the digestion and transmission of established Christian patterns of thinking and practice was paramount. To them, the near identity of culture and Christian culture was almost complete, and they were firmly located north of the Mediterranean: news from places such as Egypt and the Levant regarding monasticism was seen as exotic and needed to be contextualized for their use. For this reason the death of Augustine is a useful marker for separating "the later empire" and "the Latin west" in Late Antiquity. As a *terminus ante quam* I am going to take 550—about the time when Gildas produced his *De excidio Britanniae* (O'Loughlin 2012: 13–28). Gildas saw himself as belonging to the Roman world whose culture was his culture but it is also wholly Christian to the extent that biblical history is *his* history (in a way that the history of the Jewish people was never, for Augustine, his own history). At the same time, Gildas lived in a land where power was held by local strong men—whom he calls "kings"—with whom he communicated in an early form of Welsh rather than Latin, and he interprets the incursions of the pagan Angles and Saxons, foreign kings, in terms of being punishments of the new Israel for its unfaithfulness and its sins. Gildas is also an index of other significant developments in the period. He began his writing career as a deacon under a bishop using the *Vetus Latina* translation of the scriptures, and ended it, probably as a monk, using the Vulgate. He witnesses in his life other shifts in religion and society that mark the boundary from when we should cease to speak of "Late Antiquity" and begin to speak of "the early Middle Ages" such as, for example, his involvement in the production of new canons to regulate the Church

and the evolution of penitential structures to deal with post-baptismal sin (Bieler 1963: 60–65). But lest we think of this period as a neat unit of time, we should recall that many of the features of the world of Gildas still form the key themes of the work of Isidore of Seville several generations later. If one quality characterizes the whole period it is that of being "Janus-faced": so much can be seen as the aftermath of the time of Ambrose (d. 397), Jerome (d. 420), and Augustine, while we also see the beginning of other features in Christianity that were to become far more prominent in later centuries.

Consolidating an Inheritance

Church structures

For Augustine the discipline and unity of the Church was an ongoing concern: the Donatists and a variety of others seem to be always at his heels, and he was more than willing to formulate his theology in opposition to what he perceived as his enemies whether he saw them as visibly outside the unity of the Church, such as the Donatists, or with those whom he saw as heretics who might appear to be within the Catholic Church, such as Pelagius. His response was polemic and the calling of councils through which he sought to create a uniform pattern of response. By the mid-fifth century in Gaul these real, as they were within Augustine's perception, "others" seem to have disappeared—though there were pagan survivals and there were Arian Christians among the new peoples—but the desire for canonical consistence was greater than ever. In Gaul, for example, there were at least twelve synods between 439 and 506 (Munier 1963). While there is mention of various heresies in most of their canons, their basic purpose was to create a corpus of positive legislation for the Church as an organization whose officials, the clergy, were now as likely to be perceived as civic officials as leaders of religious communities. Moreover, it was in Gaul, especially southern Gaul, in this period that another canonical phenomenon made its appearance: the collection of canons in a handbook that could be used to regulate dioceses according to a set, book inscribed pattern. The collection of canons known as the *Collectio canonica concilium Arelatense* can be seen as a deliberate attempt to draw together material so that structures of the Church are given the same status and uniformity within the community that had earlier been seen with regard to matters of orthodoxy. These bishops took it for granted that in every church the same doctrine would be held, but were equally, if not more, anxious that a visitor would find the same practices and the same group identity

among the clergy. That collection was not an isolated phenomenon and the episcopal mindset, focused on uniformity in even matters of detail, can be seen in their group letter to Leo I (pope: 440–461) where they present themselves as united as "servants of the apostolic see" (*suffragente etiam Apostolicae Sedis auctoritate*) whose collective work brings about the building up of the churches—a task that takes place at that moment under Leo's care.

While these developments mark a new departure in Church affairs and can be seen as the seeds of later canon law and the whole theology of the papacy (as a distinct item within Christian revelation), at the time it was presented within a framework of nostalgia: this, in an ever more fragmented political world, was a dream of happier times as an idyllic imperial unity. Thus, one of those bishops' most systematic productions was entitled the *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua*: the "reviving" of an ideal early period was its claim to authority. This text, destined for a long life not only in law but as a source of theological definitions, was, significantly, often cited as a "Council of Carthage" and thus given the added authority of Augustine's name. Operating in a postimperial world, these bishops were creating an ecclesiastical surrogate where Christian order was imagined as co-terminus with social order.

This imagined Christian *saeculum* did not mean that paganism, and the wider non-Christian culture, had disappeared and the society had become a baptized *gens* (in their reading of Matthew 28:19 it was *gentes* rather than individuals that were to be baptized) in the way that later Gildas imagined British society or as his near contemporary, Gregory of Tours (538–594) imagined Frankish society. Rather it pointed to a different view of non-Christian culture by the Church coupled with an awareness that Christianity formed the now accepted public ideology. Expressions of paganism were construed not as threats to Christian integrity but as elements that could be accommodated, as the vestiges of "a natural law"—thought of through the lens of Romans 1–2—which could be re-ordered to their true purpose by the Church. A pagan cult site becomes not only the site of a church building but a focus of local cult; local tutelary deities become identified with the new holy men who act as patrons (Brown 1982), and whose *legendae* often absorb the numinous trappings of their pagan predecessors; while that most embedded of cultic realities, the calendrical cycle of festivals, is adopted with suitable mutation to the Christian liturgical year, as, for example, when the *Robigalia* become the festivities of St Mark's Day on April 24. A parallel accommodation can be found in attitudes to elite literature. In marked contrast to Jerome's rhetorically formulated contradiction between being a Christian or a Ciceronian, or even Augustine's nuanced acceptance of the Roman literature once its religious dimension had been neutralized, later writers seem to have embraced what they could from classical writers as

tokens of their sophistication. Thus, Boethius (ca. 480–c.524) could, while imprisoned, produce a masterpiece, *De consolatione philosophiae*, of reflection on the human condition without a single Christian reference (Chadwick 1990; Marenbon 2009). While this silence has generated an enormous literature speculating on whether he was, when faced with death, really "converted"—using modern notions of conversion and fidelity—or if this could be the work of the same author as that which produced the theological tractates, his work can be viewed less controversially as part of the larger process that simultaneously saw the pagan past as unthreatening while it envied its imagined elegance and orderliness. Certainly those who transmitted *De consolatione* did not see it as a challenge to their religion and understood its implicit deity in the same terms it imagined the Christian God: God was God. Moreover, if having read Jerome they now had any suspicions of the degree to which Boethius was prepared to express his condition without explicit reference to Christian revelation, they could turn to his exact contemporary, Cassiodorus (ca. 485–ca. 580) for a guide to how secular letters had a place alongside sacred letters in what was, in effect, a guide to monastic education: and Cassiodorus explicitly saw himself as filling out and giving concrete reality to the vision of "father Augustine" as he has expressed it in his *De doctrina Christiana* (*Institutiones* 2.7.4; see Mynors 1937: 157).

While this period is characterized by the desire to consolidate what had been transmitted to them and to accommodate the whole range of that inheritance—Eucherius could describe his monastic retreat on Lérins with an elegance that echoes the gardens of the Latin poets as much as Eden without explicitly echoing either source—this does not mean that it was a period of decadence (O'Loughlin 1995a). Faced with new challenges these bishops evolved a range of strategies of pastoral care, and a convenient manner of preaching—as can be seen in model sermons of Caesarius of Arles (ca. 470–542) (Klingshirn 1994)—to produce a pattern of parish-based Christianity that would be recognizable across Europe until the sixteenth century (Klingshirn 1993). Paralleling the *Statuta*, these homilies were all the more influential as they circulated under Augustine's name, with his *auctoritas*, and so with the illusion of building a Church in direct continuity with his.

Translating

One notable feature of the period was that the *Latin* west stood ever more apart from the *Greek* east. This took the curious form that while the west was developing a separate discourse it was very conscious of the east, but accessing it as a resource in translation rather than as a dialogue partner. While Ambrose was adapting material from Basil for his own use, and Augustine,

whatever his ability to read Greek, was aware of eastern debates, the following generations were content to have Greek theological literature imported in to their world where they could use it as a resource rather than as a living tradition of ideas. In effect, they related to Greek theology in Latin in a manner parallel to the way they used the scriptures in Latin: it was their inheritance and they would make of it what they could.

By far the most important act of translating—an act of cultural translating—was the work of John Cassian (ca. 360–post 430) whose accounts of the monasticism of Egypt and Palestine, presented in terms that Latin Christians could appreciate, formed the real bedrock of western monasticism (Stewart 1998). Cassian was connected to a network of monastic thinkers focused on Lérins, and through them other Greek ideas became the property of the west such as Eucherius's reduction of the work of Evagrius Ponticus to convenient notes. At the same time whole volumes of exegesis were translated (e.g. Eustatius Afer translated Basil), while Cassiodorus saw making Greek works available to a monoglot monastic culture as a key part of his own resourcing of that culture. That being cut off from Greek was seen as a problem can be seen in Boethius's ambitious program to make the classics of Greek philosophical learning available in translation. While he only managed to translate the basic works of logic, his ambition is the key to a shift in Christian culture at this period that underlies all the later divisions of Christianity into its western, Rome-focused form, which had/has only a vague awareness of the other Christianities of eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa.

An ability to read Greek never wholly died out in the west, but it did become so rare as to be a matter of comment and display. More importantly, those who would later translate Greek texts were seen as importers and the material would be used in what was emerging as a distinctly Latin discourse. While the resource base on which that discourse was established was awfully narrow in comparison with what was available in the Greek— for example its sole "philosophical" apparatus was the logical corpus of Boethius (and not even that in its entirety would be used for several centuries)—there was an inward looking focus to what was inherited from their own tradition such that collectively they felt little need to go outside (O'Loughlin, 1999, 273–295).

Normalizing theology

Isidore of Seville once asked if anyone had read *all* of St Augustine, and in that question summed up the relationship of our period with the time that went before them when three giants, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, seemed to have written brilliantly on every conceivable matter with authority.

Their successors felt that they could neither imitate them nor compete with them, rather they would reduce the complexity to order, make the massive volume of ideas convenient to handle, and produce manuals that would allow their vision of Christian theology to be taught with consistency. The manual—and virtually every work produced in the period has many of the characteristics of the manual quite apart from those with that explicit shape such as Salvian of Marseille's (fl. ca. 440) *De gubernatione Dei* or Eucherius's *Formulae spiritalis intelligentiae*—was not solely a pedagogic format, it was an institution of theology that shaped the thought of those who used it as distinctly as centuries later the university culture would shape the scholastics' work. The manual—possessing that most valued quality of their literary aesthetic: *breuitas*—presented a world where all the answers to all questions were known, all *aenigmata* had been resolved, where the truth could be conveyed in a fixed pattern of simple propositions, and where ever greater consistency was a longed-for ideal. The massive exegetical literature could become a series of brief introductions and fixed rules for decoding the text, while complex works such as Augustine's *De trinitate* could be bypassed in favor of one of Boethius's tractates. The manual not only assumed that curiosity could be channeled toward a known set of answers, but it produced the belief that Christian faith could be presented as a series of simple headlines, in what we would call a catechism, and that all other work by theologians was simply filling in the details to the extent that they had the patience and appetite for such minutiae. Eucherius could declare that the tabernacle in the wilderness was to be read as "body of the Lord or the church"; Cassiodorus could then produce meditations for monks on that basis; while, later, Bede could produce a whole book going into every detail finding consistency between the text and his own ecclesial experience. The task was to add detail to what was the received general truth, not to ask questions as to its basis, nor to work empirically through the evidence. Questions that came from any other framework were, *ipso facto*, external threats and called refutation as located within a web of falsehood. The manual as an institution has left its mark on western Christianity down to this day in the ways that theology is perceived, but just as importantly it affected the content of the discourse: the proposition came to be seen as the building block of theology, the handling of propositions the fundamental theological skill, and, indeed, it became the paradigm for revelation—the scriptures became the set of true revealed propositions.

If Christian teaching was becoming an increasingly orderly affair, then the scriptures also had to become more orderly. Augustine writing at the end of the fourth century could set out a list of biblical books such as he found them in codices in actual use. The list was smaller than that in use among

Greek-speaking Christians, but was also considerably longer than that being advocated on linguistic grounds by Jerome. Despite this, Augustine did not think of his list as much more than a convenience—and a rejection of the notion of a reduced canon limited by what could be found in "Hebrew"— and he used in his own writings texts, treated as biblical, which were not on his list. A few decades later Eucherius's *Liber instructionum* has a far more precise presentation of the books considered canonical, while Cassiodorus treats Augustine's list as authoritative and proceeds to present it as an organized system (O'Loughlin 2014). Once this had occurred it was but a small step toward the production of a second list of "apocrypha" such that "the canon" became an exclusive list whose texts must thereby share certain qualities in contrast to other texts such as inspiration, authority, and inerrancy (O'Loughlin 2009a).

The complicated set of revisions of the Latin text of the Bible that is summarized by the label "Jerome's Vulgate" (it was not a complete, thorough, or consistent revision, and it was not solely the work of Jerome), which is then contrasted with a confusion of texts of pre-Vulgate translations (again there was really only one *Vetus Latina* text despite what Augustine said), came into its own in this period (Houghton 2016). There is very little evidence that any of those who went to the bother of deliberately adopting the Vulgate were conscious of any marked superiority in its text or that a greater fidelity to the original languages was especially attractive to them—in fact there is evidence that such matters just confused them (O'Loughlin 1995b)—so what was its great attraction? When deliberate statements were made in favor of the Vulgate these have to be seen as another instance of the desire to have an orderly theology: all done in harmony with the best authorities. The Vulgate was valued as a token of acceptance of the authority of Jerome and Pope Damasus, who commissioned his work, and Augustine, who was interpreted to endorse it, rather than on an evaluation of its text, legibility, or value in the liturgy. Consequently, while we see diligent researchers such as Gildas, who searched the entire scriptures twice from the perspective of a lawyer seeking precedents in a cause, making a conscious decision in favor of the Vulgate when he recognized it, most continued to use a medley of versions while proclaiming their affection for the approved text (O'Loughlin 2012: 29–51).

This desire for a uniform theology—indeed a level of uniformity unknown outside the inherited *organon* of logical works—needed other elements to complete its sense of an ordered world. The two most significant developments were, first, the creation of an apparently settled Latin vocabulary for the discussion of matters relating to the trinity and to Christology, and, second, an agreed curriculum. The tractates of Boethius aimed at supplying

the fixed Latin terminology, and many of the words he coined (e.g. *esse* as equivalent to Aristotle's *to einai*) and definitions (e.g. *persona* (which he thought was equivalent to *hupostasis*) as "an individual substance of a rational nature") would become commonplace, but would also sow the seeds of confusion. While Boethius himself was aware of the complexity of the Greek lexicon both in metaphysics and in earlier doctrinal disputes, his followers had few such scruples and in the teaching tradition it became an unspoken assumption that (a) the Greek terminology was consistent and univocal; (b) the corresponding Latin terminology and such words as *substantia* were amenable to precise definition and used consistently in their sources; and (c) words found in canonical formulae such as *consubstantialis* (rendering *homoousios*) fitted consistently into their doctrinal lexicon. In the matter of the curriculum there was an analogous contraction from the theory to the practice. Augustine had sketched out the rudiments of a curriculum, probably with the clergy of Hippo in mind, in the *De doctrina Christiana*. This was given far more detailed shape by Cassiodorus in his *Institutiones*, where he had not only a clerical, but a monastic education in view: now the curriculum had a detailed syllabus and a bibliography for what should be read for each part of the syllabus. How many places tried to implement this as a curriculum we do not know, but we do know that it became a library wish-list of approved authors that provided a boundary marking out *a priori* what was needed (Riché 1976).

One of the remarkable phenomena of the period is the number of texts that are anonymous or that have been preserved under pseudonyms. This is not to be dismissed as simply the carelessness of scribes because its prevalence alone should alert us to its significance. These writers did not see themselves as individuals who were solving problems afresh and they recoiled from the idea of being innovators. Vincent of Lérins had argued that no one should "innovate beyond what had been handed down to him" and thus innovation or that which was peculiar to an individual, unless that was someone already acknowledged as a "Father" (a term Cassiodorus uses with reference to Augustine), was tantamount to a departure into error. The paradox that they were innovating all the time in the new way they chose to pursue and communicate Christianity was entirely hidden from them. They had a corporate identity as teachers and within this their separate identities were of little importance (O'Loughlin 1997).

The cumulative effect of these developments was to transform the thinking of the Latin Churches into a highly organized, if shallow, ideology. These teachers lacked the skill to engage critically or creatively with the sources. They had an unfounded belief in the adequacy of their simple codifications and an almost naive view of language as a system of signs linked to a fixed set of

referents. These, when coupled with their fears about heresy/innovation, lists of books to be read, and lists of approved masters—the series of works entitled "*de uiris illustribus*"—and more elaborate legal frameworks give their theology a woodiness that seems strange when we recall that they came just a few years after the masters they held in awe. It is tempting to see the period of Ambrose to Augustine as establishing a "paradigm" after which came, in Kuhn's terms (Kuhn 1962), a period of "normal science" when repetition of the known "facts" was the dominant concern. While such a view would have pleased the writers from the time of Eucherius until Isidore—for it is close to how they presented themselves—it is a view that is historically false. These writers evolved a new paradigm of what theology is and how it should be practiced distinct from those they admired. Theology, in what I would label "the monastic paradigm" even when pursued by those who were not monks, was neither about exploration nor controversy, but the production of embracing the all-explaining small picture—a *formula* in the literal sense—the universe, the place of humans within it, and of God's revelation. It addressed itself to an audience that was not only committed to Christianity as a religion but who had made an additional commitment to a monastic ideal of that religion that placed obedience to authority and the community at the core of Christianity. "Normal science" was the contented contemplation of this *formula*, combined with ongoing work of filling in more details, codification of what was known, the ever more precise removal of apparent inconsistencies in the picture, and then repetition to those who shared one's view of life.

Innovation and Adaptation

The contrast between the desire for a static theology and what was happening in society could not have been more marked. The relatively unified society of the later Roman empire was becoming the mosaic of peoples and centers of power that made up early medieval Europe. These changes meant that Christianity too was becoming more diverse, and it is the new diversity that may have been spurred the longing for Christian uniformity.

New cultures

When and how Christianity arrived in Ireland, or north of Hadrian's Wall in present-day Scotland, is unknown, but it was probably in the fourth century with traders and among slaves—the story of a wondrous apostolic conversion by Patrick (historically a problematic figure) was created in the later seventh century (O'Loughlin 2005)—and by the end of the fifth century there

were vibrant churches in these lands. For the first time in the west Christianity encountered a non-urban, non-Roman, and non-Latin environment, but now rather than further mutate to create a liturgy in the local language (as had happened in every similar situation until this time) these Christians continued to use Latin for their formal worship. This marks the emergence in this period of a long-lived and important theme: language, in this case Latin, would be the token of ecclesial union and the marker of the cultural construct of Europe. But if the medium of Latin was the message of a desired unity, then these insular churches brought many ideas into the Christian discourse that were originally quite alien to it—not least the notion of fines made up of fixed quantities of prayer and fasting that would have a long afterlife as "*zahlbare Werkfrömmigkeit*" ("a payable works piety") (Nussbaum 1961). A liturgy in a foreign language meant that it had to be decoded allegorically and re-coded to explain the fact of minimal linguistic involvement. Monasticism was not only a way of being Christian but had to take on many of the organizing roles for the Church more generally that would have been supplied by urban centers elsewhere, while the structures of Irish law that resolved crimes by a system of fines could provide a basis for overcoming the impasse of public penance (O'Loughlin 2000: 48–67). But in every case these changed responses to practical situations would involve the introduction of long-lasting theological ideas whose poor fit with the existing body of theology would only become apparent centuries later.

For the peoples who settled within Roman territories, and adopted many of the trappings of the later empire, this shift in the religious landscape might appear less significant—and indeed that it was a simple process of being absorbed within the Christian fold was a central plank in the ideology of the bishops of the time. Gregory of Tours presents the baptism of Clovis (ca. 466–511) in ?496 as marking a decisive change in the history of the Franks but as having no effect on the Church except that it had grown larger. The kingdom of the Ostrogoths in Italy, for whom Boethius worked, who was put to death by their most famous ruler, Theodoric, is, likewise, presented as problematic, not because it embodied a new style of religion, but because of its Arianism. And later, Isidore would narrate the conversion of the Visigoths without acknowledging that Christianity was as altered by the new peoples as they were by it. By the end of the sixth century there was a mosaic of very different ways of being Christian in western Europe as new peoples and older ideas fused. That there were differences between even Latin-speaking churches was not new—the North African church of Augustine's mother was very different from that of Milan—but what was new was that this diversity existed within a myth, being carefully fostered by virtually every Christian writer, of linguistic, theological, and disciplinary unity.

History and identity

This myth of a single Christian people, and of diversity being absorbed in a single Christian polity—Christendom—can be seen most clearly in the way that the histories of the various peoples were grafted into a universal Christian history. Using a mixture of forms including narratives, chronicles, and annals, the new peoples had to be fitted in to a history of the world and their own stories aligned with the biblical accounts in such a manner that their journeys through time were seen as being providentially directed to the moment of their baptism. This event marked the coming of a new age for them as peoples, allowed them to adopt the history of Israel (and so laws and customs using the Old Testament as norm or precedent) as their history also, and to see their taking on Christianity, its *Romanitas*, and its leaders, as something that should be seen as wholly appropriate to the new status. Narrating the history of one's people such that it fitted within a genealogy stretching back to Gen 10 became a central theological task (Goffart 1988, 2006). Each new people was consciously to have its identity transformed, its laws given new dignity by being aligned—in some fashion—with the biblical law and the tradition of Roman jurisprudence, and even their rulers—note the option for *rex/reges*—given new dignity by being seen, both in their successes and their misdeeds, as the successors of the anointed kings of Israel. It would not be long before anointing modeled on 1 Sam would be seen as a central king-making rite (Enright 1985). Bishops rejoiced in being these rulers' counselors and clergy labored to produce legal frameworks that apparently transformed these peoples' customs into Christian form. Far less note was taken as to how different the resulting fusion was from the Christianity of the later empire, or to how different this new western Christianity was from that of the churches outside the Latin west.

Monasticism

One other importation to the Christianity of the western Roman empire is also central to the transformation of religion in this period: monasticism. It could be argued that this import from the deserts of Egypt and Palestine underpins all the other changes—for as we have seen virtually every writer mentioned was either a monk or had close contacts with monasticism—but it also needs to be noted as a distinct phenomenon that altered western Christianity just as it was already altering eastern Christianity.

When monks first appeared in the west is unclear but by the mid-fifth century there was an important monastic center at Lérins and other communities in southern Gaul. The list of connections between these monasteries and

their writers can be seen as an index to the significance of monasticism in shaping the religion of the Latin west; and it was for these communities that Cassian wrote combining, often in the form of easily remembered anecdotes, a vision of the Christian life, its goals, its ideal liturgy, a practical solution to the various disputes over grace that had caused divisions in the later years of Augustine, and, not least, an anthropology. The monastic movement seems to have swept all before it, and if there is one element, internal to Christianity, that marks the difference between Christianity in the early sixth century from that of the early fifth century, it is the presence and influence of monasticism in every area of religion.

One significant event in this period was the production of a monastic rule known as the *Regula magistri*. Produced by the anonymous "master" somewhere southeast of Rome between 500 and 525 it draws together elements from eastern writers like Basil (ca. 330–379), practices described by Cassian, and ideas that had evolved over several generations in the west. In its vision of a small community, withdrawn from the business of "the world," and the priority of individual holiness within the like-minded community, it is a typical product of the spirituality of that culture and period. Later, in the 540s, this rule was adapted by Benedict of Nursia to form the "*Regula sancti Benedicti*" for his monastery, which comprised mainly laymen, in Monte Cassino: it was to become one of the most influential of the religious products of this period.

Monasticism with its vision of a world apart, withdrawn from the world of family, trade, and urban life, changed in this period from being one way of being a Christian to being the ideal of the Christian life. This was to have many, and far-reaching, consequences for western Christianity. Most obviously it produced a two-tier Church, with those who embraced monasticism being viewed as fully dedicated Christians who had taken up the life of the "gospel's counsels" of celibacy, poverty, and obedience. After them came the merely ordinary Christians who were not aspiring to perfection and who lived according to the Decalogue, and whose lives—involved in procreation, trade, and distractions—could hardly be free from sinfulness. This in turn led to the notion that one could outsource holiness to the monks and rely on the intercession of these holy men to bring salvation into ordinary life. In this movement we see the roots of the notion of the liturgy being primarily the possession of this spiritual elite, which is carried out on behalf of the rest of the Church (O'Loughlin 2009b). In an increasingly unsettled and unstable society, incarnation became a doctrine about an individual rather than a vision of the divine relationship to the world, and holiness was seen in "otherness" from the created order (Markus 1997: 1–33).

Christendom

The world of the Latin west was politically fragmenting and was far more culturally diverse than those who produced our written sources were prepared to see. With memories of an orderly and prosperous empire of the past, their present patchwork seemed ephemeral and dangerous, and in this situation they elaborated a myth of a unified Church that could take the place once held by imperial Rome. This new entity was in their eyes greater and more stable than the local rulers, it had a common language, a common literature, and in the scriptures a source of knowledge and law more estimable than any other, and it had common ecclesial structures. It produced an impressive array of literature itself, from *regulae* and exegetical manuals to histories and hagiography, many of which were destined to have a long-term impact on Latin, Rome-focused Christianity. This literary creativity, whose favorite trope was to deny itself as being anything other than the *sequelae* of an earlier greatness, was the first truly European theology.

This theology was produced by a Christianity with a marked nostalgia for the past, and which viewed loyalty to what was created within that vision as the hallmark of orthodoxy. One did not have a common peace or shared laws between groups, but within the Church one had an alternative reality: here was a common language, a universal law, and a common past and future. Here also was a refuge from the warfare of petty rules and the destruction that came in their wake, and in the monastery, with its ordered life and its access to heavenly patronage, one had a microcosm of the ideal. Those who created this world were aware that it was not the ideal of the past, but they believed that in their introductory writings they were creating the optimal substitute. We hear this in the preface by Cassiodorus—once a political office holder, who has now withdrawn to lead the monastic life on his estates near Naples—to his *Institutiones*, when he states that while he would have liked to have established a Christian school in Rome with masters and pupils facing one another like the famous schools of old, alas because of the warfare that afflicts the Italian kingdom, he has been forced to opt for a virtual teacher instead: his handbook. This substitute is the result of the necessity of the day, yet through it he believed that students were going to be given access to learning of real worth, to the accumulated riches of Christianity, and indeed to knowledge that could lead to the salvation of their souls.

In Cassiodorus's perception of his situation and his task, and the means by which he chose to accomplish it, we have in a nutshell the spirit of the Latin west in Late Antiquity.

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The Celtic and Germanic West and North

Bernhard Maier

Introduction

To speak of religion in the Celtic and Germanic west and north implies a specifically modern point of view, which reflects both the modern conceptual isolation of "religion" from other aspects of culture and the modern use of the terms "Celtic" and "Germanic" as (linguistically) distinct entities. However, when we look at the material remains that have come down to us from the period in question, we generally find it most difficult not only to distinguish Celts and Germans, but also to isolate religious elements from non-religious ones. Likewise, when we consult contemporary texts, we generally do not meet *Celtae* and *Germani*, but rather a bewildering variety of much smaller entities designated by names that do not appear in earlier writings and that cannot always be identified in the archeological record. Making general statements on this basis is by no means easy, for written sources tend to be extraneous, sparse, intermittent, and vague, while the archeological evidence is frequently ambiguous and difficult to interpret (Hines 1997; Carver 2010; Pluskowski 2011). Moreover, much of what in recent decades has been written about "Celtic" and "Germanic" religion in general is in fact based on evidence culled from earlier or later periods, which does not necessarily apply to the situation that prevailed in the transition period between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. In general surveys of the period

here under consideration, it has therefore been common to focus on such smaller entities as, for instance, Old Norse religion (Andrén *et al.* 2006; Andrén 2011; Nässtrom 2013), Insular Celtic religion (Bek-Pedersen 2013), continental Germanic religion (Simek 2013), and Anglo-Saxon religion (Wilson 1992; Dunn 2009; Welsh 2011; Pestell 2012; Niles 2013). Assuming that there is a good deal of thematic continuity, similarity, and overlap between these religions, it has seemed best to organize the present survey around a small number of central concepts that may be assumed to have been relevant for all Celtic- and Germanic-speaking peoples from the third to the eighth centuries, illustrating their significance by specific examples drawn from the whole body of evidence that is now available. At the same time, we probably will do well to bear in mind that the use of the umbrella term "religion" does not find any close correspondences in the vernacular languages of the cultures to which it is here applied (Lindberg 2009).

Gods and Goddesses

At the center of religion in the Celtic and Germanic west and north we may assume there to have been an indefinite number of deities that were conceived by analogy with human beings as either male or female. Linguistically this is confirmed by the continuing presence of the Old Indo-European term for "god," Celtic **dēwos* (whence Irish *día* and Welsh *duw*), and Germanic **teiwaz* (whence Old Norse *týr*) corresponding to Latin *deus* and Old Indian *devaḥ*. For reasons that are not altogether clear, the term survives in Celtic to this day to designate the one Christian God, whereas in Germanic it was on the wane as early as the Old Norse language period and ultimately gave way to the new formation **guþ* (whence German *Gott* and English *god*), which has its roots in the pagan past but is without parallels in other Indo-European languages. Two more words for "god" that are well known from Old Norse (*reginn* and *áss*) may also be traced back to the period here under consideration: one appearing in a sixth-century runic inscription from Noleby (in which the runes are said to be *raginakudo*, "of divine orgin"), and the other in chapter 13 of Jordanes' *History of the Goths*, in which Gothic *ansis* is glossed by the Latin term *semideus* "demi-god." To what extent the ideas that were associated with these inherited concepts in Late Antiquity were still the reflection of a common Indo-European heritage is a difficult question that cannot readily be answered. Nor do we know if there was a clear-cut distinction between, on the one hand, gods and goddesses who had a name and a well-defined position within the pantheon, and, on the other hand, nameless demons or spirits who were credited with a more shadowy

existence but still had to be propitiated and therefore were deemed to be worthy recipients of cultic worship. In medieval Ireland such beings were called *síde* (conveniently, but misleadingly translated into English as "fairies"), while in Anglo-Saxon England they were known as *elves* (Hall 2007). Both concepts date back to the pagan past, but even the earliest texts in which they occur betray the influence of the biblical and patristic equation of gods and demons, and they clearly underwent further development from the Christianization to the early modern period.

Regarding the names and personalities of the gods and goddesses, we are in many cases at a loss for the period here under consideration, as most of the names that have come down to us are attested in texts that date from earlier or later periods. These are, on the one hand, stray references to Celtic and Germanic deities in classical writers and Latin votive inscriptions commissioned by Celtic- and Germanic-speaking auxiliaries during the Roman imperial period, and, on the other hand, references to pagan deities in the medieval Insular Celtic (that is, Welsh and Irish) and Scandinavian literature. In general, the question to what extent these earlier and later pieces of evidence may be used to interpret mute archeological finds from the period here under consideration is highly controversial (North 1997). For this reason, individual interpretations of archeological objects as depictions of individual deities or mythological scenes usually vary greatly according to the stance which the scholars in question take in this continuing debate (Kopár 2012; Heizmann and Oehrl 2015). Thus, a fifth–sixth-century seated figure with a triple neck-ring or collar and a chin beard that was found in a bog at Rude-Eskildstrup on Zealand in Denmark in 1889 is generally thought to represent a pagan god, although it cannot be ruled out that it does in fact represent a human being. Likewise, some images of a human figure on the thin, single-sided gold medals known as bracteates, which are commonly found in northern Europe dating from the Migration Period, are frequently assumed to represent the warrior god known as Wodan/Odin, although the dependence of the bracteate iconography on Roman models makes it difficult to isolate possibly native ideas behind the scenes depicted on them (Heizmann and Axboe 2011). Sometimes it is assumed that we can identify individual deities, because the attributes with which they are depicted are also known from later written sources. Thus a bronze disk found in an Alamannic grave at Hailfingen showing a human figure surrounded by eagles has been taken to be a depiction of the god Wodan, who is frequently associated with eagles in later Old Norse literature. Nevertheless, this identification must after all be regarded as conjectural, especially as the eagle is also well known from Christian iconography.

Nor do we fare better when we turn from the archeological evidence to literary writings from the same period. Thus the monk Jonas of Bobbio claimed in his *Life of St. Columbanus* that during his sojourn near Lake Constance, Columbanus once chanced upon some pagan Alamanni gathered around a large cask of beer, who told him that they were about to make a heathen offering to their god Wodan, adding "whom others call Mercury." When Columbanus breathed on the cask, Jonas claims, it broke with a crash and fell in pieces so that all the beer ran out, making the pagans renounce their faith and convert to Christianity. Significantly, Alcuin later relates a very similar story about Saint Vedastus, bishop of Arras, and some Frankish nobles, which appears to be modeled on the very story related by Jonas, reminding us that we should not overestimate the historical accuracy of such accounts. Moreover, Jonas may well have made the equation of Mercury with Wodan on the basis of what he knew about paganism in Lombard Italy, in which case the source value of his reference to the worship of Wodan among the Alamanni would be null and void. Evidence for the cult of the god Wodan among the Alamanni is in fact provided by the occurrence of his name in a runic inscription on a fibula from Nordendorf in Bavaria. Still, it needs to be emphasized that—as in the case of Anglo-Saxon England, where the god's name is preserved in such names as *Wednesday* and *Wensleydale*—features that are clearly attested only in Old Norse literature cannot readily be assumed to have been present centuries earlier among different people and in an altogether different geographical area.

Moving further west to Celtic Ireland and Wales, it should be noted that most of the names of gods and goddesses that are commonly thought to have been current in the period here under consideration are in fact culled from later literary sources or even early modern folklore. Moreover, it needs to be stressed that—contrary to what is characteristic of Greek and Roman civilizations—many continental Celtic divine names that we meet in Latin votive inscriptions from the Roman imperial period are also attested as ordinary personal names, so we should be wary of assuming that a medieval literary character with a seemingly divine name is necessarily a euhemerized god. For instance, the Irish name *Nuadu*, which corresponds to that of the Romano-British god *Nodons* and designates an obviously mythological character in the celebrated *Story of the Second Battle of Moytura*, was also the name of a ninth-century monastic scribe, as we know from his note *araut di Nuadu*, "a prayer for Nuadu" at the end of the Cambridge Juvencus manuscript. Likewise, the continental Celtic name element *Lugu-* (Irish *Lug*, Welsh *Llew*) does not always imply a reference to the god of that name, which should caution us not to make such an assumption when it occurs in the much later Insular Celtic tradition. In the late nineteenth century it was

realized that many divine names, which in the romantic period had been traced back to a common Indo-European form, are in fact originally different. Following this realization, some scholars have tended to assume that even if divine names cannot be equated with each other philologically, structural similarities between the deities to which these names refer point to a common Indo-European heritage, Georges Dumézil (1898–1986) being one of the best-known and most influential advocates of this approach. Here, too, it should be noted that conclusions drawn from mere structural similarities between individual mythologies or rather Christian reworkings of those mythologies are fraught with uncertainties, as is Dumézil's reconstruction of a tripartite Indo-European society and religion.

Sacrifice and Divination

Of pivotal importance for the relations between human beings and the deities that they worshipped were sacrifices and rites of divination by which the will of the gods was sought to be ascertained. As both these features were also characteristic of the Greek and Roman religions, they loom large in classical ethnography from an early period and consequently are also mentioned with reference to the centuries here under consideration. Thus the fourth-century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330–395) relates how the pagan Alamanni once missed a favorable opportunity to attack the Romans, speculating that this may have been because their auguries were inauspicious (Amm. Marc. XIV.10.9). Similarly, the eighth-century Byzantine Christian historian Agathias of Myrina notes that the Alamanni in matters of religion still followed their own traditional way of life, as they worshipped certain trees, the waters of rivers, hills, and valleys, in honor of which they are said to have sacrificed horses, cattle, and numerous other animals by beheading them (*Hist.* 1.7.1–2). In general, however, both classical and Christian references to pagan sacrifices tend to be couched in rather vague and general terms and are moreover frequently suspected of reflecting earlier literary models. For this reason, a much safer guide to sacrificial rites and customs is provided by archeological findings, which, however, cannot be assumed to reflect more than a fraction of the historical reality and do not inform us about many aspects that a detailed description would yield. Thus, organic substances have in many cases vanished without a trace, and both the motivation for a sacrifice and the number and social make-up of the individuals involved can only tentatively be inferred from what may still be retrieved from the soil. With regard to the above-mentioned Alamanni, there is hardly any archeological evidence for sacrificial rituals, and although several iron

objects discovered in Münchhöf-Homberg near Constance in 1938 are thought to be the remnants of a weapon sacrifice, we can identify neither the individuals who offered it up nor the gods or goddesses to whom it was addressed. Likewise, the religious significance of the so-called special deposits in Anglo-Saxon settlements is difficult to interpret (Hamerow 2006; Morris and Jervis 2011; Sofield 2015). More ample evidence is usually provided by comprehensive and prolonged excavations of sites that were repeatedly used for sacrificial rituals. A good example of this is the sacrificial bog in the municipality of Vogtei in Thuringia, Germany, which is more widely known by the names of Oberdorla and Niederdorla (Behm-Blancke and Dušek 2002–2003). This was excavated between 1957 and 1964, archeological findings revealing that it was used from the sixth century BCE until well after the Christianization. During the Migration Period it appears to have been a major sacrificial site of more than local significance, two anthropomorphic wooden idols possibly representing the deities worshipped there.

More difficult to prove from the archeological evidence alone are rites of divination that served to establish the will of the gods and thus direct the actions of humans. Well known to both Greeks and Romans, the subject surfaces early on in classical ethnography and continues to be mentioned until the Christianization period. Thus the sixth-century historian Procopius reports that the Vandal king Geiseric once saw an eagle hovering above one of his prisoners of war, which he interpreted as a divine signal to release that prisoner (*De bello Vandalico* 1.4). Likewise, Procopius relates how king Hermigisel once chanced to meet a crow that presaged his own untimely death by its croaking (*De bello Gotico* 4.20). Apart from such instances of what looks like the observance of natural portents, classical ethnography credits the Germani in particular with more elaborate means of divination by lot, as first described by Tacitus (*Germania* 10.1). Little pieces of wood that were cut from the twigs of trees and used for divinatory purposes are mentioned by the name *tenos* in the early ninth-century *Lex Frisionum* (14.1), the Germanic word *taikna-* which this represents surfacing also in both Old English *tán* and Old Norse *teinn*.

Cult Sites

In many cases sacrificial rites are known to have been associated with special locations that consequently developed into cult sites. In some instances, natural places like groves, hilltops, rivers, pools, springs, and wetlands appear to have been chosen for the purpose, which may have been perceived to have special qualities linked to mythological associations that have not come down

to us (Semple 2007, 2010, 2011; Lund 2010). In other instances, sites appear to have been chosen for cultic purposes because of the presence of earlier, prehistoric monuments (Schot *et al.* 2011; Semple 2013: 63–107). The majority of the cult sites known to us today were identified by the archeological remains of sacrificial rituals rather than the presence of architectural features indicating temples or shrines. These in many cases appear to have left no trace or may even never have existed (Blair 1995, 2013; Sundqvist 2009). In some cases, as in Gudme on Funen, the presence of theophoric toponyms points to an elaborate ritual use of the landscape of which the cult sites formed part, although there is no contemporary written evidence to confirm this. Instead, the presence of numerous *guldgubber* (small thin pieces of beaten gold, frequently stamped with depictions of human beings) indicates that Gudme was not only of religious, but also of economic importance. Intimate links between secular and religious power are also thought to have existed at Uppåkra in southern Sweden, where archeological excavations conducted from the mid-1990s brought to light both an extensive and wealthy settlement and a major pre-Christian temple (Larsson 2004, 2007).

In the context of cult sites, it is tempting to think that these were managed by priests supervising the correct performance of rituals, but in general these have left no trace in the archeological record. On the other hand, written sources such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* have frequently been suspected of being unreliable, being strongly influenced by literary models and theological considerations (Page 1995; Church 2008; Barrow 2011). This also holds good for Irish vernacular sources, which have preserved the native Celtic term for a pre-Christian priest, *druí* (glossed in Latin texts as *magus*), but appear to portray the representatives of traditional Irish religion mainly on the basis of biblical and apocryphal writings (Maier 2004: 160–164).

The Religion of the Community

As may be gauged from the many references to the shared and collective use of cult sites and the existence of priests acting on behalf of the people, religion appears to have been first and foremost an affair, not of the individual or the extended family, but rather of the whole community. Thus, as late as the eleventh century, Adam of Bremen reports that everybody was bound to attend the central pagan celebrations at Uppsala, Christians having had to pay a special fee in order to be exempt (*Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* 4.27). Similarly, the ninth-century hagiographer Rimbert claims that many people in Denmark were afraid of the wrath of the gods because

some individuals had become negligent of the pagan cult due to the influence of Christianity (*Vita Ansgari* 31). This is in line with a regulation, somewhat surprisingly mentioned in the *Lex Frisionum*, according to which a person who has plundered a temple and appropriated its deposits shall be castrated and sacrificed to the gods whose sanctuary he has defiled (*Additio* 11).

Of pivotal importance for the life and well-being of the community as a whole was agriculture. Thus, it comes as no surprise that many collective religious rites were intimately bound up with the cycle of the seasons underlying and informing agricultural activities. In a well-known description in his treatise *De temporum ratione*, the venerable Bede claims that the pagan year began on December 25, which was known as *Modranect*, "the night of the mothers," and that there were also pagan celebrations in *Halegmonath* (September), "the month of sacred observances." Moreover, he notes that cakes were offered to gods in Solmonath, and that the following months *Hrethmonath* (March) and *Eosturmonath* (April) had their names from two goddesses whose festivals were celebrated during those months. While the last piece of information is now generally rejected, the reference to *Modranect* has plausibly been connected with the worship of mother goddesses attested elsewhere in the Germanic world, and in general it seems reasonable to assume that the passage of the seasons and the critical stages in agricultural activities connected with them were accompanied by religious rites. Similar observations can be made with respect to the traditional Irish solar calendar, for in Ireland the year was subdivided into four quarters of equal length, the beginnings of which were intimately linked to agricultural activities conditioned by the Irish Atlantic climate. Thus, *Imbolc* at the beginning of February was marked by the renewal of agricultural activities in general after the winter season, *Beltaine* at the beginning of May was marked by the sowing of the crops and the renewed use of summer pastures for the cattle, while *Lugnasad* at the beginning of August coincided with the harvesting of grain, and *Samain* around the beginning of November with the end of agricultural activities at the beginning of winter. Although it goes without saying that medieval and early modern references to "superstitious" rites and customs associated with these major festivals can at best be seen as Christian adaptations and reinterpretations of earlier prototypes that pre-date the written evidence, it can hardly be doubted that the Irish division of the year as such and the presence of religious rites attending the transition from one season to the next were intimately bound up with the traditional pre-Christian (and, possibly, even pre-Celtic) religion.

If the vicissitudes of agriculture made this sphere of human activities a legitimate concern for many religiously motivated customs, the same was

obviously true of war and fighting, which appear to have been closely associated with the gods and surrounded by sacrificial and divinatory rites. Once more, the earliest evidence for this pre-dates the period here under consideration by several centuries, as Greek and Roman observers credited both *Celtae* and *Germani* with human sacrifices in a military context. Among the continental Celts, there is abundant archeological evidence for sacrificial rites connected with warfare from the fourth and third centuries BCE. This is roughly contemporaneous with the archeological finds from the Hjortspring Bog on the island of Als in southern Denmark. These consisted of a clinker-built wooden boat of 18 m length, more than 130 shields and spearheads, and ten iron swords, which are thought to have been deposited as a votive offering to the gods (Randsborg 1995). From the late Roman imperial period and the Age of Migrations, similar but even more abundant archeological evidence has come to light in several cult sites in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia (Jørgensen *et al.* 2003; Abegg-Wigg and Rau 2008; Möller-Wiering 2011). Among the sites that were already well known in the nineteenth century, are the Torsbjerg (Thorsberg) and Nydam Bogs in southern Denmark. Excavations at Torsbjerg were conducted from 1858 to 1861, which proved that the site has been used for sacrifices from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE, with a marked increase in weapon sacrifices in the latter part of that period. Following stray finds in the 1830s, the first excavations at Nydam took place from 1859 to 1863, when archeologists found the celebrated "Nydam Boat" that had been built in the second decade of the fourth century CE and appears to have been offered up to gods only twenty to thirty years later. This, however, was just one important act of sacrifice at the Nydam Bog, as weapons, military equipment, and ships of defeated armies are thought to have been offered up to the gods from the third to the sixth century CE. Another Danish cult site investigated at about the same time is the Kragehul Bog on Funen, which was excavated between 1864 and 1877, following stray finds of prehistoric weaponry that had been made as early as the late eighteenth century. Here, too, the findings point to sacrifices being performed on the site for several centuries (Birch Iversen 2010). Among the best-known sites of this kind that were excavated and investigated with modern methods is that of Illerup Ådal in Jutland, where excavations conducted between 1950 and 1985 yielded more than 15,000 items of weapons and personal equipment dating from the period between 200 and 500 CE (Ilkjær 2002). Likewise, there were significant finds of weaponry from that period at the Ejsbøl Bog in Jutland, which was excavated from 1955 to 1964 (Jørgensen and Andersen 2014).

The importance of religious rites in the context of war and fighting is also confirmed by the iconography of the period, which sometimes shows

remarkable similarities in widely separated areas. Thus, an embossed golden disk found in an Alamannic grave at Pliezhausen in southwest Germany shows a mounted warrior who is just riding over his fallen enemy, aided by what may be interpreted as a supernatural figure gripping the shaft of his spear. A rather similar depiction is known from a helmet plate found in one of the seventh-century Valsgärde graves near Uppsala, where we also see a supernatural being guiding the spear of a mounted warrior riding over his fallen enemy. Likewise, an Alamannic sword-sheath found at Gutenstein depicts what looks like a warrior dressed up as a wolf in a fashion similar to the depiction on a helmet plate matrix found at Torslunda in Sweden. Needless to say, the warrior aspects of Germanic religion also come to the fore very much in later Old Norse literature, but an estimate of their overall importance across the whole of the Germanic world must certainly also take into consideration that our literary sources are to some extent biased, representing the beliefs of a warrior aristocracy rather than that of other segments of the population.

Another aspect of the pagan religion in which communal rites appear to have been prominent is that of death and burial (O'Brien 1999, 2009; Sanmark 2010; Williams 2010; Hausmair 2015; Hines 2015). Contrary to what we find with respect to sacrificial and divinatory rites, the subject received scant attention from classical ethnography, the descriptions of Gaulish burials by Julius Caesar (*De Bello Gallico* 6.19.4) and of Germanic burials by Tacitus (*Germania* 27.1) being rather exceptional. In fact, it appears to be only with the advent of Christianity and its focus on a life beyond death that the topic attracted considerable attention and came to be regarded as part and parcel of the pagan religion. As a result, most of what we know about pagan rites of death and burial is based on the archeological evidence, which is highly diverse in both chronological and geographical terms and usually difficult to interpret in terms of worldview and beliefs. Thus, the common pre-Christian practice of placing food and/or weapons in graves is widely thought to indicate the belief that the dead were in need of these in whatever life beyond the grave awaited them, but it is difficult to know whether such grave goods were not really meant to be merely symbolic. Likewise, unusual ritual manipulations of dead bodies might well indicate the fear of revenants that looms large in some later Old Norse texts. Still, it is difficult to fathom how much this fear is the product of changes wrought by the advent of Christianity and which forms it might have taken in earlier centuries (Blair 2009). What can readily be asserted, however, is the collective force of burial rites, as indicated by a widespread uniformity and remarkable continuity. This indicates that dealing with the dead and disposing of their bodies was widely felt to be significant for the identity of a

community and the way in which this was represented to such outsiders as neighboring communities or foreign visitors. Thus, burial rites connected with extensive feasting may be thought to have strengthened not only the sense of collective identity, but also the existing social fabric and the claims of a community to its territory by linking it to the ancestors (Lee 2007).

The Religion of the Individual

If all the spheres of religion that have been referred to so far suggest that it was in large measure of a communal and collective character, this is no doubt true in the sense that much in it was not a matter of choice or at the discretion of the individual. Still, it seems reasonable to assume that just as some religious rites were taken to be beneficial to society at large, others could be used for the benefit of the individual, ensuring his welfare and protecting him from dangers. This is indicated by the widespread use of amulets and charms, the precise symbolism of which in many cases escapes us (Meaney 1981). Of special interest in this connection is the use of the runic writing system in this context, as the interpretation of many allegedly ritual inscriptions continues to be hotly disputed (McKinnell *et al.* 2004; MacLeod and Mees 2006). While there is a widespread tendency to dub the use of objects used to ensure individual protection as "magical" rather than "religious," it deserves to be noted that in the absence of circumstantial written evidence it may be difficult if not impossible to distinguish one from the other. In fact, the modern preference of "magic" instead of "religion" in many cases appears to echo the late nineteenth-century notion that a belief in the efficacy of magical acts is more primitive and original than the worship of deities, if not the traditional Christian association of paganism with magic wrought by the devil. The question to what extent works of art are permeated by religious or mythological ideas ultimately related to protective rituals is difficult, but most scholars would probably agree that the animal symbolism that is so prominent in Migration Period art has in many cases a religious significance (Dickinson 2005; Pluskowski 2010; Pollington *et al.* 2010; Jennbert 2011).

Conclusion

In retrospect, the religions of the Celtic and Germanic west and north in the period between 200 and 800 CE reflect both the influence of the Roman empire on the peoples living beyond its confines, the beginnings of their acquaintance with Christianity—spread at first by prisoners of war and then

by Christian missionaries—and the increase of spatial mobility, military con-
flicts, and formation of new collective identities associated with the
Migration Period. Unlike many other historical traditions dealt with in this
volume, the religions dealt with in this chapter are to some extent special
because their investigation used to be intimately bound up with the devel-
opment of modern national identities (Stanley 1975; Piggott 1989; Waddell
2005; Content and Williams 2010; Manias 2013). For this reason, much of
the older literature needs to be read with caution, as it tends to be influ-
enced not only by a kind of romantic nationalism, but also by outmoded
ideas of continuity, which frequently led scholars to reconstruct the reli-
gious conditions of the Migration Period on the basis of either earlier or
later written sources. Moreover, until recently the religions of the Celts and
Germans tended to be investigated by practioners of the respective philolo-
gies rather than by historians of religion, so much of what has been written
about "animism," "shamanism," "sacral kingship," "secret societies," and
"fatalism" needs to be reviewed both with respect to the role these topics
have played in the history of scholarship and in the light of the current state
of religio-historical research.

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CHAPTER SIX

The "Greek East": Christianization and the Provincial Elites

Dirk Krausmüller

Introduction

The topic of this chapter is the provincial elites, the leading families of the many cities that dotted the eastern Mediterranean region, since they constituted the backbone of late Roman civilization. The provincial elites were deeply conservative, harking back in their writings to the golden age of classical Greece. The changes that they underwent, Romanization and Christianization, were gradual and new elements were for a long time assimilated to existing cultural patterns. The focus in this chapter will not be on the late fourth and early fifth century as is often the case but rather on the late fifth and the first half of the sixth century because this was the last period in which the fusion of old and new was successfully achieved. Ideally such a study should consider in turn the Balkans, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, and then compare these regions in order to identify similarities and differences. However, this approach is unfeasible here, not only because it would go beyond the scope of this chapter but also because of the limitations of our sources. This problem already arises for the earlier period where thanks to the writings of the Cappadocians and Libanius of Antioch we are best informed about eastern Asia Minor and northern Syria, but it is if anything

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even more extreme in the later period. Religious literature that might shed light on the condition of the elite was largely produced in Syria, Palestine, and Alexandria. We still possess a great number of theological, epistolary, and hagiographical texts, the most informative of which are the *Life* of John of Edessa by John of Qenneshre and the *Life* of Severus of Antioch by Zacharias of Gaza. The situation in Asia Minor and the Balkans is starkly different. No theological treatises or letter collections of bishops from these regions have survived and we cannot even be sure that they ever existed. All we have is a few Anatolian saints' lives and inscriptions. When we turn to secular literature the imbalance is even greater. We are extremely well informed about the city of Gaza where we can mine the letters and speeches of the local sophists Aeneas, Procopius, and Choricius. The only comparable texts from other regions are the letter collection of the sophist Dionysius of Antioch and a few papyrus fragments from Egypt. Gaza is also exceptional insofar as an unusually great number of religious texts were produced in its hinterland, chief among which are the letters of the monks Barsanuphius and John. Therefore, evidence from Gaza will often serve as a starting point and will then be supplemented with evidence from Syria and Egypt. The Balkans and Asia Minor will only contribute archeological data since excavations are more numerous there than they are in the Levant. Texts that focus on the capital Constantinople will not be considered so as not to distort the picture.

Gaza: Demography and Social Mobility

In the fifth and the first half of the sixth century the eastern Roman empire experienced strong demographic growth. For the countryside this meant that existing villages grew and new villages were founded on marginal land (Wickham 2005: 442–454, 461). The cities, too, grew in size, which resulted in considerable building activity and increased artisanal production (Wickham 2005: 614–615). They were dominated by wealthy families, which also exerted control over the countryside because they owned much of the land there. These families sold agricultural produce and were also involved in its trading. In southern Palestine, for example, estate centers made great quantities of wine, which were then shipped to destinations as far as Marseilles in the west and the Crimea in the east (Kingsley 2001: 44–68). Just how rich elite families were is difficult to gauge. Through papyrus finds we know that in Egypt the Apion family owned whole districts (Sarris 2006: 81–95). However, it is unclear how big the class of the super-rich was. Even in Egypt we encounter much more modest landowners (Sarris 2006: 96–114), and

they may well have been dominant in other regions. A case in point is southern Palestine, where the cities of Gaza and Askalon were home to several elite families, which intermarried and regarded each other as social equals (Choricius, *Opera* VI.14; 90.24–91.7; VI.43, 97.2–5). Moreover, a cache of papyri found in Petra attests to fragmented landownership in the region (Wickham 2005: 240).

Thanks to archeological excavations we are relatively well informed about the lifestyle of elite families. They lived in palatial mansions where inner courtyards were surrounded by a great number of rooms, the largest of them halls in which the owners received guests. These halls and the living quarters of the families were decorated with mosaics and marble revetments. The mansions often dated back to the early Roman period but were constantly being refurbished, with a tendency toward ever greater sumptuousness. The similarities in plan and decoration attest to the homogeneity of the provincial elites in the eastern Roman empire (Ellis 1988; 2000: 22–72).

This homogeneity was reinforced through use of the Greek language, which set the elites apart from their less well-off compatriots, who spoke local languages such as Syriac or Coptic. Greek was also the language in which young upper class men received their education. Schools of grammar and rhetoric could be found in most cities. They all followed a curriculum that had been designed more than half a millennium earlier. The pupils learned to express themselves in the dialect of ancient Athens, which was very different from the spoken Greek of the time; they acquired detailed knowledge of the Greek literary legacy; and they learned to write poetry and speeches in imitation of Homer and Demosthenes (Choricius, *Orat.* VIII.5, 111.4–13). However, education was not confined to transmitting knowledge and imparting skills. The teachers, grammarians and sophists, also inculcated in the students the value system that undergirded the lifestyle of elite families. This value system was based on the ideal of moderation. Proper behavior was defined as the golden mean between two equally reprehensible extremes. For example, by studying past exempla the pupils learned that a member of the elite should neither laugh out loud nor be grim and withdrawn but should always smile and be affable (Choricius, *Orat.* III.63–64, 64.22–65.18; I.8, 4.25–5.4). This was not just a matter of etiquette but had a political dimension. It was claimed that those who could control their own behavior also had the natural right to control others who did not show the same degree of restraint (Brown 1992: 55–56). In addition, education also had an important social function. Since elite status was not based on heredity it was possible for people of lower rank to climb up the social ladder through amassing wealth and acquiring landed property. Wealth alone, however, was not considered sufficient. In order to be accepted as a social equal one also

had to have an upper class education. The *nouveaux riches* failed to meet this criterion but they could ensure that their children would pass muster by sending them to the same schools as the sons of established elite families, a strategy that was employed successfully by Euphratas, the father of the historian Menander Protector (Blockley 1985: 41.271.278). The schools thus played a crucial role in retarding social change and maintaining the coherence of the elite.

This system was still going strong in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. We know of schools of rhetoric in Edessa, Antioch, Caesarea Maritima, and Alexandria. However, our best evidence comes from the city of Gaza, thanks to the writings of the sophists Aeneas, Procopius, and Choricius. These men taught the male offspring of the leading families of the city, presented rhetorical set pieces to the public in order to raise the profile of their schools, and delivered speeches and poems at weddings and funerals of members of the elite (Choricius, *Orat.* VIII, 6–10, 111.13–113.3, VIII.31, 121.7–11, XVI.1–9, 196.5–197.24). Their contributions were highly valued and they themselves were regarded as social equals. Indeed, cities vied with each other to attract the most accomplished practitioners. According to Choricius, Procopius received invitations from Caesarea Maritima and Antioch (Choricius, *Orat.* VIII.12, 113, 15–114.3). Procopius decided to stay put but other sophists were less wedded to their hometowns: one of Aeneas' pupils took up a post in Smyrna (Aeneas, *Epist.* XVIII. 12–13). Such mobility is not surprising when we consider that sophists from different cities frequently sent letters to each other. Aeneas, for example, corresponded with the sophist Dionysius of Antioch, the author of another surviving letter collection (Aeneas, *Epist.* XVII. 11–12; Dionysius, *Epist.*, ed. Hercher 260–274).

Romanization of Provincial Elites

This does, of course, not mean that nothing at all had changed. Imperial service was an important source of income and status, which made the elites receptive to the demands of the state. In the second half of the fourth century emperors had come to the conclusion that knowledge of Homer and Demosthenes was insufficient preparation for a post in the administration and therefore stipulated that prospective bureaucrats should have a good knowledge of Roman law. This led to a spectacular rise in the uptake of legal studies in the capital Constantinople and in Beirut, which unusually for an eastern provincial city had a strong Roman identity (Jones Hall 2004: 195–220). In the beginning this development was vehemently opposed by

teachers of rhetoric such as Libanius of Antioch, who warned that students would now neglect the study of the Greek classics. However, these fears proved groundless (Van Hoof 2010: 221). It was soon found that legal training constituted no obstacle to continuing literary production. Even Nonnus of Panopolis, the most accomplished Greek poet of the fifth century, had probably studied in Beirut (Liebeschuetz 2001: 236–237). By the sixth century a two-tiered system had been firmly established, which even teachers of rhetoric such as Procopius of Gaza accepted without demur. The sons of elite families would first acquire a traditional Greek education and then go on to study law (Procopius, *Epist.* 43. 26–27). Both were sources of pride as can be seen from a mosaic found in present-day Bodrum. This mosaic depicts the personifications of Halicarnassus, Alexandria, and Beirut, leaving no doubt that the owner of the house wished to signal to his guests that he was citizen of the first city, that he had studied rhetoric in the second, and that he had read law in the third. The same man also produced a hexametric inscription whose style closely resembles that of Nonnus' works (Poulsen 2014: 221). This does not mean that Roman influence was always superficial. The Constantinopolitan bureaucrat John Lydus, who hailed from Anatolian Philadelphia, prided himself on his knowledge of the Roman tradition on which he expatiated in several writings. However, he could also produce a Greek panegyric when called upon to do so by emperor Justinian (Maas 1992: 33). It cannot be ruled out that this work, too, contained references to Roman history. However, such innovation may have been limited to the capital. The only surviving panegyric from the provinces, a speech in honor of emperor Anastasius that Procopius delivered in his hometown Gaza, is entirely beholden to traditional conventions and studiously avoids any reference to things Roman (cf. Liebeschuetz 2001: 240). This is a vivid testimony to the strength of Hellenism in the east.

If legal training brought about a change it was to make the elites even more homogeneous than they had been before. Upper class families had always sent their children to cities with good schools, such as Athens and Alexandria. There the youths not only received an education in rhetoric and philosophy, but also forged friendships with fellow-pupils from all over the east (Watts 2008: 24–204). With the rise of legal studies the period of training was not only prolonged but also concentrated in far fewer places. Young men from southern Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt went to Beirut, whereas the main catchment area of Constantinople was most likely northern Asia Minor and the Balkans (Zacharias, *Life of Severus* 56, 58). The common identity that was thus forged found its outward expression in the title *scholastikos*, which was proudly borne by the graduates and in the late fifth and sixth centuries, became an indicator of upper class status. Once their

training was completed the young men had two career options: to become lawyers or to enter imperial service (cf. Zacharias, *Life of Severus* 56). There can be no doubt that the latter option was especially coveted. Two brothers of Procopius of Gaza, for example, found employment in the central and provincial administration (Procopius, *Epist.* 12.10; 92.31). However, this does not mean that they lost contact with their hometown. Once they had secured a post they did everything to further the careers of their younger compatriots (Procopius, *Epist.* 82.44). Moreover, not all *scholastikoi* left their cities. This is hardly surprising since in most cases at least one male member of the family would have stayed put in order to administer the family's property and to uphold the family's prominent social position. Complete relocation to Constantinople would have made economic sense only for the richest and for the poorest members of the elite.

Romanization and Christianization

Romanization, however superficial, was not the only change that the provincial elites underwent. By the sixth century they had also become largely Christianized. This was the result of a long drawn out process, which had started in the third century. The best known "early adapters" were the family of Basil of Caesarea, which suffered during the persecutions but rose to prominence in the later fourth century when Christianity had become the favored religion of the state (Van Dam 2003: 53–104). At that time and even in the fifth century many upper class families were still pagan. Ultimately, however, Christianity was to triumph. The contrast is particularly striking in Gaza where the elite was still devoted to the local god Marnas in the early fifth century, but appears to have been overwhelmingly Christian in the middle of the sixth (Van Dam 1985: 1–20). Significantly this process had no impact on elite formation. As we have seen, the old curriculum endured. Moreover, the evidence from Gaza shows that speeches and poems retained their pagan flavor even when their authors were devout Christians. In his panegyric of Anastasius, Procopius claims that the emperor is descended from Zeus (Liebeschuetz 2001: 240), and in his wedding speeches Choricius unselfconsciously mentions Eros and Aphrodite (Choricius, *Orat.* VI.14–15, 91.4–11). The fact that these texts were copied and have come down to us suggests that others, too, considered such an approach entirely acceptable. This is all the more surprising as already in the fourth century Gregory of Nazianzus had striven to Christianize rhetoric by using biblical rather than pagan *exempla* (Kennedy 1983: 215–238). That Gregory found no successors shows clearly how strong traditional literary conventions still were. They functioned as a

firewall that excluded references not only to Christianity but also to Roman history and culture. There was, however, room for ambiguity. In his funerary oration for his teacher Procopius, Choricius characterizes the deceased as an ascetic (Choricius, *Orat*. VIII.23, 118.5–14). Such a portrayal would not be out of place in a pagan text, but Choricius' Christian audience would surely have been reminded of biographies of Christian ascetics.

Indeed, it would be wrong to downplay the impact that the new religion had on the elites. Among the works of patriarch Ephraem of Antioch, himself a former high state official, we find a treatise written at the request of the *scholastikos* Anatolius, who had asked questions about complex doctrinal issues (Ephraem, *Ad Anatolium*, Phot. *cod*. 229, 249a.37–39). One should not assume, however, that men like Anatolius had rejected traditional elite culture. It is entirely possible that they effortlessly switched from one discourse to the other. Teachers of grammar and rhetoric present us with an even more interesting case. Procopius of Gaza composed an extensive biblical commentary, which shows no influence whatsoever of his rhetorical training (Kennedy 1983: 170; cf. Choricius, *Orat*. VIII, 21, 117.12–22). By contrast, his compatriots Aeneas and Zacharias were prepared to fuse Christian content with pagan form. They produced Platonic dialogues in which they sought to defend aspects of Christian dogma against pagan criticism (Kennedy 1983: 169–170). These texts are philosophical not only in form but also in argument. In general it can be said that in philosophy there was much greater scope for interaction than in rhetoric itself. In the sixth century the Alexandrian grammarian John Philoponus composed commentaries of Aristotle's works that show no influence of Christian thought. However, he also wrote a text that asserted the correctness of Christian cosmology but made its case exclusively with philosophical arguments (Sorabji 1983: 199–200). Significantly, Philoponus also employed Aristotelian concepts in his treatises on doctrinal issues, rather than following older Christian templates (Grillmeier and Hainthaler 1996: II.4, 131–135). It seems that grammarians and sophists used their knowledge of philosophy in order to stake a claim in the theological discourse. Already at the beginning of the sixth century the grammarian Sergius, who considered himself to be an arbiter of orthodoxy in his Syrian hometown, had developed a theological model to which he doggedly clung to despite the criticism of patriarch Severus of Antioch. This model was derived from Aristotelian philosophy, whereas Severus argued on the basis of proof texts from the Fathers (Torrance 1988: 37–74). The same approach was taken several decades later by the Alexandrian sophist Stephen of Niobe, which raised the ire of patriarch Damian, another hierarch who preferred to support his theological position with lengthy *florilegia* (Grillmeier and Hainthaler 1996: II.4, 80).

Christianization and Provincial Elites

Christianization had another important effect: it broadened the career options of members of the provincial elite. Already in the fourth century men like Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus chose to become bishops of their hometowns rather than sophists or advocates. The office of bishop was coveted because bishops were highly influential figures. They were in control of substantial property and played an important role in the running of their cities. In the course of the fifth century emperors came to rely more and more on their services. This process culminated in the early sixth century when the councils, which had governed the cities since time immemorial, were dissolved and replaced by informal groups of notables (Liebeschuetz 2001: 104–168). However, when need arose the bishops would also defend the interests of their cities against emperors and governors, a role that formerly had been played by sophists. The last representative of this older tradition was Timothy of Gaza, who protested against the unpopular fiscal policies of emperor Anastasius (Coyne 1991: 127). The evidence from Gaza is again highly instructive. Several speeches of Choricius, which date to the reign of Justinian, praise the local bishop, Marcian, and other members of his family. From them we can glean that Marcian was an energetic leader. Together with the provincial governor he organized the rebuilding of the walls of Gaza, sharing out the various tasks among the heads of other elite families (Choricius, *Opera* II.16, 32.5–14; III.53–56, 62.24–63.21; cf. Liebeschuetz 2001: 61). Moreover, he spoke out against the depredations of soldiers and at least once went to the capital on official business (Choricius, *Opera* II.23–24, 4-20; VII.21, 18–22).

Choricius tells us that Marcian's parents belonged to the upper class of the city. They had eight children: four boys and four girls. The boys all studied rhetoric in their hometown. However, then their career paths diverged. The younger ones were sent to Beirut to receive legal training. By contrast, the older two, Marcian and Anastasius, stayed at home where they were groomed for the episcopal office by their maternal uncle, who at the time was bishop of Gaza (Choricius, *Opera* VII.7, 101.23–102.10; II.7–8, 29.17–30.15). In due course Marcian became his uncle's successor, whereas Anastasius took up the see of the neighboring city of Eleutheropolis (Choricius, *Opera* VII. tit, 99.8–10). Here we are clearly in the presence of an ecclesiastical dynasty where office is passed down from uncle to nephew, a pattern that is well known from sixth-century Gaul (Wickham 2005: 171–172). That the family managed to lay hold of the bishopric of Eleutheropolis is highly significant. It is a sign of the interconnectedness of the local elites, who often owned property in more than one city territory (Wickham 2005: 240). How strong

these bonds were can be seen from Choricius' descriptions of religious feasts. On such occasions members of the elite from all over the region came to Gaza and Marcian processed through the city on a cart, which he shared with bishops from the neighboring cities (Choricius, *Opera* II.75, 46.18–23; I.93, 25.23–26.4).

From Choricius one gets the impression that Marcian's family had a monopoly on the post of bishop. However, this impression may well be deceptive. Ecclesiastical law stipulated that the people of a city suggest three candidates to the ecclesiastical superior, metropolitan, or patriarch, who then chooses one of them (Beck 1959: 69–70). The letters of the monks Barsanuphius and John, who lived in the countryside just outside Gaza, show what problems could arise. They tell us about an unnamed city in the region whose inhabitants had their bishop deposed because of misconduct and then proceeded to elect a new one. However, they could not agree on the candidates and further had to contend with the machinations of the former bishop, who went to Constantinople and enlisted the help of the emperor himself (Barsanuphius and John, *Epist.* 793–803, III.254–266). Moreover, the ecclesiastical superiors also had a say in the matter and could promote candidates of their own. The family of Marcian was strong enough to impose its will and overcome opposition. However, it would be wrong to generalize from the situation in the patriarchate of Jerusalem to which Gaza belonged. In Egypt the Church had long been highly centralized, which gave the patriarchs a decisive role in the choice of bishops. In the patriarchate of Constantinople a similar development took place from the fifth century onwards. The *Life* of Eutychius, Marcian's contemporary and later patriarch of Constantinople, sheds light on this process. Born in a Phrygian village, Eutychius was chosen at an early age by the metropolitan of Amasea as candidate for the bishopric of Zela in Pontus (Eustratius, *Vita Eutychii* 10.219–227; 14, 330–339). Significantly he then did not become a member of the cathedral clergy of Amasea, but was sent to Constantinople to receive the requisite training in one of its numerous churches (Eustratius, *Vita Eutychii* 14.340–356). This suggests that the metropolitan himself had strong links with the capital. Indeed, he may even have been sent out from there. Participation of the people of Zela is not mentioned, although it is possible that their resistance was responsible for the fact that in the end Eutychius could not take up his post (Eustratius, *Vita Eutychii* 17.425–439).

One of the central religious functions of bishops was instruction of their flocks in the Christian faith. In order to be able to do so they had to have a good command of scripture and at least some knowledge of theological literature, which they acquired in informal settings since there were no Christian schools (cf. Choricius, *Orat.* II.8, 30.10–15). However, this does not mean

that their sermons necessarily differed all that much from secular literature. Marcian of Gaza had received a traditional rhetorical education, which most likely colored his sermons, and he may well have agreed with Choricius' thesis that Christian content must be wedded to Greek form in order to be persuasive (Choricius, *Orat.* II.9, 30.15–19). How beholden he was to tradition is evident from the fact that he let himself be celebrated in speeches by Procopius and Choricius. These speeches present him as an old-style benefactor. Significantly they not only mention that Marcian graced his city with new buildings, but also state that he removed makeshift structures, which obstructed colonnades (Choricius, *Orat.* VIII.52, 127.21–128.5). This shows that Marcian remained loyal to the classical ideal at a time when the layout of other cities was becoming ever more untidy (Wickham 2005: 598). This does, of course, not mean that there was no Christian side to Marcian. Choricius mentions housing for the poor, which conforms to the Christian ideal of charity even if it is presented in the language of Greek euergetism (Choricius, *Orat.* I.78, 227–213). Due to the lack of comparable evidence it is difficult to gauge how representative a figure Marcian was. However, one should not for that reason dismiss his case as irrelevant. There may have been more Marcians than contemporary Church history and hagiography may lead us to believe (cf. Rapp 2005: 184–187).

Challenges and Opportunities Presented by Christianization

The fusion of Greek tradition and Christian faith for which Marcian stood was not unchallenged. Already 200 years earlier a new movement had come into existence, which rejected any admixture of foreign elements to the Christian faith. This movement was monasticism. By the sixth century it had become a well-established social institution. Indeed, during Marcian's tenure the countryside of Gaza was dotted with monasteries and hermitages. Two of their inmates, Barsanuphius and John, were famous beyond the region (Hevelone-Harper 2005: 32–60). They were revered as "holy men" (Brown 1971: 80–101). The best-known member of this class was Symeon of Telneshe, who lived in the first half of the fifth century. After trying out various forms of asceticism Symeon ascended a pillar where he was to stay for the rest of his life, exposing himself to the elements and eating and sleeping as little as possible (*Vita Syriaca Symeonis* 45–56, 129–130). In the sixth century his lifestyle was imitated by another Symeon from the city of Antioch, who then became known as Symeon the Younger. The background and upbringing of these men was anything but privileged. Symeon the Elder

herded sheep in his childhood and the father of Symeon the Younger was a craftsman (*Vita Syriaca Symeonis* 1.103–104; *Vita Symeonis Jun.* 1.2–3). If they received an education it can only have been rudimentary. Their high status was exclusively based on their personal achievements. It was their extreme asceticism that had earned them the reputation of being wonder-workers and had given them the authority to act as advisers and as arbitrators in conflicts.

There can be no doubt that holy men were held in high esteem not only by peasants and artisans but also by many members of the provincial elite. This presented a challenge to the bishops, who did not engage in equally rigorous asceticism. What strategies they developed can be seen from a fifth-century text, the *Religious History* of Theodoret, the bishop of Cyrus in northern Syria. Theodoret adapted the old template of the golden mean to the new situation with which he was faced. He accepted that the extreme behavior of monks living in his diocese was pleasing to God but contended that it was his task to call for moderation so that the monks did not kill themselves in their fervor (Urbainczyk 2002: 115–129). No such problems arose for the secular elite. The *Lives* of Symeon the Younger and Theognius of Bethelia record numerous encounters between the saints and upper class men. The help that these men solicited ranged from the material—Theognius healed the wife of the *scholastikos* Aelianus of Gaza—to the spiritual—Symeon comforted Evagrius of Epiphaneia, *scholastikos* and advocate of the patriarch of Antioch, after he had lost half of his family to the plague (Paul, *Vita Theognii* 18.100.1–4; *Vita Symeonis Jun.* 223.210). However, this does not mean that all members of the elite unquestioningly accepted the role of the "holy man." The *Life* of Symeon the Younger makes mention of *scholastikoi* who challenged the saint's credentials and called him a charlatan (*Vita Symeonis Jun.* 157.139; 224.194).

Moreover, even those who admired holy men did not necessarily consider monasticism to be a career option for their sons, any more than their ancestors had done a century and a half earlier. The *Life of Severus* by Zacharias of Gaza casts light on the obstacles that young men from good families faced if they wished to leave the world. It tells the story of Evagrius, whose parents belonged to the elite of the city of Samosata. Evagrius had been sent to Antioch in order to study rhetoric. While being there he resolved to become a monk. However, his father would not let him and instead sent him on to Beirut in order to study law. All Evagrius could do was lead a quasi-monastic life of prayer and fasting. In time he gathered around himself a group of like-minded people who were confronted with the same problem (Zacharias, *Life of Severus* 54–56). Eventually some of them mustered the courage to defy their parents and enter the monastery of Peter the Iberian near Gaza

(Zacharias, *Life of Severus* 82). According to Zacharias some of them then engaged in extreme asceticism (Zacharias, *Life of Severus* 98–100). This suggests that they also revolted against the traditional upper class mentality, which was based on the ideal of moderation. However, this does not necessarily mean that social status had ceased to play a role. Peter the Iberian himself had been brought up at the imperial court, and several of the leading men of his monastery were former *scholastikoi* (Zacharias, *Life of Severus* 88). It is hard to believe that the common background and formation of these men did not in some way color their monastic vision.

Not all elite families had as dim a view of monasticism as the parents of Evagrius and his friends. Some came to believe that having a monk in the family was not a bad thing. One such person was Aphthonia, the mother of John of Edessa, close associate of patriarch Severus of Antioch and founder of the monastery of Qennešre, which was to play an important role in the transmission of Greek learning to the Arabs. John's hagiographer, his successor as abbot of Qennešre, informs us that the saint was the youngest son of a teacher of rhetoric, who due to his wealth and social standing played a prominent role in the running of his city. When John was born his father was already dead. Fortunately for him and his brothers their mother, Aphthonia, was a very energetic woman who was determined to maintain the social status of the family. She saw to it that her four older sons received the requisite rhetorical and legal training and then secured for them posts in the imperial administration (John bar Aphtonia, *Historia* 2.123 (Nau)). Her plans for John were quite different. She had earmarked him from his birth for the monastic estate. To this end she kept him shut up in the house so that he would remain pure until he reached puberty and could join a monastic community (John bar Aphtonia, *Historia* 3.123 (Nau)). When this time had come Aphthonia proceeded with the utmost care. After thorough inquiries she did not choose one of the numerous monastic houses in the vicinity of Edessa but the monastery of St Thomas near Antioch because she became convinced that it was most conducive to the acquisition of holiness (John bar Aphtonia, *Historia* 3.124 (Nau)). The narrative shows clearly that Aphthonia was pursuing a coherent strategy that was meant to further the interests of the family. Just as her older sons had entered the service of the earthly emperor, John was to enter the service of the heavenly emperor, which would give him the power to intercede for his parents and siblings.

According to the hagiographer, Aphthonia chose St Thomas because it was a strict coenobium where all monks lived according to a common rule and individual initiative was outlawed (John bar Aphtonia, *Historia* 3.123–124 (Nau)). The way in which John's life in the monastery is described is highly instructive. We are told that the saint slept very little and that he

exposed himself to the elements. As we have seen such activities were widely believed to bring about the transformation from ordinary person into saint. However, in the *Life* of John they are given a radically different meaning. We are told that the saint endured these hardships while he was serving his brethren. There is no indication that he engaged in ascetic feats for their own sake or that he played to a non-monastic audience. Indeed, fasting is not mentioned at all in the text. This can only be understood as a challenge to the ideal of the holy man. The author makes it clear that he disapproves of all excess. He states that John's innate prudence made him eschew both inconsiderate fervor and laziness (John bar Aphtonia, *Historia* 5.126 (Nau)). This is nothing but the old ideal of moderation, which has been transposed from an aristocratic into a monastic context. Of course, we do not know whether Aphthonia's choice of St Thomas was determined by such considerations. We only have the word of the hagiographer that she did so. However, we can be sure that John himself subscribed to these values because his hagiographer was a member of the monastery that he had founded. Here we thus have a case where monastic life entails not the rejection but the affirmation of traditional elite values.

The *Life* of John of Edessa remains an isolated case in fifth- and sixth-century hagiography. This is so because the hagiographical genre was wedded to the ideal of the "holy man." Indeed, John's life was most likely written up only because he later became a confessor of Monophysitism. Coenobitic milieus produced normative texts, which are often difficult to situate in a specific context. Thus, it is easy to overlook their importance. Significantly, it was moderate and not extreme monasticism that was championed by emperor Justinian when he demanded that monks sleep in dormitories and conform to an identical regime (Beck 1959: 126–127).

Not all monks ended their lives in monasteries and hermitages. Some of them became bishops, albeit often against their will. This was a development that had begun in the fourth century and seems to have gained pace in the fifth (Sterk 2004: 178–190). Hagiographical texts such as the *Life* of Theognius give us an insight in the behavior of such men. Theognius had been the abbot of a monastery before he was chosen to become bishop in the small town of Bethelia in southern Palestine. While in office he continued to act like a typical "holy man" and periodically retreated to his old monastery (Paul, *Vita Theognii* 10.89.2–4). He traveled twice to Constantinople in order to intercede with the emperors Anastasius and Justin on behalf of his flock and in both cases he was successful (Paul, *Vita Theognii* 11.90.11–91.11; 21.104.1–17). Theognius' encounter with Anastasius began with the following interaction. He offered the emperor three *eulogiai* in a piece of cloth. When the emperor asked whether he should take only the *eulogiai* or the

cloth as well, Theognius replied that he could have that, too. The emperor laughed and kissed him and then acceded to his wishes. This interaction shows that Theognius achieved his aims by employing the rhetoric of other-worldliness, just like contemporary abbots did when they went to Constantinople in order to lobby for their monasteries. This is in stark contrast to men like Marcian, who used their acumen and their relations with friends in high places in order to achieve their ends. Of course, one must not forget that hagiographers present us with an idealized picture. It is quite possible that monks also used other methods to gain influence. Nevertheless, one gets the sense that there existed two different models of social interaction.

The effectiveness of the intercessions of holy men was without doubt one of the factors that caused local elites to elect or acquiesce in the imposition of monks as bishops. However, this does not mean that traditional values had been completely eclipsed. A universally recognized saint might command respect despite his lack of learning. However, for uneducated people who were known for their personal piety but had not achieved such a high status this was not necessarily the case, as can be seen from the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John (Barsanuphius and John, *Epist.* 809.III.247). Moreover, not every holy man turned bishop was up to the task (Rapp 2005: 162). In any case, one should not overestimate the importance of bishops, whose status was exclusively based on "ascetic" authority (cf. Rapp 2005: 100–155). It is true that the sources contain numerous references to monk–bishops. However, this information is difficult to interpret because we usually know nothing about the backgrounds of these men. Two further examples from southern Palestine can give a sense of the complexity of the matter. In the mid-fifth century the inhabitants of Askalon chose the monk Leontius as their new bishop. Leontius belonged to a leading family of his hometown and doubtlessly received the normal education before he founded a monastery and installed himself as abbot there (John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* LII.106 = John of Maiuma, *Opera*). It is entirely possible that his authority was based on his elite status rather than on any odor of sanctity that he might have acquired during his time as a monk. The case of bishop Theodore of Petra, a contemporary of Marcian's, seems at first sight to be more clear-cut. Theodore had entered the famous monastery of Theodosius the Coenobiarch (Theodore, *Vita Theodosii* 101.1–5 = Theodore of Petra, *Opera*). His funerary oration in honor of this saint leaves no doubt that he had been properly socialized into the monastic life. However, the text is also written according to the rules of classical rhetoric and even contains a reference to the Olympic Games (Theodore, *Vita Theodosii* 14.5–6 = Theodore of Petra, *Opera*). This shows clearly that Theodore had received a traditional education before he became monk, which in turn implies that he was the scion of a local elite family.

Conclusion

From the discussion of the evidence it appears that in the late fifth and in the first half of the sixth century traditional elite culture was in full bloom. However, by the late seventh century this culture had disappeared both in the regions that remained Roman and in the areas that had come under Muslim control. No further secular literature was written and it is quite possible that the mindset that found its expression in this literature had also disappeared. This demands an explanation. Some scholars argue that the decisive factor was the extraordinarily violent Persian War of the early seventh century, whereas others contend that the decline had begun several decades earlier (cf. Whittow 1990: 3–29; Liebeschuetz 2001: 402). The latter group points to the fact that emperor Justinian abolished state subsidies for schools (Kennedy 1983: 177). However, it is extremely difficult to gauge the effects of this measure. Stray references in the *Meadow* (*Pratum*) of the monk John Moschus give the impression of business as usual in the late sixth century. John's companion, Sophronius, was a sophist and so were two men in Alexandria and Antinoopolis whom John visited (John Moschus, *Pratum* 69.2920A6–8; 143. 3004C11–12; 77, 2929D4–6). Moreover, we hear of a *scholastikos* named Procopius from the small Phoenician town of Porphyreon, a good Christian, who sent his two sons to Caesarea Maritima in order to get an education (John Moschus, *Pratum* 131, 2996B7–10). It is, of course, possible that the number of schools had declined. However, those who had the necessary means could evidently still get a good education: the seventh-century historian Theophylact Simocatta, who also composed a number of rhetorical texts, will have acquired the necessary skills in a school of his hometown Alexandria (Whitby 1988: 29).

This raises the question: what did all those deeply pious grammarians and sophists teach their pupils? The admittedly slim evidence suggests that the firewall that kept Christian elements out of the rhetorical discourse had started crumbling. The only secular texts from a provincial author that can be dated to the second half of the sixth century are the poems of the Egyptian landowner Dioscorus of Aphrodito, which are known to us from papyrus finds. In these poems, Christian and pagan allusions appear side by side. This mix-up might be due to the author's inability to master the rules of the discourse, but it could also reflect a broader trend (cf. Liebeschuetz 2001: 230–231). Should we therefore assume that Christian texts had begun to enter the curriculum? If this was the case, it would have constituted a radical break with the past. However, it does not mean that the schools as such were in trouble. Thus, one could conclude that it was indeed the Persian War that put an end to traditional elite culture.

At this point a comparison with the study of law is suggestive. In the middle of the sixth century Beirut was devastated by an earthquake, which forced the law school to migrate to Sidon. More importantly, the teachers were now no longer professors but practitioners of law and the Latin language ceased to play an important role (Haldon 1990: 260). This gives the impression that Greek rhetorical education was holding up better than the study of Roman law. However, this impression may be in need of correction. Excavations have shown that in Asia Minor the palatial houses of the elite were subdivided and eventually abandoned. This often happened already in the second half of the sixth century, well before any enemy incursions. Striking examples of such early collapse have been found in the cities of Sagalassos and Sardes (Rautman 1995: 49–66; Uytterhoeven *et al.* 2013: 376). This evidence is not easy to interpret. It could be argued that these houses were no longer needed because the families that inhabited them had died out during the plague epidemic of the mid-sixth century and their heirs lived elsewhere (Whittow 2001: 137–153). If that were the case one would expect at least some mansions to be maintained. However, such buildings have not yet been found. Relocation to Constantinople is a possibility although it seems highly unlikely that the whole Anatolian elite moved there (cf. Wickham 2005: 632). In any case upper class families would then have abandoned their hometowns, some of which were disintegrating rapidly (Liebeschuetz 2001: 30–54). Under these circumstances it is hard to see how schools could have survived in the provincial cities of Asia Minor. Indeed, it can be argued that Christian institutions, too, were affected by this development. Most places retained their bishops but we know nothing about the backgrounds of these men. The decline of the cities could well have sped up the process of centralization that we have encountered in the *Life* of Eutychius. Coenobitic communities may also have suffered since their existence depended on economic stability.

One would wish to know whether the same changes took place in the areas from which our literary evidence comes. Unfortunately few mansions in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt have been studied in depth, and the data that we have, such as the excavations of Apamea, are ambiguous (Liebeschuetz 2001: 54–63). The same applies to bishops' palaces and coenobitic monasteries. The mismatch of the evidence thus makes it impossible to say whether the economic crisis of the later sixth century hit upper class families in the east equally hard. We have to await further excavations before we can determine whether elite culture, be it in its traditional or in its Christianized form, was already faltering in the eastern provinces before the enemy excursions of the seventh century.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Caucasia: Albania, Armenia, and Georgia

Nikoloz Aleksidze

Introduction: The Christian Nations

The formative era of Christian Armenian and Georgian cultures, between the fourth and eighth centuries, remains to this day one of the fundamental paradigms for national narratives and ethno-religious identity discourses of the two south Caucasian nation states. According to scholarly consensus, by the first half of the fourth century both Armenian and Iberian elites had Christianized. Armenian traditions ascribe the conversion of the Armenian royal house to St Gregory the Illuminator, who also became the founder and first patriarch of the Armenian Church, with his descendants occupying the patriarchal throne for another century. Georgian traditions, while attested in somewhat later narratives, are in accord with late antique Greek and Latin sources claiming that sometime in the first half of the fourth century Iberia's royal house was baptized through the effort of a certain captive woman, known in the Georgian tradition as Nino (Horn 1998).

Although the narrative of Christianization, as received in Georgian and Armenian traditions, was indeed associated with specific persons and events, medieval authors perceived the conversion to Christianity as a long historical process that led toward the formation of Christianized "national" cultures. Contemporary national discourses have inherited medieval perceptions. Both Armenian and Georgian national narratives present the introduction,

establishment, and spread of Christianity in Late Antiquity as crucial forma-
tive processes in their national identities as well as a persistent paradigm that
requires emulation on the part of moderns (Siekierski 2014; van Lint 2009:
273). Medieval Armenian traditions viewed Christianization as a long pro-
cess initiated in apostolic times through the efforts of apostles Thaddeus and
Bartholomew, followed after a few centuries by the conversion of the royal
Arsacid family and the institution of a "national" Patriarchal succession, con-
firmed and strengthened by the creation of the Armenian alphabet by *varda-
pet* Maštocʻ (later known as Mesrop) and the subsequent translation of
biblical books by Maštocʻ and katholikos Sahak. Soon thereafter the first
Armenian martyrs appeared and the cult of those fallen in the battles against
the Sasanians was established. This eventually culminated in the formulation
of Armenian Church canons and Orthodoxy, a process that ended with the
separation from Byzantine Chalcedonianism. Thus, continues the national
narrative, the Armenian *ethnie*, the "people of the Covenant," with unique
political and religious characteristics, took the stage of history (Siekierski
2014; Smith 2003; van Lint 2009). Contemporary Armenian post-Genocide
identity rhetoric readily appropriated the paradigms and rhetorical tools of
late antique historians. The concept of *martyrs for faith and for the father-
land*, coined by the sixth-century historian Ełišē to celebrate the memory of
those fallen in the battle of Avarayr, was epitomized in the largest canoniza-
tion in Armenia's recent history—of the victims of the 1915 Genocide. This
act was seen and presented as an emulation of the multitudes of Armenian
martyrs of the fifth century who perished in their spiritual and physical battle
with the Sasanians (van Lint 2009: 273–274).

To the north of Armenia, the foundational narrative of Iberia's (in
Georgian, Kartli's) conversion to Christianity, *Mokcevay Kartlisay* (sev-
enth century), remains to this day perhaps the most widely read and
quoted set of texts within the medieval Georgian corpus. Nineteenth-cen-
tury nationalist rhetoric and modern national narratives appropriated the
introduction of Christianity and its adoption by King Mirian in the fourth
century as a realization of Georgia's perpetual political aspiration: its reso-
lution to become part of "European" civilization. According to medieval
Georgian narratives the Christianization of Iberia was initiated long before
Christ, when Alexander the Great allegedly invaded the Caucasus, founded
a kingdom in this isolated "land of the North," and prescribed the venera-
tion of one invisible God (Lerner 2004; Thomson 1996b: 23–26). This
was followed by the legendary mission of Apostle Andrew the First-Called
and culminated in the evangelization of Iberia by St Nino of Cappadocia.
The fifth-century king Vakhtang the Wolf-Head represents the paradigm
of a holy king and, apart from his valiant military exploits, was remembered

as the figure who secured the independence of the Iberian Church. By prescribing Iberia's eternal alliance with the Byzantine world and with his determination to preserve Iberia's Christian faith at all cost, Vakhtang, as illustrated in his *Life*, also defined the political and religious *raison d'être* of the Iberian kingdom (Haas 2014; Martin-Hisard 1986). The subsequent history of Georgia—including the isolation from Christendom after the fall of Byzantium, the Arab, Persian, and Ottoman occupations, the spread of Islam, and the annexation of Georgia by the Russian empire—is still often read as a fatal detour from the course of history that prefigures the perpetual attempt to return to Georgia's political and religious foundation.

The "rediscovery" of Caucasian Albania in the twentieth century, as of a late antique political and religious entity, further prompted by the discovery and decipherment of Albanian writing, preserved in several Georgian palimpsests at St Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai (Gippert *et al.* 2008), resulted in the incorporation of this historical concept within the Azerbaijani national narrative. The nature and place of Caucasian Albania in late antique Caucasia's political and religious landscape still remains a *vexata quaestio* and national narratives, whether Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, or Dagestani, often fall prey to primordialist sentiments in their quest for the foundations of their cultures.

Thus, for all three south Caucasian nation states the formation of religious traditions in late antique Caucasia exercised and still exercises fundamental influence on identity rhetoric and national self-narratives, making this particular period an increasingly fascinating object of scholarly inquiry (Siekierski 2014; Thomson 1996a). However, such a teleological vision of history offers further challenges to scholars in their attempts to deconstruct the highly resilient myth of nation formation advocated by modern national narratives.

Problems of Methodology

The transformations that the eastern Roman world experienced and that define Late Antiquity did not find immediate resonance among south Caucasian people. They were either received late or else did not find any particular repercussions. Although Christianity was introduced and established in Caucasia during the fourth century, by the time indigenous writings were created in the following century, almost all aspects of Christian life, whether monasticism, or the cult of saints, had already been formed in the west. Due to the dramatic political circumstances of 451 the Chalcedonian

debate did not find an immediate reaction in Caucasia and became a matter of controversy only during the following two centuries. Similarly, it is still debated whether institutions, such as organized coenobial monasticism, existed in Caucasia until the seventh century (see the essays reprinted in Garsoïan 2010). The absence of sizable urban centers in late antique Caucasia may also have had an impact.

Nevertheless, the region's religious history justifies the concept of "late antique Caucasia" as a historical paradigm or framework. The introduction of so-called reformed Zoroastrianism in Armenia in the third century CE marked a new era in Caucasian religious history (de Jong 2015). For the next several centuries the opposition between Mazdeism and Christianity defined the political and religious landscape of late antique Caucasia. Virtually all narrative sources of the period, Georgian and Armenian, whether chronicles or martyrological accounts, celebrate the gradual strengthening of Christianity and elaborate upon the uncompromising opposition of the Armenian and Georgian nations to recurring Sasanian aggression. Meanwhile, from the early sixth century, religious controversies were sparked among Caucasian Churches that marked the region as a particular area of religious conflict.

The other end of the epoch, the traditionally adopted upper limit of Late Antiquity in the seventh or early eighth century, marks the terminus of a transitional period in the formation of religious traditions and identities in Caucasia, specifically of Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian orthodoxies. The very first years of the seventh century were marked by intense debates between the leaders of two main Caucasian Churches, the non-Chalcedonian Armenian and the Chalcedonian Iberian Church, over the interpretation of the Council of Chalcedon. This triggered what scholars often label the Caucasian Church Schism. The Armenian katholikos Yovhannēs Ōjnecʻi (717–728) believed that the two Church councils he had convened in Dwin (719) and in Manazkert (726) finalized the formation of the Armenian Church and its Orthodox tradition. Indeed, by the time Ōjnecʻi was writing, the Armenian Church's stand *vis-à-vis* the rest of the Churches and theological traditions was formulated, Church canons were edited, and regulations against religious sects were promulgated. This era is often seen as the beginning of the formation of the Armenian "National Church" as of a distinct ethno-religious entity (Garsoïan 1999: 183–399; Mahé 1997). However, doctrinal oscillations continued far beyond Late Antiquity depending on political preferences of various prelates or immediate political requirements.

On the Georgian side, the early seventh century is also marked by the formulation of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy by the Iberian Church. The *Mokcevay Kartlisay*, although entirely uninterested in theological disputes, culminates

with a dramatic if rather laconic description of emperor Heraclius's military campaign in the Caucasus and of the siege of Tbilisi, with an ensuing "cleansing of faith" by the said emperor and reconfirmation of Orthodoxy in Iberia (Lerner 2004). Within the narrative of *Mokcevay* these events effectively end the *longue durée* of Georgia's conversion to Christianity and indeed a major chapter in world history.

Just as the term "Caucasia" offers chronological problems, it similarly requires geographic justification, since the historical accuracy of the term "Caucasus" or the existence of such a geo-political entity as "the Caucasus" is not readily self-evident. From a geographic point of view the study of the Caucasian religious landscape requires inclusion of both northern and southern slopes and plains of the Greater Caucasian range. A strict adhesion to physical geographic boundaries would partially include the study of north Caucasian peoples, the Khazar, and Alan domains, while it would exclude a great part of the Armenian lands beyond the Caucasian limits. Therefore the adoption of the expression "the Caucasus" as of a certain political concept would force us to go far beyond the borders of either the Greater or the Lesser Caucasian mountain ranges, which would render the concept of "the Caucasus" in geographical terms almost redundant. In order to overcome the exclusivity of the more traditional term "the Caucasus," therefore, a broader term, "Caucasia," has been adopted in recent scholarship (as well as in the present chapter) in order to refer to this larger region that combines geographic and historic criteria (Rapp 2014).

In a similar way as in the case of the expression "Late Antiquity" it is in the area of religious history that the region is given a certain coherence that justifies the term "Caucasia" as a historical concept. The appropriation of Iranian religion and its syncretization with local cults in the early centuries of the first millennium, or further syncretization of Zoroastrian and Christian traditions, the formation of orthodoxies, all these factors do indeed make Caucasia a single geo-political entity, sharing similar tendencies and historical drama. The three south Caucasian lands were Christianized at roughly the same time in the fourth century, and respective religious writing too appeared in the course of the fifth century. Late antique authors, whether Georgian or Armenian, demonstrate a certain awareness of regional unity, whether in the context of conversion, or of safeguarding the Christian faith from the Sasanians, as symbolized by the united Albanian, Armenian, and Iberian rebellions against the Sasanians in the mid-fifth century. By the early sixth century the current leaders of all three Caucasian Churches seem to be in accord in their opposition against Persian Nestorianism, as illustrated by the celebrated letters of katholikos Babgēn (490–516?), who seems to have been authorized to write on behalf of all the Caucasian Churches (Garsoïan

1999, 438–457). Further, as the early seventh-century correspondence between the Armenians and Georgians reveals, this sense of unity was traditionally symbolized in the celebration of common saints, such as the great Armeno-Georgian martyr of the fifth century, Queen Šušanik, or in regular pilgrimages to each other's holy sites, with Armenians traveling to the Holy Cross of Mcxeta and the Georgians paying visits to the Cathedral of Dwin. A sense of undermined unity permeates the later historical perception of the religious schism that occurred between the Georgians and Armenians, and marred the traditional Caucasian unity.

Similarly to the ambiguities offered by the terms "Caucasus/Caucasia," "Georgia" too (*Sakartvelo*) is essentially a medieval political concept that unites western and eastern parts of contemporary Georgia. Such a concept was non-existent in Late Antiquity. Lazika or Egrisi, later known as Apxazeti, to the west, experienced a political and religious history substantially different from Iberia (Kartli). A sense of unity, even if vague, between the two, emerged much later, on the verge of the millennium. The degree of ecclesiastic unity during that period between western and eastern Georgia remains a controversial and unresolved issue in scholarship. The expressions "Armenia" and "Armenians" represent an equally imprecise category, particularly after Armenia's division between the Romans and the Sasanians in 387, or even later, when a substantial portion of the Armenian population did not join Dwin in anti-Chalcedonianism and remained beyond the jurisdiction of the Armenian Church (Adontz 1970: 7–74).

There is yet another aspect that a student of Caucasian religious history ought to consider. The center of writing and of the formation of Christian practices in the early centuries of Christianity was located not only in the Caucasus region, but also in the Holy Land. The earliest Armenian and Georgian inscriptions are attested in the environs of Jerusalem, and the earliest monastic colonies including those of Albanians were similarly thriving in Palestine (Garsoïan 2002). From the sixth century onwards, Georgians were widely present in Mar Saba Lavra and other monasteries in the region, whence the earliest pieces of writing, translations, and liturgical traditions stem (Horn 2006; Mgaloblishvili 2001; Renoux 2007, 2017, and many more items by Renoux on Armenian and Georgian liturgical practices). It was only later, perhaps in the ninth century, that the centrifuge of Georgian culture moved from Palestine to Georgia proper. As for Albania, the only surviving pieces of Albanian writing, fragments of a Gospel Lectionary, are kept in the palimpsests at St Catherine's Monastery on Sinai, while no pieces of writing have survived from the part of Caucasia that used to be Albania (Gippert *et al.* 2008).

Syncretism

Due to Caucasia's geographic location between larger cultural worlds, syncretization of religious traditions was a common phenomenon long before the adoption of Christianity. Before the Sasanians took over in the mid-third century, a kind of syncretic Mazdeism had existed in the kingdom of Armenia and likely across Caucasia, uniting local deities and the Zoroastrian pantheon, which in the Hellenistic period were further associated with the Greek pantheon (see Chapter 2 in the present volume). The royal Armenian pantheon was presided over by a triad of principal gods Aramazd (Ahura-Mazda), the supreme god, whose cult further syncretized with Semitic Baršamin (Baal Šamin), the "Lord of the Heaven"; Vahagn, the god of strength and victory; and Anahit, the goddess of fertility. It was at the site of the temple of Vahagn in Aštišat (in the western province of Taron) where St Gregory the Illuminator reportedly founded the first Armenian Church, as part of his attempt to supplant local cults with new holy sites. Apart from this principal triad other deities of various provenance were venerated within local noble dynasties, such as Semitic Nanē or Tir, "the interpreter of dreams," who had a temple in the town of Artašat (Russell 1987).

Mithra or Mihr was an important divinity of Arsacid Armenia, and Mithraism was widely present and practiced in Caucasia. The Mihr cult is apparently recalled in the Armenian epic *Sasna Crer* or the *Daredevils of Sasun* as Little Mithra (*Pʿokʿr Mher*) (Russell 1990). Some scholars have even argued that Mithraism originated on the Armenian plateau, where Roman soldiers first encountered the cult (Russell 1994).

The veneration of local variations of Ahura-Mazda or Ormizd was practiced throughout Caucasia. Medieval Georgian chronicles refer to an Iberian variation of Aramazd (Armazi in Georgian) as the main idol of Iberia, together with another idol, Zadeni—perhaps simply a phonetic variation and duplication of Armazi. Despite the awe-inspiring descriptions of the destruction of these idols by St Nino, the names of Armazi and Zadeni were not erased from popular memory but survive to this day as local place names. Ironically, but also certainly purposefully, the center of Georgian Christianity, the *Svetʿicxoveli* Cathedral, where by tradition the Living Pillar was miraculously erected, is situated in-between the hills of Armazi and Zedazeni (Upper Zadeni). The ruins of *Armaziscixe* (Armazi fortress), the walled royal site, are still observable just above Mcxeta, on the opposite bank of River Mtkvari (Kura), a site that was already known to Strabo (*Geogr.* 6.1.9) as Ἀρμοζική.

Medieval Georgian annals identify two other deities, Gac' and Ga[y], who were allegedly established as royal cults in the times of Alexander the Great. There is no scholarly consensus over the etymology and provenance of their cult, or even whether they actually existed or entered the Georgian tradition through literary sources. Another medieval Georgian account, the *Life of the Kings*, elaborates on two other deities Aynina and Danina, the latter being identified in a later colophon with Aphrodite. The *Life of the Kings* (eighth century) also mentions a certain Itrujan, "god of the Chaldeans and the enemy of Armaz." The most current etymology of the word associates the name to the Mazdean concept of *druj*, "evil," "chaos," and the Mazdean *Druj*—demon of the lie (Rapp 2014: 146–147).

The decisive victory of the Sasanians over the Parthians in 253 brought a new era to the Caucasian religious landscape. Reformed and "purified" Zoroastrianism was imposed over all Sasanian domains, and the old Parthian mixture of Zoroastrianism and local cults was suppressed. Old Parthian deities were demolished and veneration of the holy fire of Ormizd was prescribed, which resulted in syncretization and opposition of the two rather than in the elimination of the former. It has been argued that this opposition of the two traditions of Mazdeism in Caucasia is reflected in the Georgian and Armenian words *k'ur[u]m* and *mog[v]*, where the former stands for general priests of paganism, and the latter specifically for the servants of Ormizd (Mardirossian 2004: 46).

The Christian struggle against the Sasanians and the Mazdean ideology permeates the entire late antique Armenian and Georgian literary corpus. While thoroughly religious and anti-Iranian in scope, late antique narratives eloquently describe Caucasia's pre-Christian pantheon and religious practices, albeit with pious and rhetorical exaggeration. Early martyrological literature is framed upon the martyr's courageous physical and rhetorical struggle with the Persians, their mages, and expansive ideology, reflected in Queen Šušanik's (fifth century) valorous struggle against her apostate husband—the *vitax/pitiaxš* of Gogarenē, an Armeno-Georgian borderland, or a century later in Eustathios of Mcxeta's extensive polemic over the divinity of fire with the Iranian *marzpan* of Iberia.

Late antique Caucasian writing thoroughly depicts the opposition of two dominant religious traditions in Caucasia: Zoroastrianism and Christianity. While early Georgian writing was predominantly martyrological, Armenian writers produced a particular strain of historical writing in the fifth century, a tradition that reached its apogee in the late fifth and the early sixth centuries (Thomson 1975). A certain Agathangelos elaborates on the introduction of Christianity in Armenia by St Gregory the Illuminator within a wider context of the history of pre-Christian Armenia. Agathangelos is particularly

concerned with the ideological and practical policies against former cults that St Gregory the Illuminator and King Trdat enforced, and in the establishment of a new cult of saints that were supposed to supplant former shrines (Thomson 2010). A similar scope is retained in the Armenian *Epic Histories* (*Buzandaran Patmut'iunk'*), which sheds an even better light on the religious landscape of Armenia of the same period, more specifically elaborating on the interaction of the Iranian and Zoroastrian components of Armenian culture with Christianity (Garsoïan 1989). The next two historians Łazar P'arpec'i (Thomson 1991) and Ełišē (Thomson 1982) provide accounts of the foundation of the Armenian Church and the appearance of the multitude of Armenian martyrs, who fell in their spiritual and physical battle against the Sasanians. Ełišē's *History of Vardan and the Armenian War* is perhaps Armenia's single most enduring metaphor of spiritual struggle of the nation, emulating the paradigm of the Maccabees, where Armenia is defined as a martyr nation forged in its zealous opposition against Sasanian Zoroastrianism (Thomson 1975; van Lint 2009). Thus, for early Armenian writers, who served the needs of the religious elites, the opposition between Zoroastrianism and Christianity and, in a broader sense, the opposition against the Iranian expansion, is the central narrative framework within which the self-perception of the "martyr nations" rests.

Georgia's even more rugged terrain was a sufficient reason for a slow and indeed painful spread of Christianity. Echoes of this process are heard in the *Mokcevay Kartlisay* and later medieval narratives that decry the pseudo-Christian practices of Georgia's highlanders, while celebrating the forceful imposition of Christianity upon them, and hailing the new missionaries and ascetics who had attempted to eradicate the residues of former religious practices. The syncretization of Christianity with local religious practices is still observable in the remote Georgian highlands, where local deities and Christianity have formed a certain hybrid unofficial religion, with local deities and Christian saints co-existing and being co-celebrated, often presented in each other's guise. In other instances, the cults of the same figures, whether of St George or of St Barbara, are celebrated independently as Christian saints and also as pagan deities. This hybridization was certainly a long process, but in all likelihood takes its origin with the attempts of the Georgian elites to impose Christianity upon the highlanders in the fourth century.

The *Life of John of Zedazeni* places John's sojourn from Syria to Georgia in the sixth century, 200 years after Georgia's conversion, and finds that pagan, meaning perhaps Zoroastrian, practices were still persistent in Mcxeta, and John's mission was specifically to "re-enlighten" the land. A similar spirit is retained in the entire corpus known as the *Lives of Thirteen Syrian Fathers*, a series of hagiographic accounts of Syriac missionaries, ascetics, and martyrs

who allegedly followed John of Zedazeni to Iberia and established monastic communities along its peripheries, thus safeguarding the land from Zoroastrians (Martin-Hisard 1986, 2011).

Perhaps the most dramatic clash between Christianity and local pagan practices is chronicled in the *History of the Albanians*, a collection of sources on Caucasian Albania from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. The ethnically and linguistically mixed Albania and its rugged landscape were particularly resistant to Christian expansion and prone to retaining traditional religious customs and practices. The *History* recounts a series of drastic measures that Albania's King Vačagan III the Pious undertook in the sixth century in order to combat resurgent Zoroastrian and other pagan practices among the elites and the wider population. The king was particularly alarmed by the bizarre practices of a sect of self-mutilating thumb-cutters and poisoners. According to Vačagan's historian, the Albanian king initiated a religious reform by instituting schools, in order to re-educate the children of the pagans. Vačagan prescribed Church canons and promulgated the cult of some of the greatest saints of the Albanian tradition in order to supplant paganism with new holy sites and define the limits of Christian Albania (Mahé 2013).

Although anti-Iranian sentiments permeate early Caucasian writing, therein also lies the paradox of the Caucasian cultures. Despite their self-perception as a bastion of Christianity and uncompromising foe to everything Iranian, all south Caucasian cultures reveal strong and persistent Iranian and Zoroastrian components. Medieval Armenian and Georgian authors acknowledge unconcealed pride in their Iranian and more precisely Parthian ancestry. The Arsacid royal history was retained in Armenian cultural memory as a glorious part of their identity, as opposed to the hated Sasanians and their religious policy. Similarly, Georgian narratives do not shy away from the Iranian origin of their great kings and dynasties. The Georgian *Life of the Kings* is explicit in its attempt to frame Iberia's political identity as Iranian in form, which was later superimposed by a Christian cultural component. As Bernadette Martin-Hisard notes, once the good faith of the great kings had been established, their grandeur could have been further highlighted by the Iranian past, revealed in their genealogy and onomastics (Martin-Hisard 2008: 187–188).

The centuries following Gregory's and Nino's proselytism was a period of battle between former and new practices but also, in a sense, a compromise between the two. The adoption of Christianity by the Caucasian kingdoms was by no means a final victory over former practices. Long after Christianization, Iranian elements remained strongly engrained in Caucasian cultures, whether in cultic practices or in the hierarchical organization of Armenian society and its cultural self-perception. The Armenian Church was integrated into the

older Arsacid–Iranian social structure, with hereditary bishoprics tied to the leading *nakharar* families, and new holy sites were built on the old shrines. As James Russell notes, "the early hierarchy of the Armenian Church was drawn not from the Judaeo-Christians, nor from the ranks of the humble and the outcast for whose sake Christ had come, but from the privileged class of the old order" (Russell 1987: 127). This, throughout the entire Caucasian region, resulted in a unique syncretization, which can still be observed in official and non-official religious practices. For instance, to this day, on the Ascension the Armenians collect flowers *hawrot-mawrot* named after the Aməša Spəntas Haurvatāt and Amərətāt, the "divine sparks" of Ahura-Mazda (Russell 1987: 380). According to Russell, "the ancient Iranian festival of fire, *Āθrakāna-, Arm. *Ahekan*, which is celebrated by Zoroastrians with the kindling of a bon-fire outside the Dar-e Mehr, is still solemnized by the Armenians under the new name of *Teaṙnendaṙaǰ*, the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, on the evening of 13 February" (Russell 1987: 502). Georgian and Armenian Christian religious vocabulary has also preserved Zoroastrian terminology, and month names referring to original Zoroastrian festivals have remained in both Georgian and Armenian calendars modeled after Zoroastrian prototypes (Gippert 1988; Schmitt 1985; cf. also de Jong 2015). Indeed, as some of the leading scholars of Iranian–Caucasian relations have illustrated, Armenian and Georgian linguistic data, onomastics and vocabulary, and literary production, all point to the Caucasian lands as an organic part of the ancient and late antique Iranian commonwealth.

Zoroastrians of various guises far from disappeared from the scene of Caucasian history. Instead they remained a part of the Armenian and Georgian society during the entire period of Late Antiquity. Crypto-Zoroastrianism of sorts survived in Christian or quasi-Christian practices. This is exemplified by a small but influential sect that survived long after the Christianization of Armenia, known as the *Arewordik'*, "the children of the sun." This group was still known to the Patriarch Nersēs the Gracious (1102–1173) and referred to multiple times as an esoteric sect that was Christian in appearance but practiced Mazdeism in its total rejection of asceticism and belief that man is intrinsically good, a concept that stood in sharp contrast to the doctrine of original sin (Russell 1987: 517).

The Crossroad

The traditional characterization of Caucasia as a crossroad of civilizations is certainly not an overestimation (Garsoïan 2004a). Well before the introduc-tion of Christianity the region served as a buffer zone between larger regional

actors. Throughout Late Antiquity, Caucasia was home to a plethora of religious denominations and minor or major sects, who sought refuge and safe haven in the isolated highlands and valleys of Caucasia (Russell 1987: 122). Ranging from the influential Manichaean missions to Iberia to the most bizarre sect of the "thumb-cutters" in Albania, the Caucasian religious landscape experienced extreme diversity throughout Late Antiquity.

The waves of immigration of Jewish communities represent perhaps one of the earliest attestations of a religious community seeking refuge in Caucasia. In time, the Jewish component became dominant in medieval Georgian narratives, and the first Christian settlements in Iberia were readily associated with the Jewish diaspora (Mgaloblishvili and Gagoshidze 1998). The same phenomenon can also be observed in part in Armenian historical narratives (Movsēs Xorenac'i). The main protagonists of the *Conversion of Iberia* and the *Life of Nino* are Jews of Mcxeta, who converted to Christianity but retained close ties with the Jews of Jerusalem and the diaspora (Lerner 2004: 60–66).

Another medieval Georgian "refugee" cycle is that of the already mentioned "thirteen Syrian Fathers," which recounts the arrival of a group of Syrian monks and ascetics in Iberia, perhaps in the early sixth century. Their doctrinal stand with regard to Chalcedon, the purpose of their travel, and every other detail remain contested. Indeed, it is unknown whether these "Fathers" actually existed and whether they fled religious persecutions in Syria, or whether they are merely a narratological device and a product of early medieval literary imagination. The typological similarity of the role of the thirteen Syrian Fathers in Iberia's conversion narrative with that of the Nine Saints in Aksum has been noted (Haas 2008).

The Iberian Church, unlike its southern neighbor, was apparently less susceptible to doctrinal and theological sectarianism, which also resulted in a comparative scarcity of early polemical texts. While Armenian writing was involved in theological polemic already in the sixth century, Georgian churchmen did not seem to have had a direct exposure to various Christian trends and a proper *contra haereses* compendium appeared only in the eleventh century. The admittedly sparse late antique texts are almost completely uninterested in theological debate and the formation of doctrine (Martin-Hisard 2008). The very few polemical passages are incorporated within hagiographic narratives and are almost without exception anti-Mazdean in essence. One exception is a rather enigmatic reference to a certain fifth-century archbishop Mobidan, who was a latent *mogwi* (magus), and whose writings were destroyed by his successor. It has been suggested that Mobidan may have been Manichaean (Rapp 2014: 161). Certain traces of Manichaeism in late antique Iberia are observable and Iberia most probably was one of

the targets of Manichaean missions (Mgaloblishvili and Rapp 2011; Rapp 2014: 160–161). Fragments of Manichaean missionary texts refer to a mission to Waručan/Waruzān, usually identified as Iberia, a land governed by king Hamazasp, an attested *pitiaxš* of late antique Iberia (Rapp 2014: 260–265).

Conversely, due to its location immediately in the Roman and Iranian zone of conflict, Armenia harbored a number of major and minor religious movements, as recounted in the *Refutation of the Sects* attributed to Maštoc's pupil Eznik Kołbac'i and in other historical accounts. The earliest reference to religious sectarianism in Armenia is found in Koriwn's *Life of Maštoc'*, where certain *Borborites* are mentioned as a sect that had entered Armenia from Syria and did not respond to Maštoc's's proselytism. The *Borborites* are known to Epiphanius of Salamis (fourth century) as a Gnostic sect and are referred to by the Armenian *Book of the Heretics* as the "filthy ones." According to Koriwn, patriarch Atticus of Constantinople (405–425) granted permission to katholikos Sahak to preach in western Armenia only on condition that he either converted or expelled the *Borborites.*

Roughly at the same time another term *Mcłnē* appears in Armenian anti-heretical discourse. The *Mcłnē* were traditionally identified as Messalians (Syriac *mšallyānā* "one who prays"), a sect that had emerged in Mesopotamia and must have appeared in Armenia soon thereafter. Despite this, it is unclear whether this word, *Mcłnē*, which incidentally also stands for "filth" in Armenian, derives from a specific sect, or is merely a pejorative term used for various heretical activities. The *Mcłnē* caused serious concern in the Armenian Church, and several Armenian councils issued regulations against them. The aforementioned katholikos Yovhannēs Ōjnec'i was particularly worried by the presence of an "evil sect of *mcłnē* who are called Paulicians" (Mardirossian 2004: 442–443). Such a reference may indeed suggest that the *mcłnē* was both a broad type of heresy and a specific religious denomination.

Indeed, among a plethora of heterodox practices, some exercised fundamental influence on the Armenian tradition, whereas others subsequently remained as a nemesis to Armenian Christianity. Such were, for example, the Paulicians, a sect that is first recorded in the middle of the sixth century. The story of this sect is ambiguous. They were condemned on numerous occasions by several Armenian councils. The katholikos Yovhannēs Ōjnec'i wrote a letter specifically against them, focusing on their practice of condemning the veneration of images and the usage of any objects within the Christian service. The Paulicians were thus in all appearance iconoclasts. Iconoclasm has also been attested in seventh-century Albania, where iconoclasts accused other Christians of idolatry. The popularity of iconoclasm within various Christian denominations prompted the *locum tenens* of the Armenian patriarchal throne

Vrtʻtanēs Kʻerdoł (seventh century) to write a treatise against the teaching, a discourse that is considered by far the earliest theoretization on the subject of the veneration of images. Some scholars argue that Paulicians were survivors of early Adoptionists (Garsoïan 1967). In the ninth century they were identified with the Tʻondrakians, a sect that owes its origins to a certain Sambat, who declared himself "Christ" and after enduring persecutions emigrated to the region of Tondrak (Garsoïan 1967; Nersessian 1987; Mardirossian 2004: 445). The Paulicians were also known to the Byzantine sources, where they are called Manichaean and associated with a certain Paul of Samosata, who had been sent by his mother Kallinikē to preach a variation of Manichaeism near Armenia. Thereafter, in Byzantine tradition Paulicianism has been closely associated with Armenia and many of its adepts were indeed Armenian. Despite their traditional identification with the Manichaeans, the real Manichaean presence in late antique Armenia is not sufficiently proven. Most of the sources that claim that Syrian Nestorians had brought the *Book of Mani* in 591 are indeed late and cannot be taken at face value (Garsoïan 1967: 190).

The history of sectarian movements in Caucasia is inevitably obscured by the medieval veil of polemicity and the tendency to identify several distinct groups under generic misnomers such as *mcłnē*, *Borborites*, or others. The polemical identification of unconnected religious groupings proved problematic for sixth-century Armenian writing, when on the one hand Nestorians were perceived as a menace from the east, and on the other hand Chalcedonianism was experiencing a growing presence in Caucasia.

A Long Walk to Orthodoxy

The principal source for the study of the development of Armenian, and partially Georgian and Albanian, Church traditions, is the *Book of Letters*, a collection of correspondences exchanged between hierarchs of the Armenian Church with the Byzantines, Persians, Syrians, Albanians, and Georgians (Schmidt 1993). However, the authenticity of many of these letters remains dubious and requires further scrutiny. In addition, an English translation of this crucial corpus with a thorough commentary is still *a desideratum*.

The history of the formation of orthodoxies in the region, as briefly outlined in the introduction to this chapter, has produced some of the most heated debates in recent scholarship. While some scholars claim that the Armenian Church adopted anti-Chalcedonianism as early as in 506 (Babian 2001; Sarkissian 1984), others argue that this did not happen until the schism with the Georgians exactly a century later, or perhaps even until the pontificate of Yovhannēs Ōjnecʻi (Garsoïan 1999, Cowe 2004).

The Council of Chalcedon, Late Antiquity's principal apple of discord, did not find immediate resonance in Caucasia, and no representative of the region was present at the Council, apparently due to the ongoing anti-Persian wars, and the ensuing unrest. A properly documented beginning of Christological discourse in Caucasia falls in the early sixth century, when a debate around the exact nature of the Incarnation was introduced in Dwin, the center of the Armenian Church. At the Council of Dwin of 506, all south Caucasian Churches seem to have been in agreement with the current non-Chalcedonian policy of emperor Anastasius and over the vehement criticism of Nestorian dyophysitism. Ironically, this first recorded exposure of the three Caucasian lands to Chalcedonian theology came from Chalcedon's most ardent critics—a group of miaphysite monks who sought Armenian support in their struggle against the "Nestorians" in Persia. Since then the "Nestorians" remained the principal polemical targets of the Armenian Church, triggering the traditional tendency of identifying and criticizing all kinds of dyophysitism, including Chalcedonian. A nuanced differentiation between Nestorianism and Chalcedonianism, together with the formulation of the precise nature of Armenian miaphysitism, came only a century later when the Armenian polemicists realized that the Georgians professed Chalcedonianism but eagerly condemned Nestorianism along with the Armenian confession of faith.

The beginning of the divergence between the Caucasian Churches began in the middle of the sixth century, when katholikos Nersēs II convened another Council of Dwin and confirmed Armenian criticism of all guises of dyophysitism. This, in less than fifty years, resulted in a dramatic standoff between Georgian Chalcedonian and Armenian anti-Chalcedonian camps and, eventually, in the formulation of respective theological stances. The exact historical antecedents and the nature of the Schism remain unclear, although the Georgians under the leadership of katholikos Kyrion of Mcxeta (ca. 600) started to fervently defend Chalcedonianism and accuse Armenians of heterodoxy. The schism can also be explained by external political factors and by the rapid growth of Constantinople's political influence in Caucasia. From Kyrion's katholikosate onwards, Iberia was, until Byzantium's demise eight centuries later, gradually but ever more closely, drawn into Constantinople's cultural and religious orbit. A special closeness developed, which distinguished Iberia from other parts of the region. Crucially, the Armeno-Georgian schism also coincided with the end of the internal schism in the Armenian Church and the subscription of the majority of Armenian bishops to the non-Chalcedonian regulation of katholikos Abraham in 608.

The schism initiated the formation of Georgian Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, which did not seem to have experienced any notable fluctuation thereafter

(Aleksidze 2008). By contrast, however, it did not result in a final and unam-
biguous adoption of non-Chalcedonianism by the Armenian ecclesiastical
elites. A vast number of Armenians refused to commune with the fervent
anti-Chalcedonian katholikos Abraham, and remained beyond the jurisdic-
tion of the Armenian Church, as for instance, illustrated by the *Narratio de
Rebus Armeniae* (Mahé 1994–1995), a Chalcedonian Armenian account of
the sixth-century religious state of affairs in Caucasia. Moreover, several prel-
ates of the Armenian Church during the seventh century were Chalcedonian.
Katholikos Ezr, for example, willingly or forcibly subscribed to emperor
Heraclius's monoenergist formula and reunited with the Byzantines at the
Armeno–Byzantine council of Karin (Theodosioupolis) in 632/3. However,
his decision, which predated the Arab invasion of central Armenia by a mere
eight years, was not going to last. It was soon revoked without having exerted
any particular influence in the country. Another outstanding Chalcedonian
katholikos was Nersēs III the Builder (641–661), who, despite his "apos-
tasy" remained in the Armenian cultural memory as a great figure of
Armenian culture. Thus, the seventh and the early eighth centuries proved
to be a period of painful political and doctrinal oscillations within the
Armenian Church, until katholikos Yovhannēs Ōjnecʻi more or less termi-
nally defined the nature of the Armenian "national Church."

   The formation of Orthodoxy in Armenia was a multilayered process. While
the Armenian Church was refining its anti-Chalcedonian theology and rhet-
oric, the formulation of the exact nature of Armenian miaphysitism was
underway. Theological debates in a post-Chalcedonian context appeared in
Armenia in the sixth century with the initiation of the aphtharthodocetist
controversy over the corruptibility of Christ's flesh. The dominant theologi-
cal parties thus filled a spectrum of opinion between aphtharthodocetism, a
teaching associated with Julian of Halicarnassus that rejects Christ's corrupt-
ibility, and a more moderate understanding of the unity of Christ's natures,
originally advocated by Severus of Antioch (Meyendorff 1992). The
Armenian tradition was initially more receptive to the Julianite argument,
introduced at the 555 Council of Dwin by a certain Syrian Julianite Abdišo.
According to the *Book of Letters*, the council indeed criticizes, if rather
mechanically, Severus and his "writings of corruption" along with other her-
esiarchs. This was followed by the translation of prominent aphthartho-
docetist thinkers such as Philoxenus of Mabbug, which further strengthened
the Julianite tendency of the Armenian Church. Finally, the teaching was
championed by the infamous theologian Yovhannēs Mayragomecʻi, possible
author of the aptharthodocetist florilegium, the *Seal of Faith*. Mayragomecʻi
exceeded his masters in that he rejected the reality of any of the "lowly acts"
of Christ that are recorded in the Gospels, for example, acts related to fear or

hunger, and was consequently condemned by the Armenian Church as an extremist (Cowe 2004; Greenwood 2008).

The last stages of the formulation of Armenian Orthodoxy were marked by the debates between the later followers of Mayragomecʻi and the influential katholikos Yovhannēs Ōjnecʻi. The Council of Dwin of 719 codified Armenian canon law, and the twenty-ninth canon decidedly condemned Chalcedonians as schismatics. Soon thereafter, in 726, the Council of Manazkert condemned the errors of both Julian and Severus and renewed, although formally and temporarily, the severed ties with the Syrian Church. Nevertheless, these decisions were far from being stable, and the appeal of the teachings of Julian lasted for several more centuries (Thomson 1965; Greenwood 2008).

Religious controversies were by no means over in eighth-century Caucasia, and were in fact reanimated with new vigor with the advent of the second millennium. The rise of the Arab emirates and the formation of Muslim principalities in the south Caucasus raised new topics in Muslim–Christian relations and anti-Muslim polemics, both in Georgia and Armenia. The theological debates and polemical attacks between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians became even more dramatic, and medieval re-writings and conceptualizations influence the perception of the late antique state of affairs—including religious affairs—until today. The constant writing and re-writing of the region's religious history created a multilayered veil that obscures the view of the modern historian, who finds it difficult to gain an adequate understanding of the religious state of affairs in late antique Caucasia.

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FURTHER READING

Religion in late antique Caucasia has received excellent treatment by some of the most eminent scholars of the field. An in-depth study of the Christian and Iranian components in early Caucasian civilization can be found in numerous seminal studies by Georges Charachidzé (1968), James Russell (1987, 1990, and many more), Nina Garsoïan (2010; 2012; see also Garsoïan and Mahé 1997), Jost Gippert (1993), Robert Thomson (1996; 2002), and Levon Zekiyan (2005). Garsoïan's

(1989) and Thomson's (1982, 1991, 2010) translations are essential primary sources supplied with excellent commentary illustrating the religious history of pre-Christian and early Christian Armenia. Zaza Aleksidze (2008), Garsoïan (1999), Greenwood (2008), Mahé (1997), and Cowe (1996, 2004) have devoted volumes to a thorough exposition of the theological polemic and formation of orthodoxies in late antique Caucasia. Due to the relative scarcity of material, late antique Georgia has received much less treatment, despite this, studies by Bernadette Martin-Hisard (1998, 2008 *et al.*) and Stephen Rapp (2014) and others provide an in-depth study of the formation of religious traditions in late antique Iberia and its reception in medieval Georgia. For Caucasian liturgical traditions, Charles Renoux's (2007; 2017) and Gabriele Winkler's (e.g. 2000, 2008, and many more) numerous studies and publications are essential. Caucasian Albania is perhaps least represented in scholarship, although Marco Bais' (2001) historical overview could serve as an introduction. Zaza Aleksidze's discovery of the Albanian palimpsests resulted in several publications, and most importantly, in two splendid volumes, which provide essential information on late antique Albanian Christianity (Gippert *et al.* 2008; Renoux 2017).

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Rise of Monotheism in Arabia

Holger Zellentin

Introduction

If it were not for the endurance of Islam, it should be pointed out right away, scholars would hardly be trying as hard to reconstruct the history of Arabia, let alone of Arabian religions, in Late Antiquity—not because of a lack of interest, but because of the absence of reliable detailed information. The scarcity of primary Arabian sources predating the eighth century CE, even by the modest standards of late antique historiography, remains the first and foremost obstacle to writing a history that must content itself with the evidence provided by scholarly inference based on a few inscriptions, on secondary reports about Arabia—often stemming from earlier or later periods or distant lands—and on cultural comparison with neighboring regions. ("Late Antiquity" is here used as roughly the period from the first to the seventh century CE, cf. Cameron 2011.) The problem arising from the use of such information is not so much that we would be left with pure speculation: over the past century, we have gained a rather coherent, if tentative picture of some key aspects of Arabian history, such as that of the Himyarite kingdom or of the Christian community of Najrān (to which we shall return). Rather, the problem is one of scarcity of primary data coupled with an overabundance of pertinent, yet often only vaguely related or tendentious comparative data. Arabia bordered the Roman empire in the northwest, the Persian

empire in the northeast, and, divided merely by a few miles across the island-dotted "Gate of Tears" (*Bāb al-Mandab*), the Aksumite empire in the south-west. Arabia also lay on important sea routes used for Indian and Far Eastern trade. The religious and political history of Arabia, moreover, was the focus of much of traditional Islamic and parts of Christian hagiography and histo-riography, providing detailed accounts that are impossible both to dismiss in their entirety and to verify in any specific detail. A proper understanding of both Arabia's internal dynamics and of its rich intercultural exchange with its evolving neighbors thus necessitates a careful negotiation of the cultures of the three empires bordering Islam, of traditional Islamic, Christian, and Jewish sources, and of the results provided by the rapidly evolving field of Qur'ānic studies.

When approaching the history of pre-Islamic Arabia, prioritizing one set of evidence over another inexorably leads to dramatically different results. Choosing, say, an entirely endemic Arabian or even strictly "Meccan" and "Medinan" cultural context in order to tether the nascent Muslim commu-nity to a specific time and place, as has been the preferred method of tradi-tional Islamic scholarship, results in a picture starkly contrasting to the one that emerges when placing the same community in the broader discourse of late antique Judaism and Christianity, as has been the method of choice for much of western scholarship. The same holds true for Arabia as a whole: the dearth of local information led some scholars to reduce Arabia to an allegedly entirely pagan backwater, untouched by the great cultural and religious debates of Late Antiquity. The same dearth of sources has led oth-ers to conceive of Arabia merely as an epigone appendix to the surrounding empires in which these very same debates were present, yet supposedly rehashed in a bastardized and syncretistic way. As Neuwirth and others have amply illustrated, both approaches are inadequate (see e.g. Neuwirth 2010), yet how are we to retrieve the unique Arabian voices that were committed to local tradition at the same time as eagerly responding to the major trends of Roman, Persian, and Aksumite culture?

The best approach to the history of Arabian culture that contemporary scholarship may have to offer is based on a renewed focus on the Qur'ān as our key source to be read along other epigraphic, archeological, and pre- and post-Qur'ānic secondary sources. Only the Qur'ān, in its increasingly secure dating in the first half of the seventh century and in its wealth of information about its intended audience, allows for a genuine glimpse into late antique Arabia. Regardless of its religious significance, and based solely on its historical value, we should thus take the Qur'ān, along with the epigraphy, as touchstones in order to evaluate which parts of the traditional Muslim and Christian histori-ographies may be more accurate, and which parts may reflect different (or later)

circumstances. Likewise, we should use the same primary Arabian evidence in order to evaluate which aspects of late antique imperial or religious culture had indeed found fertile ground in Arabia, and which aspects are less relevant. The main hermeneutical quality of this re-reading of Arabian history must, even more than in other fields of late ancient history, remain scholarly humility and the acknowledgment of the ultimate unknowability of much of pre-Islamic Arabic culture, religion, and thereby of Arabian monotheism. The little that can be known with some amount of certainty about Arabia, hence, we do know from the intersection of the Qur'ān, of epigraphy, and of secondary sources, to which we will turn after a few initial remarks on the category of monotheism and on its history from the Hebrew Bible, throughout late antique Judaism and Christianity, and right up to one of its historical acmes in the Qur'ān.

Biblical Monotheism

"Monotheism," not unlike "religion," is an idealized abstraction about God's absolute uniqueness and unity, a discourse at home in the abstractions of theology much more than in the religious practices of the past and even of the present. The perceived self-evidence of monotheism, and especially of the imagined monotheistic nature of the so-called "Abrahamic" religions, in present discourse has been long in the making (see e.g. Levenson 2012 and Hendel 2005). Only after "religion" became a definable "set of beliefs," a process shaped by reformation and enlightenment thought, did monotheism become a perceivable and intelligible category—even if the term's coinage by the seventeenth-century theologian and philosopher Henry More was originally also used negatively to describe "pagan" pantheism (see MacDonald 2004). Yet religions, in the view of cultural anthropologists, function not as sets of beliefs but as systems of symbols that shape human lives as much as they are shaped by them (see e.g. Geertz 1973). The relationship of such symbols to one another is in turn shaped by narratives (see e.g. Smith 2003), and the religious narratives themselves hardly ever fit philosophical theories. Even from the inside of religious traditions, debates such as the one about God's absolute transcendence illustrate that the very richness of religious traditions stands in tension with philosophical rigor. Maimonides, to give but one example, may have accused his "corporalist" contemporaries of heresy, yet it seems that they had long accused him of violating biblical teachings (see e.g. Stroumsa 2009: 38–52).

Given the difficulties of reconciling the modern and early modern concept of monotheism with the history of religions, recent scholarly treatments of monotheism tend to emphasize not so much the theological or philosophical

claims to God's uniqueness, but the "translatability" of divinities: the openness of some but not other traditions to perceive of the religious Other in terms of what is sacred to the Self. One further way to bridge the gap between the vividness of religious narratives and the sterility of philosophical monotheism has been to substitute the study of the memory of certain traditions for the study of the traditions themselves. The Egyptologist Jan Assmann, for example, somewhat peculiarly following Freud's *Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion*, sees in monotheism the "remembered" untranslatability, and even the denial of religion itself (see e.g. Assmann 1997; for a biblically more informed view see Hendel 2005). Yet others, such as Mark Smith, rightly countered that the very concept of the intercultural "translatability" of divine epithets has always remained part of monotheistic religions, and that monotheism thereby remains a construct, in theological narrative as much as in human practice (see Smith 2008, esp. 38–43, and Schäfer 2005). What we can learn from these debates, for the present purpose, is that we may not be able to study monotheism, but that we can identify strands of traditions that place a greater dual emphasis than others on the oneness of God and on the increasingly categorical denial of the very existence of other divinities.

In Arabia and its environs, we can trace much of Late Ancient thought on the uniqueness and on the unity of God to the Hebrew Bible, in the sense that the local Arabian discourse evolved in an increasingly intense and distinctive dialogue with the biblical traditions of Late Antiquity. A few preliminary notes on biblical monotheism and its Jewish and Christian adaptations will thus set the stage for a look at the Arabian sources, that is, the Qur'ān and the epigraphy, and the secondary ones, that is, the cultural context and the ancient historiography. It hardly needs repeating that some strands of the Hebrew Bible are quite open to the translatability of the divine, recasting Canaanite deities in terms of the Israelite God, at the same time as denying the powers—yet hardly ever the existence—of these very same deities (see e.g. Smith 2001). What we should note in this context, however, is that the Hebrew Bible, in addition to unifying various Canaanite gods and their epithets into one single Israelite God and rejecting all others, simultaneously emphasizes this God's unity. "You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples that are round about you," we learn in Deuteronomy 6:14, just after the text implements the Shema Israel in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." For the rabbis (whose substitution of "the Lord" for the ineffable Tetragrammaton is here followed), the Shema became a central daily prayer, and the unity of God thereby became an object of daily contemplation (see e.g. Mishna *Berakhot* 1 and 2) or even of martyrological fulfillment (see e.g. Bavli *Berakhot* 61b) throughout Jewish

Late Antiquity. The type of ancient monotheism that can be found in the Israelite, as well as in the rabbinic tradition, is thus a dual concept that indeed combines uniqueness of God, the rejection of other deities—their posited non-translatability after their actual translation—with the unity of God.

This biblical type of monotheism, and even its liturgical expression in the Shema, remained the center of much debate throughout Late Antiquity. The Shema is explicitly highlighted in the Gospels (see e.g. Mark 12:29, Galatians 3:20, and James 2:19), and the Church Fathers often invoked its testimony to the unity of God the Father in their rejection of other gods or of Christian "heresies" (see e.g. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.2.2 and 5.22.1; Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lord's Prayer* (Treatise IV) 28; Athanasius, *Letter* 11.3 (*Festal Letter* for 339 CE); Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 15.3). It is thus no surprise that an echo of the Shema can be clearly heard when the Christological debates of the first Christian centuries found one of their seminal expressions in the formulation of the Nicene Creed, through which the unity of God became the central rallying point for—and, in various forms, equally an essential part of the liturgy of—Christians throughout the three empires surrounding Arabia. While many churches of the fourth century may have stood quite close to what Athanasius labeled as Arianism (cf. Hanson 1988; Berndt and Steinacher 2014), many Christians in the Latin, Greek, Syriac, and, possibly, Arabic speaking world would eventually agree to an approximation of the Nicene Creed (according to Kelly 2006: 216–217):

> We believe in one God, the Father, almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten from the Father, the only-begotten; that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth…

While the Nicene Creed emphasizes the unity of God and thereby clearly evokes the Shema Israel, the debates about the precise nature and relationship of the divine and the human in Christ soon tore Christendom apart. The Nicene Creed's original version had contained a clear condemnation of those who believed in the createdness of the son, and after the council of Chalcedon in the fifth century, the Church of the Byzantine empire split its ways with most eastern churches in the Sasanian and Aksumite empires. Most Christians in Arabia, we can thus surmise, would have followed the Nicene Creed in non-Chalcedonian ways, and their liturgies and scriptures were not Greek or Latin but Ethiopic, Syriac, or even various forms of Arabic (see Griffith 2013: 7–53; Arabian Jews likely used Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic, see e.g. Newby 1988).

Regardless of the internal schisms, with the rise of Christianity in the Roman world, the unity and uniqueness of God became more and more commonplace; even Julian the Apostate was as much a "monotheist" as his Christian opponents (on pagan monotheism see now e.g. Mitchell and van Nuffelen 2010a, 2010b). By the sixth century CE, therefore, the thrust of religious denial of the Other had changed: for Christians in the Byzantine and Aksumite empire as well as under Sassanian rule, it consisted of denying Judaism and even more so the Christological outlook of other Christian confessions; for Jews, in turn, it consisted of the denial of non-rabbinic Jews or of Christians (see e.g. Oppenheimer 1997 and Zellentin 2011 as well as Schäfer 2009). The denial of the truth claims of the monotheistic Other was often expressed through accusations of paganism, which, in the light of the non-existence of the heathen gods, was often recast as demon-worship (see e.g. Kim 2016 and Iricinschi and Zellentin 2007).

Outside the Roman empire, pre- and post-Islamic Zoroastrian sources, despite their dualist view of the creation, professed the unity of *Ahura Mazda*, likewise rejected polytheism, and equally tended to cast the practices of Jews and Christians—along with that of the Mandeans or the Zoroastrians, and later, the Muslims—in terms of the worship of evil powers (see de Jong 2004 and Daryaee 1999: 69–98; note that rabbis living under the Zoroastrian Sassanians did not conceive of their rulers as idolatrous per se, see Secunda 2014: 34–63). By the end of Late Antiquity, hence, after the Christianization of the Roman and the Aksumite empire, the denial of the powers of the gods had been more or less fully replaced by debates on the names and the qualities of the one deity—a state of affairs equally prevailing, *mutatis mutandis*, in the Sasanian Persian empire. Arabia, by the seventh century CE, was thus surrounded by three empires whose elites and whose populations by and large were monotheists, many if not most of them standing in a biblical tradition, all professing the unity of God and rejecting other gods, and all united in their fierce rejection of the ways in which their monotheist opponents constructed the nature of God and the quality of his epithets. How then did monotheism evolve in Arabia?

The Qur'ān and Arabian Monotheism

Locating the history of monotheisms, biblical or other, in Arabia, as mentioned above, is a difficult affair. While there are numerous antecedents to monotheistic discourse already in pre-Islamic sources and of course in the "Meccan" layers of the Qur'ān, the first full dogmatic formulation of monotheism in Arabia may be found in a "Medinan" surah. While some scholars

have rightfully questioned the all-too-circular preciseness with which some scholars claim to be able to determine the Qur'ān's putative sequentiality (see Reynolds 2011), the clear distinction between "Meccan" and "Medinan" materials in the Qur'ān can hardly be dismissed (see Sinai 2010). The distinction between the layers, along with the ongoing re-evaluation of the manuscript evidence, moreover, allows us more firmly to date the Qur'ān as a document whose Medinan parts were completed by the mid-seventh century at the very latest (see Déroche 2014), and whose Meccan origins should be placed after the emergence, in the late fifth and early sixth centuries CE, of those aspects of Syriac Christian culture which it presupposes (see e.g. Griffith 2011). While a slightly earlier dating of Muhammad's career may thus not yet be fully excluded, critical scholarship, by and large, seems to move toward a confirmation of the plausibility at least of the chronological bedrock of the traditional Muslim historiography, which had always dated the activities of the Qur'ān's prophet to the late sixth and early seventh century CE. This, of course, does not allow us to determine the geographical location of the Qur'ān's "Mecca" and of its "Medina." Likely as the identity of the ancient and the contemporary Saudi Arabian cities may be, especially in the case of Medina, the remaining inaccessibility of conclusive archeological evidence will, in the following, be indicated by the continued *implied* use of parentheses for these places.

It is in the Qur'ān's final Medinan layer that we can most securely determine a cultural context to Arabian monotheism; this will prove a more solid starting point for the consideration of the earlier intellectual history. *Sūrat Al-Iḫlāṣ*, the 112th surah of the Qur'ān, here given in a modified form of the translation of Qura'i (2003; the translation used in modified forms throughout this chapter), formulates the unity of God in clear rejection of God as a Father or as a son, echoing both the Shema and, in its dismissal of it, the Nicene Creed's Christology:

1. *qul huwa llāhu ʾaḥad* Say, He is God, One.
2. *Allāhu al-ṣamad* God, the all-embracing.
3. *lam yalid wa-lam yūlad* He neither begat, nor was begotten,
4. *wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan ʾaḥad* And there is, to him equal, not one.

The Qur'ān, to be sure, "cites" its antecedents as little as the Nicene Creed "cites" the Shema Israel. Yet the voice of the religious adversary becomes nearly palpable when reading the surah as a prophetic dialogue addressed to a multi-confessional audience. As Neuwirth has illustrated, the surah, in its emphasis on the unity of God and especially in its distinct use of the Arabic term ʾ*aḥad*—instead of the more common adjective

wāḥid in such a grammatical construction—echoes the first line of the Shema and even its Hebrew emphasis on "one," on *eḥad*, the key symbol in the daily life of any practicing rabbinic Jew (see Neuwirth 2010: 762; note also that all Syriac and Aramaic versions of the Shema use the distinct Aramaic term *ḥad* for "one," thus highlighting the affinity between the Hebrew and the Arabic even more). Yet rather than addressing Israel alone and speaking of "our" God, as the Shema does, the surah, in line with the Medinan Qur'ān's general criticism of Jewish and Christian "Israelite" particularism (see e.g. Zellentin 2013: 163–164), rereads the Shema in a universalist way. The Qur'ān's affinity with its antecedents should, as always, not be used to identify non-Islamic "influences," but as a springboard to explore its Islamic difference, for that difference was at the core of the message to the well versed audience whom the Qur'ān addresses.

The surah's second verse then describes God as *al-ṣamad*, an adjective that, regardless of the riveting richness of the post-Qur'ānic Muslim and even Christian interpretations of the term—echoed in Qarai's translation as "all-embracing"—most likely originally described God as "the highest authority" (see Rubin 1984 and Griffith 1997: 262). This unique epithet of all-might echoes and again implicitly modifies the Christian "almighty," excising the concept of God's fatherhood (explicitly dismissed throughout the Qur'ān, see e.g. Q2:116 and Q6:101) and thereby introducing the surah's almost direct negation of further aspects of the Nicene Creed, which widely circulated among Syriac speaking Christians especially in liturgical form (see e.g. Bruns 2000 and Jansma 1964). God has no son and God is no son, the surah tersely continues in its wholesale rejection of the belief in the son of God and of the Nicene Creed's double- and triple-barreled specification of "begotten." In response to the Christian emphasis on Christ's divine essence, the focus of so much debate throughout Late Antiquity, the surah introduces yet another unique term, *kufu'*, translated approximately as "equal," to dismiss any such equality with God (see Neuwirth 2010: 763; the term *kufu'* appears in Arabic matrimonial arrangements, possibly also implying that God also has no spouse; see Rubin 1984: 210 and compare Q72:3). The specific negation of God as the Father and God as the son, and the dismissal of any being's equality to Him, hence, constitutes the Qur'ān's full entry into the discursive realm not only of late antique Judaism, but also that of Christianity.

The Medinan Qur'ān, in this surah as well as in several others, thus evokes the Christian beliefs of parts of its audience, just as it does when rejecting trinitarian beliefs in Q7:73. In its statement that "they are certainly faithless who say, 'God is third of three,' while there is no god except the One God

(ʾillā ʾilāhun wāḥidun),” the Qurʾān leaves little doubt as to the Christian identity of some of the unbelievers (see Griffith 2007). To the Jewish, Christian, and gentile denizens of Arabia, the Medinan Qurʾān thus presents a rejuvenated form of monotheism that dismisses the Nicene Creed, or a creedal confession very close to it, in a reformulation of the biblical Shema. In its rejection of Jesus’ divinity and reformulation of the Shema, the Qurʾān is not unprecedented: some strands of late antique thought, such as expressed in the Clementine Homilies, combine a similar emphasis on the Hebrew Bible and cite the Shema in preparation for an implicit allusion to the Nicene Creed and an explicit rejection of Jesus’ divinity. The passage in question, likely once circulating in Syriac or other Semitic languages albeit preserved in Greek alone, equally expresses the uniqueness of God in ways similar to the Qurʾān and may thereby provide us with a further piece of information what the Muslim scripture shared with its contemporaries, and what is distinctive to itself (on the relationship between the Qurʾān and the Clementine Homilies see Zellentin 2013).

In *Clementine Homilies* 16.7.9, the Apostle Peter summarizes the biblical teachings on the unity of God, and including the Shema, in a manner that in some way prefigures the Qurʾān’s formulation of the unity of God:

> But also somewhere else the Scripture says, “As I live, says the Lord” (cf. Isaiah 45:23), “there is no other God but me” (cf. Isaiah 45:5). “I am the first, I am after this; except me there is no God” (cf. Isaiah 45:6). And again: “You shall fear the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Deuteronomy 10:20). And again: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord” (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4). And many passages besides seal with an oath that God is one, and that except Him there is no God (ὅτι εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεὸς καὶ πλὴν αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν θεός). (ANF 08, 314.)

As has been noted by previous scholars (see Stroumsa 2015: 82), the Homilies’ formulation that “except Him there is no God” is quite reminiscent of the Qurʾān’s own phrasing of God’s unity, as for example in the Medinan passage Q2 *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 163:

> Your God is the One God (*wa-ʾilāhukum ʾilāhun wāḥid*),
> There is no god except Him (*lā ʾilāha ʾillā huwa*),
> The Beneficent, the Merciful (*al-raḥmānu al-raḥīm*).

Similar statements can of course be found throughout the Qurʾān, for example in the Meccan passage Q38 *Sūrat Ṣād* 65:

> Say: “I am just a warner,
> And there is no god except God (*wa-mā min ʾilāhin ʾilla llāh*)
> the One, the All-paramount (*al-wāḥidu al-qahhār*).”

The similarity of monotheistic discourse between the Clementine Homilies and the Qur'ān—the combination of a rhetorical emphasis on God's unity and God's uniqueness—is remarkable, even if somewhat mitigated by the fact that we are, after all, dealing with a combination of statements well attested in the Hebrew Bible. More intriguingly yet, however, may be the fact that the Clementine Homilies, in the intermediate sequel of the passage cited, in 16.15–16, like the Qur'ān, equally dismiss Jesus' divinity, and that they do so equally in a way that also evokes the Nicene Creed in order to reject it:

> Our Lord neither asserted that there were gods except the Creator of all (παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα τὰ πάντα), nor did He proclaim Himself to be God, but He with reason pronounced blessed the person who called Him the Son of that God who has arranged the universe (τὰ πάντα διακοσμήσαντος)… In addition to this, it is the peculiarity of the Father not to have been begotten, but of the Son to have been begotten; but what is begotten cannot be compared with that which is unbegotten or self-begotten. (ANF 08, 314.)

While style, language, and religious sensitivity of this passage vary in many ways from the Medinan Qur'ān, the Clementine Homilies nevertheless constitute the closest extant testimony to the Qur'ān's phrase that "there is no god except God" and to its combination of the Shema combined with a dismissive allusion to the Nicene Creed, both in the context of a theologically informed dismissal of Jesus' divinity. The same holds true for the Homilies' endorsement of a legal code and culture very similar to the Qur'ān, yet equally expressed in starkly different ways (see Zellentin 2013). The Medinan Qur'ān is thus certainly not "dependent" on the Clementine Homilies in any way. It is true that the transmission history of the Clementine literature into Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic remains difficult to assess in its entirety, adding the difficulty of having to compare a Greek with an Arabic tradition. There can, however, be little doubt that this Greek text at least partially attests to an oral discourse—likely located within rather than without mainstream Christian groups—with great affinity to the formative Muslim community.

Again, as I have previously argued, the punctual affinity of the two texts serves best to highlight their differences: in stark contrast even to the Clementine Homilies, the Qur'ān's main point in *Sūrat al-Iḫlāṣ* is of course to deny not only Jesus' divinity, as the Homilies also do, but also his sonship, which is affirmed in the Homilies. The Qur'ān can thus be determined to affirm some of the teachings shared with the Clementine Homilies as much as rejecting others, which makes it likely that at least part of the audience was aware of traditions with at least limited affinity to the Clementine Homilies. The Qur'ān saw this audience as being both open to and in need of its own

corrective instruction. The partial overlap of the Qur'ān and the previous traditions thereby offers us a glimpse into the plausible religious world of pre-Islamic Arabia, and into the question of which type of discourse seems to have prepared the ground for its unprecedented success in reshaping Arabian monotheism.

The reason why so many citizens of Medina seem to have found the Qur'ān's message persuasive cannot yet, and perhaps never will be fully understood. Yet the simple and straightforward formulation of its universalist monotheistic creed—rejecting perceived Israelite particularism and academicism both Jewish and Christian along with the necessarily complex abstractions inherent to mature Christian doctrine and Talmudic legal discourse—certainly contributed to the rise of Islamic monotheism. Instead of a multifariously elaborated discussion, the Qur'ān offers ongoing permutations of a simple message, not unlike the Christian monastic sources that swept through Syriac Christendom since the fifth century CE (which equally proved alluring to the rabbis, see Bar Asher-Siegal 2013). And while the desert fathers already had managed to translate the study of scripture into the concrete realm of their ascetic lives (see Burton-Christie 1993: 1–106), the Qur'ān then combined spiritual simplicity with the constitution of a new scripture of the most alluring literary subtlety.

A brief look at how, and how intensely, the Qur'ān repeats its central message of God's uniqueness, stretching from the Medinan to the Meccan surahs, illustrates how closely the text's monotheism is related to its literary style. "What! Is there a god besides God?," the Qur'ān rhetorically asks in Q27:60 and 61, and, as it were, answers the question in myriad ways: in addition to the formulation "there is no god but God," in Q38:65 as well as in Q3:62, Q37:35, and 47:19, which became the basis of the Islamic *Shahāda*, the Qur'ān instructs to "… worship God! You have no other God besides Him" in Q7:73 and in Q11:61; God Himself states that there is "no god but I" in Q16:2, Q20:14, and in Q21:25, and "the man of the fish" states "there is no god but you" in Q21:87. The most common formulation, however, is the simple statement, in line with Q2:163, that "there is no god but He," which can be found in Q2:163, Q3:2, 6, and 18, Q4:87, Q6:102 and 106, Q7:59, 65, 85, and 158, Q9:31 and 129, Q10:60, Q11:14 and 84, Q13:30, Q20:8 and 98, Q23:23, 32, and 116, Q27:26, Q28:70 and 88, Q35:3, Q40:3 and 62, Q44:8, Q64:13, and in Q73:9; it is also echoed with the qualifier "besides whom there is no god" in Q2:255, and in Q59:22 and 23. While some of these passages occur in polemical contexts, others are simply general statements that set the Qur'ān's intense and universalist version of biblical monotheism apart even from its most closely related antecedents within the world of late antique Judaism and Christianity.

It is not impossible that the uniqueness of God in the Qur'ān is, at least partially, the product of a pre-Islamic process during which various deities were translated into one, akin to the process that can be illustrated to have taken place during the formation of the Hebrew Bible (see Al-Azmeh 2014: 164–357, and Chapter 16 in this volume). Yet the Qur'ān, as well as much of the epigraphic and historiographic evidence preserved by the nascent Islamic community rather points to a worldview that is shaped by a direct encounter with more mature concepts of biblical monotheism. One of the essential keys to reading at least the Medinan Qur'ān, we have already seen, is to understand its reformulation of biblical monotheism in direct challenge to the position it attributes to Jews and Christians. Informed about their practices and social arrangements, the Qur'ān accuses both groups of *širk*, of associating another deity, or at least another being, with God. "Do they ascribe partners (*'a-yušrikūna*) that create nothing and have been created themselves, and can neither help them, nor help themselves?," the Qur'ān, for example, asks in Q7 *Sūrat al-'Aʿrāf* 191–2. The idea of *širk*, literally "associationism," denotes the association of God with another power and constitutes a concept unique to the Qur'ān. While Christian heresiology and the Jewish rejection of the trinity offer many partial overlaps with the idea, there is no single concept in the pre-Islamic tradition that would be comparable to that of *širk* in the Qur'ān. *Širk*, in other words, represents a culmination of both Jewish and Christian heresiology on the one hand, as well as constituting a distinctly Qur'ānic conception of religious aberration on the other, reintroducing the problem of polytheism in a new way into the very heart of the late antique monotheistic debate. All agreed that there are no other gods, yet the Qur'ān's overarching quest is to establish the purity of God's unity in the face of those monotheists whom it found guilty of blurring the lines between God and his creation.

The re-interpretation of Qur'ānic *širk* as focusing on rival monotheists, as decrying any association of another being with God—even and especially by monotheists—introduced a potent path of inquiry in Qur'ānic studies first formulated in the late nineteenth century and increasingly emphasized since the late twentieth century (see Hawting 1999 and Crone 2016). The term *širk* and its derivatives, in the meaning of associating another being with God, occur well over 100 times in both the Meccan and the Medinan Qur'ān, numerically indicating its supreme relevance. Whereas *širk* tends to occur both in the Qur'ān's own past and in its present, terms depicting actual idols or sacrificial stones, by contrast, such as *aṣnām* in Q6:74, Q7:138, and Q14:35 or *awṭān* in Q22:30 and Q29:17 and 25, are far less frequent, and typically depict past worship or are used in general prohibitions. That is not to say that there were no objects in the time of Muḥammad that could not

have been perceived as idols: in Q4:51, for example, a group of Jews or Christians are portrayed as believing in *jibt*, which is usually understood as a venerated object. Yet the Qur'ān's own testimony is hardly compatible with the reports in parts of traditional Muslim historiography of widespread "actual" idolatry or of traditional Middle Eastern polytheism in seventh-century Arabia (see already Crone 2016: 169–172). While we should be careful not to reject the traditional Islamic historiography wholesale and thus pour out the baby with the bathwater (see Al-Azmeh 2014), the Qur'ānic evidence in this case strongly suggests that we should take the traditional reports regarding the *ǧāhiliyyah*, the conceived age of pagan ignorance, with a grain of salt (see also Hawting 2003, and cf. e.g. Q33:33). These late Islamic reports, it seems, do not sufficiently differentiate between the Qur'ān's descriptive and polemical statements: not unlike many Jewish, Christian, and biblical sources, it leveled the charge of polytheism and demon-worship at fellow monotheists, yet unlike its precedents, it placed this concern at the very core of its discourse.

Understanding *širk* in this polemical way allows for a new evaluation of how the Qur'ān perceives its Medinan and its Meccan interlocutors, and, just as importantly, how they may have perceived themselves. The Medinan Qur'ān, to begin with, accuses both Jews and Christians of elevating humans to divine rank: not only the figure of Jesus, but also religious leaders (see Zellentin 2016). Throughout the Meccan and the Medinan Qur'ān, furthermore, we encounter a group called the *mušrikūn*, that is, those defined by committing *širk*, literally the "associaters." While the Medinan Qur'ān formulates its biblical monotheism in a more pointed dialogue with Jews and especially with Christians, accusing them of *širk*, both the Meccan and the Medinan layers of the Qur'ān tend to differentiate between the "People of the Book" and the *mušrikūn*. The *mušrikūn*, like the People of the Book and the nascent Muslim community, believed in one biblical God, called by the same names used in the Qur'ān (such as *rabb*, *allāh*, and *raḥmān*), and, as Crone illustrates in some detail, they also shared many of biblical and post-biblical narratives with the Qur'ān, as well as with late antique Judaism and Christianity more generally (Crone 2016: 166–169 and 185). While the *mušrikūn* likely saw themselves as monotheists and rejected the religious accusation leveled against them (see e.g. Q6:22), Crone also argues that it is impossible to determine whether or not they would have seen themselves as Israelites: "It is hard to avoid the impression that both Jews and Judaising pagans are involved, but this is as far as one can go" (Crone 2016: 200). The Qur'ān's distinction between the People of the Book and the *mušrikūn* already in Mecca and even more clearly in Medina makes it very unlikely that Jews would be ethnically "involved" with the *mušrikūn*. Still, their state of an undetermined Israelite ethnic self-identity—constructed as broader than

the Jewish one (see Zellentin 2013, 163–164)—may still allow us to determine a little more clearly the history of Arabian monotheism.

The Meccan indeterminacy regarding the ethnic self-identity of the religious Others, to begin with, corresponds to the unclear ethnic status of the nascent Meccan Muslim community itself, yet it stands in contrast to the Medinan specificity regarding both. The Medinan Qur'ān defines the ideal believer as a non-Israelite and monotheist *ḥanīf*, as a "gentile" (see Q3:67), and defines the "People of the Book" as a separate group consisting of a Jewish and a Christian confession. The Meccan Qur'ān, by contrast, even if already employing the term *ḥanīf* (see e.g. Q6:79 and 161), does not clearly define the ethnicity of the nascent community or of the People of the Book in either such contrast or in such detail (see e.g. Zellentin 2013: 10–11 and 158–161). We can thus determine a clear shift, albeit not a break, that sets apart the Qur'ān's Medinan from its Meccan discourse regarding both monotheism and ethnicity. We see a growing emphasis on independence from "Israelite" ethnicity and from Jewish and especially Christian concepts of God's uniqueness.

Based on the Qur'ān and on an understanding of Arabia in dialogue with its monotheistic imperial neighbors (and their largest religious groups) it thus seems that the Qur'ān's contemporaries were, by and large, monotheists (without excluding the possibility of occasional polytheism and idolatry). Among its monotheist contemporaries in Medina, Jews and Christians were prominent. Its *mušrikūn* adversaries in both Medina and Mecca were equally monotheists, and, although they clearly held biblical ideas, they equally failed the Qur'ān's stringent standards of the uniqueness and the unity of God. Who were these *mušrikūn* monotheists, and whence came their faith? A reconsideration of the epigraphic and historiographic evidence in light of the Qur'ān's portrayal of the *mušrikūn* allows us to formulate a tentative answer, thereby approaching the history of the rise of monotheism in Arabia as far as we can.

Monotheism in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Arabian culture, like much of the Near and Middle East, had for millennia been polytheistic, yet from early on, Arabia had also been visited by Christians and Jews (see e.g. Hoyland 2001: 139–166, cf. Wellhausen 1887: 215–224). The question is not so much whether Jews and Christians became part of Arabian culture and religion, but where they came from, when and where they went, and in how far Arabian culture and religion had accommodated and was in turn shaped by their traditions. The presence of Christian missionaries, of monks, and of bishops throughout Arabia is attested from the late fourth century CE onwards; they managed to set up communities

especially in southern and eastern Arabia and in select other locations such as the important oasis of Najrān (see Hainthaler 2007). One of the key areas of missionary activity about which a slightly more detailed picture emerges is the southern kingdom of Himyar. This political entity, at the moment of its greatest extent (in the late fourth century CE), briefly ruled large swaths of Arabia, including the Hejaz, yet the kingdom came under increasing influence of the Aksumite empire, and the Himyarite kings after the fifth century were reduced to vassals. The previous conversions of these Himyarite kings to monotheism, as attested by historiographical and epigraphic sources, gives us one brief, if not undisputed, glimpse into the history of pre-Islamic monotheism and of Israelite ethnic discourse in Arabia that may shed some light on the monotheism of the Qur'ānic *mušrikūn* as well.

The Byzantine Church historian Philostorgius, writing only a few generations after a purported event, claims that the king of the Himyarites had been converted by the missionary Theophilus the Indian, who had been sent by Constantius II in the fourth century CE (Philostorgius, *HE* 3.4). It is true that (non-Chalcedonian) Christendom, likely under the influence of the Aksumite empire, flourished in southern Arabia in the subsequent centuries (see Hainthaler 2007: 111–136). Yet the ninth-century Muslim historiographer Ibn Hishām, editing the work of his eighth-century predecessor Ibn Isḥāq, attributes the conversion of the Himyarites not to Christian missionaries, but to Jews from Yathrib, the oasis traditionally identified with Medina (see Ibn Hishām 17). The provenance of the king's Jewish teachers, it is true, remains doubtful. The presence of Jews in the northern Hijaz, namely in Khaybar, Taymāʾ, and Yathrib, as it is affirmed throughout much of traditional Muslim historiography, cannot be independently confirmed either by outside sources or by inscriptions, a fact that leads many scholars, including myself, to take a cautious position regarding the issue (see Hoyland 2001, but cf. Mazuz 2014 and Lecker 1998). Yet it seems that Ibn Hishām's version of what happened in Himyar is closer to the historical truth than that of the Byzantine historian. Philostorgius himself, somewhat suspiciously, mentions Jewish interference in the events he describes, thereby confirming both Jewish presence and influence. We also have increasingly abundant evidence of the importance of Judaism in Himyar, constituted by a growing number of inscriptions discovered in southern Arabia and Palestine, by historiographic sources in Greek, Arabic, Syriac, and Ge'ez, and by archeological finds such as the necropolis of the Himyarites in Beth Sheʿarīm, in Palestine (in modern-day Israel, see Robin 2003, 2004 and 2014). The question if and whether the kings, and the population, of the Himyarite kingdom became Jewish, Christian, or monotheists of another confession illustrate the difficulties of determining the nature of southern Arabian religion. Yet this difficulty itself, especially in light of the similar difficulty encountered

by Crone when seeking to define the ethnicity of the Qur'ānic *mušrikūn*, indicates, first, that the scholarly categories applied may need reconsideration, and, second, that the religion and ethnicity of the Himyarites and of the Meccans could elucidate each other. For the few incidental overlaps between the religion of the Himyarites and especially of the Meccan audience of the Qur'ān allow us to speculate that the identity of these distinct groups may shed light on each other despite their geographic and chronological distance.

The epigraphic evidence shows that polytheistic inscriptions in the Himyarite kingdom, relatively common in earlier periods, cease around 380 CE, and are supplanted by others that are non-confessionally monotheistic, Jewish, or, occasionally, Christian. The key inscriptions, conveniently collected by Christian Robin, seem to suggest that under the Himyarite kings Malkīkarib (who reigned around 375–400 CE) and his son Abīkarib (who reigned around 400–440 CE), a religious reorientation from polytheism toward monotheism and in some cases even Judaism can be illustrated both on the level of government and of private individuals. This shift is shown by official inscriptions invoking, "the Merciful One (*raḥmanān*)," and "God (*ilahān*), lord (*rab*) of heaven and earth," and by private inscriptions of explicit Jewish nature both in naming and in pledging allegiance to "the people of Israel" (*šʿb Yšrʾl*, see Robin 2014 and 2004: 844–858). One inscription employs Hebrew letters symbolically within a Sabean text; another key inscription is a lengthy Hebrew one, detailing the twenty-four priestly courses according to 1 Chronicle 24:16–18; another describes a mono-ethnic burial site for Jews alone, while a particularly important bilingual Palestinian inscription contains both a Jewish prayer in Aramaic and the invocation of *raḥmānām* in Sabean (see Robin 2014 and 2004: 882–892). A few private inscriptions in Himyar are apparently Christian, mentioning the son or the messiah of the Merciful One, yet most are either Jewish or non-confessionally "monotheistic." According to Robin's plausible explanation, these inscriptions show an ultimately failed attempt to unite Himyar under an Israelite ethnic self-identity. Then, at the beginning of the sixth century, Himyar increasingly falls under Aksumite influence, with an important interlude. Around 520, a king named Joseph takes power and, having converted to Judaism, attacks the Aksumite garrison in Ẓafār, destroys local churches, and apparently massacres the Christians in the oasis of Najrān. According to one of Robin's more tentative claims, and in stark contrast to the Syriac martyrological tradition, Joseph's aim is political rather than religious: his title as "king of all the peoples" (*mlk klʾšʿb*) may indicate no further attempts at Judaizing the country (see Robin 2004: 873–875 and 2014). The ensuing successful Aksumite expedition then replaces Joseph with a Christian line of vassal kings (on these events see also Gajda 2009; Nebes 2008; and Beaucamp *et al.* 1999).

What does this information tell us about Arabian ethnicity and monotheism? As has long been noted, the most important names of God in the Qur'ān—used by the Muslims and by the *mušrikūn*—are similar to those attested in Himyar. The Qur'ān uses *allāh*, and, in its Meccan surahs more so than in the Medinan ones, especially *rabb* and *raḥmān* prominently in order to describe God, for example in Q17 *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 110: "Say: 'invoke God (*allāh*) or invoke *al-raḥmān*; whichever (name) you may invoke, to Him belong the best names." The Qur'ān's rejection of *širk* would fit a society like that of Himyar in many ways: the Qur'ān's rejection of the idea of God having taken a son, in the subsequent verse Q17:111, reminds us of the Himyarite inscription dedicated to the Merciful One along with his messiah and his son. Yet we should be careful not to build exclusively on the epigraphy. One intriguing suggestion that ignored the wider context, the so-called "Raḥmanism" hypothesis, stipulated that southern Arabia worshipped a God named "the Merciful One" in an independent manner; this suggestion has been widely rejected (see e.g. Rippin 1993). The presence and political power of Jews and Christians in Himyar suggests anything but a fully independent local tradition; as has been rightly remarked, "a merciful God (*el raḥum*)," after all, is also a biblical name for God (see e.g. Deuteronomy 4:31 and Psalms 103:8). Aziz Al-Azmeh, in a recent study, is thus certainly correct in cautioning us against imagining a widespread conversion to Judaism throughout Arabia, suggesting instead that gentile henotheism may be a more accurate description of southern Arabian religion than monotheism (see Al-Azmeh 2014: 248–276). The differentiation between monotheism and henotheism, of course, as argued above, is in itself at home in a discourse of such complexity and subtlety that no argument at all should be made based purely on the extant inscriptions, or purely based on later historiography. Once again, I suggest weighing the entirety of evidence against the much more detailed—if no less difficult—discourse of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān, and especially its Meccan surahs, in their affirmation and especially in their rejection of specific ethnic and religious proclivities, indeed show a remarkable affinity with the picture of the little we can know about Himyar. The reach, let me hasten to add, of this affinity is limited by the scarcity of sources: we do, by contrast, know much more about rabbinic Judaism and about Syriac Christianity than about the Himyarite religions, and this evidence is far more central to contextualizing the Qur'ān's narratives and worldview in general, both in the Meccan period and in the Medinan one (see e.g. Witztum 2011 and Zellentin 2013). It would thus be naive, and false, to speak about the affinities between the Qur'ān and Himyarite culture in any deterministic or one-directional way: a few hundred miles and,

in some cases, a few centuries divides the Himyarite and the Qur'ānic evidence. Yet in a unique way, the case of Himyar lends external plausibility to an understanding of the Meccan *mušrikūn* as monotheists, and the Qur'ān's way of addressing its adversaries in turn corroborates our sense that "biblical culture" of Christian or Jewish confession or of none at all was not clearly defined outside places such as Ẓafār, Najrān, and possibly Medinah. What can be compared is not specific communities, but select aspects of their shared discourse, in which especially the Qur'ān both participates and which it seeks to transcend as much as the Medinan Qur'ān will later seek to transcend Judaism and Christianity.

The picture that emerges can thus be summarized as follows: in addition to the overlap in some of God's names especially in the Meccan surahs and in the Himyarite inscriptions, a shared sense of ethnic and religious discourse emerges. Both in the Qur'ān's Hijaz and in Himyar, assuming or rejecting Israelite or gentile self-identity was apparently an urgent—and consequential—choice. On a level of ethnic discourse, the increasing emphasis on a "gentile" (non-Israelite) identity when moving from the Meccan to the Medinan Qur'ān corresponds to the various opposite turns in Himyarite history toward Judaism or Christianity. Especially in its ethnic indeterminacy regarding both its ethnic self-identity and that of its adversaries, the Meccan Qur'ān reflects the attitude of many of the non-confessional Himyarite inscriptions.

One could hazard a conjecture in which the Himyarite context provides an illustration for the broad ethnic backdrop of a society comparable to the one which the Qur'ān's biblical discourse addresses. The Meccan surahs provide as many points of contact with Jewish narratives as they do with themes that would be uniquely Christian. Without any facile equation of history and discourse or premature conclusions about the predominance of one or the other confession, we can identify a correlation between the (at times antagonistic) Jewish and Christian voices echoing in the Qur'ān and the struggle between these confessions in Najrān and in Himyar. At the same time, in line with the general ethnic indeterminacy of the Qur'ān's Meccan audience and of Himyar, it should be noted that the Meccan Qur'ān, while expecting its audience to be familiar with certain figures and broad outlines, sometimes presents the biblical details in a way in which knowledge of them conveys authority. Aspects of the biblical story of Noah, for example, as well as that of Joseph, are presented to the Meccan audience as "accounts from the unseen" (*min ʾanbāʾi l-ġaibi*; see Q11:49 and Q12:102, cf. also Q3:44). The Medinan Qur'ān, by contrast, more often presupposes detailed knowledge of biblical narratives. The Meccan Qur'ān, in other words, addresses an audience that has partial knowledge of biblical traditions and holds them in esteem, neatly corresponding to what we can conjecture would have been the

case in Himyar as well. The extent of the contact between the populations of Mecca, Najrān, and Himyar, even if facilitated by well-established trade routes and a partially shared political history, remains hard to gauge, yet it may make sense to extrapolate the southern Arabian experience and learn from it when reconstructing the northwestern one—and vice versa.

One could continue the list of possible correspondences between the Qur'ān and Himyar (see Robin 2004: 877–878). In some cases, moreover, the Himyarite inscriptions may occasionally provide a context for some aspects of the Medinan Qur'ān as well. The Qur'ānic term *šuʿūbiyya* corresponds well to the Sabean term *ʾšʿb* that we have seen above; both designate "tribes" (see Robin 2004: 876–877). Perhaps even more consequentially, the use of Hebrew in some of the Himyarite inscriptions sheds light on the occasional relevance of Hebrew (rather than Aramaic, Syriac, or Geʿez) for the understanding of a number of select passages in the Medinan Qur'ān (see e.g. Q112 above and Wheeler 2002: 1–6). What emerges, then, is not a picture in which these correspondences would allow us to reconstruct the Meccan, the Medinan, or the Himyarite religion with any precision. Rather, we must content ourselves with the far more elusive construct of plausibility in which the Qur'ān can be used to corroborate overlaps between itself and the epigraphic, historiographic, and other secondary evidence regarding Himyar. These overlaps, in a hermeneutic circle, then allow us to weigh our assumptions regarding the Qur'ān and its specific message to its Late Ancient Arabian audience, and thereby to complete our picture of the rise of monotheism in Arabia.

The overlap of the evidence points to an ongoing, yet undefined influx of monotheist ideas into Arabia, which may have first peaked with the Byzantine and Aksumite efforts of Christianizing the country that seem to have coincided with perhaps more successful Jewish ones. By all evidence, the Arab rulers as well as their subjects were open to these ideas, yet generally reluctant to become either Jews or Christians: while the turn to monotheism past the fourth century seems hard to deny, neither confession seems to have been embraced by large swaths of the population—with possible local exceptions such as in Medina, Najrān, and the Himyarite heartland once under Aksumite hegemony. The Meccans were monotheists that were generally open to biblical ideas without fully embracing or rejecting any specific form of Israelite self-identity. In Medina, finally, the early Muslim community began to formulate its monotheism in a particular Arabian form that rejected Christianity, Judaism, and the Meccan "*mušrikūn*" form of monotheism alike.

Monotheism, thus, can be conjectured to have reached Arabia in three stages. The first was an early stage that lasted from the biblical period to around 380 CE, in which individual Jews and Christians traveled to Arabia.

Little can be said about their success, with local exceptions. The second was the imperial stage, when Arabia was surrounded by monotheistic empires, during which Christian monks, bishops, and missionaries, as well as individual rabbis and other Jewish leaders likely managed to convert local communities. This stage lasted at least until the Meccan phase of the Qur'ān, and perhaps well into the early seventh century as the traditional historiography has it. It was during this stage that we see a more robust formulation of an endemic Arabian formulation of biblical monotheism, emphasizing both the uniqueness and the unity of God, and rejecting both the religion of the *mušrikūn* and many Christian ideas such as that of a son of God, routinely criticizing "the People of the Book" and "the sons of Israel." The third stage begins when the early Muslim community increasingly cuts its political and religious ties with its Jewish and Christian contemporaries. In this stage, perhaps best called the Islamic one, we can see the formulation of a truly Arabian monotheism that rebuffs other deities and divine offspring at the same time as embracing and reinventing late antique heresiology. Turning heresiology against both Jews and Christians, the Medinan Qur'ān formulates a new gentile Muslim self-identity, and thereby laid the foundation for a new religion (and thereby new empires) that reformulated the Jewish and Christian tradition both in continuity with and in contrast to its predecessors—and in line with its focus on the concept of the unity and uniqueness of God. This third stage, needless to say, has proven the most durable.

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FURTHER READING

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The broad overview by Cameron (2011) points to the dynamic development of Christianity throughout Late Antiquity, with a special focus on early Byzantium. For a comparable outline of the history and culture of the Sasanian empire, see Daryaee (2009). The volume edited by Fisher (2015) collects a number of highly pertinent case studies describing aspects especially of southern and Hejazi Arabian history before the coming of Islam. The number of studies dedicated to the relationship between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism has increased considerably over the past years. The collection of essays by Neuwirth (2014), on the one hand, details how the Qur'ān deals with biblical and especially Christian materials, and on the other hand presents the inner-Qur'ānic religious developments throughout the career of the prophet. Zellentin (2013) presents a case study of how the Qur'ān relates to late antique Christian law. Al-Azmeh (2014), finally takes a very different approach to the emergence of Islam, and emphasizes the Arabian cultural context over the Qur'ān's biblical heritage.

Along the Nile: From Alexandria to Aksum

Paul Dilley

Introduction

Egypt in Late Antiquity had already been a literate culture for more than three millennia, including a complex tradition of ritual and theological works. Texts that had been transmitted throughout this long period were still being adapted by priests, who spoke a later form of the Egyptian language than their pharaonic forebears, while also engaging with Greek and Roman culture, language, and religion. By the fourth century, Egypt was also a long-standing and important province in the Roman (and later Byzantine) empire. It felt the weight of imperial policy and legislation on matters such as the persecution of Christians and temple cult, and conversely influenced developments across the empire, for example through the leadership of the Alexandrian patriarchate in Trinitarian and Christological controversies. This chapter covers roughly the period from the Great Persecution, which began in 303 CE, to the Arab conquest in 649 CE. As elsewhere in the Roman empire, this period was marked by a progressive if incomplete Christianization; the following outlines the particular forms this took in late antique Egypt, as well as Nubia and Aksum, two states along the Nile that it influenced substantially.

In this chapter I cite various kinds of evidence familiar from other studies of the Roman empire, including literary sources, especially in Greek and

Coptic, and material culture, from architectural remains to excavated cult objects. But I also draw heavily on the papyri, sources for the religions of Late Antiquity that have been preserved en masse in Egypt, but are quite rare in other Roman provinces. For example, the Greco-Roman magical papyri, with ritual grimoires in Greek, Coptic, and Demotic, shed light on the scribal practices of Egyptian priests in Late Antiquity, and the many thousands of papyri excavated by Grenfell and Hunt from Oxyrhynchus in the late nineteenth century offer a unique perspective on the Christian community of that city (Luijendijk 2009; Blumell 2012).

The continuity of local Egyptian religious idioms, including domestic cult and public rituals, is key for understanding the diverse forms that Christianization took. Frankfurter's groundbreaking and influential study emphasizes the need for a bottom-up study of these "little" traditions and their transforming interaction with "great" traditions (Frankfurter 1998). For the purposes of a broad introduction I supplement this approach with a study of major regional and empire-wide institutions, such as the Orthodox Church, and their efforts to define in-group identity over and against Jewish, pagan, and heretical others. An approach at both of these scales helps to elucidate the connections of religious actors, institutions, and material culture, which were not only local but also trans-regional, whether in Alexandria, nome capitals such as Panopolis, or more remote Egyptian regions (see Boozer 2012 for an application of globalization theory to Trimithis in the Dakleh Oasis). And despite the persistence of local forms of piety, we cannot assume a consistent religious solidarity in smaller communities, which could include members of multiple institutions, some of which might be in conflict.

Egyptian Religion

A multitude of gods and goddesses, new and old, and always evolving, inhabited the landscape of late antique Egypt: traditional Gods such as Isis, Osiris, Horus, Tawaret, and Bes; more recent hybrids, such as Serapis; Greek deities, found on the pages of poetry but increasingly associated with Egyptian gods, especially by Hellenized priests; and other "foreign" gods, such as Heron, usually depicted in Roman army garb. Their presence was felt in the spectacular temples of the Ptolemaic and early Roman periods, as well as numerous local cultic centers, and the crucial domestic cult. This section highlights the key developments in the shift from elaborate public temple cults to the more local ritual practices that both preceded and accompanied Christianization (Frankfurter 1998).

Temples

The Ptolemies and the Julio-Claudian dynasty of Roman emperors continued to support the ancient Egyptian temple cult, with its attendant ritual and written traditions, though the construction of new monumental structures in both Alexandria and the *chora*, including Dendera, Esna, Edfu, Thebes, and elsewhere. Yet this patronage was gradually halted under later Roman emperors, who in some cases apparently closed temples out of a concern for revolts led by priests, and the evidence points to a large-scale retreat of traditional cult in the temples by the middle of the third century, independent of Christianization (Bagnall 1993). The papyrus evidence suggests continued cultic use at some centers into the fourth century, for example of the goddess Thoeris (Tawaret) in Oxyrhynchus. While the composition of hieroglyphs flourished at Thebes during the early empire, it disappears in the political crises of the third century, as imperial patronage ground to a halt (Klotz 2012).

While scholars regularly focus on the spectacular destruction of prominent temples, such as the Alexandrian Serapeum at the urging of bishop Theophilus in 391 CE, the closing and re-use of cult centers occurred for many different reasons, over various chronological intervals, and was not always associated with Christianization (Bagnall 2008, Dijkstra 2011). Even as knowledge of Egyptian writing faded, priestly families retained much temple lore, the most probable subject of the fifth-century Alexandrian Horapollon's learned Greek treatise on the *Temenika*, or *Sanctuaries* (Suda, s.v.), itself completely lost. Temple complexes on the periphery of Roman Egypt, such as of Isis at Philae and Mandulis at Kalabsha, seem to have remained functional for the longest period: the latest known composition in non-Coptic Egyptian is a Demotic inscription at Philae dated to 452 CE (see Dijkstra 2008 for context).

The Egyptian oracle and priests

While the priestly staff, regular sacrifices, and festal calendar of temples gradually disappeared under the Roman empire, other cultic aspects remained vibrant, albeit in transmuted form, above all the oracle. In earlier periods, statues of the gods were only available to the public during special processions outside the temple, when they were presented with questions and "answered" through various movements; alternatively, a god chose between two different written responses, or "tickets." While both forms persisted to a degree in Late Antiquity, new strategies of communication developed, often in otherwise disused temples, including delivery through "speaking"

statues, and incubation rooms, in which the deity should appear to suppliants during sleep. Pilgrims often recorded their encounter with the oracle on the interior walls, probably under priestly guidance. Many accounts of Christian iconoclasm portray confrontations at these shrines, such as the oracles of Bes at Abydos, Serapis at Canopus, and Isis at Menouthis, near Alexandria. Indeed, Christian martyr shrines began to offer oracles, including saints Collouthos at Antinoe, as well as Cyrus and John, also at Menouthis (Montserrat 1998).

In addition to staffing oracles, the late antique Egyptian priest functioned as a ritual expert who addressed clients' concerns about personal health, security, relationships, prosperity, and knowledge of the future. Often appropriating the Hellenistic exoticizing portrait of the "magician," a strategy that had emerged already under the Ptolemies (Moyer 2011), priests reconfigured traditional lore beyond the confines of the temple and its library, the "house of life" (Frankfurter 1998). Traditional ritual strategies associated with the priesthood are invoked in the Greco-Roman magical papyri, written in Greek, Demotic, and Old Coptic, most of which are dated to the third to fourth century and were probably discovered around Thebes in the early nineteenth century. These strategies include instructions for purity and preparation, appeals to secret knowledge, such as divine names and efficacious ingredients, as well as work on specially constructed figurines. Similar directions and motifs are found in magical papyri with invocations of Christian characters and cosmic figures, dated from the fourth century, which monks familiar with priestly traditions may have had a role in developing (Frankfurter 1998: 257–264). Other forms of divination were also based on authoritative texts: the *Sortes* attributed to the Egyptian hierophant Astrampsychos were a set of questions and corresponding responses from which the specialist selected an answer for the client; the Christian *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* presumes a similar procedure of consultation providing responses to specific queries (Luijendijk 2014).

Domestic cult

As temple cult gradually disappeared, and the priesthood moved beyond the old ritual structures and calendars, domestic space became the predominant setting for traditional Egyptian ritual and its related material culture. Excavated houses usually contain wall niches, which held painted images, icons, or terracotta figurines of various gods, such as Isis and Bes, just as later niches in excavated monastic cells feature Christian iconography. While the details of domestic cult are uncertain, it certainly involved prayer at the domestic shrines, which might be offered with incense and the lighting of

lamps. Some lamps and other ritual instruments were in the shape of temples, positioning household cult as a microcosm of temple worship.

Domestic cult continued long after the widespread disuse or re-appropriation of temple space, but the mostly Christian sources present difficult problems of interpretation, as illustrated by the abbot Shenoute's account of Flavius Aelius Gessius (Gesios), who was governor of the Thebaid 376–380, before settling in Panopolis (Brakke and Crislip 2015: 193–297; López 2013). Shenoute and his disciples raided the house of Gesios several times, from their White Monastery federation across the Nile, and claimed to have discovered idols there. But Gesios may have imputed a primarily aesthetic significance to the images, like the many widespread Dionysiac motifs that graced households in late antique Egypt, both Christian and non-Christian (Dilley 2013). During the second break-in, Shenoute claimed to have discovered a private room with statues of altar-bearing priests, along with other images and evidence that offerings were made to them. Gesios's subsequent willingness to visit the White Monastery church and become a Christian suggests that he may have been an unbaptized catechumen, as well as the fluidity of religious identity in late antique Egypt.

Between classical paideia *and pagan networks: Christianity and allegiance to pagan themes*

Alongside reconfigured Egyptian religious traditions the presence of Greek gods was also pervasive, perhaps most evident through literature, beginning with the central role of Homeric epic in grammatical education (Cribiore 2001). While Alexandria had always been associated with literary culture and innovation, provincial elites also shared in the Hellenic *paideia* that united the ruling class of the eastern Mediterranean. From the end of the third century various poets from upper Egypt achieved fame and influence throughout the empire, including Triphiodorus and Cyrus of Panopolis, Olympiodorus of Thebes, Soterichos of the (Kharga) Oasis, Colluthus of Lycopolis, and Musaeus (Cameron 2007). These authors traveled widely, even to the imperial court, and produced works in multiple genres on diverse subjects, including traditional mythological themes and local cosmogonies (texts collected in Miguélez Cavero 2008). In addition to poets, grammarians and philosophers reformulated Egyptian tradition in a Hellenistic idiom. Horapollon, a grammarian from the Panopolite nome, relocated to Alexandria, where he composed the *Hieroglyphika*, an allegorical account of hieroglyphic signs; his son and grandson were also grammarians, and were involved in the dwindling pagan philosophical circles of the fifth century.

As in the case of Gesios's "idols," the relationship between religious identity and the choice of poetic or antiquarian theme was complex: mythological subjects did not necessarily imply a pagan author. The most influential imperial Greek epic, the *Dionysiaca*, which detailed the god's travels across the world, with hundreds of mythological asides, was composed in the fifth century by Nonnus of Panopolis, who had earlier rendered the Gospel of John in hexameters. In the following century, the large archive of Dioscorus, a lawyer and aspiring poet from the Aphroditopolite nome in upper Egypt, offers a similar configuration of *paideia* and piety, mixing biblical and mythological allusions in his Homeric verse panegyrics (Fournet 1999).

Judaism

Although the legend of the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek by seventy-two scholars from Jerusalem under the patronage of Ptolemy II Philadelphius is clearly fabricated, the major role of Jews in the cultural life of Alexandria is clear. There are substantial remains of Jewish authors writing Greek literature in several different genres, especially the influential philosophical and exegetical corpus of Philo. Following the Jewish Revolt of 115–117 CE under emperor Trajan, the community in Alexandria was greatly diminished. Although Christian sources suggest that it had been revitalized by the early fifth century, the relatively sparse notices by authors such as bishop Cyril of Alexandria are almost entirely polemical and attest to violent clashes (on the role of patriarchs in fostering group violence in this period, see Watts 2010: 190–215). In contrast to Hellenistic and early Roman Egypt, no Jewish writers in Greek are attested in Late Antiquity, nor is there evidence for them in the Mishnah and Talmud (Stroumsa 2012).

The presence of Jewish communities in the *chora* is less well established, but there was a functioning temple at Leontopolis in the Heliopolite nome, which was destroyed around 73 CE, in the immediate aftermath of the Jewish War. The inscriptions attest to the scattered presence of Jews along the Nile valley from the early Hellenistic period through Late Antiquity; while mostly composed in Greek through the early empire, the later ones demonstrate an increased use of Hebrew. Similarly, at Oxyrhynchus, there are a few third-century papyrus fragments, and several later documents in Hebrew, which provide some evidence for a renewal of the community after the Revolt under Trajan in this provincial nome capital. Regarding the Jewish presence in upper Egypt in Late Antiquity: Shenoute sometimes polemicizes against the Jews, like his associate Cyril of Alexandria, but, unlike the patriarch, this rhetoric may not have occurred in the context of actual encounters and

conflict (Brakke 2016). After the Arab conquest, evidence for the Jewish community in Egypt is mostly limited to the unparalleled archive of the Cairo Geniza, including numerous Aramaic and Hebrew religious texts, but suggests that medieval Egyptian Jews did not transmit the Greek writings of their forebears, such as the philosopher Philo of Alexandria, a major influence on early Christian theology.

Christianity

Walter Bauer famously argued that in Egypt, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean region, "orthodox" groups appear only in the third and fourth centuries, while people and groups eventually labeled as "heretical" are attested already in the second century. Thus we have fragments from the second-century "Gnostic" writings of Basilides of Alexandria, but nothing from the bishops of Alexandria until a few excerpts from bishop Dionysius in the third century, preserved by Eusebius in his account of millennialism in the Fayyum, among the earliest sources for Christianity in the *chora* beyond imprecisely dated biblical papyri. In Alexandria, the bishop often competed with authoritative Christian teachers, such as the presbyter Arius; in the *chora*, monarchical bishops are attested in some urban centers only from the middle of the third century, and appear in all nome capitals only by the middle of the fourth (Wipszycka 2015); this decentralization of authority is evident in the rise of monasticism, especially federations such as Pachomius's Koinonia.

　　The Christianization of Egypt seems to have run through Alexandria, then to urban centers along the Nile, and, by the middle of the third century, in the rural towns and villages of the Delta and Valley. It was at this point that Coptic—understood as the late stage of Egyptian language written in Greek characters, with supplementary letters adapted from Demotic—was increasingly employed by Christians, for both documentary and literary purposes (Choat 2012). Coptic was not generated in a single creative moment, nor was it exclusively Christian; it was also employed for a number of distinctive dialects (Zakrzewska 2015). During the fourth century, however, the orthography became more standardized, and substantial portions of the Septuagint and New Testament were translated into Coptic, presumably at the hands of educated bilinguals; one of the goals of this activity, presumably, was to proselytize non-Greek speaking Egyptians. Christians in late antique Egypt wrote extensively in Greek and Coptic, and both languages are heavily attested in both the manuscripts and documentary papyri as well as ostraca. (Tito Orlandi's *Clavis Patrum Copticorum* (www.cmcl.it) is the most comprehensive list of Coptic writings; it will be expanded by Paola Buzi as part of the PATHs project; see also Buzi *et al.* 2016.)

Papyrologists have made creative use of onomastics, the study of names, to estimate the rate of Christianization in Egypt (Depauw and Clarysse 2014, building on several earlier studies of Bagnall). Depauw and Clarysse's rough approximation suggests that Egypt was 9% Christian in 276–285; 48% in 336–345 (though dipping into the 30s in the following two decades, suggesting difficulties in their model); and 76.3% in 436–445, between the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, when Cyril was patriarch of Alexandria and Shenoute abbot of the White Monastery. While the upward trend is certainly significant, onomastics remains only a rough index, failing to register the subtleties of ritual practice, cognitive, affective and ethical discipline, or familial and organizational affiliation, including the many varieties of early Christianity itself.

In fact, Christianity remained diverse through Late Antiquity, in ritual practice, theology, ethics, institutional structure, and many other areas; on the other hand, this variety did not imply perfectly demarcated communities, as is shown, for example, from the papyrological evidence (Choat 2006). David Brakke has cogently argued against the "horse race" model, which suggests that a "proto-orthodox" Christianity struggled with other "heretical" groups, only to lose out and disappear when the emperor Constantine threw his support behind the "orthodox" (Brakke 2016). This model excludes, among other things, the rough boundaries between groups, including shared features and mutual influence. In Egypt, it is also clear that many "heretical groups" continued, albeit in changed form, and continued to exert influence on "orthodoxy," which was not, in any case, a monolith. In presenting the diversity of late antique Egyptian Christianity, I first survey the evidence for Gnostic groups, which is inconclusive and mostly confined to the codices in which their works are preserved; the Manichaeans, who often self-identified as Christians and flourished in at least some parts of late antique Egypt, despite imperial persecution; and the many claimants to orthodoxy, who vied for imperial support, as manifested in buildings, endowments, and various institutional and political privileges and responsibilities. Melitians, Arians, Nicenes, Chalcedonians, non-Chalcedonians, and others sought for and sometimes received this support, some for longer periods than others. Leaders sought to distinguish these groups primarily through delimiting correct theological positions.

Gnostic Groups?

The thirteen Nag Hammadi codices, which have traditionally been described as Gnostic, and studied in the context of their assumed composition in the second century, were in fact all copied in the *fourth* century. Although there

is little if any evidence that classical Gnostic groups such as the Valentinians persisted through Late Antiquity, the Nag Hammadi texts were potentially read in multiple settings. Many of these writings would have appealed to independent encratite teachers such as Hieracas of Leontopolis, an early user of Coptic, and his followers (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 47.1), or the Phibionites, if they are not simply a figment of Epiphanius's lurid imagination (*Pan.* 26.4.3). Other potential readers are better known. Nag Hammadi lies close to Tabennesi, where Pachomius founded his first monastic community; scholars have long floated the idea that it was a Pachomian library, perhaps buried in response to Athanasius' *Festal Letter* 39, composed and circulated in 367 CE, which forbids the reading of non-canonical literature. More recent work has clearly demonstrated the many affinities between Nag Hammadi texts such as the *Exegesis on the Soul* and ascetic themes, from psychagogy to descriptions of visions (Lundhaug and Jennot 2015). Others have pointed to syncretistic networks of intellectuals, based in traditional centers of Egyptian religion such as Thebes, as the proper context of the corpus.

Zosimos of Panopolis is a known reader of the kind of Gnostic texts found in the Nag Hammadi Library, among a large and diverse group of writings to which he makes reference in his alchemical works. Greco-Egyptian alchemy, on its most basic level, sought to transform "black earth" (Gk. *chēmia*: the word actually means "Egypt," Cpt. *Chēme*), into "gold," through a process of purification, also described as "dyeing." Alchemy was described as an art (*technē*) and a science (*epistēmē*), which was also understood symbolically as a work of purification on the soul. Zosimus, in particular, presents this as the soul's escape from matter and the constraints of Fate, working through the planets. He refers to various alchemical writings from the early empire, attributed to such authors as Democritus, Mary "the Jewess," and Isis "the Prophetess" (writing to Horus). A related text, the *Dialogue of the Philosophers and Cleopatra*, contains a discourse of Cleopatra directed at the soul, exhorting it to awaken from its prison in Hades and clothe itself in the light, with remarkable similarities to the Pronoia hymn in the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John*, NHC II,1 (Charron 2005). Similarly, in *On the Alpha and the Omega*, Zosimus recounts how the archons imprisoned "Phōs," the spiritual first man, in the four elements, recalling another passage in the *Apocryphon of John*. While Zosimus and his predecessors employed different ritual strategies, like early Christians, including Gnostics, Manichaeans, and later monks, they mobilized a variety of traditions to explicate the path to salvation; by the fourth century, as we shall see, Athanasius's delineation of a Canon began to regulate this process in the service of establishing doctrinal and ritual norms for the Orthodox Church.

Manichaeism

Mani, who preached in Sasanian Mesopotamia during the third century CE, claimed to be the "seal" of earlier prophets, including Jesus, Zoroaster, and Buddha. Appealing to personal revelations, he described an ongoing struggle between the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness, exhorting his followers to help the Father of Greatness and his emanations bring about the victory of the light. Mani's Church (*ekklēsia*) encompassed the elect, who committed themselves to a strict ascetic life punctuated by daily alimentary rituals to free light particles, and their auditors (among whom Augustine was once numbered), who supported them materially and followed a less extensive set of ethical norms and ritual protocols. Manichaeism spread quickly throughout the Roman empire in the third century (Gardner and Lieu 2004), and the mission to Egypt appears to have been particularly active.

Mani's apostle Mar Adda is said to have reached Alexandria sometime after 244 CE. The spread of Manichaeans in Egypt seems to have mirrored the Christians' in the same period, as *electi* traveled from the metropolis to the major cities of the *chora*. The earliest anti-Manichaean text is written by the Platonist philosopher, Alexander of Lycopolis, who focuses his critique on their cosmology, which he characterizes as dualist. He also complains of the Manichaeans' attempts to connect their teaching to Greek mythology, in an effort to gain converts. It is clear that the Manichaeans sought converts among pagans, but did they also approach Christians? Lycopolis was a major seat of the Melitians (see below), who appear to have been ascetically inclined, and might have been recruited, though there is no direct evidence for this strategy.

Two of the most spectacular finds of Manichaean texts have occurred in Egypt: the Medinet Madi codices, a group of seven Coptic papyrus codices, including the largest extant ancient manuscript by page count; and the Greek *Cologne Mani Codex* (*CMC*), made of parchment, and the smallest ancient codex by page size. The Medinet Madi texts, which appeared on the Cairo antiquities market in 1931, contain a variety of important Manichaean scriptures, including various collections of *Psalms*; doctrinal texts (the two volumes of the *Kephalaia*); a collection of *Homilies*, with apocalyptic themes; and the *Synaxeis* codex, apparently a collection of excerpts from Mani's key writing, the *Living Gospel*. They can be dated through radiocarbon and paleography to the late fourth or early fifth century, demonstrating the community's tenacity after a century of threatening imperial legislation and at least occasional persecution. The *CMC* is a presentation of Mani's early life in the form of testimonies from his followers; from a paleographical perspective, it can be dated between the fifth and the eighth century and its miniature format may have been intended for hiding; alternatively, it may have been used as a phylactery.

In the 1990s numerous Manichaean documents were found in situ in the houses of Kellis, a town in the Dakleh oasis, and have been published over the last several decades (Gardner 1996, 2007; Gardner *et al.* 1999, 2014). The variety of literary, and especially documentary texts, primarily from houses 1–3, suggest that Manichaeans lived there with little disruption. Their personal letters show that they also identified as Christians. Whether or not this was an intentional effort to avoid persecution or simply based on the prominence of Jesus (and Paul) in Mani's own teaching is open to question. At least two members of the elect are mentioned in the letters: Apa Lysimachos and "the teacher," as well as auditors from several different biological families, including Makarios, Philammon, and their relatives.

The Claimants to Orthodoxy

Monasticism

Christians had experimented with ascetic practices since the first century, but the full flowering of dramatic renunciations and spiritual exercises was particularly marked in late antique Egypt, where the development of monasticism exerted a decisive influence throughout the Mediterranean world. Most famous is Antony, a young man from a prosperous family who rejected his inheritance and departed for the desert, first learning from older hermits, later battling demonic temptation in the solitude of a tomb, and finally settling down in an abandoned fort near Arsinoe in the Fayyum oasis, where he attracted his own disciples. Antony's momentous career is triumphantly recounted in the Greek *Life of Antony*, a pioneering work of Christian hagiography usually attributed to bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, who portrays Antony as a "holy man" with broad influence, teaching disciples, debating philosophers, and encouraging martyrs in Alexandria. The Egyptian desert looms large in the *Life*, not only as a challenging locale for an ascetic's survival, but as a compelling metaphor for the ideal of total withdrawal from society (Goehring 1999; for distinctions between idealized and constructed monastic landscapes see Brooks Hedstrom 2017). Many Egyptian ascetics inhabited tombs of the pharaonic era, for example in the valley walls around Thebes, which provided a stage for their goal of "dying to the world," and featured demons associated with the old gods to oppose them in the struggle for virtue (O'Connell 2007).

Antony was not the first ascetic in Egypt, where the burgeoning monastic movement took other forms, such as coenobitic ("common living") institutions, of which the traditional founder is Pachomius (ca. 292–348 CE). According to his extensive biographies, Pachomius took up asceticism after

briefly serving as a recruit in the Roman army during the civil wars preceding the rise of Constantine. Like Antony, he first apprenticed to a local hermit, gaining enough experience to live on his own near Tabennisi, a village in upper Egypt north of Thebes. Pachomius gradually acquired followers, and reorganized his growing community into several "houses." He soon had founded a number of monasteries, delegating authority across an extensive hierarchy, and establishing a set of rules to govern his developing federation, the Koinonia. Pachomius's Koinonia attracted a broad array of professions and status levels, and included female communities, the first of which was governed by his sister, Mary.

Pachomius and other coenobitic leaders claimed to provide both physical and spiritual necessities to monks: on the one hand, room, board, health care, and burial; on the other, offering them the path to salvation. In turn they demanded complete obedience from their disciples, through following the extensive institutional schedule of work and prayer, and revealing their inner thoughts and emotions. This process, sometimes translated as "confession" (*exomologēsis*), was central to the monastic care of souls. Monastic teachers counseled their disciples on evaluating their thoughts and the avoidance of sinful desires, and offered emotional support through prayer. Novices were instructed in various cognitive disciplines, such as the answering of particular temptations with related biblical verses; imagining the revelation and punishment of their hidden thoughts on the day of judgment; and cultivating a sense of thankfulness and awe by contemplating God's grandeur during prayer. Through the embodied practice of these cognitive disciplines monks learned to regulate not only their actions, but also their mental processes, with the goal of developing a virtuous life of contemplative action (Dilley 2017b).

While Pachomius's Koinonia had disbanded by the end of the sixth century, the influence of the coenobitic model remained strong, especially through the prominence of the White Monastery federation in Atripe, near Panopolis, and its abbot Shenoute (ca. 348–465 CE). Shenoute's extensive writings, which were only recently reconstructed from the dispersed manuscript tradition (Emmel 2004), include nine *Canons*, addressed to his disciples, and containing numerous monastic rules (Layton 2014), and eight *Discourses*, comprising addresses and open letters to Roman officials and prominent citizens such as Gesios, as well as homilies delivered to monks and laity at the White Monastery church (see Dilley 2017a for the complex textual culture of Shenoute's community, and Orlandi 2002 for the history of its library). These works are only now receiving their first critical edition, and have already inspired several monographs that make important advances in late antique monasticism (Krawiec 2002; Brakke 2006; Crislip 2006;

Schroeder 2007) and the social history of late antique Egypt (López 2013). They are further contextualized by the Red Monastery church, with its rich paintings going back to Late Antiquity, which has recently been studied in a multidisciplinary project directed by Elizabeth Bolman (Bolman 2016).

The cult of saints

Burial was a key practice in which Christianity creatively adapted earlier Egyptian traditions (Denzey-Lewis 2013; Torallas-Tovar 2013). It could also be a site of controversy: when Pachomius sensed death approaching, according to the hagiographic tradition, he ordered his close associate Theodore to bury his body in secret, so that his followers did not establish a *martyrion* around his body (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 122). Horsiesius, the third leader of the Koinonia, refers to the rules of Pachomius as his bones, implying that the monks should express their piety by obedience to his laws rather than the veneration of relics (Horsiesius, *Letter* 3.2). This early monastic opposition is also reflected in Athanasius's *Festal Letters* 41 and 42, which criticize various aspects of the martyr cult, including exhumation and oracles, associating it with the Melitians; as well as an interest in the prophetic powers of demonic spirits expelled by the martyrs (for context, see Frankfurter 2010). Despite these concerns, the cult of saints spread rapidly, and monastic leaders were themselves venerated by the middle of the fifth century, as evidenced, for example, by a chapel for Shenoute at the White Monastery (Bolman *et al.* 2010).

The earliest literary evidence for the cult of saints is preserved in several fourth-century papyrus fragments: two Greek martyrdoms of Phileas of Thmuis and Dioscorus, and the earliest Coptic martyrdom, of the priest Stephen near Antinoopolis (Van Minnen 1995). Other literary genres are closely connected to the ritual commemoration of martyrs, including encomia delivered on their feast day, and descriptions of miracles performed at their sanctuaries; both are attested for the cult of the doctor-martyr Collouthos at Antinoe, where incubation was practiced (Schenke 2013) alongside ticket oracles (Delattre 2010). Coptic accounts of martyrdom often detail the body's dismemberment, followed by its miraculous reconstitution, which Theofried Baumeister labeled "Koptischer Konsens," associating it with pharaonic concerns about corporal integrity (Baumeister 1972). While a certain degree of continuity is undeniable, ancient Egyptian heritage is not a concern of the texts themselves, which instead provide etiologies for a Christianized sacred landscape punctuated by martyr shrines (Papaconstantinou 2002, 2006). The baroque torments are already attested

to in Shenoute (Horn 1986), but are especially drawn out in the later Coptic cycles preserved in the manuscript tradition, around such fictional characters as Basilides and his extended family at the court of Diocletian, which attained their final form after the Arab conquest of Egypt.

The institutional Church(es)

The Christian Church in Egypt is dominated by the office of the bishop of Alexandria, which enjoyed significant power in Late Antiquity, in terms of both its institutional prerogatives and its celebration in the literary and cultural imagination (Davis 2004). Traced back to the apostle Mark, the patriarchal seat was later held by a number of power brokers wielding great influence within Egypt and abroad. Peter of Alexandria, who went into exile but was eventually killed during the Great Persecution in 311 CE, was revered as both an archbishop and martyr. However, a major schism developed under his tenure, after Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis and confessor, objected to his comparatively restrained approach to reintegrating lapsed Christians, and began ordaining bishops who followed his views, usurping Peter's authority. The Melitians, who referred to themselves as the "Church of the Martyrs" (see Hauben 1998), maintained a separate identity for several hundred years, and are best attested in papyrological archives from monastic communities, which were perhaps the last bastion of the group.

Athanasius of Alexandria was another towering figure of theology and ecclesiology, who served as bishop of Alexandria for over four decades (328–373 CE), gaining empire-wide notoriety as one of the most prominent supporters of the Nicene Creed. Although he was ultimately successful in his conflict with the heirs of Arius's theology, Athanasius was exiled five times as bishop, by four different emperors: Constantine, Constantius II, Julian, and Valens. During this time, he cultivated relationships with numerous Egyptian ascetics, trying to bring them under his authority (see Brakke 1995), and apparently took refuge from imperial authorities in the Pachomian federation during his third exile (356–361 CE).

Cyril of Alexandria, bishop of Alexandria between 412 and 444 CE, was Athanasius's equal in theological disputation, which he also furthered through his extensive and influential works of scriptural exegesis. He represented his patriarchal see throughout the Christological controversy, including the First Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, where his arguments on the "one nature" of Christ and the appropriateness of Mary's title *theotokos* carried the day against Nestorius, bishop of Antioch. His tenure was also marked by violence against non-Christians in Alexandria: the philosopher Hypatia was brutally murdered by a Christian crowd, and Cyril is also said to have expelled Jews from the city, converting a synagogue into a church.

Cyril's theological legacy, as well as the place of Egyptian Christianity within the imperial Church, was complicated by the Second Council of Ephesus, held in 449 CE, and the Council of Chalcedon, near Constantinople, held in 451 CE. At Second Ephesus, Cyril's successor Dioscorus of Alexandria rashly humiliated his rival Flavian, archbishop of Constantinople, and rebuffed the attempts of pope Leo's legates to have his Christological *Tome* read. The Council of Chalcedon was called two years later by the emperor Marcian, who had just succeeded Theodosius II, to address the resulting divisions between the eastern and western churches. Leo's Tome was declared orthodox, and in agreement with Cyril's *Twelve Anathemas*, despite its insistence on two natures in hypostatic union. Dioscorus, meanwhile, was deposed and sent into exile for his actions at Second Ephesus.

The rejection of Chalcedon would become a key feature of Coptic Christian identity, alongside the Church of the Martyrs, just as notions of Christology were intimately connected to ritual practice (Davis 2008). But in the two centuries before the Arab conquest, the situation was quite complex, with significant numbers in Egypt supporting the Council or simply avoiding reference to its controversial terminology. In the wake of Dioscorus's exile, Proterius, an Alexandrian presbyter, was appointed at the Council of Chalcedon to take his place, presumably to gain support through the choice of an insider. But when Dioscorus died in 454, his partisans, who felt that Cyril's teachings had been abandoned by adopting the phrase "two natures," appointed an alternative candidate, Timothy II (called "Aelurus," or "weasel"), which marked the first instance of the patriarchate contested between imperial and anti-Chalcedonian parties in Egypt. Proterius was murdered in 457, according to the Church historian Evagrius Scholasticus by the supporters of Timothy, which suggests that tensions had escalated significantly (*HE* 2.2). In the ensuing several centuries of disputes, the emperors in Constantinople largely supported Chalcedonian claimants to the Alexandrian patriarchate, despite various attempts at theological compromise, but following the Arab conquest, the Egyptian Church became heavily non-Chalcedonian.

Along the Middle Nile and the Horn of Africa: Nubia and Aksum

Two cultural/political regions lay to the south of Egypt, independent of the Roman empire, and later, of the early Arab caliphates: Nubia and Aksum. The three Christian kingdoms of late antique Nubia arose in the fourth century on the middle Nile, in the wake of the failure of the millennium-old state of Meroe (also called Cush, and later Ethiopia); Aksum (eventually also called Ethiopia) was to the east of the Blue Nile, in the Horn of Africa, and

on the southern Red Sea coast. Despite their proximity, and a brief Aksumite invasion of Nubia in the fourth century, there is little evidence for extended cultural, economic, or political exchange between the two powers, which communicated directly with Roman Egypt through the Red Sea and the Nile, respectively (Hatke 2013). In Late Antiquity, however, both the Nubian kingdoms and Aksum were drawn into the orbit of the Alexandrian patriarch, and thus also of imperial politics; their respective histories of Christianization are crucial for understanding the local evolutions of diverse cultural traditions, as well as the supra-regional influence of Egyptian Christianity along the Middle Nile and the Horn of Africa.

Christianity in Nubia

While the political boundaries of the Roman empire in Late Antiquity extended to the island of Philae, Christianity gradually spread south, beyond the Nile's first cataract, into the remains of the kingdom of Meroe (also called Cush), which existed from approximately the eighth century BCE to the fourth century CE, with its capital of the same name in the middle Nile region, between the third and fourth cataracts. This region had interacted with Egyptian culture for centuries, developing several writing systems based on hieroglyphs, although its language, Meroitic, is not well understood. Few details about Meroitic religion are clear, but several major cult centers have been partially excavated, for example of the lion-god Apedemak, at Meroe and Musawwaret as-Sofra. Some Meroitic kings had also ruled Egypt as pharaohs, and received cult after their death, as attested by the mud-brick temple dedicated to Taharqa, who reigned from 690–664 BCE (twenty-fifth dynasty), in Qasr Ibrim (Primis/Phrim), near the Roman border.

A number of peoples, nomadic and otherwise, inhabited the desert bor-derlands of both Egypt and Meroe, sometimes crossing over and settling. The Blemmyes, a group of desert nomadic tribes who formed various politi-cal allegiances with one another and with Rome, are first mentioned by Strabo and are said to have made occasional raids by later authors; these continued into Late Antiquity, as attested in the writings of Shenoute. They may have occupied some of the Meroitic sites in lower Nubia, and were par-ticularly connected to the massive temple compound of Isis on the island of Philae, which was established as the southernmost boundary of the Roman empire in a treaty of 298 CE between the Blemmyes and Diocletian, who agreed to withdraw from the territory of the Dodechaskainos. The Blemmyes celebrated a yearly pilgrimage to Philae in honor of Isis through the sixth century, and also worshipped at the temple of Kalabsha, immediately to the south of Philae, dedicated to the solar God Mandulis. Here, a variety of

third-century inscriptions in Greek, and one in Meroitic, demonstrate the partial Hellenization of Meroitic cult. Later, the temple was used as a Christian church, as were several others in this region, including the Temple of Dendur (Richter 2013), now relocated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In the fifth century, Silko, "King of the Nubians," commissioned a Greek inscription at Kalabsha thanking "God" for his victory over the Blemmyes. While the interpretative details of this inscription are controversial, it certainly points to the ascendency and settlement of the Nubians, apparently a nomadic people from the Western Desert, in post-Meroitic lower Nubia (Obłuski 2014). Silko's apparently monotheistic phraseology aside, the dynamics of the Christianization of late antique Nubia remain sketchy. According to John of Ephesus, the empress Theodora sent Julianus, an anti-Chalcedonian presbyter, to baptize the king of the Noubades and his courtiers, staying there for a few years between 536 and 548 CE. Several decades later, a certain Longinus was ordained bishop of the Nubians, traveling to his new diocese in around 569 CE, and staying there for six years before returning through Alexandria (*HE* 4.6–9). While John's brief account offers little information about Nubian political structure, other evidence shows that there were three separate Nubian kingdoms in Late Antiquity: Nobadia, with its capital in Faras (Pachoras), was the northernmost, bordering Roman Egypt. To the south was Makuria, with its capital at Old Dongola (Tungul), connected by caravan to Kordofan and Darfur; and the kingdom of Alodia, with its capital at Soba, south of the split between the Blue and White Nile rivers.

The culture of Nobadia and Makuria is illuminated through a rich trove of material evidence, including inscriptions, manuscript fragments, and written documents (see the resources and bibliography in www.medievalnubia.info, curated by Ochała and Ruffini). Much of this has come to light in the past fifty years, in the wake of rescue excavations before flooding from the Aswan dam: at Faras, for example, the Polish team uncovered a large cathedral, with stunning wall paintings and numerous wall inscriptions; in the following decades, the excavations of the Polish Institute at Old Dongola have uncovered numerous murals and inscriptions in its churches and monasteries. The fort of Qasr Ibrim, now an island in Lake Nasser, has produced the greatest number of papyri, literary and documentary, many of which remain to be published.

By the end of Late Antiquity, a rich trilingual literary culture in Greek, Coptic, and Old Nubian had developed in Nubia, much of it related to Christian institutions, including biblical, liturgical, and literary texts, pilgrimage inscriptions, and various *dipinti* covering the richly painted walls of

the region's many churches (Ochała 2014). Greek is used throughout all three kingdoms from the seventh to the fourteenth century, in both documentary as well as liturgical texts; it may have been the primary liturgical language. Coptic was used as a language of Christian literature, and seems to have been most prevalent in Nobadia, which shared a border with Roman Egypt, and in the monasteries of Makuria to the south (on the place of Coptic in the Nubian kingdoms, see Van der Vliet 2010). Old Nubian is an eastern Sudanic language related to several modern dialects, including Nobiin, which was first written down in the eighth century, using the Coptic alphabet, with several additional letters. It flourished as a literary language beginning in the eleventh century, and consists of translations from Greek and Coptic texts, demonstrating the cultural influence of late antique Egyptian Christianity. For example, the *Dance of the Savior*, an apocryphal text related to late antique liturgical practices, survives in Coptic and Old Nubian manuscripts, both of which were deposited in churches as a form of pious offering (Dilley 2013).

Aksum/Ethiopia

To the east of the Blue Nile, within the Horn of Africa and on the shores of the Red Sea, under the cultural influence of the Sabaeans of south Arabia, the kingdom of Aksum was founded around the second century BCE, and became a major power in Late Antiquity, based in the capital city of the same name. The Aksumite inscriptions, which first appear in the fourth century CE, use a script based on the south Arabian *musnad*, with which they wrote Ge'ez, an Ethiosemitic language; some are written in Greek, demonstrating, as in the Nubian kingdoms, the influence of Hellenism even in areas never under Greek or Roman political control. Other sources for late antique Ethiopia include the extensive coins, which demonstrate a Byzantine influence (Munro-Hay 1993), and translations into Ge'ez, although only the Garimā Gospel manuscripts themselves date to this period. Medieval Ge'ez literature, such as the famous *Kebra Negast*, or Book of Kings, rework older traditions, but are best understood in their later context (Piovanelli 2014), and are thus not considered in this chapter.

The earliest inscriptions demonstrate the Christianization of the Aksumite dynasty, complementing the account of Rufinus (*HE* 10:9–10), who does not name the king and queen in question, and speaks generally of the region as "India" (see Chapter 10 in this volume). According to Rufinus, Aedesius and Frumentius, two young Christians from Roman Syria, are shipwrecked on the Red Sea coast, along with their teacher Meropius the Tyrian philosopher. After Meropius was murdered, the local king (probably Ousanas)

appointed Aedesius as his cupbearer and Frumentius as his secretary, presumably because of his Greek education. When the king died, Frumentius became the adviser of his young son (probably ʿĒzānā); eventually allowed to leave, he traveled to Alexandria, where Athanasius appointed him bishop of the Aksumites, presumably between his first and second exiles (328–335 CE).

The earliest inscriptions of king ʿĒzānā refer to the god Maḥrem/Ares, the traditional divine patron of the Aksumite royal house. In a lengthy Greek inscription describing his campaign against the Nubians, however, he begins, "By faith in God and by the power of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost," and refers several other times to Christ, suggesting that he embraced Christianity at some point in his reign (Hatke 2013: 86–9). This is further supported by ʿĒzānā's change in the iconography of Aksumite coinage, replacing the sun and crescent moon, a symbol of Maḥrem, with the cross, which his successors eventually placed on the reverse (Munro-Hay 1993).

The patriarchate of Alexandria seems to have maintained steady connections with Aksum through Late Antiquity, although the evidence is spotty. In 525 CE, as the Aksumite king Kālēb planned an invasion of southern Arabia to make war against the Himyarites, the Byzantine emperor Justin I promised to provide him with an army of "Blemmyes and Nubians," using Timothy III, patriarch of Alexandria, to communicate this message. According to the apocryphal forty-second Canon of the Council of Nicaea, probably composed in the seventh century, the metropolitan of Ethiopia was subject to the patriarch of Alexandria, and moreover was required to be an Egyptian; a variety of medieval evidence, including correspondence between Ethiopia and Alexandria/Cairo, suggests that this tradition was largely honored, despite the great distance and difficulty of travel (Munro-Hay 1999).

The long-term influence of the Alexandrian patriarchate on the Ethiopian Church is reflected not only in their common anti-Chalcedonian theological stance, but also in a shared literary tradition, although evidently never mediated through Coptic, in contrast to the Nubian kingdoms. A steadily increasing number of Ge'ez works have been identified as Aksumite translations from a Greco-Egyptian *Vorlage*, including the Pachomian *Rules*, and the fourth-century *Acts of Mark*, which describe the foundation of the Egyptian Church through Mark, identified as the first archbishop of Alexandria (Lusini 2006). An important and extensive compilation, including canonical material related to the Alexandrian patriarchate, has recently been identified as an Aksumite translation of a Greek original (Bausi and Camplani 2013). Yet the vast majority of known surviving Ge'ez texts seem to be post-Aksumite medieval translations, many deriving from Coptic originals, through an Arabic intermediary, in such genres as liturgy, hagiography, and monastic literature (Kaplan 2008).

Conclusion: The Legacy of Late Antique Egypt

Late Antiquity, while marked by a degree of continuity with the past, also constitutes a major rupture in the history of Egyptian religion and culture. Although most temples closed in the third century, priestly traditions continued in modified form, sometimes as an aspect of Christianization, as is evident in the continuation of key institutions such as the oracle. At the same time, numerous Egyptian literary "survivals," from references to Isis, Horus, and other gods, to general attitudes toward death and the afterlife, are evident in magical papyri, both Greco-Roman and Coptic, as well as various Christian genres (on which, see especially Behlmer 1996). But these were hardly recognized as such by the producers and audience, who understood them in their new context, whether martyr cult, or incantations of ritual power invoking figures from within and without the Bible. The context of ancient Egyptian religion was lost not only in the temples, but also in the scriptorium, when the traditional texts were no longer copied; Christians by contrast produced an extensive literature in Greek and Coptic, which buttressed institutions such as monasticism, the cult of saints, and the liturgy.

The legacy of late antique Egypt for the medieval period and later is marked by the widespread copying of this literature within Christendom, and especially African Christendom. The ascetic corpus of Stephen of Thebes, a little known fourth-century monk (see Suciu 2015 for a discussion of his corpus), demonstrates the lasting influence and prestige of the Egyptian Church, especially as related to monasticism. His *sermo asceticus* is preserved in Byzantine Greek manuscripts (CPG 8240), a Sahidic Coptic version copied in several fragmentary manuscripts, including one copied for the White Monastery, an Arabic version no doubt translated from the Coptic, which was translated into Ge'ez during the medieval period, when connections between Ethiopia and the Egyptian Church were strong. Although there is no Old Nubian translation extant, one of the Coptic fragments was excavated at the fortress of Qasr Ibrim, near Nobadia. In short, Stephen's work is best understood through its journey from late antique Egypt, where it existed in Greek and Coptic, to the Nubian kingdoms; and later its translation into Arabic, where it made its way east of the Nile, to Ethiopia.

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FURTHER READING

While not introductory, the best analytical overviews for late antique Egypt remain Bagnall 1993 for social history, and Frankfurter 1998 for the history of religion; for early Christianity and Coptic culture, the essays in Gabra 2014 provide an excellent starting point. There are at present no full-length introductions to religion in late antique Nubia or Ethiopia, but see the individual studies in the references section.

CHAPTER TEN

Across the Indian Ocean: Reconsidering Christianity in South Asia to the Ninth Century

James M. Hegarty

Introduction: Anywhere but India

Thomas' initial reaction to the prospect of his Indian mission cannot be described as a positive one. He said, "How can I, being a Hebrew, go among the Indians to proclaim the truth?" Even a vision of the savior himself was not sufficient to convince him: "Wherever you wish to send me, send me, but elsewhere. For I am not going to the Indians" (Elliot 1993: 448). This is, at least, what we are told in the first verse of the *Acts of Thomas* (henceforth the *Acts*), which is an originally Syriac text, subsequently translated into a number of languages that is generally dated to the third century CE (James 1924; Klijn 2003: 15).

Thomas' disinclination is not surprising. The Mediterranean world and India, notwithstanding mutual, if indirect, intellectual influence, growing trade links, and some history of military conflict, were not well known to one another at the beginning of the Common Era. The legacy of Herodotus' vague and meager knowledge of India was an impression of a region replete with man-eating, gold-digging ants, monstrous animals and strange men, some of which were described as cannibals and others as emitting black semen (Herodotus, *Hist*. III. 99–106). For the majority of people, this

impression was not much altered even by the establishment of a Greek colony in the Indian northwest (subsequent to Alexander's campaigns) or the presence of a small number of Indians in Alexandria toward the end of the first century CE (as we are told by Dio Chrysostom in his *Orations*, 32: 373, as discussed by McCrindle 1979: 177).

On the Indic side, as well as recurrent mention of Greeks, or *yavanas*, the cities of Babylon, Rome, and perhaps Antioch find mention in early Pāli and Sanskrit sources (such as the *Jātaka*—accounts of the previous lives of the Buddha—and the *Mahābhārata*—India's great narrative poem; see Rawlinson 2001: 4 and Edgerton 1938: 262). Yet the picture that emerges from these sources can hardly be described as a detailed one. Difficulties are compounded by the fact that the sources are hard to date, though the *Jātaka* and *Mahābhārata* were circulating in a developed form by the early centuries of the Common Era.

There is little direct evidence of cultural connection, but there is considerable speculation by scholars as to philosophical and literary inter-relationships between India and the Mediterranean world in the pre-Common Era. Thomas McEvilley's ambitious *The Shape of Ancient Thought* provides a tendentious and wide-ranging exploration of, in particular, the possibility of mutual philosophical influence from the seventh century BCE onward (McEvilley 2002; see also Karttunen 2008). McEvilley's exploration of recurrent ideas and apparent connections between the Pre-Socratics and India, and subsequently between mature Greek thought and Buddhist traditions, is nevertheless thought provoking. There has also been recent work that explores the possible influences of specifically Buddhist thought on the Mediterranean world (e.g. Kusminski 2008; Beckwith 2015). While these works have established that mutual influence was possible, even likely, the nature of the evidence precludes rich or definitive characterization of the nature of this influence.

The two vectors of contact were via land and sea. The former was composed of the trade routes established for the purposes of the spice and commodities trade, which went from Alexandria and Constantinople to Samarkand and, eventually, to Hangzhou on the east China Sea. This is the "Silk Road" (which was neither a road nor exclusively concerned with the trading of silk), whose name was coined by the nineteenth-century geographer, baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (Hansen 2012: 6–7). There were also those pathways beaten out for the purpose of conquest by the Achaemenid Persians and Alexander the Great, which traversed the Hindu Kush. Sea routes to India were entirely mercantile and somewhat later in their development. There are two key early sources for our knowledge of them: the first is the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, which is a navigator's manual for the trade routes

between the Red Sea (starting in Myos Hormos) and south India, including many harbors along the African, Arabian, and Indian coasts. It is dated, fairly reliably, between 40 and 70 CE (due to its reference to the Nabatean king Malichus II, 40–70 CE, see Casson 1989: 6–7; Bowersock 2013: 24); the second source is the *Alexandrian Tariff*, which was issued by Marcus Aurelius between 176 and 180 CE. It lists fifty-four items subject to import duty, of which some are Indian in origin (Cappers 1999: 52). There are also archeobotanical finds from Berenike on the Red Sea that include black pepper, rice, coconut, and other, mostly Indian, trade goods. They date to the period of the *Periplus* and the *Alexandrian Tariff* and confirm and expand the list of goods found in these texts. The sheer number of peppercorns found in sites along the Red Sea shows very clearly, for example, that the pepper trade was enormous (Cappers 1999: 60).

There is thus considerable evidence of—mostly indirect—contact between India and the Mediterranean world in the centuries surrounding the commencement of the Common Era, albeit little evidence of direct intellectual or cultural exchange, though much that is highly suggestive of such exchange (based, in large part, on intermediaries, such as the various Near Eastern, Mesopotamian, and Iranian cultures and polities). Nevertheless, Thomas' reaction is understandable: he was being sent to a place that, however indirectly influential it might have been, was encountered by few and remained largely *terra incognita*. We shall see that it is not even clear in late antique sources where precisely was meant by India, and so Thomas might have been being dispatched to a variety of locations. What is clear is that "India" was on the periphery of the known world at the time of the apostolic missions.

The Approach of the Present Chapter

Christianity is, arguably, the *sine qua non* of Late Antiquity. By this I mean that, notwithstanding the various attempts to create a periodization on the basis of historical events, or theoretical preferences (Marcone 2008), it is Christian ideas and practices, and the ramifications of their progressive dissemination and institutionalization that are the signal development of this period, however it is conceived. Classical literature may well have made its way to South Asia (Wulff Alonso 2008). Alexander the Great, after all, is said to have kept a copy of the Iliad under his pillow (and who knows if he dropped it as he crossed the Hindu Kush). He is also said, by Strabo, to have been accompanied by the philosopher Pyrrho (as discussed by Kusminski 2008 and Beckwith 2015). The *gymnosophistae*, or naked philosophers, of South Asia were mentioned both by Arrian and Plutarch in their biographies

of Alexander (see Parker 2008: 6). There is also no doubt that Greek astrological ideas made their way to India by the beginning of the Common Era (for details, see Pingree 1981: 10–11). However, all of these things are classical, or pre-classical, in origin. The great late antique export is Christianity, albeit variously conceived, practiced, and integrated.

In what follows, I will therefore present, and reflect upon, the most important evidence upon which we base our knowledge of the transmission of Christianity to South Asia in the early part of the Common Era. The key sources for our inquiry span from the third to the ninth century (which slightly exceeds the span of Late Antiquity as given in Bowersock *et al.* 1999). By Christianity, I refer to the ideas and practices of individuals and institutions that made primary legitimating reference to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. I re-examine the evidence with a view to seeing what the late antique sources can tell us about (a) the likelihood of the existence of an indigenous Christian community in India in the apostolic and immediately post-apostolic periods, and (b) the way in which early Christians *imagined* India and the exportation of their beliefs and practices to peoples and places on the fringes of the known world. We shall see that it is the latter task that is more rewarding in the light of the evidence that has been left to us.

The present chapter organizes the transmission of Christianity to South Asia into two broad categories: the "legendary" and the "historical." By legendary, I refer to those textual sources that preserve accounts of Christianity's transmission to South Asia in the apostolic and immediately post-apostolic period, but which are not direct witnesses to that which they relate. By historic, I refer to materials that are contemporaneous or near contemporaneous with the events they relate. The former are mostly literary sources, the latter are largely epigraphic. The *locus classicus* of Christianity's transmission to India (notwithstanding the latter's vague definition in sources of the period) is the aforementioned *Acts*. There are earlier references to Christianity in India, such as those of Origen (as also Bartholomew and Pantaenus), but these are fragmentary references to the mission of Thomas, which is described in the *Acts*. The latest sources that I will take up are donative inscriptions from Kerala (ca. ninth century), which attest to an established, albeit minority and probably ethnically distinct, Christian community in the south of India. The story of the transmission of Christianity to India, unlike that of say Buddhism to China, is not one of "success." The first eight centuries of the Common Era instead suggest the piecemeal and patchy presence of Christianity in South Asia and a concomitant struggle to achieve liturgical and institutional stability. However, Christianity is an important, albeit minority, cultural presence in India today (as is amply attested in, for example, Afonso 2009 and Frykenberg 2008).

This chapter does not engage directly with the historical traditions of the Syrian Christians of Kerala (who claim to be the oldest Christian community in India). This tradition sees St Thomas landing at Malankara near Cranganur in 52 CE and founding seven churches in Kerala, as well as converting several high-ranking Brahmin families (such as the Pakalomattoms). He is then said to have crossed to the eastern, Coromandel, coast of southern India and been martyred and buried in 68 CE at Mylapore near Madras (though his remains were subsequently removed). There is also a tradition of the mission of Thomas of Cana, who came from Persia in the eighth century. There is a further tradition of the mission of the Armenian saints, Sapor and Prot, in south India in the eighth or ninth centuries, who are said to have founded a church there. These traditions are known from Portuguese accounts, such as those of Miguel Ferreira (c. 1533 CE), and Indian vernacular works, such as the *Tommaparvam*, or Book of Thomas. All such works are late medieval or early modern even though they may preserve much older traditions (see Brown 1956: 49; Frykenberg 2008: 98–102; Baum and Winkler 2003: 51–52).

The present chapter is organized into three sections. The first provides background for that which follows; it charts the history of the relations, military and trade-based, that existed between the Mediterranean world and South Asia up to the time of Thomas' mission. The second, main, section explores the late antique, largely legendary sources—not necessarily conceived as such by their authors and audiences—that tell of Thomas' mission and its aftermath. The final rather shorter section takes up the Indian materials that independently corroborate the spread of Christianity to India before the ninth century.

South Asia and the "West": The Historical Background

The Achaemenid Iranians and, subsequently, the Greeks who accompanied Alexander and his successors were to have a lasting impact in South Asia. It was Darius I, the king of the Achaemenid empire, who extended his territories into the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. The famous inscription of Behistun (ca. 518 BCE) records his conquest of northwestern India (Srivastava 2001: 30). Herodotus—notwithstanding his salacious descriptions—mentions the *Indoi* (Indian regions) as providing soldiers to successive monarchs of the Persian empire (*Histories* 7.69–70, and 88, as well as 8.111 and 9.31). While there is little archeological evidence for the Achaemenid presence in India (other than in Taxila in the Puñjāb, as part of the Hindush satrapy, which is mentioned in the Persepolis fortification texts,

see Curtis and Simpson 2014: 520), it is hard to discount the possibility that the Persian model of rule provided a ready example of cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious government for subsequent South and Central Asian dynasts (Magee *et al.* 2005 suggests that much is yet to be discovered in terms of the archeology of the Achaemenid empire in South Asia). Such a model, even if influential, might also be the subject of implicit criticism; supporting such a contention is a recent paper by an Indologist, Oskar von Hinüber, in which he interprets the edicts of the Indian emperor Aśoka Maurya (304–232 BCE) as a deliberate counter statement to the more triumphal epigraphs of the Achaemenid kings (von Hinüber 2010). More general ideas of influence find support in the work of other Indologists, such as that of Harry Falk, who argues that Aśokan monumental architecture is reflective of non-Indic exemplars (Falk 2006: 154; see also Karttunen 1989: 63 on earlier proponents of this view).

As well as the Persians, the Greeks are of considerable importance in the history of at least the northwest of the Indian subcontinent: Alexander's campaigns in the east are the stuff of legend and have been immortalized in art and literature. From the Kābul valley to the foot of the Hindu Kush and into the Puñjāb, Alexander was to leave his mark. Arrian's second-century CE *Anabasis Alexandrou*, which tells of Alexander's campaigns, is replete with tales of Dionysiac revels on the slopes of Mt Meros (the *axis mundi* of Indian mythology, Mt Meru) and the "discovery," in Afghanistan, of the cave in which Prometheus had been imprisoned (see Mensch 2010). These sources attest to a legacy, albeit fragmentary, of inter-cultural encounter, at least in the Greek and Roman literary imagination. Alexander's grip on the Indian subcontinent was never firm or far-reaching, however, and, subsequent to his death, in 323 BCE, his subcontinental holdings came under Indian control once again when they were retaken by the Mauryan monarch Candragupta I from Alexander's general, Eudemus.

The story does not end there, however. Antiochos I Soter (r. 281–286 BCE), the Seleucid monarch who inherited Alexander's holdings in the east, sent an ambassador to Candragupta. Megasthenes (ca. 350–290 BCE) visited the Mauryan court—in Pāṭaliputra (near modern-day Patnā in Bihar)—prior to the death of the aforementioned Candragupta (in 298 BCE—for details, see McCrindle 1926 and Dahlqvist 1977). Further ambassadors were sent to Candragupta's successors by Antiochus II Theos (261–246 BCE). Megasthenes left a series of observations of Mauryan rule, but these survive to us only in fragments (collected in Jacoby 1958). India was not just "on the map," then, in this period, it was a partner in political dialogue, albeit only at the fringes of the Hellenistic world.

It was in Bactria (the Greek name for Balkh in modern Afghanistan) and the surrounding regions that a lasting Greek presence was established in South Asia. Archeology furnishes us with rich evidence of a fusion of Greek and Indian cultural influences in the area (Holt 1999; Brancaccio and Behrendt 2006). After his father, Euthymedus, wiped out the previous Greco-Bactrian, Diodotid, dynasty (who had broken with the Seleucids in ca. 250 BCE), Demetrius I expanded his empire by pushing deeper into India; Strabo, in his *Geography*, describes him as having conquered the regions of Gandhāra and the Puñjāb in ca. 185 BCE. Justin in his *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus* goes further and describes Demetrius as *Rex Indorum*, "king of India" (Holt 1999: 57). This is hyperbole to be sure and it is worth noting that to surpass Alexander in India was not the challenge it would be elsewhere, but it points to the continuation of the Greek presence (military and diplomatic) in north India of the second century BCE. The next celebrated Indo-Greek king is Menander (ca. 150 BCE), who survives to us through literature and very limited inscriptional evidence (Holt 1999: 180–183). He is the only Greek king to make a substantial appearance in an Indian text of the period. His fame, in this regard, rests on his presence in a para-canonical Buddhist text, *The Questions of King Milinda* (Menander), the *Milindapañha*, in which the king puts questions to a Buddhist sage.

Beyond the rich material cultural heritage of Bactria and Gandhāra (chiefly their statuary and coinage), and the Megasthenes fragments, the legacy of the Greek presence in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent is difficult to gauge from the Indian sources, which are hard to pin down in the matter of geographical or historical specifics. However, the frequent mention of *yavanas*, or Greeks, in Brahminical texts such as the epics and *Purāṇas*, the epigraphic and numismatic record (which includes the use of the Greek language and Greek names in some regions, for details see Salomon 1998), and the presence of at least one Indo-Bactrian king, by name, in Buddhist literature, suggests that we should not discount their presence and perhaps even their influence on some aspects of early Indian culture (Klaus Karttunen has provided the definitive survey in his *India and the Hellenistic World* (1997) and further discussion of the Indic sources in his 2015 *Yonas and Yavanas in Indian Literature*). We find, therefore, that the Mediterranean and Indic worlds, notwithstanding localized hybrid cultural forms, such as we find in Gandhāra, and the matter of their hard-to-pin-down mutual literary and philosophical influence, are distantly, but recurrently, connected to one another in the classical and Hellenistic periods.

The "Legendary" Phase

Moving to Late Antiquity, it is important to note at the outset that late antique sources are often imprecise in their use of the term "India." While it can refer to the subcontinent proper, it equally can refer to islands off it and, more troublingly for the historian of Indian Christianity, to areas quite unconnected to India, such as Ethiopia, the Yemen, and, on occasion, even Armenia. This lack of precision has been associated with a decline in Roman trade with the east (Hourani 1951: 39). This has led commentators into error. Some of these errors have been of fact, and have been corrected vigorously by subsequent scholars (Alphonse Mingana, as early as 1926, was able to list these, see Mingana 1926: 443). Though, as late as 1982, some scholars still report accounts of Ethiopian Christianity, as if they were Indian (e.g. Kuriakose 1982: 6). There is another, less obvious, error of interpretation, however. This is one in which incredulity dominates; the late antique sources on "India," however conceived, share a common emphasis on the expansion of Christianity into the geographical "periphery." This periphery is well beyond the reach of the Christian heartlands or the Roman *imperium*. This means that they have a utility for the study of a cluster of places *associated in the late antique imagination*. This section, then, explores the major narratives associated with India, regardless of the precise location of the India that they discuss. The first and most important of these sources is the *Acts*.

The *Acts* was a popular work in Late Antiquity and in subsequent periods; it is known in several versions: there are two late and much expanded Latin translations, as well as—in addition to the Greek—an Armenian version. Although the original is thought to have been in Syriac (and one later Syriac version is extant), the Greek versions are considered more faithful versions of the early form of the text (Elliot 1993: 440). Some sections of the text have also been found in Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic (as well as material in Slavonic and Georgian; for details, see Elliot 1993: 442–443). The legend was integrated into a wide range of literature (for a full list, see Dihle 1996) into the Hymns of Ephraem (306–373 CE). Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390 CE) also mentions St Thomas' apostolate to India in his *Against Arians* (33.6, cited in Kuriakose 1982: 5). The treatise, *De Moribus Brachmanorum*, ascribed to Ambrose of Milan (333–397 CE), and circulating in a number of versions, also speaks of Thomas' mission to India, as well as that of others (Yankowski 1962, for the problems surrounding the recensions of this text, see Wilmart 1933; Derrett and Duncan 1962; Berghoff 1967; Brunel 1978; Pritchard 1993; Stoneman 1994). This tradition is reinforced by it being mentioned by Gaudentius in 410 CE, by Jerome in 420 CE, and by Paulinus of Nola in 410 CE (see Baum and Winkler 2003: 52). Gregory of Tours (538–594 CE), in his

Miraculorum Liber (1.32), reports that the remains of Thomas were removed from India to Edessa in Syria (the *Acts* itself reports the movement of his relics, though their specific destination is not named). On this basis, scholars have suggested that the *Acts* made it to Britain by the sixth century (Frykenberg 2008: 112; Neill 2004: 44) and grew in influence from that time. The British attachment to the Thomas legend and to India is further attested in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle (in the entry for AD 883—see Savage 1983: 97) and William of Malmesbury's eleventh-century *Gesta regum Anglorum* (*The Deeds of the Kings of England*), in which he speaks of a mission to India sent by Sighelm, bishop of Sherborne (Kuriakose 1982: 13). It can also be found in later sources (such as the *Otia Imperialia* of Gervase of Tilbury ca. 1150–1228). There is also a much later Latin work, the *Historia Trium Regum* (*History of the Three Kings*) by John of Hildesheim (1364–1375), which makes mention of the St Thomas legend, as part of its larger project of consolidating and expanding upon the biblical account of the three Magi (Horstmann 1886). This work is also an important source for the popular Prester John legends, which tell of a Christian patriarch in the east and which constituted an important source of reflection on India prior to the "Age of Sail" (that is to say the exploratory trade missions of European powers of the late fifteenth century that established contact with the "New World" and commenced the colonial and, subsequently, the imperial enterprise).

It is important to note that the "legendary" phase of Christianity in India continues well into the period that we have concrete evidence of indigenous Christian communities in India. Furthermore, as these Christian communities encounter the edifice of—literally and figuratively—apocryphal tales of India in late antique sources, they weave them into the fabric of their own narrative histories. This then leads to positivistic claims about the early history of variety of Christian communities and their practices (see, for example, Afonso 2009). These claims are often plausible, but none is currently demonstrable. This process, of the braiding of the legendary and the historical begins in the medieval period in India and is beyond the scope of the present work (though its consequences are reflected in even the most sober of historical works, such as those of Neill 2004). Frykenberg offers sensible reflections, but no final answers, on this topic in his *Christianity in India* (2008: 91–93).

I will return to patristic and other literatures concerning the Thomas legend and Christianity's inroads into South Asia after a detailed consideration of the *Acts* itself, to which I will now turn. The Syriac title of the first *Act* of St Thomas is both narratively tantalizing and clear in its focus on India; it reads "First Act of the Apostle Judas Thomas. How the Lord sold him to the merchant Abban, that he should go down and convert India (*Acts* 1)."

Thomas is thus sold, by Jesus himself, into slavery. He is purchased by the merchant Abban, who has been asked to procure a carpenter for his king, Gundaphorus. Gundaphorus was an Indo-Parthian king of the region that now straddles Afghanistan and Pakistan (and included the Kābul Valley and parts of the Puñjāb and Sindh regions). His capital was Taxila, which, as we know, was a great cultural and mercantile center (the center of a modern Christian pilgrimage, but not one that can reliably be associated with any ancient events. For details, see Dar 1988).

Gondophares I (ca. 20–46) is known from sources other than the biblical Apocrypha: he is mentioned in the *Takht-i-Bahi* inscription (Konow 1929: 62; Bivar 1983: 193) and on his coins, and is associated with the introduction of Greek astrological thought to India (Falk 2001: 133). The name itself was also used for a number of monarchs, which makes the identification of the "Gundaphorus" of the *Acts* difficult. However, the fact remains that this king can be plausibly associated with the Indian northwest at a period that coincides with St Thomas' mission. The idea of the "conversion" of the king, as it is presented in the *Acts* is, however, difficult to reconcile with the nature of religious patronage among South Asian monarchs of the period, which tended to be inclusive (even the great "Buddhist" emperor, Aśoka, extolled the virtue of Brahmins in his inscriptions and donative records). Numismatic finds do not support the idea of conversion either, as Gondophares I issued coins with Śiva on them (Senior 2000: 165).

The *Acts*' narrative is, however, a compelling one and not lacking in drama. Thomas' first act, for example, occurs in Andrapolis: while attending the wedding feast of the local king's daughter, a cupbearer strikes Thomas. Thomas prays for posthumous forgiveness for his persecutor, but he nevertheless prophesies—in Hebrew—that the hand that struck him shall soon be "dragged along by dogs." Having uttered a hymn, which is understood only by a Hebrew "flute girl," it becomes apparent that the cupbearer, while refilling his jug at a fountain has been torn to pieces by a lion and that his body parts are now being carried hither and thither by dogs. One black dog brings the offending hand back to the feast. At this point, the Hebrew flute girl prostrates herself before Thomas and explains to the crowd what has occurred. The king asks Thomas to pray for his daughter and her bridegroom. The bridal chamber is then cleared for the consummation to occur; the bridegroom however, on drawing back the curtain of the bridal bed, finds Jesus therein locked in conversation with his bride. He is the image of Thomas (a doubling that is repeatedly exploited in the text. Indeed, in verse 39, he is described as the "twin brother of Christ" and, in the fourth chapter, Thomas rides a colt that is the relative of that used by Jesus; see *Acts* 4.40). Jesus offers a lesson on the vileness of offspring and the superiority of the

celibate life (one of several distinctly ascetic passages in the *Acts*). The king is less than pleased to find that his daughter and son-in-law have converted to Christianity—of a particularly ascetic brand—rather than cause his dynasty to grow. He calls for the capture of the "sorcerer" Thomas; however, all that he finds is his own conversion at the hands of the Hebrew flute girl, who first recognized that Thomas "was God or God's apostle." The gender and low social status of the girl is worthy of note (and is discussed by Bremmer 2001: 78), and we shall say more on this later in the chapter. Eventually, the entire community is said to follow Thomas to India (or, more likely, Parthia).

The first act of Thomas is classically hagiographical (and something of a synecdoche for what follows). The saint cannot commit perjury and his supernormal powers of prediction attest to the veracity of his teachings. The interposing of a hymn between the prophecy and its outcome speak, obliquely, to the power of the religious utterance (reflexively suggestive in what is, after all, a religious *text* and a strategy that is repeated in the inclusion of the famous *Hymn of the Pearl* later in the *Acts*). The king seeks to yoke Thomas' power to the fruitfulness of his line, but he is utterly frustrated in this regard. Indeed, not just Thomas, but Jesus himself overwhelms these ambitions by means of his theophany and ascetic teachings, which adds considerably to the pyrotechnics of the miraculous in the *Acts*.

The second chapter of the *Acts* sees Thomas in the court of king Gundaphorus and engaged in a pious "swindle." King Gundaphorus commissions Thomas to build a palace for him. He gives Thomas a fortune in silver and gold. Thomas distributes this to the poor. On being asked about the whereabouts of the king's palace he replies that it is in heaven. Gundaphorus is unimpressed by his immaterial palace and imprisons both Thomas and the merchant Abban, who brought him. Further plot complications ensue with the death and resurrection of the king's brother Gad; Gad, upon dying, sees the glorious heavenly palace built by the good works of Thomas on behalf of Gundaphorus. The soul of Gad is released so that he might ask for the gift of this heavenly palace from the king. The testimony of his newly resurrected brother convinces the king of the *bona fides* of Thomas. There is an extended and dramatic description of the baptism of Gundaphorus and Abban, in which, first of all, the voice of God and, then, his very person, in the form of a young man carrying a too-bright lamp, appear to the assembled converts. This is followed by a further, divinely ordered, mass conversion. Again, there is no stinting in the *Acts* when it comes to "high-level" intervention.

The first two acts establish something of a pattern for what follows. Table 10.1 provides an overview of the text and evidence that its emphasis on miraculous occurrences and conversions is recurrent.

Table 10.1 Narrative content and key outcomes of the *Acts of Thomas*

Chapter	Key event	Outcome
1	The prophecy at the wedding feast	Mass conversion
2	The building of a heavenly palace	Mass conversion
3	The slaying of the great serpent	Mass conversion
4	The address of the speaking Ass-colt	No outcome
5	The exorcism of a beautiful woman	Mass conversion; Eucharist
6	The resurrected maiden and a vision of hell	Mass conversion
7	Captain Siphor (in the service of king Misdaeus) and the harassment of his wife and daughter by demons	Conversion of Siphor/ Appointment of deacon Xenophon
8	The miracle of the yoking of the wild asses	Exorcism of captain's wife and daughter
9	The Conversion of Mygdonia, wife of Charisius, who is a relative of king Misdaeus	Conversion of Mygdonia
10	The baptism of Mygdonia and the first imprisonment of Thomas	Details of baptism of Mygdonia, Siphor, and his family
11	Conversion of Tertia, king Misdaeus' wife and the second arrest of Thomas	Conversion of Tertia
12	Conversion of Vazan, the son of king Misdaeus	Conversion of Vazan
13	Baptism of prince Vazan and others	Baptism of Vazan, Tertia, and others
14	Martyrdom of St Thomas, healing of young prince by dust from place of absent relics of Thomas	Vazan is made a deacon, Siphor a presbyter, conversion of king Misdaeus

The pattern of outcomes in the text is an interesting one. It begins with the conversion of a low-status Hebrew serving girl. The text thus starts with the ethnic "self." The first seven chapters then contain a fairly unsystematic array of miracles and conversions, in which various members of the *polloi*, as well as members of the social elite become Christians. Mass baptism and the subsequent offering of the Eucharist is commonplace (2.29 and 5.49 offer dramatic examples of this). We see also the institutional consolidation of the movement with the appointment of deacons (Xenophon is the first men-tioned to be so mentioned, at 7.66) and the establishment of income streams (followers are described as "bringing money" at 6.59) In contrast, the sec-ond set of seven chapters, which take us to the dramatic close of the text

constitute what might be called a mini-epic, which we might entitle "The Story of Saint Thomas and King Misdaeus." In this, much more cohesive, narrative, we see the systematic expansion of both the "social surface" of the Christian community (Stark 1997: 20) and its penetration of political hierarchies. Our apostle initially converts a military subordinate of the king (Siphor) and proceeds via the wives of the aristocracy to, eventually, the king's own spouse, Tertia. He then converts the eldest son of the king, Vazan. Opposition grows all the while. King Misdaeus eventually acts to stop the ascetic mission of Thomas, but finds that, even after Thomas has been executed, he cannot change the minds of his followers. The Syriac and Greek texts differ in the precise wording of the death of Thomas: the Syriac sources have Thomas emphasize the oneness of God at the moment of his murder saying, "one chief leads me and holds me by my hand"; the Greek makes clear the allegorical dimension of his death, in which Thomas makes much of being slain by four assailants, who represent the four elements making up humankind, which was a prominent feature of Hellenistic and contemporary Jewish anthropology (for details, see Klijn 2003: 245–246); the martyrdom of St Thomas has been dramatically immortalized by Rubens (original in the Czech National Gallery in Prague), who includes the four assailants of the Greek tradition and also India's ubiquitous coconut palm.

Subsequently, on seeking the relics of Thomas to affect the cure of a sick child, King Misdaeus is reprimanded by a vision of Thomas, but promised aid. Despite the removal of the bones of Thomas to Mesopotamia, the dust from around them is sufficient to cure Misdaeus' young son. Siphor, now a priest, then baptizes the king.

We see therefore in the very narrative structure of the *Acts*, a sort of missionary manual. The text begins with a *mélange* of the miraculous, which sees, initially, a Hebrew, but then a variety of others, come to the Christian fold. This fragmentary hagiographic approach gives way to a much more structured account of the growing influence of Thomas among a particular aristocratic elite, which finally shades into a suggestion of relic cult, albeit *in absentia*. The *Acts* then is sociologically and politically suggestive of a considered approach to mission in the geographical periphery. This works against a metaphysical backdrop that is strongly moral in tone and organization, about which a few more words are in order.

The moral metaphysic of the *Acts* is a fairly rude construction: the idea of "conviction by Eucharist" in chapter six, in which a young man, who had murdered his lover for refusing to lead an ascetic life with him, found that his hands withered when he partook of the Eucharist, is a case in point. This miracle of guilt is combined in the same chapter with a series of visions of hell that were experienced by the murdered maiden, who is resurrected by

Thomas. The story extolls, once again, the virtues of celibacy, but it also speaks to a lively sense of the miraculous and, behind this, a deep sense of the moral order of the universe; the sinner's hands wither; the reluctant celibate is destined for hell (and Gad was able, in the second chapter of the *Acts*, *to see* his brother's heavenly palace). This is combined with a vivid sense of demonic opposition in the *Acts*; indeed, as well as numerous instances of demonic possession and harassment, the text furnishes us, in chapter eight (verse 76), with something of a demonic anti-missionary, who states, "as you have come to preach, so have I come to destroy." The benefits of faith are, then, set against the backdrop of a profoundly moral universe with clearly articulated posthumous destinations of punishment and reward and beset by demonic opposition, in which only Jesus has the power to intervene successfully. Jesus does this recurrently for Thomas both during his life and, crucially, after it, by means of his relics and even the dust that surrounded his relics.

Although the relics occupy but one verse in the *Acts*, they are worthy of further consideration. Relics, essentially corporeal, are also inescapably territorial in all religious traditions. Their movement (or their removal in the case of the *Acts*) often marks the stating of claims with regard to the reach of a given set of religious teachings. Their miraculous powers confirm the veracity of the *account of the world* provided by exponents (and the capacity for a given tradition to address commonplace existential threats, such as disease). What is more, in the particular case of the *Acts* they allow for a miracle of forgiveness for king Misdaeus, who encompassed the death of Thomas and yet is granted aid. Here the absent relics may also be significant: the India of the *Acts* remains *beyond* the edges of the known world (Thomas' relics do not reside there), but the healing dust that surrounded them suggests a Christian land, at least *in potentia*. Much of this sense of the power of relics is captured in the Hymns of Ephraem (306–373 CE). They speak of the movement of Thomas' relics to Edessa (Şanliurfa in modern Turkey). Ephraim writes, "His deeds the rough Indian convinced. Who dares doubt the truth of his Relics?" (as cited in Kuriakose 1982: 5).

An examination of a few of the chapters of the *Acts* certainly furnishes us with exciting narrative content and the popularity of the text in Late Antiquity is not surprising. What one does not find in the *Acts*, however, is any concrete evidence of India. The text is, in narrative terms, highly generic, if doctrinally less so (though the asceticism of the text has been interpreted variously as Manichaean or Encratite, see Elliot 1993: 440). The *Acts*, then, presents us with narratives of conversion, accompanied by abundant evidence of the power of prophecy and a peppering of supra-normal occurrences; these are common tropes of the "hagiography of religious expansion," as one might term it, both in India and elsewhere (see Hegarty 2009). They tell us that the community

that creates and transmits these narratives *desires* to expand and can *imagine* itself doing so. The structure of the text and the outcomes of its various chapters speak also to a community that knows *how* to expand. However, texts such as the *Acts* also speak to the widespread longing for a community to hear tales of triumph and of the self-evident superiority of its point of view. In this regard, such tales are not necessarily outward looking, but are instead inwardly focused; the community is confirming to itself that—at the very margins of its imaginative capacity—its truths are self-evident and that God will swiftly intervene to attest to this. This is, generally, an index of expansion and institutional consolidation, but not one that can be readily, or reliably, mapped onto physical territories (Sikh hagiographies are, for example, replete with examples of Guru Nānak founding Sikh communities in the Arab peninsular and Tibet, but no such communities were founded at that time).

After the *Acts*, the mention of Christianity in India in late antique sources thins considerably. Eusebius of Caesarea (265–340 CE) writing in Alexandria, and quoting Origen (184–253 CE), confines Thomas' mission to Parthia (northeastern Iran), but this might have included the Indian northwest, as both came under Gondophares' rule:

> Meanwhile, the holy apostles and disciples of our Saviour were dispersed throughout the world. Parthia, according to tradition, was allotted to Thomas as his field of labour. (Eusebius, *HE* III.1 cited in Kuriakose 1982: 3)

Eusebius, once again, is our source for accounts of another prominent Christian visitor to India: Pantaenus, who was the predecessor of Clement as head of the catechetical school of Alexandria (ca. 179 CE). Eusebius tells us that "he displayed such zeal for the divine word, that he was appointed as herald of the Gospel of Christ to the nations in the Far East, and was sent as far as India" (*HE* X.1–3 cited in Kuriakose 1982: 4). This mission would have occurred ca. 180 CE. There is again, however, doubt as to what is meant in the patristic sources by "India." Scholars have debated whether or not Pantaenus reached the subcontinent (Neill 2004: 40; Frynkenberg 2008: 103) and the various usages of the term India with adjectives such as "interior," "exterior," "greater," and "lesser" (Mingana 1926: 443; Bowersock 2013: 23). Eusebius describes Pantaenus' encounter with a community of Indian Christians in possession of a "Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew letters," which they had been furnished with by the apostle Bartholomew, who is more generally associated with the conversion of Polymius, the king of Armenia (see Dihle 1963). Jerome (347–420 CE) confirms the association of this Indian community of Christians with Bartholomew (Jerome, *De viris*

illustribus 36). Jerome states that Pantaenus returned to Alexandria with a copy of the "Indian" Matthew in Hebrew letters. There is no doubt that Pantaenus' stoicism would have resonated with indigenous, more ascetically inclined, philosophical traditions, but we have no Indian sources to corroborate religious dialogue.

The aforementioned *De Moribus Brachmanorum* provides a richer and more geographically specific account of mission in India, replete with—highly imprecise—mentions of Brahmins (the titular *Brachmanorum*) and Muziris itself, which it calls "the emporium of all India on this side of the Ganges" (the major part of Pseudo-Ambrosius is translated from Pseudo-Palladius' Greek work, see Derrett and Duncan 1960a, 1960b; the account of the Muziris is known only in the Latin version of the text). He also mentions the visit of one Museus, bishop of Doleni.

Rufinus of Aquileia (345–410 CE), in his *Ecclesiastical History* (retold thereafter in the Church histories of Socrates, Theodoretus, and Sozomenus), consolidates the foregoing accounts and offers a different perspective on them (Amidon 1997, Kuriakose 1982: 6–8). Rufinus rejects the idea that Thomas went to India, confining him, as Origen did, to Parthia. He suggests that it was under Constantine that "Further India" was evangelized, but, while he speaks of "Further India," much of what he says relates, on the basis of other accounts, to the kingdom of Aksum (in what is now modern Eritrea and northern Ethiopia; for details, see Bowersock 2013: 66). He paints, nonetheless, a rich picture of intellectual and cultural exchange with "India," which has much to tell us about the general character of Christianity's expansion beyond the Mediterranean (10.9ff.). He points first of all to visits by both philosophers—one Metrodorus is mentioned—and merchants, mentioning the existence of treaties between Further India and Rome. He subsequently offers an involved narrative whereby one Meropius, inspired by the example of Metrodorus, travels by sea to "India," but is slain on arrival. Two of his young kinsmen, Edesius and Frumentius, are spared and enter service in the royal household of the "King of the Indians," as a cup bearer and keeper of the royal records, respectively (a role which suggests high intellectual achievement on the part of Frumentius). When the king died, these two young men were asked by the queen to act as regents for the young heir. Rufinus tells us that Frumentius made it his business to seek out Christians among the visiting Roman merchants and to provide them with facilities for worship. Frumentius builds a church and begins to instruct some of the locals in Christian doctrine and worship. Eventually, the young king reaches maturity and Edesius and Frumentius are able to leave his service. While Edesius returns home to Tyre, Frumentius reports to the newly invested bishop Athanasius in Alexandria (whose episcopate lasted 45 years,

with interruptions, from 328–373 CE). He implores Athanasius to send a bishop and clergy to "India." Athanasius offers the role of bishop to Frumentius, who accepts and acquits himself well, building churches and even going so far as to perform miracles.

The foregoing narrative is quite different from the *Acts*. The rich mythological detail, of prophecy fulfilled and visions of Jesus, is entirely absent. The miracles are mentioned almost as an afterthought. While the *Acts* can, unreliably, be associated with the Indian northwest, the story of Frumentius is unlikely to be about India, despite the use of this term. However, it provides, in contrast to the bombast and *Grand Guignol* of the apostolic account of conversion, a more modest narrative of Christianity's spread into foreign lands when not accompanied by main force. The undertaking of critical roles in administration is strikingly corroborated by our earliest sources for actual Christian communities in India, as we shall see in the section that follows this one.

A contemporary of Rufinus, Philostorgius (368–439 CE), tells us of the visit of Theophilus the Indian (born in Socotra or the Maldives), to Arabia and India in his *Ecclesiastical History* 2.6, and more fully at 3.4–5. Theophilus encounters a Christian community in "India" and is not impressed with their mode of worship (sitting, for example, while reading the Gospel). He observes, in an appreciative tone, that their doctrinal stance was Arian (a view of which he was himself a firm advocate). However, once again, it is not at all clear from the text that India is being described and there is a high likelihood that the text refers to Arabia Felix (modern-day Yemen). Notwithstanding this, the text provides, like that of Rufinus, an insight into a world of workaday missionary activity that is far more realistic than the vivid *Acts*.

Other Christian authorities are described as traveling to India. The *Chronicle of Seert*, an Arabic document, written ca. ninth to eleventh century, tells us of the travels of bishop Dūdi of Basra, who, we are told, "went to India and evangelized many people" (Mingana 1926: 450, 495; Kuriakose 1982: 3). We have a gratifyingly narrow date range for this visit, as it was undertaken during the patriarchate of Shahlūpha and Pāpa (293–300 CE). Neill conjectures that Dūdi's mission reflects the needs of an isolated merchant community of Christians in the deep south of the subcontinent (2004: 41). This is certainly not clear from the rather late text as it stands, or the "corroborating" evidence, of the extensive maritime links between Muziris (a port in central Kerala, near Kodungullur/Cranganore—for details see Narayan 1972b: 23–30) and Alexandria in the second century of the Common Era (as attested in the Muziris Papyrus, see Casson 1990 and Malekandathil 2015: 39—not to mention the fact that Dūdi, as the bishop of Basra, has nothing to do with Alexandria). However, later sources do suggest, albeit in an indirect fashion, a situation not unlike the one that Neill

envisages. The *Chronicle of Seert* also refers to the establishment of a bishop of India by the catholicos of the Church of the East in 345 CE, as well as the translation into Syriac and distribution of a selection of texts "to all the islands in the sea and to India." These accounts certainly point to the institutional consolidation of Christianity in India (see Baum and Winkler 2003: 53), but not in a detailed fashion (see also Bussagli 1953).

One final late antique authority is worthy of consideration in some detail: the Alexandrian monk Cosmas Indicopleustès. Notwithstanding his name, the latter part of which means "sailor to India" (a moniker that was only given to this author in the eleventh century), there is no reason to suppose that Cosmas ever set foot on the Indian subcontinent (Bowersock 2013: 22–24). The *Christian Topography* (ca. 550) does, however, refer to India in some detail. Cosmas turns to the subcontinent in its eleventh book, which is entitled *A Description of the Animals and Trees of India and the Island of Taprobane* (Wolska-Conus 1973: 314). He commences his account with descriptions of exotic animals, such as the rhinoceros, hippopotamus, and the unicorn, but soon moves on to the Christian communities of the region:

> The island (Taprobane/śrī Laṅkā) has also a church of Persian Christians who have settled there, and a presbyter who is appointed from Persia and a deacon and a complete ecclesiastical ritual. (McCrindle 2010: 365)

Cosmas goes on to mention other far-flung Christian communities that are mostly Persian in origin (which would make sense in terms of historical events in Sassanian Iran, which I take up below). He concludes:

> And so likewise among the Bactrians and Huns and Persians and the rest of the Indians and throughout the whole land of Persia there is no limit to the number of churches with bishops and very large communities of Christian people, as well as martyrs, and monks also living as hermits. (McCrindle 2010: 120)

This paints a picture of the edge of the known world (an apposite phrase, as Cosmas' work was an anti-Ptolemaic diatribe defending the idea of a flat earth) that is far from unacquainted with Christianity, but equally, one that is still very much under the sway of pagan kings. Indeed, there might be a racial distinction implied by the designation of the people and kings of Taprobane as *allophuloi*, or "strangers" (at XI.14), which suggests that the Christian communities might have been ethnically distinct at this time. This is a conclusion that finds support in the limited material evidence for Christianity in early India, which is discussed below.

After Cosmas, there are further references to India and to Thomas of course, from Isidore of Seville, William of Malmesbury, Mar Solomon, and Marco Polo (Kuriakose 1982: 10–15), as well as others, but these add little to our sum of certain knowledge.

The late antique sources provide us with two distinct pictures of the Christianization of India. The first, found in the *Acts*, is a dramatic description of the miraculous conversion of the peoples and rulers of an area that we may associate, uncertainly, with the Indian northwest or southern India. The second is a mixture of gazetteer-like accounts of far-flung regions and more prosaic descriptions of the missionary process, which emphasize initial philosophical and commercial inroads, the vagaries of persuasion and the need to establish liturgical and doctrinal uniformity. India—be it greater, inner, lesser, or outer—is a somewhat vague territory, which, more often than not, does not refer to South Asia proper. We find in these sources very limited evidence for the integration of South Asian territories into the ecclesiastical structures of the Church or for indigenous peoples becoming Christian in large numbers.

The "Historical" Phase

There were certainly contextual reasons for the migration of Christians from Iran eastwards from the early fourth century CE. The persecutions of Sapor II, the Sassanian king of Iran (r. 309–379 CE) were widespread and led to the wholesale relocation of Christian communities. This relocation to the east might have been as a consequence of the presence of pre-existing Christian groups in those areas to welcome them (Mingana 1926: 439–440).

The earliest material evidence of the Christian presence in India is constituted by a series of inscribed stone crosses (in Syriac, the *Mar Thoma Sliba*, or St Thomas crosses). The dedications on them are in Middle Persian. There are six East Syriac crosses with inscriptions (in Pahlavi script): one on Mount Thomas in Mylapore near Madras; four near Kottayam; and a further example in Travancore in Kerala. All share the same inscription, which records the desire of one Gabriel, son of Chahabokht, for divine mercy. These crosses date sometime between the sixth and the ninth centuries. Another cross was found in Goa, of the same type, in 2001 (Baum and Winkler 2003: 53). There is thus the possibility of further discoveries. The language of the crosses and the name of their donor suggest a foreign rather than an indigenous presence. It is worth noting, however, that the East Syriac historian Amr b. Matta's *Book of the Tower* (ca. 1350 CE) mentions a separate metropolitanate of India being established between 650 and 850 CE (Baum and

Winkler 2003: 53–54). This points to a growing community that may not have been entirely foreign in its make-up.

The first substantial historical source we have for Christian communities in India are sets of copper plate inscriptions, which date to the period of king Sthanu Ravi (ca. 880 CE) of the later Cheras (ninth to twelfth century CE). The plates record the gift of land, rights, and privileges, and a limited amount of legal self-determination, to the Terisapalli church in "Kurakekeni Kollam" (modern Quilon in Kerala). The king gave the city to a Christian merchant, Sapir Iso by name (for detailed consideration of this merchant, see Narayan 1972a). A local governor, Ayyan Atikal Tiruvatikal, grants Christians the right to sit on carpets and ride elephants (markers of high status). In addition, a monopoly of weights and measures was established, as well as rights of protection over a union of Jewish traders. The witnesses, who were Jews, Muslims, and Zoroastrians, signed in Middle Persian (in Pahlavi script), Arabic (in Kufic script), and in Hebrew. The plates point to an influential and high-status mercantile Christian community. The foreign co-signatories suggest a foreign enclave rather than an indigenous community. They do not allow us to say much more than this.

The historical evidence for the presence of Christian communities in India of the first millennium is scant. However, the late first millennium material points to a cosmopolitan south Indian context, in which mercantile Christian communities were certainly present. This harmonizes with those late antique sources of the more sober type, which record isolated Christian communities often with variant liturgy and ritual and little ecclesiastical oversight (at least from the Church of the East). This picture is perhaps changing from around 650, with the establishment of the jurisdiction of the Church of the East over Malabari Christians under katholikos Ishoyab III.

Conclusion: From Legend to History

There is no real reason on the basis of the present survey of sources to suppose the existence of an institutionally consolidated Christianity, practiced by indigenous people, at any time in the first five or so centuries of the Common Era in India. Yet, there is considerable evidence of recurrent contact between the Christian heartlands of the Mediterranean basin and the Near East and India, though not all places that bear the name India refer to South Asia, as we have seen. There is also evidence of the establishment of resident mercantile Christian communities in southern India in the latter part of the first millennium and the progressive integration of these communities into the ecclesiastical hierarchies of the Church of the East, which suggests growing numbers, some of whom may have been indigenous. There are also medieval

and early modern sources that point to a concerted missionary effort, possibly from Syria, Armenia, or Persia, toward the end of the first millennium (Baum and Winkler 2003: 51–58). These have not formed part of the present discussion. Indian Christians were to build accounts of their past on the basis of the *Acts* and other late antique and medieval sources. These accounts, which mostly agree on the fact of a successful mission to India by Thomas at the beginning of the Common Era, and the establishment of an indigenous Christian community shortly thereafter, has certainly not been confirmed by the present inquiry, but it has not been disproved either.

What we do find ample evidence of are Christian authors and their reading communities reflecting, recalling, and imagining mission at the geographical periphery. India, in the late antique imagination, instantiates this periphery like nowhere else; from Thomas to Cosmas, there is a recurrent concern to Christianize the edges of the known world. The *Acts* offers us a richly miraculous narrative with an underlying understanding of the *realia* of mission. Our more prosaic sources describe the establishment and maintenance of Christian communities throughout the known world. These accounts often exceed the bounds of what is historically likely to have been the case (in much the same way that royal accounts of conquest tend to exceed the bounds of the actual territories conquered). There is thus a blend of the practical and the fabulous in late antique accounts of India to the ninth century, which is both beguiling and instructive. It suggests not a confident advance, but rather an iterative process that was marked by mission, propaganda, and the blending of these two things.

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Along the Silk Road: From Aleppo to Chang'an

Max Deeg

Late Antiquity in Central and East Asia?

Around this time, certain monks, coming from India and learning that the Emperor Justinian entertained the desire that the Romans should no longer purchase their silk from the Persians, came before the emperor and promised to settle the silk question that the Romans would no longer purchase this article from their enemies, the Persians, nor indeed from any other nation; for they had, they said, spent a long time in the country situated north of the numerous nations of India—a country called Serinda—and there they had learned accurately by what means it was possible for silk to be produced in the land of the Romans. Whereupon the emperor made very diligent enquiries and asked them many questions to see whether their statements were true, and the monks explained to him that certain worms are the manufacturers of silk, nature being their teacher and compelling them to work continually. And while it was impossible to convey the worms thither alive, it was still practicable and altogether easy to convey their offspring. Now the offspring of these worms, they said, consisted in innumerable eggs from each one. And men bury these eggs, long after the time when they are produced, in dung, and, after thus heating them for a sufficient time, they bring forth the living creatures.

After they had thus spoken, the emperor promised to reward them with large gifts and urged them to confirm their account in action. They then once more went to Serinda and brought back the eggs to Byzantium, and in the manner described caused them to be transformed into worms, which they fed on the leaves of the mulberry; and thus they made possible the production of silk in the land of the Romans.

(Procopius, *On the Wars* 8.17.1ff; Dewing 1962: 226–231)

This narrative by Procopius (sixth century), different versions of which are also extant in other western sources (e.g. Theophanes of Byzantium, early ninth century, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum IV*; cf. Feltham 2009: 17), tells about the introduction of the manufacturing of silk, one of the most important products for the economic wealth of the east Roman empire, to Byzantium (Pigulewskaja 1969: 80–87). Instrumental in this transaction were Indian monks, probably of the Church of the East, coming from Central Asia or China (Serinda) (Feltham 2009; cf. also Chapter 13 in this volume). This story of the introduction of the Asian technology for producing the raw material for silk into the western world can be supplemented—and contrasted—by another story, which comes from the very opposite side of the Eurasian landmass, from China, and describes the introduction of a western religious tradition into the empire of the Tang dynasty (618–907). The text that follows is the beginning of the historical part of the inscription of the famous Xi'an stele and describes the advent of the first Christian priest in Chang'an (today's Xi'an):

The Cultivated Emperor Taizong (r. 635–649) made the Empire radiate and flourish, opened up the course of matters and approached the people as a radiant and wise ruler. At that time there was a Venerable in the empire of Daqin called Aluoben. After he had expounded the azure clouds and loaded the True Scriptures, and had observed the Tunes of the Wind and thereby advanced against all obstacles, he arrived in Chang'an in the ninth year of the era Zhenguan (635). The emperor ordered the venerable minister Fang Xuanling (579–648) to go with the imperial guard of honor to the Western suburb; he received Aluoben as a guest and brought him to the palace. The emperor had the *sūtra*s translated in the Academy of Scholars; inside the Forbidden Gates he asked Aluoben about the Way (Dao) and deeply realized the Truth. (Translation Deeg; for details, see the commentary in Pelliot 1996, and Deeg 2017)

Both narratives evoke the image of the overland route of economic and cultural trade called the Silk Road (McLaughlin 2010) and also the movement of religions along this route, which connected the extreme eastern part of the Mediterranean, Constantinople, and the Byzantine empire, and the easternmost empire of the then known world, China, with its western capital Chang'an

(today's Xi'an). The two texts reflect the entangled histories of the huge landmass between the Chinese empire and the Mediterranean world in terms of material culture, economy, politics, and the spread of religion. The stories—they refer to a common socio-religious context and recall moments from the history of the East-Syrian Church—also seem to justify the extension of the geographic conceptualization of Late Antiquity beyond its confinement to the Mediterranean world (e.g. Brown 1978) into a wider entangled system of communication reaching as far as Central and East Asia (see also Chapter 1 in this volume).

Both cited texts, however, also reflect the dilemma which anyone faces who attempts to give an overview of the religious situation in the different regions: they only reflect the "motional activities" of one religious tradition and its spread in terms of material and religious culture, namely Christianity in its eastern organized form, that is, the Syriac Church of the East (previously and mistakenly called "Nestorian"), while in reality the wider regions around and along the Silk Road from the third to the eighth century were more of a buzzing melting pot and a "bazaar" of many religions.

If we speak of "the Silk Road," we have to realize that we are dealing more with a deliberate conceptual and therefore also somewhat artificial construction rather than a material entity evidenced entirely by historical, political, or geographical data. In fact we should also perhaps rather speak of "Silk Roads," as we are dealing with an entire web of routes stretching hundreds of miles across. This construct runs from Constantinople (Byzantium) through Aleppo (Syria, Levant) and from there through major political or economic urban centers like Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the winter capital of the Sasanids and the first Islamic caliphates, and, further to the north, Samarkand, Merv, Bukhara, Balkh, Kutscha, Turfan, Dunhuang, and others (Litvinsky *et al.* 1996a; Beckwith 2009; Hansen 2012). The religious landscape we encounter in this vast area during the half millennium from the third to the eighth century is a dramatically changing one. This has also to do with dramatic changes to the political landscape.

For most of our period the scene was dominated by the imperial polities of the east Roman (Byzantine), Persian (Sasanian), and Chinese empires (the latter divided from after the fall of the Later Han at the beginning of the third century to the Tang), which interacted in different ways. These imperial polities can be supplemented by the Kushan empire (first to fourth century), which had, during the period of its existence, borders with the Iranian, South Asian (Indian), and Chinese worlds, and served as a transit region for trade and the spread of religions. Later political players were the emerging Tibetan empire in the east (Beckwith 1987) and, further to the west, reaching out from their homeland, the Arab peninsula, the Muslim Arabs. Even before Muhammad the Arabs had already been entangled in the political,

economic, and religious history of the wider Mediterranean context of Late Antiquity (see e.g. Crone 1987). Now, through their conquest of parts of Central Asia from the seventh and eighth centuries onwards, they became a dominant factor in that region (Gibb 1923).

The major religions that "traveled" along the Silk Road in both eastern and western direction from their places of origin include the major traditions originating in and from the Near East and Iran (Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) but also the South Asian religion of Buddhism (Foltz 2010). In addition one should also at least mention the regional Central Asian religions, often called tribal or shamanistic (e.g. of the pre-Buddhist and pre-Manichaean Turkic tribes; see Stark 2008), which are hardly documented and did not have a transregional impact, as well as the South Asian religions (Brahmanism/Hinduism, Jainism), which have left only indirect but none the less considerable traces in the Central Asian regions.

The multitude of languages involved in the transmission of these religions—and in their study—are incredibly rich: Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Iranian languages like Avestan, Parthian, Middle Persian, Khotanese (Śaka), Sogdian or Bactrian; Indian languages like Sanskrit and Middle-Indo-Aryan Prakrits (Gāndhārī); then the most eastern of the Indo-European languages Tocharian (dialects A and B), (Turkic) Uyghur, Chinese, and, last but not least, Arabic. In total there are seventeen languages, some of them written in non-autochthonous scripts, for example, Bactrian texts being written in Greek and some Syriac Christian texts in Sogdian script. The different documents that Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943), Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), and other explorers found in the Dunhuang cave library (sealed in the early eleventh century), or that the German and Japanese expeditions found in Turfan and other sites along the so-called Northern Silk Road (Dabbs 1963; for a more popular description, see Hopkirk 2001), reflect this complex linguistic situation quite clearly.

Some of the religions proved to be very flexible and adapted to new cultural and linguistic environments (Buddhism, Christianity, Manichaeism). Other religious or ideological systems either did not spread or were restricted to much smaller diaspora communities (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Brahmanism/Hinduism). There is clearly a dominance of eastward movements of religious traditions while East Asian traditions (Daoism; for Buddhism see p. 243–244) remained popular and were practiced only in their own social contexts. This "one-sidedness" calls for an explanation that, however, can only be a very general, complex, and hypothetical one. The emerging religious Daoism in China from the late second century onwards, for example, developed in the context of Buddhism arriving in China and was very

much restricted to its Chinese environment. The problem of translatability, not only of ideas or concepts but also, in more concrete terms, of language and script, added another hindering element to the matter: except for later examples from the Buddhist Asian "oikumene" (Tibet, Mongolia) philosophical or religious Chinese texts have never been translated into another language.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the different religious traditions in the historical period and geographical area concerned separately and with a focus on their spread and extension through Central Asia to what is called the Far East, that is, China. The terrain covered and the number of religious traditions involved allow me only to draw rough sketches and to provide a limited range of basic and more specialized bibliographical references that should guide the reader to the more detailed scholarship.

There is no specific reason for the selected order other than a west–east axial paradigm that is, however, somewhat justifiable by the fact that the movement of religious traditions and influences was mostly in an eastern direction. One could rightly object, of course, that this mode of presentation downplays any mutual influence that may have existed. As a consequence the entanglement of some of these traditions, for example Manichaeism, with others, particularly in the Central Asian context, becomes almost invisible. This approach also does not seem fully to do justice to the pre-Islamic multi-religiosity of ethnic groups like the Kushans, the Bactrians, the Sogdians, and others. The Kushans, for instance, venerated Hindu and Iranian deities and the Buddha, but also their autochthonous Central Asian gods, and among the Sogdian merchants along the Silk Road were Zoroastrians, Manicheans, Christians, and Buddhists (Golden 2011: 53–58). Under the Chinese Tang dynasty all the major religious traditions—the three Iranian ones, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and eastern Christianity being called the "Three Barbarian Teachings" (Chinese *sanyi jiao*)—had arrived in China partly because of the open social and cultural "climate" under the Tang rule, but partly also because China became a safe haven for Iranian diaspora and refugee communities after the fall of the Sasanid rule and the Arab conquest of Iran and beyond.

Christianity

The spread of Christianity to the east is a rather neglected chapter in the religion's history (Baum and Winkler 2003: 1). While the split of the early Church into its different branches in the Mediterranean region is well known, the history of its further spread, the one of the Apostolic Church of the East

(and others) eastward to India, Central Asia, and China is not part of the standard Church history starting with Eusebius of Caesarea (fourth century) and centered on the Latin west and the Greek east and becoming stronger after the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451. As a result of that Council almost all Christian institutions east of Byzantium, including the Church of the East, were condemned as dyophysite Nestorians (Baum and Winkler 2003: 2–3, 7; cf. Lössl 2010: 223–224). This also had the effect that they were less studied as part of a wider Christian tradition, although in recent years this deficit has been somewhat amended (Moffett 1998; Gillman and Klimkeit 1999; Baum and Winkler 2003).

The Christian communities along the Silk Road and in the Chinese empire belonged to the Church of the East. This used Syriac (Aramaic) as its Church language, while its religious center, the seat of the patriarch or Catholicos, lay in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the erstwhile capital of the Sasanid empire, and later the capital of the first two Muslim Caliphates. Christianity, it has to be added, had gained a foothold in the Iranian regions as early as in the second and third centuries CE under Parthian rule.

Later medieval sources of the Church of the East claim the existence of sees in India and China for a relatively early period to the apostle Thomas and his disciples Aggai and Mari, but these reports are Church-historical projections and cannot be substantiated historically (Baum and Winkler 2003: 12; see also Chapter 10 in this volume). The first clear traces of the spread of Christianity beyond the northeastern borders of the Iranian empire along the Silk Road and into Central Asia are provided by Merv, which had become a diocese by the second half of the fourth century (Baum and Winkler 2003: 14), and Kashgar on the western rim of the Taklamakan desert, which had become a diocese at the beginning of the sixth century (Baum and Winkler 2003: 32).

The evidence of the spread of eastern Christianity is not only traceable in the Syriac sources (Dickens 2015), but Christian texts (or fragments of texts) are extant in different Central Asian languages such as Sogdian and Uyghur (Asmussen 1984; Sims-Williams 1985, 1992; Zieme 2015).

The most impressing monument and at the same time historical document of the Church of the East's presence in East Asia in the first millennium is, without any doubt, the inscription of Chang'an—often called "Stele of Hsi-an-fu," "Nestorian document," etc. and since its discovery in the early seventeenth century an object of imagination and historical criticism (Keevak 2008)—bearing the heading "Inscription on the Spread of the Brilliant Teaching from Daqin to the Middle Kingdom (China)" (*Daqin jingjiao liuxing zhongguo bei*), "Brilliant Teaching" (*Jingjiao*) being the self-given name of the Church in the East during the Tang period. It sketches the

history of the Church of the East to the time of its erection in the year 781 in a self-propagating style, claiming that from the advent of the first monk called in Chinese transliteration Aluoben (corresponding to a Persian name Ardabān?) in the year 635 the ruling Tang emperors, starting with the second emperor Taizong (626–649), had supported the Church and the community in China.

The Chang'an inscription provides some insight into how the Christian Church, very probably mainly consisting of Iranian diaspora communities, adapted to its Chinese environment. The father of the "author" of the inscription Jingjing/Adam, Yisi/Yazadbozid, is described as having played a major role in the suppression of what is known as the revolt of An Lushan (755–763) which almost toppled the Tang dynasty (Deeg 2013). Adaptation was also necessary in terms of the translation of concepts and terminology: we can assume that Syriac was used as Church language—the Chang'an inscription, written in Chinese, has a kind of colophon and a list of names of Church hierarchs and monks in Syriac written in Estrangelo script (Hunter 2009; Lieu 2009). Christian ideas and institutions had to be rendered in Chinese as soon as the non-Iranian public was addressed.

While the Chang'an inscription as a semi-official document follows a highly elaborate style, using elements and terminology from classical Chinese texts (Deeg 2007) with some innovative Christian terminology (e.g. *san-yi*, lit.: "three-one," for Trinity), the few Christian documents (manuscripts) (Riboud 2001; Tang 2004) in Chinese that have survived show a strong influence of adaptation of Daoist and particularly Buddhist terminology (Deeg 2015). These texts are obviously not translations of extant Christian Syriac sources but probably a kind of compendia comprising different topics like monotheism ("Treatise of the One God," *Yishen lun*), life of the Messiah, the ten commandments, the path of redemption, but also deal with the veneration of the emperor (the so-called "Sūtra of Jesus the Messiah," *Xuting mishi suo jing*). Only one text, the so-called "Scripture of the Three Venerables" (*Sanzun jing*), seems to be modeled after the Syriac "Gloria in Excelsis Deo," which does also exist in a Sogdian version (Sims-Williams 1995).

The discovery of a new Chinese inscription on a stone pillar from the former eastern Chinese capital of Luoyang some years ago (Ge 2009; Tang 2009) has substantiated the scholarly opinion that the Christian communities in China between the seventh and the ninth century mainly consisted of Iranian-speaking diaspora groups (i.e. Middle Persian, Sogdians; Christians, Manichaeans, and Zoroastrians). The fate of these communities after the middle of the ninth century, particularly after the great persecution of Buddhism and other foreign religions (844–845) under the Tang emperor

Wuzong (r. 840–846), is unknown, although it is generally assumed that after this persecution the Church of the East disappeared in the Chinese empire (Deeg 2006). What can be said is that there is no continuity to the Christian communities that emerge into the light of history as the so-called Yelikewen under Mongolian rule (Yuan dynasty) centuries later (Tang 2011).

Judaism

The diaspora of the Jews after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE (see Chapter 12 in this volume) and Jewish participation in the long-distance trade also led to the establishment of communities along the Silk Road in cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and certainly, although there is no direct evidence for this, further to the east. The rather restrictive policy of the Sasanian government (Neusner 2012) may have facilitated the move of Jews to the periphery of the Persian empire. These religious, cultural, and ethnical networks, which from the middle of the first millennium found their coherence and structure in the Radhanite merchants about whose activities vivid descriptions are extant from the pen of the ninth-century Muslim author Ibn Khordadbeh in his Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik ("Book of Roads and Kingdoms"):

> These merchants speak Arabic, Persian, Roman, the Frank, Spanish, and Slav languages. They journey from West to East, from East to West, partly on land, partly by sea… They embark in the East Sea and sail from al-Kolzum to al-Jar and al-Jeddah, then they go to Sind, India, and China… Sometimes these Jew merchants, when embarking from the land of the Franks, on the Western Sea, make for Antioch (at the head of the Orontes River); thence by land to al-Jabia (al-Hanaya on the bank of the Euphrates), where they arrive after three days' march. There they embark on the Euphrates and reach Baghdad, whence they sail down the Tigris, to al-Obolla. From al-Obolla they sail for Oman, Sindh, Hind, and China. (Adler 1987: 2–3)

Traces of Jews, their culture and religion east of Persia, in Central Asia and in China (Cansdale 1998; Xu 2005: 348–349), are scant for the period but sufficient to document their presence in the regions. A letter written in Judaeo-Persian, Persian with Hebrew words and written in Hebrew script, by a Jewish merchant on paper probably originating from China, found in Dandan Uyliq (Khotan) on the southwestern corner of the Tarim basin and dated to the year 718, shows the multilingual and -cultural setting of the Jewish communities (Gindin 2012). Fragments of penitential prayers (*selichot*) with passages from

the Psalms and Prophets in Hebrew were found by Pelliot in the cave library in Dunhuang (Wu 1996). The extent of the Jewish networks is also shown by Judaeo-Persian rock inscriptions at Tang-e Azāo (Gindin 2012) and tomb inscriptions from the eighth to the twelfth century in Jām in Afghanistan (Hunter 2014), which prove the ubiquity of Jewish merchants and communities on the ancient trade routes.

Zoroastrianism

According to its own tradition the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism (Boyce 1979) goes back to a founder figure Zarathushtra (Greek Zoroaster) whose exact origin in terms of space and time is not settled but seems to have been located more in the northeastern part of the wider Iranian sphere than its later cultural and political centers.

Under the Sasanid rulers the religion of the Zoroastrian priests, the *magi* (Grecisized plural form of Persian *magu*) became state religion and sometimes caused the direct persecution of other religious communities such as the Manichaeans or the Christians, as under the kings Bahram I and Bahram II and under the influence of the influential Zoroastrian head priest Kedīr or Karder (Boyce 1984: 112–113).

Zoroastrianism figures in Latin and Greek sources from a very early period onward (de Jong 1998). The religion appeared as an indirect influence in the late Roman empire through and in the cult of Mithras, as much as it may have lost its Iranian character through the process of cultural adaptation (Beck 2007: 28–30; Alvar 2008: 74–106).

Starting with the Kushan period (second century CE) numismatic iconography and epigraphy reflect a syncretism of Mesopotamian, Indian, Greek, and Iranian–Zoroastrian deities for the region of Bactria (Afghanistan). Onomastic evidence (names of deities as part of personal names) in the region is not conclusive, but in higher quantity it allows one to conclude Zoroastrian influence at least (Grenet 2015: 131–133).

Zoroastrianism for a later period (seventh/eighth century) and in more northern regions of Central Asia (Sogdiana, Chorasmia) is documented in some Sogdian and also in Chinese sources, although the religion must have been practiced in other regions as well (e.g. Khotan). The iconography of the Sogdian area of Samarkand, for example, paintings from the well-known site of Panjikent, give evidence of the presence and veneration of Zoroastrian deities (Grenet 2015: 133–139). Archeological remains bear clear signs of Zoroastrian religious practice as the cult of fire—funerals that reflect regional differences from the Iranian heartland (Grenet 2015: 139–144).

With the presence of the Iranian–Persian diaspora in China, particularly its growth due to the decline and fall of the Sasanian empire, Zoroastrianism was also introduced to the Middle Kingdom (Aoki 2015: 149–152). Although no Zoroastrian texts in the Chinese language are preserved (Aoki 2015: 148), traces of the religion in China exist in the form of iconography and inscriptions (Chinese, Persian) on funerary artifacts (Humbach and Wang 1988; Grenet *et al.* 2004).

Manichaeism

The beginnings of Manichaeism (Baker-Brian 2011, and Chapter 15 in this volume), a now extinct religion that once had spread from its Iranian homeland to North Africa and China, are situated exactly at the beginning of the period under discussion. The founder of the religion, Mani (216–277), lived in a period of strong Sasanian rulers (Ardashir, Shahpur I) and Zoroastrian religious predominance in Iran. He grew up in the Judaeo-Christian sect of the Elcesaites. After having had a vision he started preaching the true message of Christ and traveled to northwest India where he certainly was influenced by the Indian religious traditions in the region, Buddhism and maybe Jainism (Deeg and Gardner 2009). Shah Bahram I persecuted the young religion and Mani, who died in prison under the following ruler Bahram II. However, this did not prevent the young community from spreading relatively quickly in western and eastern directions from its original center of the Sasanian empire (Lieu 1992).

The sources documenting the spread of Manichaeism to the east have the advantage that they are largely themselves Manichaean. By contrast, knowledge about the religion from the Mediterranean regions is somewhat tainted by the fact that many sources from that wider cultural sphere, except the more recently discovered written in Coptic (e.g. the Kephalaia; Gardner 1995) and some others (e.g. the Cologne Codex; Koenen and Römer 1988), tend to reflect the views of their religious opponents, mostly Christians (Lieu 1999; Gardner and Lieu 2004: 25–35). Eastern Manichaean texts are preserved in the major languages of Iran and along the Silk Road (Parthian, Middle Persian, Sogdian, Uyghur, and Chinese; Klimkeit 1989; Tremblay 2001) and were discovered mainly in Chinese Turkestan (Gulácsi 2005: 4–8). Apart from the textual sources there is also material evidence of the religion in form of Manichaean art, particularly book illumination (Klimkeit 1996; Gulácsi 2005).

Manichaeism had reached China definitely by the Tang period (Lieu 1992: 219–262), although there is new evidence suggesting the presence of

Manichaeism in China already in the sixth century (de la Vaissière 2005). A few Manichaean texts from this period are preserved in Chinese (Chavannes and Pelliot 1911 and 1913; Schmidt-Glintzer 1987; Mikkelsen 2004). The style and language of these translations show similarities to those of the Chinese Christian documents (Mikkelsen 2005).

The presence of Manichaeism along the Silk Road was so strong and continuous that the religion became state religion in the Turkic Uyghur kingdom of Kočo between the eighth and the eleventh century (Lieu 1992: 240–242), a fact that led to the survival of quite a number of Manichaean texts that would otherwise have been lost. Although they are of some later date, they can shed some light on and complement Manichaean religious literature in other languages.

Buddhism

As a founder religion from the Indian subcontinent Buddhism, at a very early time, spread beyond the geographical boundaries of the South Asian subcontinent. Already the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (third century BCE) in his rock edicts refers to messengers whom he sent to the different neighboring rulers, some of whom were Greek (Lamotte 1988: 227; von Hinüber 2010; see also Chapter 2 in the present volume), and two of the inscriptions of his edicts, which he propagated across his huge empire in the extreme northwest (southeast of Afghanistan), are written in Greek and Aramaic (Falk 2006). This contact with western, that is, ancient, classical (Greek, Roman) culture (Karttunen 1989, 1997; for a new but overall rather implausible reconstruction of a very early encounter, see Beckwith 2014) found its climax and expression in the art (Bussaglio 1996) and literature (Salomon 1999; Strauch and Falk 2014) of northwest Buddhist culture called Gandhāran (from the ancient name of the region, Gandhāra, today Pakistan and the southeastern part of Afghanistan).

Despite attempts to trace the religion in the Mediterranean world and the proved presence of Indian traders, some of whom may have been Buddhist, for example, in Egypt (Salomon 1991) and the Arabic peninsula (on the island of Socotra/Suquṭrā on the Yemenite coast; Strauch and Bukharin 2004; Strauch 2012) between the second and third century CE, Buddhism did not spread westwards beyond the Iranian cultural sphere. Some information about Buddhism was available in the west in early Late Antiquity as the references of Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) to the sanctity of the Buddha among the Indians, and Jerome (347–419) to the Buddha's birth from a virgin show (de Jong 1987: 5–6). But institutionally the religion was not able to gain a foothold in Iran proper or in the regions west of it. There

are multiple possible reasons for this situation, both political and socio-economic. Between the Indian and the late antique cultural spheres was the Sasanian empire. It was hostile to the Roman empire and, as already pointed out, rather restrictive in terms of religious policy. On the other hand, the emergence of Christian monasticism in Egypt, the Levant, and adjacent areas was not working in favor of another community competing for resources and being alien to these regions.

Buddhism clearly was more successful along the Silk Road, where it spread from the Indian northwest (Gandhāra) via Bactria (Afghanistan) along the southern and northern routes to China under the rule of the Kushans, who originally had come from Central Asia and conquered the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. Central Asian Buddhists like the Parthian An Shigao (fl. 148–170), the Indo-Scythian Lokakṣema (fl. 167–186), the Kutchean Kumārajīva (350–409), and others, while demonstrating the importance of their places of origin as Buddhist strongholds, were essential for the further spread of the *dharma* into China (Puri 1987; Kudara 2002). While the Gandhāran Buddhist art of this period and this region, and indirectly the art of Central Asia and even China (Martin Rhie 2007) reflect antique influence and some few texts were written in the Bactrian language and in Greek script, western (late antique) influence on Buddhism along the Silk Road was limited despite some scholarly attempts to trace Iranian influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the first centuries of the first millennium Buddhism spread through the medium of Indian languages (Sanskrit, Middle Indo-Aryan Gāndhārī) and scripts (Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī), and evidence of translation and text production in Central Asian languages like Khotanese, Sogdian, Tocharian, and Uyghur belong to a later period.

After Buddhism had arrived in China the cultural supremacy of this new cultural environment quickly impacted on the new religion and vice versa (Zürcher 2007). Buddhist texts could not be transmitted, as they were in Central Asia, by means of Indian languages, but had to be translated into Chinese from the very beginning. The earliest translations of Buddhist texts from the third century reflect how the translators coined new terminology (Deeg 2008) and concepts of the Indian religion that centuries later became the model for rendering Manichaean and Christian texts in Chinese.

Islam

In scholarship the Muslim Arab conquest has been, in the context of Late Antiquity, mainly discussed with a view of its confrontation with the Byzantine empire and the territorial achievements under the Umayyad caliphate

(661–750) in the Mediterranean regions (North Africa, Spain) in the first decades after Muhammad's death in 632. The spread of Islam is, however, bound as much to the military success east of the Arabian Peninsula as to the conquest of Mediterranean territory. Historically the transfer of the Muslim political center further east is linked to the defeat of the Sasanid dynasty in 651 and to the establishment of the caliphate of the Abbasids (750–1258) with their capital at Ctesiphon on ancient Iranian territory. Less attention has been paid to the early spread of the religion in the northeastern direction into the partly Iranian-speaking regions of the Central Asian trade centers and polities (Gibb 1923; Litvinsky *et al.* 1996b; Golden 2011: 58–62). The turning point was reached with the Abbasid victory over the Chinese Tang forces in the battle of Talas in the year 751 (border region of modern Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), which resulted in them gaining control of the Transoxanian region with the cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent, so important for the control of the Silk Road trade, and the retreat of the Chinese forces from most of Central Asia. The latter was also caused by the revolt of the Iranian Tang general An Lushan (755–763) and thereby threatened the very rule of the Tang dynasty in China.

This somewhat simplistic "conquer-and-convert" narrative has been revised recently in favor of a more subtle understanding of a slower infiltration of Arab Muslim culture with successes and setbacks and a gradual rather than a quick and forced conversion to Islam. The appearance of syncretic religious groups in northern Iran in the early Abbasid period throws considerable light on the persistence of non- and partly pre-Muslim religious traditions (Crone 2012). Continuity with an earlier heritage is, for example, also reflected by the dynastic clan of the Barmakids, powerful advisers of the Abbasid caliphs whose ancestors were head priests (Skt. *pramukha* > Barmak) of the Buddhist center Nawbahār (Skt. Navavihāra, "New Monastery"; Bailey 1943: 2) in Balkh, Bactria (von Bladel 2011).

It took, however, still several more centuries and quite some political changes until more or less the whole of Central Asia was converted to Islam. The Turkic tribes in the Taklamakan basin and beyond still upheld their Manichaean and Buddhist faith and practices until the late medieval period when they were then gradually converted to Islam.

Conclusion

Late Antiquity has, in the past, been considered largely a Mediterranean phenomenon and the focus has been mainly on the early period of Christianization distinguished by its heritage of Greco-Roman culture.

Central and East Asia have long played hardly any role in this story but seem to have been treated as part of an altogether different set of narratives. To be sure, the transfer of material goods from the east to the west along the Silk Road has long captivated the romantic imagination of western scholars, and certainly of western popular culture. By contrast, the spread of Mediterranean cultural elements and religions to the east and possible influences of eastern religions in the west have been studied far less. However, an integral understanding of a religion like Manichaeism, full at sway in the late Roman empire, can only be achieved by looking at its eastern sources instead of reconstructing it from Christian apologetic critics only.

Long-term historical developments like the Islamization of Central Asia and the establishment of the Turkic Ottoman empire had an impact on much later periods in European history, which can only be understood in the light of events centuries earlier. The former exchange and finally severed link with the east left its traces in the early Christian memory not only in the early form of the story of the Three Magi in the Nativity narrative of Matthew's Gospel (Brown 1993: 165–201; Barthel and van Kooten 2015), it is also reflected in the later medieval western consciousness of and fascination with the narrative of Prester John, the mysterious Christian ruler in Central Asia on whom Christendom put its strategic hopes during the crusades (Baum 1999). Another trace is extant in the widely transmitted story of Barlaam and Jasaphat (Lopez and McCracken 2014; Cordoni and Meyer 2015) in which a rather "unconscious knowledge" of the life story of the Buddha (Jasaphat < *bodhisattva*, cp. Būδāsf in the Arabic version: Gimaret 1971) has survived in the disguise of Christian hagiography and moral appropriation. The west did not have, however, writers such as the Muslim historian Al-Bīrūnī (973–1048) or Rašīd ad-Dīn (1247–1318; on his biography of the Buddha, see Jahn 1965: 31–77), who were eager to collect information about different regions and religions in Asia. Their vindication in the west only came when the historicist approach of the nineteenth century rediscovered—or indeed for the first time discovered, and appreciated—the real complexities of the economic, political, cultural, and religious historical entanglements of the regions between Aleppo and Chang'an.

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PART II

TRADITIONS AND IDENTITIES

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Beginnings of Jewish Late Antiquity: The Fate of the Book of Esther

Hector M. Patmore

Preliminary Remarks

In a volume dedicated to religion in Late Antiquity it seems apt to begin with some reflections on what the term "Late Antiquity" might mean in the context of Judaism. For scholars of classical culture—or even early Christianity—the disintegration of the Roman empire between the third and fifth centuries is an obvious turning point that marks the beginning of a distinctly different historical phase, now generally termed "Late Antiquity." But such a periodization is much less appropriate in the field of Jewish studies. From a Jewish point of view the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, and to a lesser extent the brutal quelling of the Diaspora Revolt and the so-called Bar Kochba rebellion, are far more significant events. These events initiated a process of radical transformation within Judaism. Power structures, partisan divisions, and societal norms were all swept away; theologies needed to be reconfigured and models of authority renegotiated; above all a new collective identity needed to be constructed if Judaism were to survive. This period of cultural upheaval was the crucible in which what most of us now recognize as Judaism was forged. A decisive turning point had been reached. Hence when we speak of "Late Antiquity" in the context of Jewish

studies it is commonly understood as the period beginning with the destruction of the Temple (70 CE), as is indicated by Brill's recently launched monograph series, *Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*, subtitled *The History of Jews from the Period of the Second Temple to the Rise of Islam*.

The question that this chapter seeks to address is this: what changed in this period, which I term "Jewish Late Antiquity," which marks it as distinctly different from the preceding period (the period of the Second Temple)? It is not possible to provide an exhaustive answer in such a short essay as this. Instead, I draw attention to several aspects of Jewish life that underwent dramatic change: where Jews lived, the languages they used, their cultural orientation, and their social makeup. In examining these changes, I focus on the fate of one biblical book, the Book of Esther. The Book of Esther serves as a heuristic tool, highlighting some of the consequences of these changes for the shape and nature of Judaism's central source of authority, its scriptures.

Introduction to the Sources

The Book of Esther narrates an episode during the reign of the King of Persia, Xerxes I (*r.* 486/85–465/64 BCE), whom the Hebrew text refers to as Ahasuerus. The heroes of the story are Mordechai and his orphaned cousin, the beautiful Esther, whom he adopts as his daughter. Mordechai secures a place for Esther in the king's harem, the king is smitten at first sight, and Esther is appointed as his queen to replace the disobedient queen Vashti. The king then promotes to a position of governance a certain Haman, who immediately takes a dislike to Mordechai and sets about planning the extermination of all the Jews. Esther intercedes on behalf of the Jews, the king takes her side, Haman and his supporters are massacred, and the Jews are delivered. The Jews celebrate their deliverance with a festival, Purim.

The original Hebrew text of the Book of Esther (which is not necessarily identical to the Masoretic Text as we now have it) was probably composed sometime in the late Persian or early Hellenistic period, though there is no firm consensus concerning the precise date of its composition nor its final redaction. The Hebrew text was subsequently translated into Greek. Unusually for the books of the Hebrew canon, two Greek versions of the Book of Esther have survived. They are known as the Septuagint (or sometimes "Old Greek") and the Alpha Text (or, in earlier scholarship, "Lucianic"). Although there are some differences between the two versions, there is much parallel material.

How these two versions relate to each other and to the Hebrew text is a topic that continues to vex scholars. The simplest explanation is that the Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew text to which additions have been

added, while the Alpha Text is simply a reworking of the Septuagint (see e.g. De Troyer 2003: 9–28, 59–89 and her earlier publications). Others—most recently Fox (1991) and Carr (2011: 170–178)—have concluded that the Alpha Text was translated from a version of the Hebrew text earlier than the version that we now find in the Hebrew canon (i.e. a pre-Masoretic Text *Vorlage*). This translation was subsequently harmonized with the Septuagint, which had been translated from a more evolved version of the Hebrew text closer to the Masoretic Text. Several other theories have been advanced (for an overview, see Cavalier 2012: 28–37).

Regardless of which explanation one adopts, the major difference between the Hebrew text and the two Greek versions is that both of the Greek texts contain six additional chapters (designated by the letters A to F)—adding about half again to the length of the text. These are almost identical in both of the Greek versions, suggesting that they were not part of the original Greek text of either, but have been added after the completion of the original translation(s).

Additional chapter F in the Septuagint contains what has been taken by some to be a colophon (see Cavalier 2012: 29), giving us some indication of the text's provenance. It reads as follows:

> In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and a Levite, and Ptolemy his son brought to Egypt the preceding letter about Purim, which they said is extant (ἔφασαν εἶναι) and had been translated by Lysimachus son of Ptolemy, one of the residents of Jerusalem. (LXX Addition F, 11)

Assuming that this "colophon" is itself not a later Christian addition to the text (cf. Swete 1902: 77), then it gives us a *terminus a quo* for this version of Greek Esther (NB the "colophon" is absent from the Alpha Text). Since there were three Ptolemies associated with a Cleopatra in the fourth year of their reign, three dates are possible: 114/13 BCE (Ptolemy IX Soter II Lathyros and his mother and co-regent Cleopatra III); 77/76 BCE (Ptolemy XII Auletos and Cleopatra V); or 49/48 BCE (Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra VII). The middle of these three (i.e. 77/76 BCE), however, seems most likely (Bickerman 1944: 346–347).

The Book of Esther and the Egyptian Diaspora

The Book of Esther is a fable about Jews in the diaspora, so it is of little surprise that it should have piqued the interest of Jews in another diaspora context, Egypt (on which, see Barclay 1996). The Jewish community in

Egypt goes back at least to the time of the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians, but after the district of Syria and Phoenicia, which included the city of Jerusalem and its territory, came under Ptolemaic rule (301 BCE) the community was dramatically enlarged by a massive influx of Jewish immigrants, who arrived as economic migrants, slaves, or soldiers in the armies of the Ptolemies.

On the whole, the period of Ptolemaic rule (301–198 BCE) was a time of flourishing for the Jewish community in Egypt and the Jews in Alexandria were strongly attracted to Greek culture, adopting what is commonly referred to as "Hellenism" (see for this also Chapter 2 in the present volume). In the upper echelons of society, for example, an acquaintance with Greek learning became a mark of status and distinction (see e.g. *Letter of Aristeas* 121–122; cf. Shutt 1985). Greek became the common language of Egyptian Jews, hence the translation of the Book of Esther. Yet the community's enduring collective identity was also a source of friction with the native Egyptians and Greek citizens.

It would be anachronistic to imagine that this collective identity was purely—or even primarily—religious in character. The precise meaning of the term by which this community is identified in the Greek sources, Ἰουδαῖοι (*Ioudaioi*), remains opaque. The term has geographical, tribal, genealogical, cultural, and religious connotations (the same may be said of the *jəhūdī* יְהוּדִי, on which see Bar-Asher 2014: 75–79). Deciding which of these are at play in any given context, which predominates (should we translate "Jews" or "Judaeans"?), and what this may suggest about the collective identity of the group is a matter of an ongoing scholarly debate that is a long way from reaching consensus (for a survey, see Miller 2014: 216–233; cf. Cohen 1999). Nonetheless a common set of religious beliefs and practices played a part in maintaining the distinct group identity against the risk of assimilation. The translation of the Book of Esther—and indeed the rest of the Jewish Bible—into Greek was part of a process of constructing a new kind of Jewish identity in this Hellenistic world: it is an attempt to remain true to the community's Hebrew roots on the one hand, while becoming immersed in Hellenistic culture on the other (see Rajak 2009).

That the Jews were part of Alexandrian Greek society, and yet also somehow separate from it, fostered suspicion among non-Jews that the loyalty of Jews may be divided. The Jews were certainly conscious of the precarious position in which their distinctiveness put them. This is perhaps best illustrated by an episode recorded by the Roman-Jewish historian, Josephus Flavius (ca. 37–after 100 CE). In 145 BCE a Jewish army, supported by the Jewish population of Alexandria, became embroiled in a dynastic war between Euergetes II (nicknamed Physcon) and Cleopatra II, who both claimed the

right to the throne. Physcon was victorious but the Jews had backed Cleopatra. According to Josephus (in a section that is preserved only in Latin) Physcon sought to avenge the Jews' treachery (as he saw it):

> [Physcon] had gathered and arrested all the Judaeans (or "Jews"? Latin: *Iudaeos*) in the city, with their children and wives, and placed them, naked and bound, in front of elephants, to be crushed to death by them, and for this purpose had also got the animals drunk. Things turned out quite contrary to what he had planned. For the elephants left untouched the Judaeans placed in front of them, but charged at Physcon's friends, killing many of them… Hence, the Judaeans who are settled in Alexandria are known to celebrate this day as a festival, rightly, since they were visibly granted deliverance by God. (*Against Apion* 2.53–54; tr. Barclay, adapted by author)

A variant of this same legend appears in 3 Maccabees, where it is attributed (wrongly) to the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–203 BCE). 3 Maccabees describes how Philopator attempted to enter the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple whereupon God intervened, paralyzing the king to prevent the violation. Humiliated, Philopator determined to exact retribution on the Jews, and on his return to Egypt he imposed various punitive measures, including attempting to impose the pagan cult of Dionysus on them. Some abandoned Judaism, lured by the promise of "equal citizenship with the Alexandrians" but, the narrator tells us, "the majority acted firmly with a courageous spirit and did not abandon their religion" (2.30–32). Those who refused to forsake Judaism were condemned to be trampled to death by intoxicated elephants, a fate from which they are miraculously delivered by the intervention of two angels. The king, overcome with remorse for his malevolence, ordered that the Jews be given whatever they needed for a seven-day festival to celebrate this deliverance.

It is difficult to know whether there is any truth behind either of these accounts (for a critical discussion of the latter, see Johnson 2004). It is certainly plausible to suggest that the annual celebration of a miraculous escape from death goes back to some genuine threat that was unexpectedly averted (Barclay 1996: 32, 38). Historical or not, this legend reflects a climate of trepidation—foreboding even—about the place of Jews under non-Jewish rulers in diaspora contexts.

Under these circumstances it is not hard to see why the Book of Esther had immediate appeal to Greek speaking diaspora Jews. The Book of Esther also describes an attempt at mass extermination of the Jews, their ultimate deliverance, and the institution of a festival to record the event. In the Hebrew version of the Book of Esther this deliverance is effected by some savvy maneuvering by Esther and Mordechai, by which they manage to

exploit the king's evident weakness for attractive young women and (at the critical moment) his drunkenness (Esther 7). The Greek versions put a rather different spin on matters. The Additions, which appear only in the Greek versions and not in the Hebrew, attribute the deliverance to God, a figure who is conspicuous by his absence in the Hebrew text. Indeed, according to the Greek versions, even the king (who is identified in the Greek text as Artaxerxes) acknowledges that he is but a bit-part player on God's stage:

> But we find that the Judaeans (or "Jews"? Greek: Ἰουδαίους), who were consigned to annihilation by this thrice-accursed man, are not criminals but are governed by most righteous laws, and are children of the most high, most great, living God, who has directed the kingdom for us and for our ancestors in the most excellent order. You will therefore do well not to carry out the letters sent by Haman [ordering the annihilation] … since the God who prevails over all things has recompensed him quickly with the deserved judgement. (LXX Addition E, 16.15–18 NETS cf. Esther 7:9)

A similar affirmation appears in Addition F, which records Mordechai's closing speech:

> The Lord has saved his people, and the Lord has rescued us from all these evils, and God has done signs and great wonders that have not happened among the nations. (LXX Addition F, 4.6 NETS)

3 Maccabees (see above) and the Greek versions of Esther reflect the same anxiety and the same hope. The fear of collective persecution and the reassurance of deliverance by divine intervention are also strongly evident in other near-contemporaneous Jewish literature. The Book of Judith, for example, tells how Judith, a pious Israelite, managed to cut off the head of Holofernes, the chief general of Nebuchadnezzar's army, thus sparing the Israelites. The text, however, strains to stress that it was God *acting through Judith* that achieved the deliverance: "Blessed be the Lord God…" declared Uzziah, one of the elders of her town, "who has guided you to cut off the head of the leader of our enemies" (Judith 13:18 NRSV); Judith herself is said to have sung: "the Lord Almighty has foiled [the Assyrians, Israel's enemy in the story] by the hand of a woman" (Judith 16:5 NRSV). All of this aims to offer an assurance of *God's* protection for his people (cf. Judith 16:25).

What this comparison of 3 Maccabees, LXX Esther, and the Book of Judith highlights is that during the first century BCE a sense of precariousness pervaded not only the Jewish diaspora, but also the communities of the land of Israel. 3 Maccabees may have been composed in Egypt, probably in

Alexandria, sometime in the first century BCE (the date of its composition is highly contested); Judith was composed in the land of Israel, probably shortly after the Greek version of Esther had been produced (i.e. after 77/76 BCE). Indeed the piety that characterizes Judith (e.g. abstaining from defiled food, Judith 12:2; prayer before her dangerous endeavor, Judith 9:2–14; 13:4–7), may well indicate its direct literary dependence on LXX Esther (cf. LXX Esther 14:3–19; see Corley 2015: 224–225). As we noted earlier, the Book of Esther—the translation of which was brought to Egypt from Jerusalem—bridges these geographical contexts and as such reflects a sense of belonging to a single community that existed among Jews in the land of Israel and those in the diaspora. Events in Judah affected Jews in the diaspora and vice versa (see e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.354–355).

This point is well illustrated in the Second Book of Maccabees, which indicates that segments of the Egyptian diaspora had adopted the feast of Hanukkah (2 Maccabees 1:1–2:18). Hanukkah recalls the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple following its recapture from the Seleucid (i.e. Greek) ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BCE), who had banned the practice of Judaism and set up pagan sacrifice there. Evidently some members of the Egyptian diaspora supported the Hasmoneans—the dynasty who had driven out the Seleucids and won independence for the Jews—and bought in to their ideology, strengthening this growing sense of ethnic cohesion and solidarity that was developing among Jewish inhabitants of Egypt (Barclay 1996: 35).

The anxiety underlying Greek Esther cannot therefore simply be regarded as an anxiety about Jews in the context of the Egyptian diaspora. Rather, it reflects an anxiety about the insecure position of the Jews as a whole. In the first half of the second century BCE the persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes had given Jews a visceral sense of the precariousness of their position in their own land—a disquiet to which the Book of Daniel gives vivid expression. There had been a near-miraculous deliverance at the hand of the Maccabees but in the first decades of the first century BCE creeping Roman power gave the Jews in both the land of Israel and in the diaspora every justification for renewed anxiety.

By the start of the first century BCE the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt had begun to crumble. Neighboring Cyrene was already under Roman control and Ptolemy XII Auletes (80–51 BCE)—during whose reign Esther was translated into Greek—was merely a Roman puppet. When Dositheus brought the newly translated text of Esther to Egypt, he would have been able to see the stormcloud of Roman rule looming menacingly on the horizon as clearly from Jerusalem as from Alexandria and it would not be long before the Romans had taken advantage of instability in the region: dynastic squabbles

among the Hasmoneans gave the Roman general Pompey a chance to instigate Roman rule in Judah (63 BCE) and Egypt was annexed by Octavius in 30 BCE. The clash between Roman interests and Jewish national aspirations would lead, eventually, to the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (70 CE).

The Transition into Jewish Late Antiquity

Returning to the question I set myself earlier on, what changed after the destruction of the Temple that justifies the claim that this event heralded the beginning of Jewish Late Antiquity?

First, the distribution and configuration of Jewish society shifted significantly. As the bizarre episode with the intoxicated elephants mentioned above already suggests, claims of Jewish disloyalty were nothing new; Jews in the Egyptian diaspora became caught up in anti-Roman sentiment, in part on account of the role the Jews had played in supporting Roman troops at the end of Ptolemaic reign. Hostility was strongest in Alexandria. Riots in Alexandria in 38 CE resulted in a pogrom and violent clashes broke out again in 66 CE, imitating riots in Judaea at the outbreak of the Jewish War.

There was no single cause of the outbreak of the Jewish War (66–73 CE) in Judaea itself: a lingering desire for autonomy, eschatological fervor, the messianic pretensions of some leading figures, the belief that the Jews were God's chosen people, social and economic factors as well as Roman misrule all blended together to form a volatile cocktail. Provocation by the Roman procurator Florus lit the tinderbox, deliberately if Josephus is to be believed (*Jewish War* 2.14). The consequences were death, enslavement, dislocation on a massive scale, and the destruction of the focal point of Jewish worship, the Jerusalem Temple (Goodman 2007).

With their compatriots engaged in insurrection in Judaea, the diaspora communities in Egypt could no longer rely on the protection of the Romans; the situation deteriorated markedly after the Jewish War. A massive influx of insurgents and refugees, the imposition of the Jewish tax (*fiscus Judaicus*)—money that had formally been sent to the Jerusalem Temple—and the likely messianic pretensions of some of the community's own leaders, helped bring tensions to a head in a Jewish uprising (the "Diaspora Revolt") of 115–117 CE (Kerkeslager *et al.* 2006: 53–68). A number of Greek papyri provide snapshots of the revolt and its aftermath (Tcherikover and Fuks 1960: 87–99, 225–260), for which we have only scant narrative sources, helping to make clear how disastrous were the consequences of the revolt for the Egyptian diaspora. As Barclay has put it, "the most glorious center of Jewish life in the

Diaspora, which had produced the finest literary and intellectual products of Hellenized Judaism, and which had once wielded such military, economic and political influence, was all but snuffed out in a frenzy of intercommunal violence" (Barclay 1996: 81).

It was not long before a similar fate was to befall what was left of the Jewish community in the territory of Judaea. Hadrian's visit to Judaea in 130 CE and his founding of a Roman colony (*Aelia Capitolina*) on the ruins of Jerusalem snuffed out any lingering hopes for the restoration of the Temple. This was the final straw for an already discontented Jewish population and another violent Jewish uprising broke out under the leadership of Shimon ben Kosibah, known to those who held him to be the messiah by the sobriquet Bar Kochba, "Son of the Star" (132–135 CE). One consequence of the revolt was that Judaea lost much of its Jewish population; the core of Jewish settlement in the land became concentrated in Galilee and the cities along the coast.

The havoc wreaked in Judaea by the Jewish War and the subsequent revolt set in train arguably the most important development of Jewish Late Antiquity: the emergence and growth of the rabbinic movement. According to later rabbinic legend, from the burned ruins of the Jerusalem Temple a new Judaism emerged in which prayer, study, and good deeds served as an effective substitute for the Temple cult. The Babylonian Talmud (b. Git 56a–b; cf. Epstein 1935–1948) tells the tale of Yohanan ben Zakkai, who escaped from a besieged Jerusalem during the final phases of the Jewish War, bumps into Vespasian, and correctly foretells that he will become Roman emperor. Vespasian is so impressed that he grants to Yohanan ben Zakkai Yavneh (a.k.a. Jamnia), a small town on the coast, where he is able to form an academy of rabbinic sages.

Certainly by the fourth century CE rabbinic sages were advocating a form of Judaism along these lines, but the notion that it was devised in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the Temple is "deeply implausible" (Goodman 2007: 448). There is no hint in Josephus, writing at the end of the first century, that a new and different Judaism had arisen; equally a wider range of evidence (textual, archeological) indicates that the "Rabbis were numerically small and a politically and religiously insignificant group throughout much if not all of the formative period" (Lapin 2010: 73). The production of the Mishnah around 200 CE points to the emergence of a "movement," with a coherent self-identity as the direct inheritors of a tradition stretching back to Moses at Sinai (m. Avot 1.1–1.12; 2.8; cf. Neusner 1988). But it was only from the fourth century that the rabbinic movement began to exert significant influence over the wider Jewish population. The account of Yohanan ben Zakkai's derring-do served as this later movement's founding myth.

However, the geographical setting of the rabbinic movement reflects the new geographical realities of the wider Jewish population. After Yavneh, the center of rabbinic activity shifted to Usha in the north, then nearby Beth Shearim, Sepphoris, and finally Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. The relocation of Jewish populations and the gradual shift in the central focus of Jewish theology away from the Temple went hand in hand.

In the same period Jewish communities further east, in Mesopotamia, were in the ascendancy. That the outbreak of the Diaspora Revolt (see above) coincided with Trajan's campaign against Parthia was probably not coincidental, since significant Jewish communities were settled in Parthian territory (Goodman 2007: 474–480). Unfortunately the available data on the origins and development of these communities are relatively limited prior to the Sasanian period (224–651 CE), when they flourished. During that period the community maintained strong links to the established rabbinic centers in Palestine: there seems to have been a continuous exchange of scholars and many of the leading Babylonian rabbis are said to have trained in the land of Israel. At some point rabbinic "academies" were established at Sura and Nehardea (later Pumbedita). When this occurred is disputed, but what is clear is that these came to increasing prominence to the extent that Babylonian influence would eventually eclipse that of Palestinian Jewry in the early medieval era.

To paint with a rather broad brush then, it was the violent events that characterized the end of the first- and beginning of the second century CE that thrust upon Jews a distinctly new way of being, signaling the start of Jewish Late Antiquity. The Jewish War and the Bar Kochba revolt forced the focus of Jewish life out of Judaea and the Diaspora Revolt effectively put paid to the Jewish communities in Egypt. The cultural hub of Judaism therefore shifted north (to Galilee) and east (to Babylonia) and began to coalesce into a new form that would become increasingly prominent: rabbinic Judaism. When Judaism did eventually reestablish itself in Egypt and Cyrenaica (where there was no appreciable presence until the end of the third century) it was Judaism in its nascent rabbinic form.

The Book of Esther in Jewish Late Antiquity

What was the fate of the Book of Esther in all this social turmoil and cultural transformation? Although their influence was initially limited, it is indisputable that the rabbinic movement eventually came to be the dominant force in Judaism. The development of the canon of the Jewish Bible is undoubtedly one of the most significant developments in the shaping of Judaism in

Jewish Late Antiquity, so the rabbis' recognition that the Book of Esther belonged to the rabbinic Bible is of particular significance for the book's fate in the subsequent history of Judaism.

The traditional view of the canonization process holds that the question of which books were "in" and which books were "out" was settled at a rabbinic synod convened at Yavneh around 90 CE. This theory is no longer thought to be tenable (Lewis 2002). Disputes continued over certain books (including Esther) well beyond this. The rabbis at Yavneh did not *fix* the canon; at most they discussed marginal books such as the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes (e.g. m. Yad. 3.5; b. Meg 7a). Debate surrounding the Book of Esther centered on whether or not it "defiled the hands," an effect that only books composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit can have. In short, we do not know when or how exactly the canon was "fixed." The canon probably emerged organically, so that by the time the rabbis came to discuss the biblical books they were already dealing with a *de facto* canon established by convention, so the scope for "fixing" a canon was limited (see Alexander 2007; Satlow 2014: 257–275). Indeed, that the rabbis were dealing with existing notions of authority can be inferred from Josephus, who speaks of a closed corpus of twenty-two books, adding:

> Although such a long time has now passed, no-one has dared to add, to take away, or to alter anything; and it is innate in every Judaean (or "Jew"?), right from birth, to regard them as decrees of God, to remain faithful to them and, if necessary, gladly to die on their behalf. (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.37–43, citation 1.42; tr. Barclay)

Unfortunately, because of the vagueness of Josephus' description, we cannot be certain to which twenty-two books precisely he was referring (Mason 2002).

Aside from the information given in rabbinic sources, there are a few indirect witnesses to the presence of Esther in the Jewish canon. Josephus' detailed paraphrase of Esther (for which he used the Greek version, including at least four of the "Additions"), may imply that he took it to be canonical, but we cannot be certain. It is clear from Origen's list, transmitted by Eusebius (*HE* VI 25, 1–2), that Esther formed part of the Hebrew Bible in third-century Palestine (at least in some circles).

Why then was Esther included in the canon? The very nature of the Hebrew version of the Book of Esther also lends support to the argument that the rabbis were putting their seal on the *status quo*—or to put it more strongly, claiming authority over the *status quo*. It is evident from the discussions in rabbinic literature that the Hebrew version of the Book of Esther, with which the rabbis were dealing, presented them with some thorny

problems: God is conspicuously absent and there is a striking lack of religious observance. So what accounts for its inclusion in the rabbinic canon? In short, the sheer popularity of the book and its connection to Purim probably constituted a *force majeure* (cf. Moore 1977).

The festival of Purim, for which the Book of Esther provides an etiology (see Esther 9:20–28), had evidently become widespread by the end of the Second Temple period. That 2 Maccabees 15:36 (a work of uncertain date, probably later second or first century BCE) can refer to it simply as "Mordechai's Day," without the need for further elaboration, combined with the designation of the Book of Esther as a "letter about Purim" in the "colophon" of the Septuagint (see above), indicates that the festival was being widely celebrated in the diaspora (at least in littoral north Africa) by the first century BCE.

As I argued above, the Greek form of the Book of Esther, which advocates maintaining Jewish distinctiveness and contains the latent promise that the God of Israel will ultimately deliver, had obvious appeal in the Greek speaking diaspora. Koller (2014: 155–160) has plausibly suggested that the popularity of Purim in *Palestine* may be connected to the Herodian age. The themes of acculturation, compromise, and cooperation, which are so evident in the Hebrew version, would have been offensive to anyone who subscribed to Hasmonean ideology and is suppressed in the Greek version. But these are exactly the themes the Herodian dynasty and its supporters would want to emphasize. After all, Herod was a client king, dependent on the favor of Rome for his survival and open to cultural and political integration. Whatever accounts for its popularity, by the time we enter Jewish Late Antiquity the rabbis could do nothing but accept the Book of Esther as "canonical."

The rabbis ultimately accepted that the Book of Esther was here to stay among the Holy Books of the Jews and set about not only bringing the practice of Purim under their control—Mishnah tractate Megillah is largely dedicated to how the Scroll of Esther was correctly to be read during the festival—but also "theologizing" its content (as the Greek versions had done in their own way), offering a sort of *post factum* reasoning for its inclusion in the Hebrew Bible. This phenomenon has been discussed in detail by Koller (2014: 161–225). Here I want to pick out some key developments and illustrate these with reference to the Targums, another major innovation of Jewish Late Antiquity.

The Targums are Jewish Aramaic interpretative translations of the biblical text, the purpose of which is to translate the text in such a way that the meaning of the text (as understood by the translator) becomes clear. This is achieved by figurative translations, glosses, larger additions, and a range of other techniques (for a description of the genre of Targum, see Houtman

and Sysling 2009: 16–27). The Targums were recited orally as part of the synagogue liturgy, where they accompanied (rather than replaced) the reading of the scriptures in Hebrew. Their audience in Galilee—the main center of Jewish cultural life in the early part of Jewish Late Antiquity—were multilingual, with varying degrees of ability in Aramaic and Hebrew, as well as smatterings of Greek. The purpose of accompanying the reading of the scriptures in Hebrew with the Targum was not, therefore, *primarily* to provide a translation for Aramaic speakers who no longer understood the Hebrew. Rather the Targum acted as a "middleman" between scripture and oral teaching—or to put it another way, between synagogue and school (Fraade 1992). As such the Targums functioned as "convenient repositories of traditional exegesis" (Alexander 2004: 241). It therefore comes as little surprise that we find in the Targums traditions about Esther that are also present in the main rabbinic corpus.

The rabbis needed to satisfy themselves that the Book of Esther belonged in Sacred Scripture, which told a grand narrative of the Land, of God, and of the Temple, themes entirely absent from the Hebrew version of the Book of Esther. The rabbis were able to find biblical warrant for the Book of Esther's inclusion among the Holy Scriptures by reading it as a witness to Israel's enduring conflict with the Amalekites (Koller 2014: 170–173). They interpreted the Lord's address to Moses at the conclusion of the battle between Amalek and Israel at Rehidim ("Inscribe this in a document as a reminder… I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!" Exodus 17:14 JPS) as evidence that there would be three future iterations of the conflict between Amalek and Israel, to which Deuteronomy 25, 1 Samuel 15, and the Book of Esther attest (e.g. b. Meg 7a). In linking these texts the rabbis were in fact adopting an existing tradition of interpretation, which they then embedded in the synagogue liturgy: the texts from Deuteronomy and 1 Samuel were to be read on *Shabbat Zachor*, the shabbat immediately preceding Purim, while the text from Exodus was to accompany the reading of Esther on Purim itself (see Perrot 1973: 217–222).

Given the function of the Targums in the early rabbinic period it is of little surprise to find that this tradition lies behind Targum Neofiti's Aramaic rendering of Exodus 17.16:

> **Hebrew Text:** He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of the LORD!' The LORD will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages." (JPS)

> **Targum Neofiti:** He said, "An oath came out from under the throne of the glory of the Lord of all the universe. The first (king) that will arise from the tribe of Benjamin will be Saul the son of Kish. He will wage war with the House of Amalek and he will kill kings as well as governors [1 Samuel 15]; and whoever is left of [the House of Amalek], Mordechai

and Esther will destroy them." So the Lord promised by his Word to wipe out the memory of Amalek from every generation. (TgNeof. Exod. 17.16)

Here Targum Neofiti reflects the rabbinic concern about the Book of Esther's canonical status: as the final example of an enduring conflict between Amalek and Israel, Esther is made to fit into that grand biblical narrative. It is difficult to date this Targumic material with certainty—we have only one copy of Targum Neofiti, preserved in an Italian manuscript from the early sixteenth century—but a near-identical text is found in manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah and in the so-called Fragment Targums, pointing to an early Palestinian tradition (but probably no earlier than the late second century CE; see Flesher and Chilton 2011: 151–166).

The basis of this tradition is the identification of Mordechai as a Benjaminite (Esther 2:5) and Haman, the antagonist of the Jews, as an Agagite (Esther 3:1 etc.). The designation "Agagite" is understood to mean a descendant of Agag, who was king of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:8 etc.). Thus, where the Hebrew text of Esther describes Haman as "Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha," the First Targum of Esther (an essentially Palestinian work, composed probably at the very end of Late Antiquity; Grossfeld 1991: 19–24) elaborates "Haman, the son of Hammedatha, *who was from the family of Agag, son of the wicked Amalek*" (Tg. Est. I 3.1).

This interpretative move also enables the rabbis to identify Haman with Esau, the ancestor of Amalek (Genesis 36:16). By Jewish Late Antiquity a widely attested rabbinic equation between Esau, the archetypal adversary of Israel (Jacob), and Rome had developed (e.g. Berthelot 2016; Hadas-Lebel 1984), allowing the whole story of Esther to be brought up to date: the wicked Roman state (Haman) will eventually be destroyed and the Jews delivered. This tradition appears in Targum Jonathan's rendering of the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1–10), the haftarah for *Shabbat Zachor* (see above p. 269).

Hebrew Text: Men once sated must hire themselves out for bread; Men once hungry hunger no more. While the barren woman bears seven, the mother of many is forlorn.

Targum Jonathan: Upon the sons of Haman she prophesied and said, "Those who were satisfied with bread, proud on account of [their] riches, and [who had] a great deal of money became poor; they turned themselves over to be hired out in exchange for bread—the food of their mouth. [Whereas] Mordechai and Esther, who were poor became rich and forgot their poverty; they have returned to being free. Thus Jerusalem, which is

like a barren woman shall be filled with the people of her exile; and [as for] Rome, which is full of a great many people, her armies shall come to an end! She will be desolate and ruined!" (TgJon 1 Sam. 2.5)

As is common in the Targums, the whole poetic section (1 Samuel 2:1–10) is significantly elaborated. The Targum recounts a sequence of events from Israel's past in which Israel was delivered from its oppressors (Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, etc.) in order to provide hope for the future: wicked Rome will eventually be defeated and the righteous rewarded. The reversal of Esther and Mordechai's fortunes is here more important than how the reversal was brought about.

Conclusions

Let us return to the question with which we began: what changed that marks Jewish Late Antiquity as distinctly different from the period of the Second Temple? Tracing the fate of the Book of Esther through the transition from Second Temple Judaism into Jewish Late Antiquity highlights two major aspects of Judaism that underwent dramatic change: its geography and its identity.

The Jewish War, the Diaspora Revolt, and finally the so-called Bar Kochba revolt pushed the center of Jewish life out of the cultural powerhouse centered around Alexandria and out of its spiritual heartland in Judaea. One mark of the onset of Jewish Late Antiquity, then, was the reorientation of Judaism toward Galilee and Mesopotamia. The curtailing of Hellenistic Jewish culture and the elimination of the Temple as a centripetal force, created the space for a new movement, the rabbinic movement, to emerge and stake its claim to authority (including over the scriptures). In so doing the rabbis were forging a new kind of identity, which gradually established itself as the dominant expression of Jewishness (Cohen 1999; Lapin 2012).

This demographic change also occasioned a linguistic shift. The use of Greek among Jews certainly did not die out (see e.g. Aitken and Paget 2014; de Lange 2016), but with the decimation of the Greek speaking diaspora its significance within Judaism was diminished. Although the rabbis made provision for the continued use of Greek in worship—including permitting the reading of Esther in Greek (בלעז) on Purim if the audience knew no Hebrew (m. Meg 2.1)—there can be no doubt that their ideological preference was (increasingly) for Hebrew, supplemented by Aramaic, their mother tongue (Smelik 2013; Alexander 2014).

The political circumstances of the late Second Temple period had led to the emergence of new kinds of Jewish identity. Jews in the Greek speaking

diaspora were seeking to be part of the wider society while retaining a distinct identity, a process to which the very act of translating Esther into Greek bears vivid witness. But negotiating between these poles was not merely a discussion internal to the Jewish communities themselves: as the bizarre story of the intoxicated elephants in Josephus and 3 Maccabees makes plain, the question of whether or not Jews *belonged* was a question that troubled non-Jewish rulers. The end of the Hasmonean dynasty and the arrival of Roman power in Judaea forced this diaspora conundrum on the Jews there too. The Jews effectively became a diaspora community in their own land.

One response to the sense of precariousness that the diaspora situation created was the reworking of the story of Esther into its Greek versions, which (despite their differences) provide a reassurance of ultimate deliverance by divine intervention. But by Jewish Late Antiquity the vision offered in the Greek versions of the Book of Esther of God working through a benign non-Jewish ruler to ensure the safety of Jewish communities within their realm was no longer tenable. After 70 CE there was no sense in which the Roman rulers could be re-imagined as the new Ahasuerus. Yet the popularity of Purim meant that the rabbis could not avoid explaining the presence of the Book of Esther among the Holy Scriptures and (as the Greek translators before them had done in their own way) they did this in the light of their current circumstances. The rabbinic claim was that the Book of Esther bore witness to the final phase of a long running historical scheme: the current confrontation with Rome was the final iteration of the struggle between Esau and Jacob.

The message that the rabbis found in the text, which they disseminated through the school house and synagogue in the form of the Targums, was that God will bring their enduring conflict to a conclusion in victory and restoration for the Jews. The fortunes of the people will be reversed; the exile will end; the people will be vindicated. The contrast between the interpretation of the Greek versions of Esther and the rabbinic interpretation attested in the liturgy and the Targums can be characterized as offering two distinct framing narratives for Jewish life: the Greek versions share with the Hebrew text a vision of security and self-determination within an alien culture (while disagreeing with the Hebrew as to how this is brought about); the rabbis, on the other hand, situate the story of Esther within a wider narrative of exile and return. The Greek versions of Esther reflect an attempt to find a way of being Jewish *in* the diaspora, whereas the rabbinic interpretation of Esther presents the diaspora situation as antithetical to Jewish identity and look for its ending. The sense of *galut* (exile) articulated by the rabbis remained a defining category of Jewish thought down to the present day, as the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel so clearly articulates.

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JPS   *Jewish Publication Society* (see *The Jewish Study Bible*)
LXX   *Septuaginta* (see Hanhart 1983)
NETS *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (see Pietersma *et al.* 2007)
NRSV *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (see Coogan *et al.* 2010)

For all other abbreviations, see abbreviations listings in any of the Bible editions listed below.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Christianity

Augustine Casiday

Introduction

In the period from the third century to the eighth century Christianity
achieved its classic form, a form that is historically foundational for its subse-
quent developments and that most modern Christians regard as seminal (and
many as normative). It is during this time that Christianity developed from a
tiny group of followers who affirm Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah or Christ
who would redeem Israel, into a religion that spread across the width of
Eurasia, from Frisia to the north to the Sahara and Sri Lanka to the south. As
Christianity spread, it developed institutionally and intellectually not least
through interacting with the far-flung societies it encountered. Because sub-
sequent Christians have frequently invested this period with immense impor-
tance, the study of late ancient Christianity is often contested by those whose
values about Christianity differ. For that reason, it seems prudent to state a
few tenets about Christianity that inform this approach to the subject. These
tenets will guide both the selection of evidence and its evaluation.

   To begin with, a direct statement of three guiding principles: late ancient
Christianity was internally diverse, rather than homogenous; it evolved and
changed, rather than being essentially static; and it was embedded in all
aspects of human experience, rather than being restricted to liturgy and the-
ology. In line with these premises, this evaluation eschews any impulse to
claim that Christianity is essentially distinct from other late ancient religions.
Rather, it accepts that rituals of various sorts as well as beliefs, ranging from

ethics to cosmology, characteristic of late ancient Christianity are in most cases paralleled by its contemporary religions, even sometimes in similar configurations. Thus, research has shown that boundaries between Christianity and Judaism were negotiated and fluid for centuries (Becker and Yoshiko Reed 2007). Even religious respect for Jesus was not restricted to Christianity. For example, the *Historia Augusta* reports how emperor Elagabalus incorporated Christian worship into his personal observances, while his successor Severus Alexander set up a statue of Christ with his *lares* and embraced some Christian teachings and practices (*Heliogabalus* 3.5 and *Alexander Severus* 29.2, 45.6–7, 51.6–8; Magie 1993: 110–112 and 234, 270, 282). Jesus was held in even higher regard in early Islam (Khalidi 2001), while Manichaeans (Franzmann 2003) and various Gnostics (Franzmann 1996) affirmed Jesus Christ as savior.

Above and beyond such similarities with other religions, within Christianity our period was marked by internecine debates and outright fights among Christians, which occurred on such a scale that contemporaries worried about safeguarding the unity of Christianity. So deep were some internal divisions that some modern scholars find it convenient to speak of "Christianities" (e.g. Smith 1990; Noble and Smith 2010). This etic terminology may refocus scholarly perspectives in ways that are conducive to certain lines of analysis, though it also introduces the risk of obscuring emic distinctions that are potentially informative and meaningful (cf. Harris 1976; Goodenough 2003), and for that reason it will not be used here. Moreover, as previously stated, this analysis presumes that late ancient Christianity was not static or homogenous. That presumption extends to two facets of Christianity that, though indisputably important, are not exhaustive of it: theology and worship. Set in a period of dynamic changes, the statement and refinement of normative theological terminology and the proliferation of stable forms of worship provide mechanisms that were used in determining group membership. To put it otherwise, many participants in those controversies manifestly believed that the positions taken in those controversies separated the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats. It is nevertheless possible for us to take stock of those beliefs, without necessarily endorsing them, in much the same way that any other beliefs manifested in the evidence can be taken seriously without being endorsed. The debates over theological and especially Christological definitions provide a representative example: disputants may well have accused one another of not being "real" Christians, but that failure of mutual recognition in and of itself does not determine this evaluation. By declining to endorse one of the numerous standards for orthodoxy or orthopraxy from Late Antiquity, this analysis aims to provide a meaningful, and meaningfully comprehensive, account of Christianity in its complexity.

Acknowledging this complexity does not amount to abandoning any prospect of categorization, however. As Josef Lössl (2010: 14–24) has argued, the primary sources provide an indigenous category that is serviceable for contemporary scholarship: the Church, or indeed "the Great Church." Within the parameters of the Great Church, this chapter will identify significant structures within late ancient Christianity and provide an analysis of them. Following Lössl further (specifically, in his use of the concept of cultural memory for purposes of understanding historical evidence), this analysis attends particularly to a stock of common beliefs that were affirmed, and the practices that memorialize them, even when much else in common had fallen away. One such practice is the recurrence of associations with Rome in one guise or another—associations that outlast Rome's status as an imperial capital, and indeed that outlast any continuing ecclesiastical communion with the actual Church of Rome. These associations, it will be argued, chiefly serve as indicators of orientation toward the public and legitimation through organic continuity.

The Emergence of the Great Church

From early days, Christians considered that they had a sacred charge to propagate the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and also the teachings about Jesus as the Christ or Messiah, and had divine power in support of that mission. All four canonical gospels explicitly relate this charge and it is repeated in the Acts of the Apostles, where it justifies the apostles' enterprises (Matthew 10:5–15, 28:18–20; Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23; Acts 1:4–8). It is also the implicit basis for the epistles that make up the best-attested genre in the canonical collection and that preserve some of the earliest texts in that collection. The letters served to instruct and to exhort new believers and, occasionally, to warn them against bad practices and misrepresentations of Jesus' message. An important feature of early Christianity indicated by these documents is that, from early days, the dissemination of teachings by and about Jesus was contested. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus himself warns his followers against "wolves in sheep's clothing," that is, false prophets (Matthew 7:15–16), and in all the synoptic gospels Jesus warns them against false messiahs coming in his name (Matthew 24:5; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8). These warnings are buttressed by indications from the canonical scriptures that exorcists not connected with Jesus' disciples used his name to cast out demons (cf. Mark 16:17), sometimes to the consternation of the disciples (Mark 9:38–41; Luke 9:49), sometimes to the peril of the exorcists (Acts 19:13–19). Even if interlopers sometimes effectively invoked the power

of Jesus' name, a famously failed attempt at buying power from the disciples earned a rebuke and a curse (Acts 8:9–24): the exercise of divine power in Jesus' name without understanding was clearly problematical from the perspective of the Apostles and their successors (Acts 19:11–20).

The emphasis on teaching and safeguarding the gospel indicates that there were multiple Christian messages even at the time, at least some of which were mutually inconsistent and directly competed with others. Because of this plurality of messages in the earliest days of Christianity, one cannot accept as a chronological generalization the claim that orthodoxy is primary and heresy is derivative. Rejecting that claim as a historical generality does not entail rejecting it entirely. It may well have value as a theological assertion, in that one can believe truth is logically prior to error without being committed to maintaining a claim about the prevalence of a given view in a given place at a given time. By the same token, whether Christian orthodoxy or heresy was chronologically prior in a specific location is, in itself, only theologically significant if one accepts the remarkably crude theory that earlier is better. Perhaps the forms of Christianity first established in specific regions were (by later standards) heretical (thus, Bauer 1971). Even so, the attitudes we have just surveyed from early Christian scripture provide resources more than adequate for evaluating such variations and addressing them as deviations from the truth, not least as it had been handed down and understood in the Great Church.

It is noteworthy that many of the letters that form the basis for the New Testament and a major genre for the apostolic fathers were open letters, typically addressed to the Christians assembled in a named location (though some are addressed to all the Christians, and a few to specific individuals). The prevalence of public communication characterizes the earliest phases of normative Christianity as being significantly open to the public, rather than sectarian. The transmission of those letters, not to mention missionary journeys related in the New Testament, was facilitated by the infrastructure of the Roman empire (Leyerle 2000). Nor is it coincidental that Rome itself appears in the apostolic and sub-apostolic literature as the ultimate destination for major figures like the Apostle Paul, whose missionary journey to Rome and preaching there culminate the canonical history of earliest Christianity (Acts 19:21, 23:11, 27:1–28:31), and Ignatius of Antioch, who dispatched several letters on his journey to Rome. Those epistles describe the importance of the episcopate, the eucharist, and the catholicity of the Church in such positive and seemingly technical terms that ecclesiastical leaders and scholars have debated their authenticity from at least the time of Calvin. (J. B. Lightfoot's case for the authenticity of the seven letters that he edited (1885) is now generally accepted, though even his painstaking arguments

did little to shield him from the allegation that he had allowed his Episcopalian loyalties to compromise his scholarly integrity (Killen 1886: 5–6; 2001: 97).)

Some fifty years after Ignatius had been put to death, Abercius, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, left an epitaph (Kaufmann 1917: 169–178) that describes his travels in language filled with religious symbols. He traveled to Rome "to contemplate majesty, and to see a queen in golden robe and golden sandals"—a presumable reference to the church. He also found "brethren" in Syria and Nisibis, and alludes to partaking in all these places of fish, bread, and wine—a reference that seemingly connects eucharistic assemblies in Rome proper and Roman Asia Minor. And his traveling companion on the journey was "Paul," which seems to indicate the Apostle Paul, or perhaps the Pauline epistles (cf. Markschies 2006: 25–26). Ignatius' letters and Abercius' epitaph are early witnesses to a grounding of mutual recognition in liturgical communion and, through it, ritualized commemorations that linked Christians even across the expanses of the Roman empire.

A related and important element that supported the Great Church in its development is found in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyon. In his case against "knowledge falsely so-called," Irenaeus placed great emphasis on the open proclamation of Christian teaching, reinforced by "the order and the sequence of the Scriptures" (*Against Heresies* 1.1.15, Harvey 1857: I: 67) and the succession of apostolic teachers (*Against Heresies* 1.2–3, Harvey 1857: I: 90–94). These factors guarantee that "all the church has one and the same faith throughout the whole world" (*Against Heresies* 1.4, Harvey 1857: I: 97). The implication of these comments is that the content of Christian knowledge is generally available, anchored to the exposition of sacred writings (which exposition Irenaeus demonstrates in his writings), and provided consistently. Consistency is guaranteed, in principle, through the personal transmission of teaching from accredited witnesses to their successors within a supportive and corrective society of believers.

This consistency is guaranteed in principle, not automatically. In a significant passage in *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus confidently asserts a teaching that satisfies his standards and relies upon an oral tradition derived from the Apostle John. The teaching in question is that Jesus lived for roughly fifty years (*Against Heresies* 2.33.3, Harvey 1857: I: 331). This affirmation is based upon Irenaeus' theological concept of "recapitulation" (see Behr 2013: 136–140). However, Irenaeus himself noted the scriptural data that are relevant to Jesus' age at time of death and that normally result in the estimation that he was thirty-three years old, namely, that Jesus was about thirty when he began his ministry (*Against Heresies* 2.33.3, Harvey 1857: I: 330; cf. Luke 3:23) and that three Passovers are mentioned during his

ministry (*Against Heresies* 2.33.1, Harvey 1857: I: 328–329; cf. John 2:13, 6:4, 11:55). But Irenaeus set aside the conventional estimation in favor of a construal that would accommodate the concept of "recapitulation." Plucky attempts to vindicate Irenaeus' exegetical daring notwithstanding (Behr 2013: 10 n.23; 170 n. 70), the extraordinary suggestion that Jesus' public ministry lasted for twenty years is less a matter of faithful public witness to the gospel than the overextension of a theological tenet anchored by an irrelevant verse (i.e. John 8:57 at *Against Heresies* 2.33.4, Harvey 1857: I: 331–332). This is a practice of interpreting scriptures that, when Irenaeus encountered it in the writings of his adversaries, he characterized as "treacherously adapting them to their own delusion" (*Against Heresies* 1.1.6, Harvey 1857: I: 31). Yet even in the case of this deeply eccentric but putatively apostolic tradition, Irenaeus' instinct is to proclaim the teaching publicly and state its apostolic credentials, submitting it to open scrutiny. In this way his overriding principles keep true knowledge from becoming a sectarian preserve while emphatically situating Christianity within the public domain.

Irenaeus addressed himself to challenges posed by the existence of religious factions, whereas other Christians offered ἀπολογία for Christians' place in society (or reasoned accounts by way of defense). The task of the apologists was rendered more urgent by periodic and local outbreaks of persecution up to 250 CE, when centralized persecution began under Decius and intensified markedly from 303 to 312 CE (the "Great Persecution;" see Chapter 3). In responding to those circumstances, apologists made far-reaching claims about the compatibility of Christianity with traditional Greco-Roman philosophy and literature. The contributions of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria are outstanding examples. Christians also adapted Greco-Roman culture in several artistic media (Bauckham 2010; Jensen 2010; McKinnon 2010; White 2010). These works and writings provided a foundation for the rapid expansion of the Great Church from the early fourth century.

Benefiting from legal acts of religious tolerance as reported in Lactantius' *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 34–35 and 48 (Brandt and Laubmann 1897: 212–214, 228–233), Christians eventually enjoyed not only imperial patronage, but also unprecedented opportunities to extend and consolidate earlier networks—along with confronting challenges about how to reconcile the new status of the Church with collective memories of persecution, which were particularly visible in dealings with the major communities of Donatist Christians in Roman North Africa (Tilley 1997). The removal of impediments in law allowed the idea implicit in Abercius' epitaph to flourish, as the Great Church became an overt social entity.

The quantity of surviving evidence about late ancient Christianity improves almost incredibly from the time these edicts of tolerance took effect. This period is a golden age. Even major reference works can only make preliminary introductions to this material, and it is not possible within the scope of this chapter, or perhaps any chapter, to treat justly these developments (cf. Casiday and Norris 2007). Before the close of Late Antiquity, Christians were already looking back in awe to the theological literature, the administrative and disciplinary codes, and the elaboration of worship that developed at this time. Indications of those attitudes toward earlier authoritative texts can be found in literary genres that begin to appear increasingly from the fifth century, such as catena and encyclopedia. Thus, two early excerpts from Augustine of Hippo's corpus of writings survive, one by Vincent of Lérins (Madoz 1940; Casiday 2014), another by Prosper of Aquitaine (Hwang 2009: 202–207), while Defensor of Ligugé's *Liber Scintillarum* ranges across an even wider selection of literature (MacCoull 2002). Meanwhile, Procopius of Gaza (ter Haar Romeny 2007) and Primasius of Hadrumetum (Haussleiter 1887) laid the foundations for exegesis through linking extracts from earlier commentaries, or *catena* (the Latin for "chain"). Isidore of Seville (Henderson 2007) and John of Damascus (Kontouma 2015) produced massive syntheses that systematized earlier learning. Another major project was the production of surveys of the past, sometimes in the form of ecclesiastical histories (Louth 2004), sometimes in heresiological catalogues (Lyman 2007), providing accounts of the past that normalized their authors' positions and thus gave them historical legitimacy. This outstanding period of activity in effect created a resource for Christianity that has been broadly used from that time to the present day.

Christianity Beyond the Roman Empire

Despite a Christian presence in the city from earliest days (Lampe 2003), the Christianization of the Roman empire was comparatively gradual. Rome lagged behind Armenia (ca. 314; Garsoïan 1997: 81–82), Aksum (ca. 330; Munro-Hay 1991: 80–85) and Iberia (ca. 334/7; Haas 2008) in officially embracing the religion. This is to say nothing of Osroene, where Abgar VIII and several high officials may well have been Christian in the early third century (thus, Palmer 1992) and where by the middle of that century Edessa was probably already "a Christian city" (Segal 1970: 86); further autonomous developments were curtailed by the progressive degrading of Edessan independence. With all due respect to the ponderous labors of Eusebius the ecclesiastical historian, a more meaningful date for the Christianization of

Rome than the incremental conversion and patronage of Constantine is the edict *Cunctos populos* of 380 (*Cod. Theod.* 16.1.2, Mommsen and Mayer 1905: I.i: 833), which provided an enforceable definition in law for Christianity. Even so, despite adopting Christianity after several other late ancient polities, Rome became a touchstone for Christianity. Indeed, it remained a touchstone even though political upheavals that redefined the Roman empire—marked in the west by the transformation of several former provinces into successor states and by the ascent of the Church of Rome as a political power in its own right (Smith 2005)—were well under way in a little over a century. Political expediency had long accustomed Romans to accept different and multiple centers of governance. But it is good to recall that the longest enduring other capital, Constantinople, was established precisely as "New Rome." Contrary to the convention made famous by Gibbon (1896–1900: IV: 50–51) that regards Odoacer's deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 CE as the "extinction of the Western Empire," the rulers in New Rome regarded themselves as the legitimate overlords of the entire Roman empire without regard to distinctions between east and west. From their perspective, there was no extinction of the western empire but rather a loss of western provinces. It is precisely such an attitude that informed Belisarius' campaigns in the west, and strained Byzantine relations with the Carolingians, not least after Charlemagne's coronation in 800. They regarded themselves as Roman (Rapp 2008: 140–141).

This is not to say that Constantinopolitans were unaware of any difference between themselves and Romans. In the late seventh century, when the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome were estranged over theological teachings, a monk who had formerly been head of the Imperial Chancellery (Lackner 1971) and who was named Maximus was arrested in Rome and brought to Constantinople to stand trial for heresy. During the proceedings, the distinctions between Rome and Constantinople or Romans and Byzantines were made frequently (e.g. *Relatio motionis* 7, 9; Allen and Neil 2002: 62–66). Indeed, during the interrogation, the finance minister asked the aged monk, "Why do you love the Romans ['Ρωμαίους], and hate the Greeks [Γραικοὺς]?" To this Maximus responded: "We have a command-ment not to hate anybody. I love the Romans because we share the same faith [ὁμοπίστους], whereas I love the Greeks because we share the same language [ὁμογλώσσους]" (*Relatio motionis* 11, 70–71; cf. Rapp 2008). Perhaps the distinction was forced so sharply because Rome and Constantinople were at odds. In any case, that exchange illuminates some terms that could be used when the appearance of pan-Roman identity could not be sustained, as well as the ability of a subtle and intelligent man to negotiate competing loyalties under duress.

Under normal circumstances, the relationship between the empire and the Church was long portrayed as mutually reinforcing or even directly connected in much discussed texts by Eusebius in the fourth century (Singh 2015) and Justinian in the sixth (Casiday 2015), and also in relatively neglected sources. Cosmas Indicopleustes' passing remarks provide a good example. A merchant sailor who wrote of his travels in the mid-sixth century, Cosmas is best-known for his sharp and idiosyncratic case for the flatness of the earth (*Christian Topography* 4; Winstedt 1909: 128–135). He is also an important witness to the spread of Christianity in Asia, as we shall see. For present purposes, what matters is Cosmas' strident confidence in the superiority of the Roman empire to the Persian empire because the former is Christian (*Christian Topography* 2, 113B; Winstedt 1909: 80): "The empire of the Romans thus participates in the honors of the Kingdom of the Lord Christ, surpassing all [empires] as far as possible in this life and remaining unconquered even til the final consummation: for *it shall not be destroyed*, it says, *for ever* [Daniel 2:44]." Not even Cosmas' great respect for Patrikios (*Christian Topography* 2, 73A (Winstedt 1909: 52)), the Greek name that he uses for the chief primate of the Persian Church, Catholicos Mar Ata (cf. Assemani 1728: xcii), tempers Cosmas' immense regard for the Roman empire as an unequaled repository of Christ's honors.

Even some records from beyond the empire that refer to Christianity indicate or imply that others believed the empire and the religion to have a peculiarly close relationship. The *Chronicle of Edessa* (Guidi 1903: 1–13), for instance, regularly relates Roman political events, but Persian political events only insofar as they relate to Rome. Similarly, George, bishop of the Arabs (ca. 638–724 CE), makes frequent references to succession within the Roman empire alongside succession in the Persian empire for relative chronology in his letter about the life of Aphraates (Ryssel 1891: 44–48); in the letter about Gregory the Illuminator, after a brief mention of the Armenian king Tiridates, George focuses on the Council of Nicaea, quotes Eusebius of Caesarea, and uses Roman succession to build up his chronology (Ryssel 1891: 57). This association sometimes had a negative impact, as attested in relevant sections of the *Chronicle of Seert*, which relates how Shapur II of Persia (309–379 CE) persecuted the Christians in his domain after the death of Constantine (ca. 340 CE). Constantine, whom the *Chronicle* celebrates (14; Scher 1908: 289–292), had claimed an interest in all Christians, including those in Persia (cf. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4.8; Heikel 1902: 120–121), which had reputedly held Shapur's animosity in check (*Chronicle* 23, 27; Scher 1908: 287–289, 296–303). In the ensuing persecution, prominent Christians were martyred for refusing to convert to Zoroastrianism (29; Scher 1908: 309–311), suggesting once more that religious loyalties were seen as an indicator of political allegiance (see further Brock 1982).

Even so, when political and social circumstances favored the organization of the Churches in Persia (Asmussen 1983; Gillman and Klimkeit 1999: 109–152), that organization was directly based upon the canons and creeds that the "western" Christians promulgated at Nicaea. Significant differences in social circumstances moved the Persian fathers to introduce practical adaptations, as attested by Maruthas of Martyropolis, bishop, diplomat, and translator, in whose "On the affairs of the Synod at Nicaea" (Vööbus 1982: 28) we read that

> the holy fathers did well in that they determined and set up canons for all the ranks, (namely) out of the necessity that they should do so because in this land the king, the nobility and his powers and all the ranks which are under his authority are Christians.
>   In the land of the Persians not all the canons are necessary because the kings and all the ranks which are with him do not adhere to our faith or through our faith they would be subject to our canons.

Maruthas was not slavishly deferential to the canons of the Romans, though he did play a major role in organizing the council that oversaw the endorsement of the Nicene Creed in Syriac in 410. The preface to the Syriac collection of canons from the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon thus stresses Maruthas' role as the reconciler of the Churches "for the whole people of God," east (Persian) and west (Roman) (Chabot 1902: 255). Maruthas' legacy shows how a uniform expression of fundamental belief can sit alongside a varied model for practice and practical organization.

Beyond the Persian empire, Christianity proliferated across Asia, not least along trade routes, and remained there long after the end of the period that concerns us here (Halbertsma 2008). Cosmas Indicopleustes wrote of mercantile voyages that took him to Ethiopia (*Christian Topography* 2, 11), India (3, 11), and Sri Lanka (3, 11; see further Daryaee 2003 and Chapter 10 in the present volume). Of Sri Lanka he noted, "This island also has a Church of Persian Christians residing there, and a priest who is ordained from Persia, and a deacon, and the complete Church liturgy. But the natives and the kings are pagans [ἀλλόφυλοι]" (Winstedt 1909: 322). These observations are part of Cosmas's larger claim for the universal spread of Christianity, without particular regard to the internal relations of the different communities of Christians. Moreover, it was approximately during this period that the Byzantine production of silk began, after silkworms were smuggled from China into the eastern Roman empire—by two monks! According to Procopius' *On the Wars* 8.17.1–8 (Dewing 1962: 226–231) the monks secured an audience with Justinian, persuaded him to bypass Persian

merchants, and returned with the larvae that became the basis for Byzantine sericulture. The monks' base of operations in China is unknown. But Persian Christian communities, including churches and monasteries, were at this time established in China, where over several centuries they synthesized Christian teachings and Chinese traditions (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999: 275–282; see also Chapter 11 in this volume). Initial advances of the Persian Church probably proceeded along with Persian commerce. There is, however, evidence that by the late eighth century deliberate efforts were going into consolidating and expanding the Church's positions in the Far East. Particularly outstanding were the efforts of Patriarch Timothy I, whose ambitious policies and structural reforms facilitated this remarkable expansion, sometimes despite considerable adversity (Berti 2006). Late ancient Chinese sources preserve the cultural memory that links Christianity and Rome, or Dàqín/Ta-ch'in, an exonym referring vaguely to the Roman empire (Pulleyblank 1999: 77–78), in contrast to Po-ssu/Persia (Pulleyblank 1991), or indeed Fu-lin/the eastern Roman empire (Hirth 1909, 1913). In the midst of multiple clear indications of the Persian province of Chinese Christianity, the word Dàqín is so odd that some scholars have hypothesized that by the Tang dynasty it bore specifically religious connotations (Standaert 2001: 3 n. 4) or a quasi-mythical sense (Lieu 2013: 129–130). The Persian Churches and Roman Churches were by this time estranged over Christological teachings (Brock 1996), making it all the more interesting that the Persian Christians were considered "Roman" in China.

As for divisions over theological formulations, these were not beyond the wit of Christians to redress. Justinian attempted a reconciliation in 532 CE, yet despite his generous attitude toward the theological issues at stake the practical implications of union were not acceptable to the oriental delegates (thus, Brock 1980). And again in 562/3 CE Justinian initiated a three-day theological dialogue with a group of theologians from Persia, led by Paul of Nisibis (*Chronicle of Seert* 32; Scher 1911: 187–188). An exchange between the two survives in Syriac, the tone of which is constructive—but, as Antoine Guillaumont observes, a basic shift within the Persian Church had already begun that was incompatible with the sort of reconciliation that Justinian wished to achieve (Guillaumont 1969/1970). Thus, Barhadbeshabba of 'Arbaya portrays Paul of Nisibis speaking stridently in defense of Theodore and Nestorius, and returning from the meeting in triumph (*HE* 31; Nau 1913–1932: I. 628–630), with no sense of an opportunity lost. The meeting did not result in any lasting entente. Perhaps another reason why the theological conferences did not have substantial results can be found in another domain where Justinian demonstrated a willingness to undertake political engagements with Christians with whom his Church was not in communion.

Despite Byzantine and Aksumite theological differences (cf. John of Ephesus, *HE* 4.6–7; Cureton 1853: 220–224), Justinian made common cause with Elesbaan, the ruler of Aksum, in support of the Christians of Najran whom Dhu Nawwas persecuted (Bowersock 2013). Given Justinian's policy of conquest and expansion, his theological overtures may well have been hampered by a Persian sense that he was attempting to create a Byzantine protectorate over Persian Christians (cf. Grillmeier 1995: 464–466). Welcome as such support may have been for some Persian Christians in the time of Constantine, and perhaps for some in Justinian's own time, the Church in Persia had established its autonomy from the Church in Constantinople and its leaders had little interest in the loss of standing and self-determination that would follow from reconciliation.

Toward the end of the final war between Constantinople and Ctesiphon, a remarkable theological encounter occurred. Boran, the daughter and successor of Khosrau II, dispatched Catholicos Îshô'yahb II to Heraclius to convey her intentions to renew the peace. According to the *Chronicle of Seert* 93 (Scher 1919: 557–561), Boran was mindful in doing so of such precedents as Yabhallaha representing Yazdegerd I to Theodosius II, Acacius representing Balash to Zeno, and Paul of Nisibis representing Khosrau to Justinian. (In his *Historia monastica* 2.4 (Wallis Budge 1893: II: 123–127), Thomas of Marga attributes the embassy to Kavadh II Sheroe, and without listing earlier instances where a Christian primate represented the shahanshah, but his account is otherwise consistent with the *Chronicle*.) Heraclius interrogated Îshô'yahb about contested Christological questions and the chroniclers preserve two of his responses: a *libellus* in which Îshô'yahb explained his rejection of the term *theotokos* (Scher 1919: 559), and a profession of Trinitarian faith preserved in Arabic translation by 'Amr ibn Matta (Gismond 1896–1899: IV: 31). Throughout, Îshô'yahb maintained the fidelity of his tradition to the faith of Nicaea, defended the memory and teachings of Nestorius, and challenged Byzantine Christology (see further Winkler 2007). Heraclius was favorably impressed by Îshô'yahb and requested that he perform the liturgy in his presence. Heraclius even acceded to Îshô'yahb's request to suppress Cyril's name from liturgical commemoration, and received communion from Îshô'yahb's hand (this last detail is attested by the *Chronicle of Seert* and by Mari ibn Suleiman (Gismond 1896–1899: II: 54)). Heraclius favored Îshô'yahb with many gifts and sent him back to Boran with honor.

Thomas of Marga rated the embassy a resounding success (Wallis Budge 1893: II: 127): "And thus through Christ our Lord, the Lord of the worlds and the Governor and Guardian of the two countries and of the whole world gave these shepherds mercy in the sight of the Greeks, and they received their assembly and their petition as if they had been angels of God." But the

Chronicle of Seert reports a far less encouraging sequel upon Îshô'yahb's return. According to the *Chronicle* 94 (Scher 1919: 561–579), Îshô'yahb was faulted for failing to commemorate liturgically Diodore, Theodore, and Nestorius in the presence of the emperor. Under the leadership of Barsauma of Susa, several Christians accused Îshô'yahb of being corrupted by Heraclius' gifts and attacked him. Thereafter Barsauma attempted with a series of letters to discredit Îshô'yahb. Îshô'yahb responded with dignity and was eventually vindicated.

The involvement of senior clerics from the Persian Church in such embassies indicates that they were regarded as having a significant affinity to the Christians of the Byzantine empire, and by extension to the network of Christians with whom the Byzantines were connected. And the fact that these embassies achieved positive outcomes speaks to a level of mutual recognition by the participants—typically, let us note, predicated on a common reverence for the teachings of earlier theologians who generally wrote in Greek. Recognition of this kind certainly does not guarantee that these meetings would result in full restoration of normal relations by all the Christians of the respective Churches. Barsauma of Susa orchestrated a campaign of dissatisfaction against Îshô'yahb, chiefly on the basis that Îshô'yahb had not gone far enough in his dealings with Heraclius and securing the categorical acceptance of their position. Disaffected observers can readily pronounce unattained standards, or even unattainable standards, after the fact. But it is far from self-evident that, in doing so, they are more reliable witnesses to the prevailing temperament of their contemporaries than are the conciliatory and diplomatic agents whom they denounced. On the contrary, the possibility of meaningful disagreement presupposes a common frame of reference, whereas total disagreement is arguably indicative of no mutual understanding at all.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to identify a common frame of reference that includes Christians within three major linguistic and cultural heritages—Greek, Latin, and Syriac. Several elements make up this frame of reference. First and foremost, there is a common commitment to the theological premises of the Nicene Creed. That creed exemplified exegetical techniques, too, which were also mutually interesting, as we can see from Junillus Africanus' Latin treatise, which he wrote in Constantinople and which relied heavily on Paul the Persian's exegesis (Maas 2003). Interest in exegesis points to a third constitutive element of this consensus: acceptance of a stable, authoritative

collection of sacred texts. Another feature comprises high regard for the teachings of the "great and ancient doctors," as Timothy I of Baghdad describes such men as Justin, Hippolytus, Methodius, Athanasius, Basil, "the three [*sic*] Gregorys," and "the great John" [Chrysostom?], whose works had been translated into Syriac (Pognon 1903: xxviii). Here it should be noted that Timothy mentioned their names in order to justify his endorsement of Nestorius, on the basis that Nestorius' teachings comport with their much older teachings. This is as much as to note that there were multiple and sometimes conflicting receptions of eminent Greek theologians. Rather than appeals to (say) *a priori* reason, theological arguments were frequently based on recognized authorities like the writings by those theologians, even by people who had no direct access to Greek. On a similar note, there is evidence of widespread and, presumably, unifying veneration for some figures, quite apart from the doctors of the Church mentioned above. Examples include the emperor Constantine (Conterno 2013), Anastasius the Persian (Franklin 2004), Symeon Stylites (Elbern 1967; Lent 1915), as well as more or less legendary figures like Sergius and Bacchus (Woods 1997; Key Fowden 1999) and Alexis, Man of God (Amiaud 1889; Rösler 1905; Vásquez de Parga 1942), whose hagiography likely formed very late within the period under consideration here through the conflation of earlier elements, but who is all the more significant for that very reason since his legend links Rome and Edessa.

These factors indicate that the shared heritage of Roman Christianity was foundational, even when its heirs were at odds with one another—occasionally even berating one another for falling short of that heritage—and even when that heritage developed beyond any continued contact with the Church of Rome itself. Suggesting that the common legacy of Christian Rome, which can be found in many late ancient sources, is a feature of the Great Church is by no means an attempt to reverse the gains that many scholars have made in the history of late ancient Christianity by looking beyond the Roman empire (cf. Kawerau 1962). Rather, it is merely to draw attention to the attitudes toward the past that are found in historical documents themselves.

The differences that vexed ecclesiastical dignitaries and theologians did not necessarily bring an end to a sense of common Christianity across Eurasia and a residual sense of the Great Church. Perhaps awareness of this commonality accounts for Asian rulers' deputation of Christian ambassadors to the west. Thus, Simeon Rabban Ata (Claverie 2000), 'Īsā *kelemechi*, also called Ai-Hsieh (Pelliot 1914: 638–641; 1922–1923: 248–249), Saifuddin Muzaffar Daoud and Markos (Pelliot 1931: 12–37), and Rabban Bar Sauma (Borbone 2008) served as ambassadors to the papacy and other European Christian powers on behalf of the Mongols in the thirteenth century. Diplomacy also included useful marriages, such that Abaġa Khan

(1234–1282 CE), the son and grandson of Mongol Christian princesses, could mention his father-in-law the emperor of Constantinople in establishing his credentials with Pope Clement IV (Tisserant 1946: 556). Indeed, as the Great Khan Güyük (?1206–1248 CE) informed Pope Innocent IV, in his eyes "there is no difference between Latins and Greeks and Armenians and Nestorians and Jacobites, and all who adore the cross. All are one to us" (Pelliot 1922–1923: 14). A more theologically precise, but no less irenic, assessment survives from ʿAlī ibn Dāwud al-Arfādī, probably an eleventh-century Jacobite from near Aleppo, whose *Book on the Unity of the Faith* emphasizes consensus with respect to scriptures, the creed, rituals, the sign of the cross, the respect due to the Virgin Mary, charity, and humility, even (and most adventurously) the full reality of Christ's humanity and divinity (Troupeau 1969; Teule 1999). Nor was this generous perspective restricted to people from the Near East, as we see from the memoirs of Marco Polo, who registers that Armenians, Georgians, Jacobites, Nestorians, Persians, and Russians differ from the Catholic faith without troubling to explain in what ways, much less to excoriate them (Moule and Pelliot 1938: 100–101; cf. Olschki 1960: 211–232). To the contrary, he frequently treats them without prejudice or hostility, sympathizing with their plights, praising their holy lives and virtues, and even wondering at miracles wrought by God among them (Moule and Pelliot 1938: 397–400). He relates with admiration how, when a caliph oppressed the Christians, God sent an angel to "a bishop who was a very good Christian servant of God, and a man of very holy life" to direct this bishop to a Christian shoemaker "who has one eye, […] a man acceptable to God," and at the intercessions of that simple but devout shoemaker, God caused a mountain to move (Moule and Pelliot 1938: 105–112). As a result of this wondrous event, all the Christians were spared and, despite the fact that "the Christians, Armenians, Nestorians, and Jacobites, differ in certain articles; indeed, on this account one repudiates and is separate from another" (Moule and Pelliot 1938: 112), they all commemorate the day with a vigil and a celebration of thanksgiving. Theological distinctions central to the history of Christian dogma are not necessarily as weighty in the history of Christianity.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Varieties of Christian Gnosis

Timothy Pettipiece

Introduction

Modern research into early Christianity was born out of the Protestant–Catholic controversies of the post-Reformation period (Clark 2008). As a result, it is a subject that has often been colored by polemical concerns. Some of the earliest modern writers interested in gnosis sought to re-evaluate heretical groups as champions of "true" Christianity (Arnold 1699). According to Kurt Rudolph (1983), the real history of Gnosticism research begins with Ferdinand Christian Baur's *Die Christliche Gnosis*, although viewed through a Hegelian lens. During this early phase it was common for scholars to search for an "oriental" origin of Christian gnosis, an approach which simply reproduced the patristic goal of finding its source outside the Church. Adolf von Harnack treated Gnosticism in his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1886), although here too an external impetus was suggested in the form of the radical Hellenization of Christianity. Adolf Hilgenfeld also sought an outside source among Samaritan religiosity in his *Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums* (1884), whereas Wilhelm Bousset saw gnosis as a synthesis of Babylonian and Iranian elements (in his *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* from 1907). This approach, heavily indebted to the *Religionsgeschichtliche* school, was further pursued by Richard Reitzenstein, who also saw Gnosticism as an Iranian phenomenon. By the mid-twentieth century, Hans Jonas ambitiously tried to present an integrated, albeit largely philosophical, reading of the *Gnosis und spätantiker*

Geist using a wide variety of sources—patristic, Mandaean, Manichaean, and Hermetic (1934). The English translation of this work, known as *The Gnostic Religion* (1963) did much to popularize gnosis in the public imagination, leaving a strong impression that a Gnostic *religion* existed in Late Antiquity.

As one might expect, the history of research into Gnosticism has been greatly influenced (and often limited) by the sources available at any given time. New discoveries lead to new insights and the re-evaluation of old ideas. One of the reasons that earlier generations of scholars so eagerly looked for an eastern origin was due to the discovery of primary Manichaean texts in various Iranian dialects at the turn of the twentieth century, which were seen as representing an authentic form of gnosis. This view would be shaken by two major manuscript discoveries, first, the Coptic Manichaean texts from Medinet Madi in 1929 (Robinson 2013) and the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945 (Robinson 2014). The Coptic Manichaean texts turned out to be much earlier than the Iranian texts uncovered at Turfan and showed the essentially Christian origins of Manichaean tradition. Similarly, the Nag Hammadi codices contained a multitude of previously unknown apocryphal texts, many with strong Gnostic tendencies. As a result, the study of Gnosticism was revolutionized as the focus shifted to evaluating this wealth of new material. Since then the publication of German, American, and French Canadian editions of the texts has stimulated a great deal of research. Much of this research has been exchanged at international conferences in Messina (1966), Stockholm (1973), Strasbourg (1974), Halle (1976), Yale (1978), Leiden (1980), Quebec City (1978, 2003), Rome (1979), Louvain (1980), Berlin (1982), Anaheim (1985), etc. Regular forums have also been organized, such as the annual Society of Biblical Literature's Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism section, the Brill series Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, as well as Université Laval's *Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi*.

One of the key developments in Gnostic studies since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices has been the prominent role played by female scholars such as Elaine Pagels (1979, 1988, 2003), Pheme Perkins (1980, 1993), Simone Pétrement (1984), Karen King (1995, 2003, 2008), Anne Pasquier (1983, 2010), and Madeleine Scopello (1991, 2005). These scholars have published and continue to publish some of the field's most important work, offering refreshing insights into the phenomenon of Christian gnosis and often taking the lead in discussion of new discoveries, such as the *Gospel of Judas*.

In recent years, much attention has been paid to problematizing and refining the definition of Gnosticism (Williams 1996; King 2003; Marjanen 2008), while another focus has been untangling the Middle and Neoplatonic influences on Nag Hammadi texts (Turner 2001; Rasimus 2010, 2013).

Valentinian thought has also generated considerable interest (Thomassen 2006; Kaler 2008; Dunderberg 2008; Tite 2009), as have the various Thomas traditions (DeConick 2005; Painchaud and Poirier 2007). Most recently, the *Gospel of Judas* from the Tchacos Codex has inspired a number of publications (Kasser *et al.* 2006; Ehrman 2006; Pagels and King 2007). Moreover, the field has benefited from the recent publication of a number of high quality introductory works (Pearson 2007; Brakke 2010; Denzey Lewis 2013), which seek to present a new synthesis of research.

One of the greatest difficulties in evaluating forms of early Christian gnosis is its diversity. Authors both ancient and modern have tended to include a wide and often bewildering variety of material and perspectives under the general rubric of Gnosticism, which has often led to fruitless attempts to reconstruct an original Gnostic system. This chapter will shy away from both of these terms and instead will prefer the term gnosis, which in itself was value neutral in Antiquity, only being differentiated as either *true* or *false* by various theological factions. Moreover, in an effort to be concise, this chapter will focus on some of the most common themes that emerge from a deliberate selection of sources that appear to have been most influential. The aim here is not simply to catalogue and describe, but also to explain by addressing some key questions: what did early Christian authors mean by gnosis? How was one gnosis differentiated from another? And most importantly, what key issues were at stake in this differentiation between true and false gnosis?

Whose Gnosis?

In the many debates about the definition of Gnosticism the basic meaning and function of the term on which this designation is based has often been obscured. The words gnosis, Gnostic, and Gnosticism have long ceased to be used in a strictly historical fashion (Tardieu and Dubois 1986: 35–37). For better or worse, they have been widely applied in a variety of modern contexts from Jungian psychology (Jung and Segal 1992), the science fiction of Philip K. Dick (DiTommaso 2001), and even *The Matrix* trilogy (Grau 2005). The term gnosis, however, was important to the Greek philosophical tradition from its very beginnings. Among the many questions debated by Socrates and his interlocutors were the nature of knowledge and the knowability of things. In fact, in his discussion with Cratylus, Socrates muses that "there is no knowledge (*gnosis*) at all, if everything is in a state of transition and there is nothing abiding" (*Cratylus* 440a). In the *Republic*, however, we learn that "knowledge (*gnosis*) pertains to that which is and ignorance of

necessity to that which is not" (477a). In this way, the Platonic tradition established an important dichotomy whereby knowledge (gnosis) is equated with true, eternal being—that is, the Platonic world of the forms—and ignorance with false and impermanent things—the visible world. This is precisely the distinction that several ambitious early Christian thinkers, deeply influenced by Platonic thought, attempted to make by searching for authentic being outside of the visible world and in the hidden architecture beyond the cosmos. After all, the Genesis account of the creation of the world begins with God creating "the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Nothing is said about the nature of this God or the realm that he inhabits, leaving many early Christian theologians dissatisfied.

In the earliest Christian literature, the term gnosis comes to signify "knowledge of God"—more specifically, a distinctly Christian construction of that knowledge. The word rarely occurs in the canonical gospels, as in the Song of Zechariah from Luke, when John the Baptist is predicted "to give knowledge (*gnosis*) of salvation to his people" (1:77). At the same time, there is a cautious ambivalence toward the term elsewhere in the canon. Paul, for instance, spoke about gnosis in the context of the spiritual gifts that may be bestowed upon members of the Church, along with other *charismata* such as the ability to prophesy and speak "in tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:8; 13:8) For Paul, however, such specialized gifts had to be subordinate to "love," which had the capacity to build up and bind the community together. As he famously admonished the Corinthians, "Knowledge (*gnosis*) puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:2). Other New Testament writers, such as the author of 1 Timothy, were also keenly aware of the ability of gnosis to lead to arrogance and division. This manifestation of gnosis, however, is carefully qualified as "false-knowledge" (1 Timothy 6:20).

Like many debates within the development of early Christianity, the idea of gnosis became a focal point around which several competing factions attempted to gain legitimacy and authority. Therefore, those who have their particular gnosis recognized as true or condemned as false is largely subjective. Among the apostolic writers, the gift of gnosis continues to be seen as positive and desirable. For example, 1 Clement praises the "perfect knowledge" of his addressees (1.2). At the same time, however, there is also an awareness of the danger that it can pose to the coherence of a fledgling Christian group. It would seem that proto-orthodox writers judged *true gnosis* by its ability to unite and *false gnosis* by its tendency to divide. A tenuous criterion at best, but nonetheless, they might say "each tree will be judged by its fruits." For the author of the *Epistle to Diognetus* the cultivation of gnosis depends on a life-giving attitude of love and obedience (12), while the *Epistle of Barnabas* suggests that such knowledge can be derived

from the allegorical reading of scripture (9.8). *Barnabas* even offers a summary of his idea of authentic Christian gnosis, which tellingly includes admonitions to "love the one who made you; stand in reverential awe of the one who formed you; glorify the one who ransomed you from death. Be simple in heart and rich in spirit" (19). This is worth noting since, as we shall see, anxieties about the nature of the creator and creation itself were at the core of many gnosis speculations. For someone like Justin Martyr, however, gnosis is a path that is open to everyone. As he states in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, "though a man be a Scythian or Persian, if he has the knowledge of God and of his Christ, and keeps the everlasting decrees… God rejoices in his gifts and offerings" (28). As such, the perceived exclusivity and elitism of the teachers of false gnosis will become a prime concern of proto-orthodox heresiologists. As Irenaeus states, "they tell us that this knowledge has not been openly divulged, because all are not capable of receiving it, but has been mystically revealed by the Savior through means of parables to those qualified for understanding it" (*Against Heresies* 1.3.1).

Early Christian authors were building upon a similar ambivalence already present in Hellenistic Jewish traditions. In the Septuagint, for example, the wicked are said to ask: "How can God know? Is there knowledge (*gnosis*) in the Most High?" (Psalm 73 (72): 11), while the righteous one admits that "such knowledge (*gnosis*) is too wonderful for me; it is so high I cannot attain it" (Psalm 139 (138): 6). Similarly, the *Wisdom of Sirach* suggests that "like a house in ruins is wisdom (*sophia*) to a fool, and to the ignorant, knowledge (*gnosis*) is talk that has no meaning" (Sirach 21:18 NRSV). In 4 Maccabees, "wisdom is the knowledge (*gnosis*) of divine and human matters" (1:16 NRSV), while the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, for its part, suggests that knowledge is the fifth of the "seven spirits" given to humanity (2 (OTP 1:782)) and is correlated with "arrogance" as the fifth "spirit of error" (3 (OTP 1:783)). For Philo, gnosis was the "understanding of God" achieved by the mind when it is guided by wisdom (*Quod deus sit immutabilis* 143). In fact, Philo directly quotes Plato's *Theaitetus* 176c when he states that "knowledge of him is wisdom and true virtue, while not knowing is ignorance and manifest wickedness" (*De fuga et inventione* 82).

It is the arrogance of those claiming to possess gnosis that particularly annoyed writers like Irenaeus of Lyon in the late second century CE, who claimed that his opponents had undermined the faith of many by "drawing them away under a pretense of [superior] knowledge (*gnosis*)" (*Against Heresies* 1 preface). It is important to recall that the actual name of Irenaeus' treatise commonly known as *Against Heresies* was *A Refutation and Subversion of Knowledge Falsely So-Called* (Eusebius, *HE* 5.7). Like his predecessors, Irenaeus does not object to gnosis in and of itself, but rather to

those whom he feels *falsely* claim access to specialized revealed knowledge (*Against Heresies* 1.3) and therefore cause division in the Church. As he says, "it does not follow because men are endowed with greater and less degrees of intelligence, that they should therefore change the subject-matter (of the faith) itself" (*Against Heresies* 1.10). It is the content and consequences of their gnosis that he opposes, not the possibility that a Christian might receive the gift of gnosis as such. Also in the late second century CE, Clement of Alexandria went to great lengths in his works to paint a portrait of the true "Gnostic" (*gnostikos*) as "he who brings everything to bear on a right life, procuring examples from the Greeks and barbarians, this man is an experienced searcher after truth" (*Stromata* 1.9). Perhaps he was even actively rehabilitating the term. According to Clement, this "much-knowing gnostic can distinguish sophistry from philosophy" (*Stromata* 1.9). Such a person, whom Clement considers a true Christian philosopher, embodies the capacities for philosophical inquiry, right conduct, and moral education (*Stromata* 2.10). Clement was someone wholly committed to the Gnostic path, or at least his version of it, which he called *gnostike askesis* (*Stromata* 4.21). For Clement, "knowledge (*gnosis*) is the illumination we receive, which makes ignorance disappear, and endows us with clear vision" (*Paedagogus* 1.6). This meant that the educated Christian ought to

> strive to reach manhood as befits the gnostic (*gnostikos*), and to be as perfect as we can while still abiding in the flesh, making it our study with perfect concord here to concur with the will of God, to the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of what is the truly perfect nobleness and relationship, to the fullness (*pleroma*) of Christ, what which perfectly depends on our perfection. (*Stromata* 4.21)

Presumably, this is what teachers such as Valentinus and Ptolemaeus would have aspired to do. What then was so objectionable about the content of their teaching and their allegedly false claim to possess the gift of gnosis? Part of the answer lies in the struggle over whether or not Greek philosophy had a place in early Christian thought. On this question, early Christian writers were sharply divided, with Alexandrians like Clement and Origen championing Greek philosophy as an important intellectual tool and the North African lawyer Tertullian demanding to know, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" (*Prescription against Heretics* 7). Several authors could point to the multiplicity of Greek philosophical schools as evidence of its damaging and divisive nature. Nevertheless, the term *gnostikos* continued to have currency in ascetic circles well into the fifth century CE. When the Church historian Socrates Scholasticus would fondly recall

the wisdom of "Gnostics" such as the fourth-century, Origenist monk Evagrius, who would publish his manual of ascetical wisdom under the title *The Gnostic* (*HE* 4.23). Socrates also referred to Didymus the Blind as "the great and *gnostic* teacher" (*HE* 4.23).

Fragments of Forgotten Faith

Like most fields involving the ancient world, the study of Christian gnosis is faced with some difficult methodological problems, especially in terms of sources. On the one hand are the writings of early Christian heresiologists, which are closer to the time in which these perspectives flourished (second and third centuries CE) and the languages in which they were expressed (Greek and Latin) but are often bitterly hostile to their subjects. On the other hand, the non-canonical writings found in various Egyptian manuscripts are later (fourth and fifth centuries CE) and preserved in translations (Coptic) of varying quality. Understandably, earlier generations of scholars had to rely on the outsiders' reports prior to the discovery of primary sources, but since their discovery many scholars have tended to dismiss or ignore the information provided by the Church Fathers. At best they are seen as unreliable and at worst distortions and inventions. Yet to gain a complete and holistic understanding of this very important aspect of early Christian tradition we must take into account both insider and outsider sources, and balance them accordingly.

A number of early Christian writers dedicated themselves to combating what they saw as the troubling and pernicious influence of false gnosis. The earliest known heresiological work is the *Compilation* or *Syntagma* of Justin Martyr, which is now lost (Rudolph 1983: 10–11). Among the works that do survive, the most prominent and influential among are those by Irenaeus of Lyons (second century), Hippolytus of Rome (third century), and Epiphanius of Salamis (fourth century), each of which produced increasingly complex catalogues of theologies they considered heretical (Vallée 1981). Other authors, such as Tertullian, Origen, and Ephraim, targeted specific perspectives in a less systematic fashion. From these works we can glean a general sense of the sectarian taxonomies employed by proto-orthodox writers.

As Table 14.1 shows, for the size of the Christian movement at the time, this is a relatively large number of people to be cast into the outer darkness. The number of Church Fathers of the second and third centuries is scarcely greater. It should be noted, however, that in their effort to establish a normative apostolic tradition, proto-orthodox heresiologists not only rejected their opponents' positions but sought to create an alternate and independent

Table 14.1 Sectarian taxonomies in the works of proto-orthodox writers

Irenaeus *(second century CE)*	*Hippolytus* *(third century CE)*	*Epiphanius* *(fourth century CE)*
Ptolemaeus	Naasenes	Simon
Valentinus	Peratae	Menander
Colorbasus	Sethians	Satornilus
Marcus	Justin	Basilides
Simon Magus	Simon Magus	Nicolaitans
Menander	Valentinus	Gnostics
Saturninus	Secundus	Carpocrates
Basilides	Ptolemaeus	Cerinthus
Cerinthus	Heracleon	Nazoraeans
Ebionites	Marcus	Ebionites
Nicolaitians	Colarbasus	Valentinians
Cerdo	Basilides	Secundus
Marcion	Saturnilus	Ptolemaeus
Tatian	Menander	Marcus
Encratites	Marcion	Colorbasus
Barbeloites	Carpocrates	Heracleon
Cainites	Cerinthus	Ophites
	Ebionites	Cainites
	Theodotus	Sethians
	Cerdo(n)	Archontics
	Marcion	Cerdo
	Apelles	Marcion
	Monoimus	Lucian
	Tatian	Apelles
	Quartodecimans	Severus
	Montanus	Tatian
	Encratites	
	Noetus	
	Callistus	
	Elchasites	

lineage of heresy, dividing their opponents into sects and schools modeled on their perception of Greco-Roman philosophical traditions. Much of this is artificial and so we should be cautious about accepting proto-orthodox taxonomies or alleged teacher–student relationships. It could simply be that these writers imagined or assumed that relationships existed between individuals such as Simon, Valentinus, and Basilides.

Among the heresiological works there are a number of what we might call quotations or fragments from the teachers of so-called false gnosis—especially

those classified as members of the Valentinian school. These include fragments attributed to Valentinus himself (see Layton 1987), as well as the *Letter to Flora* written by Ptolemaeus (quoted by Epiphanius 33.3–7; Layton 1987), and the *Excerpts of Theodotus* (quoted by Clement of Alexandria; Casey 1934). In addition, we have the Coptic manuscripts containing (mostly early Christian) writings expressing similar forms of gnosis. Most important among these are the Nag Hammadi codices discovered in 1945. These thirteen manuscripts contain dozens of non-canonical and sectarian writings, most of them previously unknown (Table 14.2).

Gnostic Mythmaking

In the context of this chapter it is not possible to deal with all of the source material in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, a key example from each corpus will be singled out to highlight some of the basic elements found in many of the so-called Gnostic accounts. First, from the outsider sources, we will use Irenaeus' detailed account of the Ptolemaean system, which is not only our earliest surviving source, but it is also the narrative on which Irenaeus puts the most emphasis by placing it first in his refutation. Second, from the insider sources, we will look at the *Secret Book of John*, which has been found in no less than four versions (two long and two short) among the Coptic manuscripts. Clearly this work had a wide readership and circulation (by ancient standards). Moreover, these sources represent the two groups that both the heresiologists and modern scholars have considered the most influential purveyors of gnosis—the Valentinians and the Sethians. Yet, as was mentioned above, it is by no means certain that any of these sectarian configurations existed outside of the imaginations of proto-orthodox authors.

Irenaeus' Ptolemaean Myth

At the core of the Ptolemaean teaching presented by Irenaeus is a complex hierarchy of preexistent beings, called *aeons*, which exist in a divine realm, known as the "Fullness" or *pleroma* (see Table 14.3) The principal being known as "First-Father" emanates a series of masculine–feminine pairings—first four, then eight, then eventually thirty (*Against Heresies* 1.1). Many of these aeons have names with important Christian connotations, but are presented as pre-existing abstractions, much like the Platonic forms. Wisdom (*Sophia*), the last of the emanations, developed an overwhelming desire to

Table 14.2   Individual works in the Nag Hammadi, Bruce and Askew, Berlin, and Tchacos codices

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Nag Hammadi codices (1945)

Codex I (Jung codex)
Prayer of the Apostle Paul
Apocryphon of James
Gospel of Truth
Treatise on the Resurrection
Tripartite Tractate

Codex II
Secret Book of John
Gospel of Thomas
Gospel of Philip
Hypostasis of the Archons
On the Origin of the World
Exegesis on the Soul
Book of Thomas the Contender

Codex III
Secret Book of John
Gospel of the Egyptians
Eugnostos the Blessed
Sophia of Jesus Christ
The Dialogue of the Savior

Codex IV
Secret Book of John
Gospel of the Egyptians

Codex V
Eugnostos the Blessed
Apocalypse of Paul
First Apocalypse of James
Second Apocalypse of James
Apocalypse of Adam

Codex VI
Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles
Thunder, Perfect Mind
Authoritative Teaching
Concept of Our Great Power
Fragment of Plato's Republic
Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth
The Prayer of Thanksgiving
Asclepius

Codex VII
Paraphrase of Shem
Second Treatise of the Great Seth
Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter
Teachings of Silvanus
Three Steles of Seth

Codex VIII
Zostrianos
Letter of Peter to Philip

Codex IX
Melchizedek
The Thought of Norea
The Testimony of Truth

Codex X
Marsanes

Codex XI
The Interpretation of Knowledge
A Valentinian Exposition,
On the Anointing,
On Baptism
(A and B)
On the Eucharist
(A and B)
Allogenes
Hypsiphrone

Codex XII
Sentences of Sextus
Gospel of Truth
Fragments

Codex XIII
Trimorphic Protennoia
On the Origin of the World

Table 14.2 Continued

Bruce and Askew codices (eighteenth century)	Berlin codex (1896)	Tchacos codex (ca. 1970s)
Pistis Sophia Books of Jeu Untitled Treatise	Gospel of Mary Secret Book of John The Sophia of Jesus Christ Act of Peter	Letter of Peter to Philip First Apocalypse of James Gospel of Judas Book of Allogenes

Table 14.3 Irenaeus' exposition of the Ptolemaean myth

Emanations	Aeons of the pleroma	
Tetrad	First-Father (*propator*)	Thought (*ennoia*)
↓	Mind (*nous*)	Truth (*aletheia*)
Ogdoad	Word (*logos*)	Life (*zoe*)
↓	Humankind (*anthropos*)	Church (*ekklesia*)
Decad	Deep (*bythos*)	Mixture (*mixis*)
↓	Ageless (*ageratos*)	Union (*henosis*)
	Self-existent (*autophyses*)	Pleasure (*hedone*)
↓	Immovable (*akinetos*)	Blending (*synkrasis*)
	Only-begotten (*monogenes*)	Blessing (*makaria*)
Duodecad	Comforter (*parakletos*)	Faith (*pistis*)
	Fatherly (*patrikos*)	Hope (*elpis*)
	Motherly (*metrikos*)	Love (*agape*)
	Praise (*ainos*)	Understanding (*synesis*)
	Ecclesial (*ekklesiastikos*)	Blessed (*makariotes*)
	Desired (*theletos*)	Wisdom (*sophia*)

know the First-Father, but was unable to attain her wish (*Against Heresies* 1.2). In her frustration she produces an imperfect offspring without the participation of her partner. This offspring is known as "Conception" (*enthumesis*) or *Achamoth* (from Hebrew *hokhmah* "wisdom"), which is expelled from the Fullness of the divine realm and another pair of aeons, "Christ" and "Holy Spirit," are created to serve as mediators for those who wish to know the Father (*Against Heresies* 1.2). Achamoth, abandoned in the outer darkness, is left in ignorance, fear, and confusion (*Against Heresies* 1.4), although the "Savior" is sent by Christ to comfort her. Amazed by the image of the Savior and his angels, Achamoth brings forth three types of offspring—material, psychic, and spiritual substances (*Against Heresies* 1.4.5)—and forms the "Craftsman" or *Demiurge* to serve as king and ruler of all that is outside the Fullness. This Demiurge proceeds to create the cosmos, including human beings. Born in ignorance of the higher divinity, the Demiurge perceives himself as the supreme God and declares "I am God, and beside me there is no other" (see Isaiah 45) (*Against Heresies* 1.5). In this way, the Genesis account is radically reimagined to cast the Jewish god as an inferior and imperfect being. Humanity would be left to languish under the ignorant rule of the Demiurge were it not for the fact that the typology of three types of beings engendered by Achamoth is also applied to human beings. Therefore, the Valentinians with their revealed gnosis, class themselves as enlightened "spirituals," while their proto-orthodox rivals are considered imperfect "psychics," and ignorant pagans as irredeemable "materials" (*Against Heresies* 1.6). Each of these classes is represented biblically by Cain, Abel, and Seth (*Against Heresies* 1.7).

The Secret Book(s) of John

The *Secret Book of John* is a revelation discourse delivered by the Savior to the disciple John, son of Zebedee. In this account, drawn largely from the long version of Nag Hammadi Codex II, the Savior reveals himself as the supreme God, the *Monad* that is the source of all being (NHC II I,2). This being is described in apophatic terms as illimitable, unsearchable, immeasurable, invisible, and ineffable (NHC II I,3), reflecting the primordial One of late-Platonic speculation. Contemplating himself in the luminous pool of his own being, he gave birth to Thought (*ennoia*), a perfect being also known as *Barbelo* (NHC II I,4). At Barbelo's request a series of emanations are brought forth, including Foreknowledge, Indestructibility, Self-Begotten, and Eternal Life (NHC II I,6), as well as "four luminaries" (Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai, and Eleleth), each with

three aeons (NHC II I,7–8). The last of these beings, Wisdom (*Sophia*), desires to bring forth a being like herself, but without the consent of her divine consort. What results is a monstrous offspring that she conceals in a luminous cloud and names *Yaldabaoth* (NHC II I,9–10). Abandoned by his mother, this "chief ruler of darkness" proceeds to bring forth a host of angelic powers to serve as his minions and to ruler over the created world. In his arrogance he proclaims, "I am God, and beside me there is no other" (Isaiah 45) (NHC II I,11). Then, gathering together his fellow rulers and authorities, they determine to create human beings "in the image and likeness of God" (NHC II I,15), which results in the creation of Adam. Sophia, however, seeking to retrieve her power, tricks Yaldabaoth into breathing life into his creation, which causes Adam to awake (NHC II I,19). Jealous of Adam's intelligence, the rulers cast him into the lower darkness. Taking pity on Adam, Insight (*epinoia*) is sent to dwell in humanity as a redemptive spark. Seeking to further imprison Adam, the rulers place him within Paradise, casting a spell of sleep and forgetfulness over him (NHC II I, 21–22). After Eve is created, the Savior appears as an eagle to guide the first couple to the Tree of Knowledge. In his ignorance and rage, Yaldabaoth rapes Eve, leading to the birth of Cain and Abel. Only later is Seth born, the true child of Adam and Eve (NHC II I,25). Human beings are again made to forget their true origin until the divine spark of Insight can be awakened by divine gnosis (NHC II I,27).

It can be no accident that the main account labeled by Irenaeus as false gnosis and a Coptic source so well-attested tell two versions of the same story. Both accounts, although different in some details, nonetheless contain a number of common themes:

1. true reality is said to be found in a spiritual realm of divine forms beyond the cosmos;
2. the cosmos was created from a progressive degeneration of spiritual being and under the influence of angelic powers;
3. the chief among these cosmic powers—the Demiurge—is equated with the Jewish god;
4. Christ is seen as the one who liberates humanity, particularly the descendants of Seth, from the influence of the Demiurge.

There were of course other ideas that the heresiologists lumped together with false gnosis, such as numerical and alphabetical mysticism (Marcus), docetic christologies (Basilides), and hostility to procreation (Encratites), but the demiurgical tale appears to be the one they found most problematic.

A House Divided…

If these types of narrative constituted the basis of what some considered false gnosis, what was is it that the proto-orthodox authorities found so offensive and difficult to accept? As it turns out, this rather otherworldly story struck at the core of several very real-world issues that the early Church was wrestling with in order to define its evolving relationship with both its Jewish heritage and wider Roman society.

Ever since the conquests of Alexander the Great, ancient Near Easterners were contemplating how to react to the cultural ideology being imposed on them by the occupiers. For various reasons we have more documentation of Jewish responses to this problem than for other communities, whereby we can see that there was a great diversity of opinion both within the Land of Israel and the diaspora. On one side of the spectrum was the Maccabean revolt of the second century BCE, which sought to throw off the yoke of Macedonian domination, only to be submerged later by an even more fearsome imperial machine. On the other side was the highly integrationist approach of the Alexandrian Jewish community, which is not only credited (at least in Jewish folklore) with facilitating the creation of the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the scriptures—but sought to interpret it using the tools of Greek philosophical tradition. Philo epitomized this philhellenic trend and his work would go a long way to normalize the allegorical interpretations of scripture so prevalent in early Christian exegesis.

The earliest Christians faced the same set of choices about whether or not to integrate into their host society. In the wake of another set of Jewish revolts against foreign domination, this time against Rome, two main groups would emerge—the rabbis who offered a reimagined Judaism for Jews and the Christians who essentially offered a Judaism tailor-made for Gentiles. In fact, it might be argued that the gnosis controversy partly represents a struggle in the early Church over just how far that accommodation could go. This meant establishing limits on Hellenistic allegorization. As Irenaeus claimed, the Valentinians were able to extrapolate the existence of the thirty aeons through exegesis of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Mt 20). For him, the Valentinians were "like those who bring forward any kind of hypothesis they fancy, and then endeavor to support them out of the poems of Homer" (*Against Heresies* 1.9). By doing so they "falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation" (*Against Heresies* 1 preface). There can be no doubt that the concept of the Fullness (*pleroma*) of pre-existing aeons strongly resembles the Platonic world of the forms. In both versions, the world that we perceive with our senses is not the true reality. True reality is counterintuitively imagined as

consisting of a realm of authentic and eternal being beyond the cosmos. This resemblance is likely what led Hippolytus to conclude that Valentinus and his followers were Platonists rather than Christians and that their entire system was borrowed from Plato and Pythagoras (*Refutation* 6.24). In fact, Hippolytus was convinced that much of what the so-called "Gnostics" taught was ultimately taken from Greek philosophy and literature (*Refutation* 5 preface). Such people, he suggests, prefer Homer to the scriptures (*Refutation* 5.3). For him, Basilides was influenced by Aristotle (*Refutation* 7.2), Marcion by Empedocles (*Refutation* 7.17–18), and the Sethians were said to derive their teachings from ancient wise men like Musaeus, Linus, Orpheus, and Homer (*Refutation* 5.15).

While some teachers were engaged in creative allegorization, others appeared to go much further by not simply allegorizing the scriptures but seemingly inverting their meaning altogether. In particular, the radical re-interpretation of Genesis elaborated above was of major concern to proto-orthodox authorities. The idea of the "world-creating angels" appears repeatedly in both the heresiological and primary-source accounts. For example, according to Hippolytus, Simon Magus was said to have taught that "the angels who created the world made whatever enactments they pleased" to enslave people (*Refutation* 6.14), while Saturnilus supposed that the "God of the Jews is one of the angels and that it was on account of the Father's desire to deprive of sovereignty all the Archons that Christ came for the overthrow of the God of the Jews" (*Refutation* 7.16). Similar examples from Epiphanius abound. For many, it seems, the Jewish god had become an object not of veneration but of scorn. As a result, the Jewish scriptures could be entirely repudiated—a situation that posed a serious problem for early Christians facing an increasing degree of social and state hostility.

Above all the Romans valued continuity. They could tolerate the diversity of cultures and religions within the borders of their *imperium* so long as people were seen to be following the ways of their ancestors (Wilken 1984: 48–67). Even Jewish monotheism was accommodated as long as the high priest prayed for the well-being of the emperor. The early Christians, how-ever, seemed to the Romans to be something else entirely. Not only did they deny the existence of other deities, they were seen to have abandoned their Jewish roots and to be propagating an illegal *superstitio*. Stories circulated in the major cities about cannibalism and incest at clandestine Christian rituals, where flesh and blood were sacrilegiously consumed. In order to defuse these rather damaging urban legends, Christian intellectuals such as Justin and Athenagoras went on a "public relations" campaign and sought to demonstrate their allegiance not only to the basic norms of Roman society but to Christianity's Jewish heritage as well. At the center of the Christian

apologetic argument was the idea that Christians had not abandoned their Jewish tradition, but in fact represented its messianic fulfillment. This meant that an integrated Christological reading of the Jewish scriptures had to take center stage if Christianity was to have a defensible theology in the face of Roman persecution. Naturally, there was no room left for the demiurgical gnosis of the Valentinians and Sethians. In order to distance themselves from such alternate Christianities, proto-orthodox authors went to great lengths to establish a distinct heresiological lineage as a way to insulate their own claims to an unbroken chain of apostolic authority. Simon Magus thus became the antithesis of Simon Peter, an antagonism vividly portrayed in the Clementine literature.

Still, it is important to remember just how "plausible" and "attractive" Irenaeus thought these teachings were to what he maligned as immature and inexperienced minds (*Against Heresies* preface). Such an admission speaks to the traction that such ideas had among educated Christians, many of whom would have been familiar with Greek philosophical concepts and would have found the idea of a transcendent divine being surrounded by a hierarchy of eternal forms palatable and compelling. In hindsight it is easy to see such ideas as exotic and strange, but for many early Christians they were an expression of the philosophical *koine* of the late-Roman world. The proto-orthodox realignment with the philosophically uncouth Jewish scriptures would have seemed far more foreign and radical. In this way, the gnosis controversy can be read as the repudiation of the first Christian intellectual elite, whose philosophical daring gave way to the hardened realism of proto-orthodox over-seers.

Knowledge is Power

There is, however, a profound irony in all this. For as much as patristic authors such as Hippolytus and Tertullian defined *false* gnosis as Greek philosophy run wild, the roots of this perspective can be found within the many permutations of the Jewish tradition itself.

It is obvious to even the casual reader that the demiurgical narratives have strong Semitic markers. For instance, Irenaeus tells us that Wisdom/Sophia was also known as *Achamoth*, a name derived from the Hebrew word for wisdom (*hokhmah*). Moreover, the name of the other main protagonist in the story, *Yaldabaoth*, has been interpreted to mean "Child of Chaos." The same holds true for the *Secret Book of John*, which features not only Yaldabaoth, but *Barbelo*, which may mean "God in four" in Hebrew, as well as the four luminous angels—*Harmozel*, *Oroial*, *Daveithai*, and *Eleleth*. In Irenaeus' account of the Sethians, the companions of Yaldabaoth are called *Iao*, *Sabaoth*, *Adoneus*, *Eloeus*, *Oreus*, and *Astanphaeus* (*Against Heresies* 1.30). While in Hippolytus,

the first sectarian targets are called *Naasenes*, a name related to the Hebrew word for serpent (*Refutation* 5.1). Moreover, Hippolytus' lengthy description of the heretic Justin's *Baruch* has many Jewish elements that the heresiologist forcibly attempts to derive from Greek myth (*Refutation* 5.18–21). All of this points to an originally, or at least strongly, Semitic milieu as a point of origin.

How can this be explained? How can mythic cosmogonies that are so seemingly hostile to the Jewish god and tradition still be derived from that tradition? The answer lies in one of the great disasters of Jewish history—the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE. Only an event of this magnitude can explain such a radical rejection of the normative Jewish tradition (Grant 1966: 34). One can easily imagine late first and early second-century Jews feeling a profound sense of betrayal amid the rubble of their holy city. After all, the covenant which they shared with their god seemed increasingly one-sided and its guarantor decidedly cruel if not outright wicked. It would not be surprising then if some became convinced that this god was an imposter. A malignant demigod whose ruinous will meant nothing but destruction and oppression. It is also understandable that such reactionaries might seek solace in a purely transcendent realm beyond the broken cosmos—a world of pure, ethereal forms—knowledge (that is, gnosis) of which made the tragedy bearable. Christians were surely part of this environment of "protest exegesis" (Rudolph 1983: 54; Williams 1996: 54–57), since Jewish and Christian identities continued to be fluid well beyond this time. Still, it would not be difficult for Christian teachers without any specific attachment to Jewish identity to accept the repudiation of a tradition for which they already had little sympathy. One need not evoke an "age of anxiety" or general malaise of Late Antiquity to explain the gnosis debate. Nor can it really be supposed that such attitudes were simply the end result of Alexandrian philosophical reflection, as Friedländer (1898) suggested (see also Pearson 1990: 11–19). This would not be a strong enough catalyst. As Birger Pearson aptly noted, "the rise of Gnosticism should also be seen as a response not only to a syncretistic conflict-mixture of 'traditions' and 'ideas' but also to the concrete circumstances of history, to social and political conditions" (Pearson 1990: 27). The situation on the ground is more than sufficient and provides the only really plausible motive for turning the Genesis story inside out.

Conclusion

There are a few things that this chapter has sought to make clear. First, the terms *gnosis* and *gnostikos* were largely value neutral, even in Christian usage, meaning simply "knowledge of the divine" and "the one who knows the

divine." Such terms were qualified by being considered *true* or *false* depending on the person(s) employing them. Second, proto-orthodox authors had very specific types of speculation in mind that they considered "so-called" or *false gnosis*, namely demiurgical reworkings of the Genesis story that sought true divinity in a Platonically conceived hypercosmic reality. This is precisely what Irenaeus, our earliest source, has in mind and which is reproduced by the multiple versions of the *Secret Book of John*. Finally, the rise of these speculations can and should be explained in relation to the historical events of the late first and early second centuries—particularly the failure of the Jewish revolts—and their rejection understood in light of the social pressures being felt by early Christians to maintain a link with their Jewish roots and resist the excesses of Platonic allegorization.

Ultimately, the use of the term "Gnostic" might be compared to the use of "sophist" in the Greco-Roman world. While it was meant to describe an educated and often itinerant teacher, it could also carry a pejorative connotation of an intellectual charlatan. It is also similar in the sense that even though modern scholars talk about the Second Sophistic, this was no more an organized movement than anything one might imagine as "Gnosticism," let alone a "religion" unto itself. To put it plainly, there was no *Gnostic religion* in Antiquity, only rival claims to gnosis. It is true that the heresiologists tried to paint all their opponents with the same brush, but modern scholars ought to take more care. This means that specific reference can be made to Valentinian gnosis, Sethian gnosis, Clementine gnosis, even Hermetic gnosis, as the case may be. After all, had things turned out differently, I could be writing about obscure groups of early Christians who claimed that the only true understanding of Christ came from an allegorical reading of the Jewish scriptures. The fact is there were many in the ancient Roman world who claimed to possess gnosis, but not all of them were able to turn their gnosis into a world religion. The orthodox are and have always been reactionary in the sense that their positions are usually formed in response to other alternatives. However, the need to present a united front in the face of state-sponsored violence meant that some avenues of theological inquiry had to be abandoned. This was not done out of spite or oppression, but in response to spite and oppression by the dominant society. A religion accessible only to small groups of Platonizing study circles would not have survived, since religious movements meant only for an elite rarely gain wide acceptance. Early Christians had to decide whether the focus of their master narrative was going to be inside or outside of creation. Did salvation depend on divine activities within the hypercosmic realm or divine activities in the course of human history?

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A New Religion? The Emergence of Manichaeism in Late Antiquity

Nicholas J. Baker-Brian

Introduction

"Religion" and "Empire," understood either as exclusive concerns or more commonly as relational concepts in dialogue with one another, are prominent themes in the contemporary study of Late Antiquity (Bowersock *et al.* 1999: vii–xiii). Indeed, for English-speaking scholars the association between religion(s) and empire(s) has been in the foreground of late antique studies from the earliest times. The study that has arguably done more to influence academic perceptions of the period than any other, Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity*, utilized—in its original publication from 1971—a sub-heading bounded on one side by a Roman emperor and on the other by a prophet (*From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*) in order to frame the Roman provincial context for the emergence of the key religious players of the period (Greco-Roman paganism, Judaism, Christianity) and to demarcate the origins of a theocratic polity in a region that stood at the very limit of imperial oversight (paleo-Islam: Al-Azmeh 2014; and Chapter 16 of this volume). Indeed it is Brown's work that has been instrumental in shifting the emphasis from traditional Romanocentric and Christocentric *foci* of the period to a polycentric presentation (Marcone 2008: 9) of diverse and frequently competing religions and empires stretching from the western fringes of the later Roman empire to the northeastern territories of the

Sasanian empire. However, it has been left to those commentators from disciplines traditionally outside the study of Late Antiquity to challenge even recently received ideas about the period. In the assessment of one Sinologist, the account of Late Antiquity "as a self-contained historical universe, clamped onto the Mediterranean and its Middle Eastern inlands" does little to exploit the periodization's full potential for developing a "connective history," favoring instead a return to "the fuzzy 'Late Antiquity' of archeologists and art historians—of [Alois] Riegl, [Albert] von Le Coq, [Benjamin] Rowland— unfettered as it was by preordained narrative settings" (Palumbo 2015: 95; 117). In this regard, Manichaeism, the religion associated with the teachings of Mani (b. 216–d. ca. 274), offers a compelling case study for thinking about a range of complex issues relating to the emergence, consolidation, and spread of religions in a period characterized by shifting imperial dynamics and by major transformations in the way prophets and religious leaders ("the sage, the Gnostic and the saint": Stroumsa 2008: 33) conceptualized and maintained their teachings. Therefore, Manichaeism as a religious phenomenon of the late antique period is, in the fashion of Levi-Strauss, "good to think [with]" (Garber 2012: 94–103) in relation not only to reappraising established ideas about the geographical limits of the period, but also for re-evaluating the ways in which academic commentators analyze religions according to their presumed origins, or according to the extent of their debts to prior traditions.

Mani was a visionary teacher from mid-third-century Mesopotamia who proclaimed himself an "Apostle of Jesus Christ" (e.g. in his *Living Gospel*, which is partially preserved in the *Cologne Mani Codex* 66.1–69.8, trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 156; and in one of Mani's letters preserved in P. Kellis Copt. 53.12.1–2, trans. Gardner 2007: 74, and also Gardner and Lieu 2004: 167). The evolution of legendary material for Mani's birth and upbringing—enshrined in the relatively late Greek biography of the apostle known as the *Cologne Mani Codex* (trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 47–73; Römer 1994; for dating considerations, see Fonkic and Poljakov 1990)— offers a portrayal of Mani's emergence as an iconoclast who begins a religious revolution in the heart of Mesopotamia, and travels to the furthest eastern fringes of the Sasanian empire in a missionizing push to establish his ideas. Legendary biographies, however, often represent the upper layer of the "stratigraphy" of a religion's archeology (Gardner 2009), and in terms of discerning the "historical Mani"—including details of his family, his education, and his travels in the service of his teachings—such a task remains fraught with problems in part because what Mani actually wrote has been consigned to oblivion (Gardner 2009), and later biographers reimagined Mani according to their own needs and those of their communities (de Jong

2008; Baker-Brian 2011: 33–60). Fortunately for us, however, valuable morsels of evidence remain.

A striking feature of Manichaeism in its earliest guise, propagated during Mani's own lifetime and in the decades following his death, was the ambition to develop Mani's teachings into a universal phenomenon: in the words of Mani himself, his religion (Middle Persian: *dēn*) will become "manifest in every country and in all languages … it will be taught in faraway countries" (M5794 + M5761; trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 109). Like the other major traditions of the late antique period (Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam), Manichaeism responded to the rhetoric of empire by mirroring its claims for universalism, but also by negotiating or indeed rejecting manifestations of imperial power. Indeed, key features of Mani's religion actively rejected the prevailing norms and values of local society in a spirit that chimed with earlier Gnostic attempts to formulate a countercultural response to the ills afflicting the human soul (DeConick 2016; Baker-Brian 2017). Mani's own beginnings lay in Sasanian-controlled Mesopotamia, characterized recently as "the crossroads of religion and power in the ancient world, connecting Egypt, Greece, Persia, India and China" (Laine 2014: 5). Later, historicizing sources for the third-century eastward and westward missions led by Mani's earliest disciples, Adda (Baker-Brian 2009: 39–79) and Ammo (trans. Klimkeit 1993: 202–206), convey memories of a Manichaean universalism founded on the idea that Mesopotamia remained the geographical center of Manichaean activity, in addition to the stated ambition that an equal reach for Mani's teachings on both sides of this ancient province formed a central concern for the nascent religion.

So far we have somewhat casually employed the term "religion" to characterize the totality of Mani's activities without any attempt to define the word. Recent research on Manichaeism has emphasized the pioneering position taken by Mani and his immediate followers in contriving a form for their activities which to modern eyes qualifies as a "working concept of a religion" (BeDuhn 2015a: 268; also the remarks by Nongbri 2013: 66–73). Mani's efforts in this regard were informed by a range of different influences, including the practices of existing sacred traditions and their ethnographic representation in a range of texts (BeDuhn 2015a: 269). Mani presented his revelation as a highly self-conscious novelty, portrayed as consciously avoiding the errors and failing of prior traditions; although where appropriate also acknowledging his debts to them. Excerpts from Mani's writings in which he advanced the "designer status" (de Jong 2008: 104) of his religion included his own interpretation of a prophetology—a chain or family of prophets—of prior revealers, and a detailed statement or "manifesto" of ten advantages

that his religion had over previous traditions, both aspects of which are discussed later in this chapter. Indeed, Mani's philosophy of mission and his attendant pledge to universalism facilitated a broader trend in the religious history of Late Antiquity toward religion's *disembedding* from its "local context of a restricted place and time" (Stones 2012). Building on work examining the impact of the process of Christianization on late antique society (Schwartz 2004: 179–202), Jason BeDuhn has highlighted the catalyzing effect of Mani's concept of religion on late ancient religious trends: a period that witnessed the emergence of religions as discrete entities, "when particular sets of religious practices no longer carried exclusive identification with … a native land, but belonged to a community that carried its own disembedded cultic identity" (BeDuhn 2015a: 248). Such a development was contingent on the (largely accidental) configuration of historical circumstances determined in part by monarchical forms of government realizing their imperial ambitions. The complex networks and infrastructure necessary for the transaction of imperial affairs, for example the movement of troops, goods and services, also included as a feature of those transactions the conveyance of intangible "commodities" including philosophical and theological concepts and related intellectual ideas. When approached from the context of "a long late Antiquity" (Marcone 2008), the origin, development, and subsequent decline of Manichaeism were all features closely linked to the network of cities, states, and empires —the "contact zones"—which stretched across the continental landmass of Eurasia (Reed 2009). From the third century to the ninth century and beyond, Manichaean communities were to be found in the urbanized, semi-rural, and rural territories of the great ruling confederacies of Late Antiquity, including the Iranian empire as configured under the leadership of the Sasanian monarchy, the Roman empire in both its western and eastern (= Byzantine) guises, the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates of the early Islamic world, the Uyghur kingdom of Central Asia, and the Tang dynasty in China (see Chapter 11 in this volume). As a result of this broad geographical spread, sources relating to Manichaeism either written by Manichaeans or about the Manichaeans are to be found in Syriac, Greek, Coptic, and Latin (from the Roman and Byzantine empires), Arabic and Persian (from the territories of ancient Iran), and Parthian, Middle Persian, Sogdian, Turkish, Chinese and Bactrian (from Central and East Asia). While the social, economic, and cultural conditions fostered by the empires of Late Antiquity facilitated the spread of Manichaeism, Mani's teachings also predicated ideas that capitalized on the forms of religious patronage displayed by the ruling monarchs. Indeed, Manichaeism promoted itself in terms that mirrored the languages of legitimacy emanating from these ruling imperial elites. This chapter then investigates the close

relationship between Mani, Manichaeism, and empire in Late Antiquity (predominantly by looking at the context for nascent Manichaeism in the Sasanian empire), in particular it examines the dialogue between the legitimizing language of empire, and the scope and character of Mani's teachings as a form of theological rhetoric. The chapter will argue that the conceptual limitations arising from the framework chosen by Mani to formulate his teachings led directly to the flowering of an interpretive culture among subsequent generations of Manichaeans: it was these followers who took on the responsibility to not only maintain his teachings, but also to develop them into a characteristically late antique religion.

The Patronizing of Mani

Mani developed a mission strategy for his religion at an early period—as stated explicitly in the ten advantages that he set out in his writings—and, it appears, partially realized this strategy during his own lifetime. It also appears to be the case that Mani himself did not travel beyond Sasanian-controlled territory (de Jong 2008: 92). According to *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (also known as the Berlin *Kephalaia*; Robinson 2013: 198–224), a Coptic work recovered from Narmouthis (Madînat Mâdi) in the Fayoum region of Egypt in the late 1930s (Gardner and Lieu 1996), Mani first met with Shapur I, the shah of Iran (r. 240–270), during the early years of the monarch's reign. The opening chapter of this *Kephalaia* situates this initial exchange soon after Mani had returned to Persia from a missionary journey to the eastern reaches of the Iranian empire stretching as far as "India" ("a very imprecise term," de Jong 2008: 92): it indicates that Mani was "received … with great honor" by the Sasanian king. This work, along with *The Kephalaia of the Wisdom of My Lord Mani* (also known as the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia*; Robinson 2013: 303–308; Gardner *et al.* 2015), represent voluminous collections of Mani's teachings assembled (with the attendant, creative act of editing those teachings) by second- and third-generation Manichaeans toward the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century. While these kephalaïc works are not in any way transcriptions of Mani's teachings, they nonetheless contain authentic, early traditions about Mani's teachings and ideas mediated through the interpretive lens of later followers (Pettipiece 2009: 7–13). Chapter 1 of *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, entitled "Concerning the Advent of the Apostle," outlines Mani's own apostolic credentials in the context of a broader prophetology that comprised a host of familiar biblical figures and great transregional prophets. Chapter 1 reflects both in name and focus the opening chapter of a work written by

Mani himself, the *Shābuhragān* ("dedicated to Shapur": Reck 2010), composed for the edification of Shapur I in the 240s and preserved partially in al-Biruni's *The Book of the Remaining Signs of Past Centuries* from the tenth century (Reeves 2011: 102–103). The chapter from the *Kephalaia* contains an extended discussion of the role of Jesus, designated "our master" by Mani, in the Manichaean prophetology. Chapter 1 situates Mani's apostolate in the time of the Paraclete, identified by Jesus as the figure sent to comfort his disciples following his departure (Jn 14:16). As a revelatory figure, it is the Paraclete who discloses to Mani the parameters of his mission, and the knowledge required to fulfill it. It is particularly significant that chapter 1 aligns the stages of Mani's emergence as an apostle with the investiture ceremonies of the Sasanian monarchs. Thus, the time of Mani's assumption of the Paraclete—in effect his "Twin" (Gk. *Syzygos*)—coincided with the coronation of Ardashir I (r. 224–239/40), the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. Mani's first public declarations of his apostolate are presented as occurring during the last years of Ardashir's reign and during the time of the coronation of Shapur I, the son of Ardashir, as co-regent of Iran. The chapter entitled "The Advent of the Apostle" from Mani's *Shābuhragān*, preserved by al-Biruni, indicates that it was Mani himself who highlighted the points of synchronicity between his own biography and these regnal events (Reeves 2011: 102–103). The *Kephalaia*'s extension of these associations was likely meant to recall the emphasis in the Christian Gospel traditions whereby Jesus' birth occurred in the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus (Lk 2:1–7); however, it also seems that for Mani and his followers their connections with the ruling Sasanian dynasty served an important interpretive role in highlighting the significance of Mani's apostolate for the salvation of the "last generation." Thus, alignment with the principal ruling (earthly) power (chapter 77 of *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* identifies "the land of Babylon and Persia" as the first of "the four great kingdoms": trans. Gardner 1995: 197) was a sign of Mani's election as the final apostle charged with the responsibility of unveiling "all these hidden things" (Gardner 1995: 22).

Manichaeans greatly valued their contacts with the ruling elites of Late Antiquity. However, estimating the nature of these relationships can prove difficult. A small number of sources reveal Mani converting kings, princes, and other members of imperial families, including queen Tadi—that is, Zenobia the empress of Palmyra (Klimkeit 1993: 208–209; Pedersen 1997; Gardner and Lieu 2004: 112–214)—following the restoration of the health of her sister, Nafsa, by Mani (Baker-Brian 2009: 45–46). Fragments of a source in Parthian describing Mani's conversion of the Turan-Shah—in all likelihood the eponymous son of Shapur I (BeDuhn 2015b: 57), who ruled the small kingdom of Turan (situated in the modern day province of

Baluchistan in Pakistan) as a vassal king—illustrate the idealized understanding of Mani's engagement with would-be elite patrons. In the setting of the Turan-Shah's court, Mani engages a "righteous one"—possibly an *arhat*, an enlightened Buddhist—in a contest that involves their ascent into the air. Following this, Mani teaches the king of Turan about the wisdom of the universe, which also seems to have included another ascent experience in which Mani showed the Turan-Shah the mysteries of paradise and hell (Klimkeit 1993: 207; BeDuhn 2015b: 60–61). The monarch proclaims Mani to be "the Buddha": he and his entourage "accepted the faith and became benign toward the apostle and the religion" (trans. Klimkeit 1993: 207). Importantly, key features of this episode are paralleled in the Coptic text *The Kephalaia of the Wisdom of My Lord Mani*, which suggests a Buddhist influence on the development of early Manichaean texts and traditions, as opposed to a later effort at cultural acculturation to Buddhist-dominated environs (BeDuhn 2015b: 63–66). The narrativizing of these and similar accounts in homiletic and historicizing literature calls into question their reliability as sources of evidence for judging the nature of the patronage extended to Mani, alongside evaluating the extent of early Manichaean missions. Literary models portraying the conversions of kings and princes by prophets and apostles, often in the context of missionizing journeys—for example, *The Acts of Thomas* (Drijvers 1992), and the biography of Zoroaster (de Jong 2014) among others—actively informed the engagement of Mani and his disciples with travel and patronage (Tardieu 2008: 31–32), but also influenced the memorialization of their deeds in Manichaean literature. The awareness that the elite patronage of religious figures in this period tended more toward the adoption of an attitude of toleration by monarchs rather than their outright conversion and commitment to the cause, confirms the circumspection that tends to be applied in handling hagiographic literature. Positivist judgments of this kind nonetheless obscure another crucial point about early Manichaeism: namely, that the ambition of Manichaeans in Late Antiquity was such that they could write confidently about the conversion of individuals of high standing, regardless of whether the transformation was real or fictive. The truth of the matter probably lies somewhere between the two assessments. This would most certainly appear to be the case with Shapur's endorsement of Mani. Shapur I endorsed Mani's apostolate, principally by granting him permission in the form of letters to travel and to proselytize among the princes of provincial territories in the wider Sasanian empire (*Manichaean Homilies* 48.2–3; Pedersen 2006). The extent of Mani's familiarity with Shapur was also likely overstated in Manichaean literature for rhetorical effect, as can be seen in chapter 76 of *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (Gardner 1995: 193–197). Here Shapur is shown making repeated requests

for Mani to attend his court, thereby eliciting from a disciple the request that the apostle generate another Mani so that their teacher can be in two places at once: the point of this lesson being to highlight the magnitude of Mani's apostolate, that one Mani is enough for the world in which "a turmoil arose before me. And thus, if two Manis had come to the world, what place would be able to tolerate them, or [what land] would [be able] to accept them?" (trans. Gardner 1995: 196).

In spite of the triumphalist tone of numerous Manichaean sources indicating the success of Mani and his disciples in winning over figures like Shapur I, Turan-Shah, Mihr-Shah—the ruler of Mesene and a brother of Shapur I (Klimkeit 1993: 211–212), the ultimate fate of Mani alerted literate Manichaeans at the end of the third century to the ephemeral nature of such associations. A cycle detailing Mani's "Last Days" is identifiable across a number of extant sources—among the most important (in terms of its near completeness and relatively early date of composition) is the "The Section of the Narrative about the Crucifixion" in the Coptic Homilies (Pedersen 1996)—in which Mani's fall from grace during the reign of Bahram I (r. 271–274), Shapur's eldest son, is detailed (Gardner 2015a). The theological narrativizing of Mani's loss of patronage and subsequent imprisonment and death into a passion story akin to the Gospel's depiction of Jesus' last days became a pillar of Manichaean liturgy. The sources that portray the circumstances for Mani's demise make reference to the allegation of Bahram I—advised by the hostile figure of Kartir the Mobed and the Mazdayasnian clergy in attendance at court—that Mani had departed from the established law (i.e. "the law of Zarades" Gardner 2015a: 192) and innovated a law of his own that he had encouraged others to adopt (*Manichaean Homilies* 46: 13–14; Pedersen 2006: 46).

"… Wisdom and Deeds"

Leaving aside the historiography of Manichaean mission, it is the case that the broader context for Mani's relationship with Shapur and other vassal monarchs can be seen in the place that sages carved out for themselves in the royal courts of Late Antiquity. In a monarch's retinue, a figure like Mani came to be valued in any number of roles including as a teacher, counselor, physician, or artist (cf. Hutter 1993). However, the question of origins also mattered when it came to evaluating the status of visiting sages. Mani's older contemporary, Bardaisan of Edessa (d. 222), resided for many years in the royal court of Abgar VIII ("the Great"), the Parthian king of the independent kingdom of Osrhoene (Drijvers 1966). Like Mani, he was also a prolific

author who attracted numerous disciples. Two fragments from a work composed by Bardaisan "On India" disclose his presence at the court of the Roman emperor Elagabalus (r. 218–222) during the period when the emperor received an embassy from India (Ramelli 2009: 91–109). Bardaisan's account of the lifestyles and practices of the Brahmans and Samaneans (Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 4.17–18.4; Clark 2000; Deeg and Gardner 2009) was indicative of an interest in ancient "eastern" wisdom shared across the courts of Rome, and West and Central Asia (Dilley 2013: 45–50). The values introduced initially by a "pan-Hellenism" (Burns 2014: 8–31) in shaping the idea of an ancient, universal wisdom (subjugated, of course, to the primacy of Greek philosophy) that philosophers "rediscovered" served as an influence on a wide range of thinkers, schools, and traditions in the post-Hellenistic period (Boys-Stones 2001: 99–122). Mani himself was evidently influenced by this concern with an archaic wisdom that earlier generations of teachers, prophets, and apostles had expounded; his own interpretation of the idea was a main plank during the early dissemination of his message following his return from wider Iran, "India," and the "east" more broadly (ca. 240s). Again, it is proper to see Bardaisan as a predecessor of Mani in this area. The Syrian-Christian appropriation of ideas including religious universalism and the role of the "east" in redefining the cultural identity of Syrians and Mesopotamians in the third century is evident in the work, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, composed by a disciple of Bardaisan in the form of a dialogue with the esteemed teacher (Drijvers 2007). This work being somewhat akin to the *Acts of Thomas* in that it "[envisions] large-scale conceptual geographies that integrate a variety of peoples outside the Roman empire" (Reed 2009: 70), also reduces cultural and ethnic difference to the marker of a universal revealed religious law. The author of the work closes the dialogue with a paean to Christian-Messianic universalism: "What shall we say of the new people of us Christians that the Messiah has caused to arise in every place and in all climates by his coming? … But in whatever place they are and wherever they may find themselves, the local laws cannot force them to give up the law of their Messiah…" (trans. Drijvers 2007: 59–61). Mani's contribution to the broader discussion of religious universalism further innovated on the advances of Bardaisanite tradition by proposing that religion represented the primary marker of Manichaean identity as opposed to the older Christian notion linking religious identity to a newly emergent ethnic marker (BeDuhn 2015a: 270).

Mani began to travel, teach, and sow the seeds for the establishment of communities dedicated to his teachings shortly after his break from the religious commune in which he had been raised from infancy; the identity of this group, most certainly a party of baptizing Christian sectarians, possibly

linked to the figure of Elchasai, remains the subject of some controversy (Luttikhuizen 1985: 152–172; de Jong 2014). The *Cologne Mani Codex* comprises a hagiography of the early years of the apostle's life and activities, and includes the first journeys of Mani in the early 240s (Baker-Brian 2011: 33–60; trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 47–73). While the chronology of Mani's travels is evasive, the *Cologne Mani Codex* indicates a course traversing the areas around the sea-route now referred to as the Persian Gulf (trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 66–73; Daryaee 2003): in this context, Mani is portrayed as following the passage to the Indian subcontinent traversed by the sages memorialized in legendary accounts of western engagements with the east, namely the *Life of Apollonius* by Philostratus, and the *Acts of Thomas* (Parker 2008: 251–307). Mani's visit to Turan almost certainly dates from this period too. While the separation of fact from fiction remains an important concern in handling the historiography of Mani's journeys in relation to his conversion of monarchs, it is nonetheless apparent that Mani took full advantage of his familiarity with prevailing narratives detailing an ancient wisdom in order to secure the support of the nascent Sasanian monarchy.

Soon after his return to Persia and his initial encounters with Shapur I, Mani wrote his *Shābuhragān* (lit. "The treatise for Shapur" its full title, *The Two Principles of the Shābuhragān*: Colditz 2015: 53). This work was unusual insofar as it was the only work written by Mani in Middle Persian, notably the language of the Sasanian court, all of his other writings being composed in Aramaic, which was his principal dialect. The work survives as fragments of text (MacKenzie 1979; Hutter 1992). Additional valuable testimony about the structure and contents of the work is given by Islamic writers from the ninth to the thirteenth century (Reeves 2011: 98–105). According to the witness of al-Biruni, the *Shābuhragān* opened with a chapter outlining the details of Mani's identity as an apostle of God. Mani relativized his own contribution by identifying prior exponents of "wisdom and deeds" (or, "wisdom and knowledge": trans. Reeves 2011: 102–103) from previous eras:

> Apostles of God have constantly brought wisdom and deeds in successive times. In one era they were brought by the apostle al-Bud (i.e. the Buddha) to the land of India, in another (era) by Zardasht (i.e. Zoroaster) to Persia, and in another (era) by Jesus to the West. Now this revelation has descended and this prophecy is promulgated during this final era by me, Mani, the apostle of God of truth to Babylonia.

Mani's appropriation of Buddha and Zoroaster as prior apostles highlighted his own pedigree in order (no doubt) to facilitate the acceptance of his

teachings within elite Sasanian circles. Both figures carried "cultural capital" as purveyors of ancient wisdom, a concern that during the Sasanian period became subjugated to a nationalistic ideology: according to the later Zoroastrian source, the *Dēnkard* ("Acts of Religion"), Ardashir I and Shapur I ordered disparate wisdom, understood to be of Iranian origin (and that had been lost during the conquests of Alexander the Great), to be collected in the process of consolidating the *Avesta*, as an exercise in reclaiming dispersed patrimony (Shaked 2003: 67–68; Dilley 2013: 48). By bringing these prophetic figures together as his forebears, and by assigning them territory along with introducing Jesus, a relative newcomer, to the family of prophets, Mani presented himself to Shapur as a religious innovator who, at the same time, acknowledged his debt to prior revealers. He thus appears to have positioned himself as both a conservative and a radical at the same time. Both Buddha and Zoroaster were the prophetic figureheads of traditions who were known to have espoused contrasting theologies, for example the absolutist theology and ethics of the Mazdayasnian religion versus the "Middle Way" attributed to the Buddha (for some interesting albeit speculative ideas on the response of early Buddhism to early Zoroastrianism, see Beckwith 2015: 6–10). Mani's appropriation of both figures was likely a feature of his claim to have reconciled all older and previously oppositional religions in his own teachings, which was articulated in the statement outlining the superiority of his religion found initially in the *Shābuhragān* (Lieu 2006). His inclusion of the (relatively) novel Jesus represents a further innovation on Mani's part, which nonetheless betrayed the central importance of Jesus to Mani's own sense of apostolic identity (Franzmann 2003).

Judging the novelty of Mani's teachings forms part of a broader question frequently asked by historians and religious studies scholars alike about how to classify Manichaeism as a discrete tradition. In a sense, this has been *the* question applied perennially by a range of commentators to Mani's teachings from its earliest origins in Late Antiquity. For Christian, Muslim, and Zoroastrian authors of heresiological literature, Mani's teachings represented self-serving distortions of established traditions. These authors applied distinctive epithets to Mani's followers and institutions in order to illustrate Mani's doctrinal deviancy: in Patristic literature, the primacy of Jesus as an apostle for Manichaean teachings was nullified by depriving Manichaeans of any claim to the name "Christian" (hence the eponymous projection of Mani's name to his followers in the heresiological work of Epiphanius, *Panarion* 66.1.1, trans. Williams 1994: 219–308); in Islamic literature, Mani's religion became the heresy of *zandaqa* (Reeves 2011: 18), deriving from the Middle Persian term for propagators of allegorizing commentary (Middle Persian: *zand*) of the *Avesta*, which became extended to those who

taught the doctrine of pre-eternity and denied the creation of the world (following the tenth-century explanation in al-Ma'sūdī's *Murūj* in Reeves 2011: 167; also, de Blois 2002). While devising strategies of alterity no longer preoccupy (at least consciously!) contemporary commentators, moderns badge Manichaeism according to a variety of labels—for example, "Gnostic," "syncretic," "Christian," "Iranian," along with numerous others—in order to contribute phenomenological explanations for Manichaean theology, but which evaluate Manichaeism relationally with the attendant pitfalls involved in an analysis of this kind (King 2003: 1–19). Recent research, however, takes seriously Mani's claim to be doing something new with his ideas:

> [Manichaeism is] a religion that needs to be understood as a new religion that took shape, or indeed, was designed, in a particular setting, early Sasanian Babylonia. It was designed by an individual who was fully aware of that fact that the world that surrounded him knew a plurality of competing religions. (de Jong 2014: 131)

The attention Mani gave to promoting himself (via his prophetology) and his teachings is also evident in the way in which he conceptualized his religion as a dynamic contribution within the landscape of ancient religions.

For Mani, however, religion was divine wisdom of archaic origin habitually revealed across history in the efforts of appointed apostles and realized institutionally in specific places. Thus, the requisite acknowledgment of his predecessors' achievements was central to Mani's prophetology. The establishment of genuine or fictional links to legendary predecessors, highlighting areas of continuity and, more importantly, claiming to supersede the achievements of those predecessors, were aspects of the way genealogies were utilized to legitimize claims of authority across both religious and imperial spheres of influence. The Sasanian dynasty and the religion of Mani were at formative stages of development during the mid-third century, and both shared the tendency to overstate their achievements and ambitions in this early period, not in a vainglorious way but rather from necessity since the claim of being superior to one's predecessors was a feature of the language of legitimacy in Sasanian state and religious propaganda at this time (Kreyenbroek 2008; for a critical approach to thinking about "religion" in the Sasanian empire of the time, see Becker 2014). The superlative achievements of Shapur I as recorded on the Ka'ba of Zoroaster on the base of the rock reliefs of Naqš-I Rustām (Rubin 2002) convey an artificial genealogy along with a list of martial victories characterized by "the first flush of Sasanid self-assertion" (Fowden 2014: 102; on the genealogy of the Sasanian dynasty, see Olbrycht 2016). Mani's articulation of this legitimizing principle is

evident in the famous statement of his religion's superiority derived, in all likelihood, from the *Shābuhragān* (Lieu 2006). A collection of fragmentary texts in Middle Persian (M5794 and M5761; trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 109; see Lieu 2006 for additional commentary) preserves half of the ten advantages that Mani believed his own "religion" (*dēn*) had over "previous religions" (*pēšēnagān dēnān*). A more complete variation of this scheme also found its way into *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (chapter 151, following the numeration of Funk 2002: trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 265–268) This statement, configured as an autobiographical reflection outlining the defining characteristics of Mani's religion, has been viewed in recent times as an effort on his part to move his religion beyond the established boundaries of state, ethnicity, and orality, thereby presaging modern attempts to define religion as a category (Nongbri 2013: 66–73; BeDuhn 2015a: 266–275). The advantages or aspects represent Mani's articulation of contemporary anxieties regarding the place of religion in imperial confederacies and transregional cultures, and specifically the association between religion and ethnicity, the degradation of revealed truth across generations, and the movement toward the stabilization of revelation in the canonization of writings (Dilley 2013).

The first advantage conveys Mani's ambition to achieve the universal dissemination of his teachings in terms that would now be identified as a disembedded phenomenon. This ambition represented a radical departure from the traditional alignment of religion with ethnic markers—an association that Mani himself repeats in the *Shābuhragān*'s prophetology, and which he exploits further in this autobiographical segment: "the older religions were in one country and one language; but my religion is of the kind that it will be manifest in every country and in all languages, and it will be taught in faraway countries" (trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 109). The second advantage highlights the degradation of the older religions arising from the physical departure of their founders conveyed in terms of the characteristic motif of the heavenly ascent of apostles in Manichaean tradition (Dilley 2015). By contrast Mani's religion will not become "confused and slack" when Mani departs as a result of its surrogate structure, and will thus "remain firm through the living (…tea)chers, the bishops, the elect and the hearers; and of wisdom and works will stay on until the end" (trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 109). The third advantage conveys the message that "former souls" who "in their own good action were not completed" will discover in Mani's religion "the gate of salvation" (trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 109). This is an ambiguous statement as it could refer either to those souls who having changed their allegiance fulfil their religious lives as members of Mani's community; or, Mani could be referring to those souls who lived during the times of the earlier apostles and did not attain to salvation on account

(perhaps) of inadequacies in the prior traditions' teachings but who now, as reborn souls, attain salvation as followers of Mani (see chapter 91 of *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* for the matter of reincarnation: trans. Gardner 1995: 235–241). The fourth advantage involves Mani highlighting the superiority of his teachings based on the idea of the Two Principles (of the Light and the Darkness) and his "living books." According to the kephalaïc rendering (chapter 151) of the scheme, Mani indicates (as the second aspect) that his writings preserve his wisdom in distinction to his predecessors who did write down their teachings. The matter of avoiding the corruption of teachings noted in the second advantage of the Middle Persian texts is noted again here but in relation to the role of Mani's writings as guaranteeing the preservation of his wisdom intact for future generations (Gardner and Lieu 2004: 266). In the final fifth advantage from the Middle Persian fragments, Mani notes that "all writings, all wisdom and all parables of the previous religions" have become manifest in his religion. Chapter 151 offers a more poetic and more detailed presentation of this advantage according to which Mani staked his claim to be the apostle of the culminant religion:

> The fourth: The writings and the wisdom and the revelations and the parables and the psalms of all the first churches (*nšarp nekklēsia*) have been collected in every place. They have come down to my church. They have been added to the wisdom that I have revealed, the way that water might add to water and become many waters. Again, this is also the way that the ancient books have added to my writings, and have become great wisdom; its like was not uttered in all the ancient generations. They did not write nor did they unveil in the books the way that I, I have written it. (151.372.10–20; trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 266)

The ten aspects represented a unique development in the religious landscape of the period. At an early stage Mani perceived his religion as a complete package: its "designer status" (de Jong 2008: 104) is evident in Mani's anticipation of the problems that he expected were likely to undermine the development of his religion based on his own assessment of the state of existing religions in Sasanian Persia including Zoroastrianism, which was becoming codified canonically and institutionally for the first time at this point in Iranian history (Dilley 2013: 45–50). While the scheme itself was likely intended to serve as a manifesto utilized in the course of Manichaean missions to present a series of claims, codes, and keywords to would-be initiates (Colditz 2015), it is also the case that the fundamental components of Manichaeism began to be developed from early on in its history, the most prominent of which included its scriptural texts and its nascent communal structure. We now turn to examine both components.

Creating New Chapters

Mani himself noted his own involvement in the early development of his Church in a letter written to members of a Manichaean community (the letter's formula of address has not been preserved); the letter itself was preserved in a limited collection of Mani's epistles maintained by a later community of followers from Kellis in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis during the mid-fourth century (Gardner 2013).

> Remember your first faith that you had in your youth: How I labored in the congregations of the sects at the time when there was yet no catechumen or church. You have become people made better by blessed poverty. Now, since you have been bringing forth catechumens and churches—you proclaimed and they listened to you—you are obliged the more now to perfect the blessing of this poverty, by which you will gain the victory over the sects and the world. (P. Kellis Copt. 53. 51.1–14; trans. I. Gardner and W.-P. Funk in Gardner 2007: 55)

While the author of a recent monograph on the Manichaean Church has noted that the subject of Mani's *ecclesia* is "an obvious and trite subject … [having] been well known and accepted for centuries" (Leurini 2013: 13), it is also the case that research into the connectedness of the Manichaean Church with other aspects of Mani's religion remains largely downplayed by scholars. Claudia Leurini's efforts to expose the ideology beneath the structure of the Manichaean Church has revealed that its organization was determined in large part by the cosmology developed by Mani as an explanation for the historic emergence of the universe and its soteriological destiny as realized in the ritualized actions of his followers. According to Leurini's findings, the Manichaean Church is portrayed in a range of (disparate) sources for Mani's cosmology as the twelfth Firmament, the Church represented as "a practical consequence of the structure of the universe" (Leurini 2013: 154) commissioned by the transcendent deity to assist in the liberation of divine Light. However, a clear explanation for the source of Mani's cosmology remains largely unattainable: as a narrative account positing a scientific explanation for creation and the errant nature of the created order, the character of Manichaean cosmology reflected the complex hybridity of ancient cosmological science, where astronomical ideas from Babylonia fused with Iranian, Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Jain, and Buddhist models (Leurini 2013: 152–153).

Mani was nonetheless among the first to articulate clearly a practical structure for his Church based on his cosmology. The "poverty" (Coptic: *mnthēke*) noted by Mani in his letter cited above identified the ideal condition for both

the catechumenate and the Elect, the two tiers comprising the Manichaean Church. "Poverty" functioned as a code-word that represented the state of ascetic self-abnegation required of both parties, which was then relativized according to the different demands placed on the two groups. The catechumenate (or Hearers) were the lay-members of the Church whose primary responsibility was to the Elect, a grouping of gyrovagic individuals who served the Church by perfecting their "blessed poverty" via their commitment to abstaining from thinking or acting in impure ways (Colditz 2009). It is a remarkable feature of Mani's community that this fundamental relationship between the two grades remained functional irrespective of the environment in which it became embedded, for instance in the domestic setting of Kellis during the fourth century (BeDuhn 2008), or in the Uyghur-sponsored monastic communities of Central Asia (Lieu 1998: 76–97). The obvious limitations placed on the Elect were compensated for by the donative role assigned to the Hearers who became the Elect's patrons (P. Kellis Copt. 31.17, Gardner *et al.* 1999: 210–211; Baker-Brian 2017) by supplying alms, foremost among which included the distribution of food that the Elect consumed in a daily, ritual meal. Manichaeism stood in a tradition of dietetic philosophies (BeDuhn 1992, 2000) that linked spiritual growth to the management of the appetites of the human body. Ever the innovator, Mani fused Hellenistic medical ideas positing the relationship between the body and the soul with a Gnostic explanation for the soul's alienation. Thus, the Elect stood on the frontline of a cosmic battle between two opposing substances (see Mani's *Fundamental Epistle* frg. 5a, in Augustine's *Against the Fundamental Epistle* 13.16: trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 169; Stein 2002: 22–23)—commonly reduced in scholarship on the topic to a conflict between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness, hence the infamous tag-line, "Manichaean Dualism" (Tardieu 2008: 75–90; Baker-Brian 2011: 96–133; Gardner 2015c)—where a proportion of elemental Light was lost in the war's opening skirmishes. According to Manichaean cosmology, the universe—comprising the Firmaments and associated mechanistic structures—was designed to facilitate the release and processing of Light alienated in the material world (the earth, vegetation, animal, and human bodies) and to facilitate its eventual return to the realm of the transcendent God. The bodies of the Elect represented small yet vital cogs in this machine of salvation since, as a result of their ascetic conditioning, they were able to metabolize Light psychologically and physiologically thereby effecting its release (BeDuhn 2000: 163–208).

It should be apparent that Mani's cosmology together with the theology and ecclesiology that flowed from it was highly complex and therefore likely impossible for followers to attain familiarity with in one sitting. Returning to

the ten aspects, the frequency of references to Mani collecting wisdom from ancient books and adding this to his own scriptures indicates that the apostle's commitment to the authoring of texts was paramount: above all his works were indispensable in communicating his teachings. Mani's followers responded to their apostle's literary labor by displaying a tremendous appetite for his books: Manichaeans copied his works as an aspect of their religious obligations, and also owned libraries of their apostle's works, which they exhorted one another to study routinely (P. Kellis Copt. 19.82–84; Gardner *et al.*, 1999: 162). With the exception of the *Shābuhragān* (which itself has only been preserved in a series of fragmentary texts and then only partially: MacKenzie 1979, 1980; Hutter 1992), next to nothing of Mani's writings has survived the passage of time (for the extant testimonia and excerpts, see Gardner and Lieu 2004: 151–175). Sporadic censorship of Manichaean scriptures by inimical religious authorities and hostile rulers (Lieu 1992: 214–215) has meant that only a meager number of fragments of works authored by Mani have survived, cited in the main by his opponents writing against them. What little we do know of Mani's canonical writings indicates that the explication of his cosmology and attendant themes (including Mani's theogony, prophetology, and his presentation of the eschaton) took center-stage. However, recent work on fragments of Mani's letter collections also reveals an author committed to the practical needs of his community (Baker-Brian 2016), including the pastoral resolution of interpersonal problems affecting Manichaeans in his nascent Church (e.g. in the "Epistle of the Ten Words" included in the smaller version of Mani's collected epistles: Gardner 2007: 74–78; also Gardner 2013). Indeed, Mani's understanding of the needs of his religious community extended to its liturgical practices: in the canon lists for his Aramaic writings (thus, excluding the *Shābuhragān*: see the "Introduction" to *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* 5.23–26; trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 153–154), he is said to have been the author of *Psalms and Prayers*, the influence of which ranged across the liturgical lives of Manichaean communities for centuries (Gardner 2011). It is a tantalizing prospect that Mani's hand lay behind the writing of the glorificatory text known as the "Prayer of the Emanations" utilized by Manichaeans in Roman Kellis (P. Kellis Gr. 98; Gardner 2007: 111–128), although a definitive explanation for the theological provenance of this work is still very much needed (Gardner 2015c: 424–425).

Mani and his subsequent followers also greatly valued images as a didactic medium for the communication of his ideas. The rendering of the ten aspects preserved in *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (chapter 151) includes alongside references to the written conveyance of wisdom in Mani's books (identifying specifically "the great *Gospel*," which is the work known as *The Living Gospel*)

a reference to his *Hikōn*, or *Picture-Book* (Gardner and Lieu 2004: 266; Gulácsi 2015: 26–29). The Mani of the *Kephalaia* notes that in the same way that his written works marked a point of departure in the history of revelation, he is also the first among the apostolic brethren to leave a book of images: "(The apostles did not write) their wisdom in a book the way that I, I have written it. (Nor) did they depict their wisdom in the *Picture* (*-Book*) the way (that I, I have) depicted it" (151.371.26–29; trans. Gardner and Lieu 2004: 266). The *Picture-Book* (or *Hikōn* according to its title in Coptic) was a pictorial work containing illustrations depicting aspects of Mani's teachings (Gulácsi 2015: 496). It acquired canonical status, and Manichaean tradition early assigned it to the labor of Mani himself (Gulácsi 2015: 492–498). Chapter 92 of the aforementioned *Kephalaia* is a valuable early witness to one of the concerns of this no longer extant work. The discussion in this chapter revolved around the depiction of the fates of "the righteous one" (an Elect) and "the sinner" in the judgment after death (92. 234.6–236.6; trans. Gardner 1995: 241–242; Gulácsi 2015: 29–32). The spur for the book's depiction of judgment lay in a question asked by a Hearer regarding the absence of images relating to the fate of "the catechumen;" despite the lacunose nature of the text at this point, it is apparent that Mani's reply entailed explaining that the catechumen passes through "the Middle Way" of purification and her ultimate fate is that of the Elect, which is indeed depicted in the work. As Zsuzsanna Gulácsi illustrates in her recent monograph on Manichaean religious art, chapter 92 discloses "the didactic value of the *Hikōn*" by indicating "how the *Hikōn* was pointed to as a visual aid that captured the essence of a specific teaching, and how the *Hikōn* became a catalyst of discussion in the course of religious instruction" (Gulácsi 2015: 31–32; 62–65).

The *Picture-Book* played a vital role in imparting Mani's teachings to the community and, as can be seen in chapter 92 of *The Kephalaia*, it serviced the culture of orality that marked late antique Manichaeism (Gulácsi 2015: 62–63). While the ten aspects mandated the role that Mani's books played in preserving his teachings unchanged (chapter 151: 151.371.23–24), other existing signs indicate that Manichaeans were not discouraged from developing their own interpretations of their apostle's teachings. The appearance of historical, liturgical (in the guise of the Manichaean Psalms), and commentarial writings in the period after Mani's death indicates a vibrant intellectual culture that encouraged rather than discouraged writing alongside a process that was responsible for canonizing Mani's works (Robinson 2013: 193–311). Of paramount importance in this regard was the emergence of the kephalaïc literature toward the end of the third century (Gardner 2015b). Late antique Manichaeans were thereby able to uphold two seemingly opposing concerns: an obligation not to alter Mani's teachings, while nonetheless continuing to engage in and then present extensive discussions of those same ideas.

The Kephalaia of the Teacher, one of the most important religious writings of the late antique period, illustrates the importance of dialogue and argumentation as a strategy in Manichaean didacticism. As a literary work, the *Kephalaia* has clear antecedents (Pettipiece 2009: 8–10). Its rhetorical strategies of discourse and theological patterning were overlaid one on top of another (Pettipiece 2009: 79–91); and yet, the *Kephalaia*'s portrayal of the potential range of topics *potentially* discussed by Mani and his disciples represents the idealization of teaching, dialogue and orality in the religion.

Thus, despite the "ready-made" impression of Mani's religion presented by the ten aspects, it is apparent that his teachings were not "highly systematized and unambiguous" (Pettipiece 2009: 13). As Timothy Pettipiece has sensibly observed regarding Mani's works, they were "likely written over a substantial period of time in varying circumstances, Mani's writings seem to have been largely incidental, dealing with a wide range of (of miscellaneous) theological, polemical, and pastoral concerns (as in the *Book of Mysteries* and *Epistles*)" (Pettipiece 2009: 79). Indeed, it seems very likely that the forms employed by Mani to convey his ideas—namely, mythography and image—encouraged further discussion precisely because these forms demanded an interpretative approach (Baker-Brian 2011: 97–105). In acts of interpretation subsequent to Mani, Manichaeans began systematizing their apostle's theology via a theological and ontological patterning based around pentadic groups of virtues, divine figures, and intellectual powers: this developed a concern on Mani's part for five-fold structures, although Manichaeans in their kephalaïc literature took this preoccupation to a new level (Pettipiece 2009: *passim*). What emerged in this instance is frequently referred to as a "scholastic tradition" (Pettipiece 2009: 79–85; Gardner 2009). Furthermore, Manichaeans over time shifted their religion's parameters of authority away from the agencies privileged by the apostle toward Mani himself. Such transformations included the gradual erasure of the role of the Holy Spirit from the kephalaïc literature, a figure who had nonetheless been paramount to Mani's own apostolic self-identity (Gardner 2009: 149–150), and the ascribing of the dualistic datum of the religion—namely, discernment of the two natures—to Mani, when in fact Mani had explicitly identified this as a fundamental feature of Jesus' revelation as seen in the language of the two trees from the synoptic gospels (Gardner 2015c: 426–427).

Conclusion

Innovation and novelty are largely undertheorized concepts in the study of ancient religion (Houtman *et al.* 2008). As a result, moderns have been reluctant to discuss emergent religions in these terms, in addition to the fact

that other paradigms concerned with evaluating the genealogies of religions have predominated (Baker-Brian 2011: 7–15). As such, an appreciation of Mani's efforts to contrive something radically different from the religions that surrounded him in the province of Mesopotamia has been frequently overlooked in modern scholarship. However, the emergence of new interpretive paradigms utilized to evaluate religious transformations in late antique society—for example, theories relating to religion as a countercultural force (DeConick 2016) or the identification of religions becoming disembedded from societal nexuses and the attendant consequences of this process (BeDuhn 2015a)—has meant that a more acute sense of Mani's novel significance in the landscape of late antique religious history has come to the fore. Mani's religion outlasted Late Antiquity by many centuries (Lieu 2012), but as a religion aligned to systems of power its time had long passed. Indeed, Manichaeism was very much a religion of the late ancient world. As we have seen in this chapter, Mani's ambitions and anxieties for his religion as articulated in his ten aspects were concerns of the *Zeitgeist*. The ongoing importance of prophets and prophecy, the alignment of religious authority with imperial power, the emergence of portable ecclesiastical structures, and the role of scriptures and the process of canonization as extensions of cultural memory, were foremost among the concerns of late antique religious history (Stroumsa 2015; see also Chapter 26 in this volume). The fact that they were preoccupations of Mani and his followers in the third century illustrates the important, catalyzing role of his religion in shaping theological debates and religious practices in subsequent centuries, and in supplying "Manichaean" vestiges to later versions of Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism (Baker-Brian 2013).

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FURTHER READING

A number of well-produced and accessible (English-language) source collections pertaining to the study of Manichaeism are now available. Klimkeit's (1993) volume is a treasury of historical and liturgical texts documenting the "eastern" diffusion of Manichaeism. For the "western" diffusion, there is the volume edited by Gardner and Lieu (2004), which also contains an excellent introduction outlining key features and moments in the religion's early history. For the testimony of Islamic and Zoroastrian authors on the phenomenon of Manichaeism, Reeves' (2011) book is an invaluable collection that is strongly recommended. Iain Gardner's (1995) translation of the edited *Kephalaia* material has lately been reprinted in paperback form. Readers will be able to find the translations of Manichaean literary texts from Roman Egypt (including the remains of Mani's epistles) by Gardner (2007) in good university libraries. Recent introductions to Manichaeism include Tardieu (2008), and Baker-Brian (2011). More detailed historical surveys of Mani's religion can be found in Lieu (1992, 1994, and 1998).

Paleo-Islam: Transfigurations of Late Antique Religion

Aziz Al-Azmeh

Introduction

Familiar as it may seem, writing or speaking of "Islam" is neither straightforward, nor is there an obvious point of reference. Islam is and has always been many things to many people. As a noun it can indicate a variety of things, by deliberation or by association, depending on the context in which it is used. Used unreflectively as a name and without further specification in terms of time, place, or level of analysis, it is vulnerable to being drawn into interpretative drifts associated with clichés and stereotypes prevalent in demotic perceptions and, especially in the past two decades or so, associated with images of very considerable ideological density. Expert scholarship has not been immune to this either.

These drifts generally convey an emphasis on singularity and incommensurability in a contrastive "Islam-and-the-West" mode of apprehension. They tend to privilege an understanding of Islam that is overdetermined by doctrine and doctrinal texts, and by a culturalist outlook generally oblivious to concrete social actors enracinated in time, place, and process. Islam thus devolves to a nominal category consisting of textual fragments transcending historical context, to a context consisting largely of floating texts, to history and to a social process perceived primarily through texts (Cahen 1967; Hourani 1976: 114–115; 117; Al-Azmeh 2007, chapters 2 and 7).

Strictly speaking, therefore, there can be no such thing as "Islamic history," although there are histories of Muslim cult, institutions, dogmas, and so forth, marked or demarcated in determinate ways by Islam as a religion. In contradistinction to a history stood upon its head, the present chapter will propose an approach that is, in the usual way of history and historians, more attentive to discrimination and distinction than metahistorical uniformity and linearity, or to rhetorical figures of continuity as may be conveyed by terms such as civilization. It is proposed that Islam, and the term is used here for convenience, be regarded in terms of time and process, rather than be perceived in terms of a homeostatic constancy over time, in which the genesis and development of Islam is presumed to be that of a total historical actor born virtually complete, signaled by the Qur'ān and by a political order ostensibly associated with it, even emerging from it, subsequent history being no more than the unfolding of a pre-established potential.

Thus, both Islam and Late Antiquity, the two terms framing this chapter, will need to be defined as to the specific settings in which they are, for present purposes, conjoined, and the manner of their association will need to be indicated explicitly. Both terms are therefore at once perspectives and constraints. Islam is in this context a nascent religion. Born under circumstances specific to late antique western Arabia and carried by social and political factors, Paleo-Islam is eventually and in the end rapidly becoming an Arab-Muslim imperial polity extending to the central lands of Late Antiquity, with a base in Syria.

Reflecting on Late Antiquity

Late Antiquity is a historical and geographical setting and an assembly of interrelated conditions, not simply a chronological tranche. It is lent coherence by an imperial system based on military prowess and the maintenance of tax bases and of a monetary system, with a distinct sense of confessionalism and of the lofty and hallowed station of the imperial person. This imperial system impelled the Arabs, as it had impelled the Goths and a variety of other Germanic peoples, to form ever greater, albeit not always stable, political and territorial units, and to be inducted thereby into the flow of Late Antiquity. This drove the Arabs to enter upon a process of ethnogenesis, with royalist or quasi-royalist structures of domination and established networks of trade giving force to ethnogenetic genealogies and increasingly correlated myths, legends, and lore, as well as the crucial linguistic and literary registers of a vehicular Arabic, ultimately written in a special script rather than other ambient prestige scripts (Nabatean, Greek, South Arabian), and producing a considerable volume of poetry and epic materials (Al-Azmeh 2014a, chapter 3).

Late Antiquity was also a period that witnessed profound transformations. Erstwhile polytheistic territories were becoming predominantly—if not almost entirely—Christian in the third and fourth centuries, while the much older Judaism persisted, with crucial developments in Rabbinism in Iraq and Palestine in the course of the fourth century (Boyarin 2009). The late antique world also saw the emergence of religions that were ultimately to be short-lived, such as Manichaeism, and—with the arrival of the Arabs in Iraq and Iran—the diminution and displacement of Zoroastrianism. And it witnessed, crucially, the canonization of scriptures (Smith 1989; Sawyer 1999; Fowden 2014, chapter 6).

A number of further specifications regarding Late Antiquity need to be made in order to achieve a measure of clarity about the parameters of the discussion, and about the constraints that arise from the Late Antiquity component itself. Scholarship on Late Antiquity has made considerable progress in the past three decades (Brown *et al.* 1997; Vessey 1998; Liebeschuetz 2004; Cameron 2008; Fowden 2014, chapter 2), though it is still beset by a host of questions regarding chronology, periodization, and morphology, which cannot be discussed here (Giardina 1999; Bowersock 2004; Athanassiadi 2006; Al-Azmeh 2014a: 2–18). Suffice it to say that in the present chapter the concept is used in a determinate way. Late Antiquity, as understood here, is unconcerned with the "hermeneutic of decadence and decline" (Cameron 2014: 82) that the study of the period inherited from its connection with classical history, as understood traditionally. It is devoid of east–west polarities, which had preoccupied quite a number of discussions, and which have little historical verisimilitude but do have ideological density arising from their being above all rhetorical figures for genealogical continuity. It is proposed here that Late Antiquity be regarded from a perspective that weighs space with time in such a way that the political, economic, and cultural center of gravity of the category, and of Romanity as well, is recognized as having shifted to Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean as the Italic and other erstwhile lands of the first Rome were disengaging themselves from the particular historical itinerary which we call Late Antiquity (Fowden 1993, chapter 1; Fowden 2014, chapter 4; Al-Azmeh 2014a: 4–5, 15–19, 23–26).

Moreover, and alongside specifying geographical remit by weighting it with chronology, the analysis of Late Antiquity can be further refined with reference to certain parameters of analysis. Thus, there can be various overlapping but differentiated sectoral periodizations of the histories of architecture, decorative arts, statuary, iconography, urbanism, language, literary forms, philosophy, and many other instances (Martin 1976; Al-Azmeh 2014a: 12–13). In effect, much of the work on Late Antiquity has conceived

this period under a particular signature, endowing it with a particular ethos that has been made to stand in, *pars pro toto*, for the entire period. This synecdoche has generally been taken for aspects of religious life, in a Gibbonsian attitude given a positive spin, be this expressed in Marrou's Theopolis or indicated by terms such as the "age of spirituality," or described as having been primarily an age that saw the rise into prominence of Peter Brown's late antique "cockney culture" encapsulated by the Holy Man. Most recently, it has been conceived under the signature of religious-exegetical and philosophical developments seen to characterize, and lend an inner morphological consistency to the millennium between Augustus and Avicenna (Fowden 2014).

This emphasis on religion is retained in this chapter for the simple reason that religion is this chapter's central concern. But it is an emphasis that is quite explicitly taken to be sectoral rather than morphologically central or structuring for other aspects of history, and it is conjoined with regard to the salience of empire (Cameron 2014, chapter 2). Empire was the vertical hinge of historical developments, a condition for developments of Paleo-Islam that took place, and in many very determinate ways a central causal element. Moreover, fundamental to this discussion of religion is not so much secondary elaborations by means of doctrine, basic or theologically and exegetically elaborated, as much as religion as practice at concrete points of application. This applies most particularly to the genesis of Islam.

Paleo-Islam

The reconstruction here offered of this period, and of Arabian religion and polity more generally, is based on Arabic literary sources, including Abbasid-era antiquarianism, as well as the Qur'ānic text and archeological and epigraphic remains. One common view, in some circles taken for self-evidence, claims that for a variety of reasons Arabic literary sources are unreliable to the degree of being virtually unusable. This hyper-skeptical school of scholarship, while being salutary in emphasizing the importance of source criticism and of the assessment of evidence, seems ultimately to neglect one essential task of a historian, which is historical reconstruction from difficult source material, in favor of a nihilistic cognitive position. It generally adopts too narrow an understanding of the document, reminiscent of the narrowest of nineteenth-century positivistic requirements for conditions and conceptions of certainty that do not obtain in reality. Moreover, it adopts on occasion echoes of post-structuralist and post-modern narrativist tropes, generally drawn at second or third hand. It makes a number of unwarranted assumptions implicitly,

assumptions of the wilful invention after the event of an entire body of literature, a conspiracy of astonishing and indeed inhuman range and power, one which, by default of any rational explanation or by reference to historical verisimilitude, must appear to have been miraculously enforced and maintained. Having produced a cognitive tabula rasa of this period, many fanciful counter-historical scenarios were proposed and substituted for fact, including the emergence of Paleo-Islam outside western Arabia, the proposition that Muḥammad was a narrative fiction, or that the Qurʾān was a late Mesopotamian text. In recent years this trend seems to have exhausted its potential for productive work, and seems to persist still on inertial energy alone generated by the first, previous generation of practitioners (see Al-Azmeh 2014b). It is interesting to note that, with the emphasis on the pertinence of non-Arab sources and witnesses, the one work that has used these systematically in addition to epigraphic and other material remains (Hoyland 2015) produces a narrative that introduces interesting and pertinent material, but also tends to be in agreement with the general outline (as well as much detail) of what occurs in the Arabic sources.

What is being discussed here is therefore the emergence and, with time, the initial configuration of elements that were to crystallize and constitute what is generally characterized as classical Muslim civilization and polity, what I would rather characterize as Near Eastern civilization at the end of Late Antiquity ca. 750 CE and beyond. The period of somewhat over a century leading up to this will be designated as Paleo-Islam, in preference to other labels that have been used almost casually, such as early, earliest, or primitive, or pre-dynastic Islam, all of which seem to arise from a retrospective glance from an accomplished condition that regarded its past as tidily linear. The term is a historiographic category wedded to a chronological span, intended to highlight the distinctiveness of this period of flux. It is quite deliberately to allay any implicit assumption, made all too often, that the end result was inherent in its beginning and arose from it inevitably and almost seamlessly. One might say that pre-Umayyad or "pre-dynastic" Arabia would have been more apt had it not been for the resilience of terminological conventions containing the term "Islam," and for the thematic focus of this chapter. The historiographic point of the "Paleo" description was taken on board fruitfully (Fowden 2016); there is now a major Paleocoran research project, and "Paleo-Arabic" has been suggested as a term (Robin 2016: 302–303).

Paleo-Islam is here understood as both a socio-religious phenomenon and a broader historical development that saw the emergence of both a political structure that was, in the fullness of time, to become durable, and of an evolving scatter of credal, mythimetic, and devotional elements, both practices and representations, which were later to constitute a system. It is a

period that saw much alert exploration, innovation, adaptation, and assimilation correlative with the development of Muḥammad's charismatic polity and religion that were later to be construed together as a body of traditions. Paleo-Islam is the emergent condition of a new religion, Muḥammad's religion, prior to its doctrinal and exegetical elaboration, and prior to the consolidation of conditions, many the products of chance and fortune, that were to render its crystallization possible (for this whole body of topics, in this and subsequent paragraphs, see Al-Azmeh 2014a: 358–368).

It is being suggested that what was to become what we call classical Muslim civilization had been in effect the regional civilization of western Asia, perhaps its most successful crystallization (Morony 1984: 526). Late antique empires provided the conditions for both its emergence and initial crystallization. Paleo-Islam forms an integral part of Late Antiquity, and indeed in determinate ways its accomplishment (Fowden 1993, chapters 1 and 6; Fowden 2014, chapter 1; Al-Azmeh 2014a, chapter 1) in the sense that it instantiated, under the signature of a new universal calendar, two salient features that characterize this period.

These two features are monotheism and ecumenical empire, the conjunction of which, in constituting the history of this period, serves in very complex ways as its points of articulation and internal coherence. Umayyad polity is the end product of the translation of Romanity to the east, wherein its conditions of durability obtained: ecumenical empire with the salvific vocation of a monotheist religion, the two articulated symbolically by political theology and a theology of history both making increasing appeal to canonical proof-texts. The system was underwritten by an ecumenical currency (the epigraphic *dīnār*) and urbanism, whereby God and Mammon were engaged in a mutual embrace (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 38–39, 503–506, 524–525). It was underwritten by a continuity in taxation regimes no less than in certain forms of capital punishment (Marsham 2009: 486–488; 2011), by continuities in material culture including urbanism (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 37)—indeed, regarded in terms of lineal continuity, it is true that in its "perpetuation of a centralized, monotheist, and monarchical state, the caliphate was a direct inheritor of late antiquity" (Marsham 2009: 491; Al-Azmeh 2014a: 18–30, 500–508). Communal religious organization and confessional and sectarian elaborations continued from Roman through to Caliphal histories (Hoyland 2011: 1059–1062). The combined package was now expressed under a new, Arabian and Muḥammadan geneaological signature, and in a different linguistic medium, as the opening to Sasanian erstwhile territories in the east made possible the monetary and commercial, and also the cultural articulation of territories hitherto divided between Rome and Iran, now both forming part of the same imperial, commercial, and, with time, cultural world.

There have been a number of ways in which the emergence of Paleo-Islam as a religion has been narrated and analyzed, and the topic has been very much alive in recent scholarship, certain sub-fields of which, such as Arabian archeology and the history of Qur'ānic redaction, are in exponential growth. Broadly speaking, these various approaches have shared the general assumption that this religion emerged from the doctrinal and ritual templates of Judaism and Christianity, and that its emergence was linear, in essential measure seamless, almost natural and virtually self-explanatory. There have been internalist and externalist inflections to these studies, with emphases placed variously on proximate (including indigenous Arabian) or more distant monotheistic sources, but the historiographic template of interpretation has been fairly constant, generally tending to take antecedents for causes.

It is also generally assumed that the emergence of the Paleo-Muslim religion is largely to be conceived and understood in terms of texts and of Qur'ānic intertextuality, rather than in the systematic pursuit of the Sitz im Leben for the emergence of this text or for its internal structure and compositional process. There is considerable disagreement about which texts might be more relevant than others for this type of analysis, and the ever unresolved question of the intertexts of intertexts, as well as traversing a whole range of possibilities between appeals to general or vague precedents (such as the hypothetical "Syriac lectionary") and assertions of chapter-and-verse correspondences, concordances, and secondary redactions (Al-Azmeh 2013). More recently, academic fashion has opted for the use of Late Antiquity as a context (Hoyland 2012), the period being understood generally in terms of religion, a theopolis, as it were, and religions understood to consist of scripture, and in one particularly elaborate treatment, of scripture developing along with community-building itself understood as aligned with scriptural templates, developing, according to one major recent line of interpretation, from the psalmodic to the midrashic (Neuwirth 2010).

Such interpretations are generally doctrine-driven, and are overdetermined by theological assumptions, assuming the Qur'ān to have a distinct and univocal *Leittheologie* in the Protestant manner, making strong assumptions about a fanatical piety as the primary interpretative and causal motif (Sizgorich 2009: 36ff; Donner 2010), often making further assumptions about eschatological expectations as well (see Hoyland 2011: 1062–1063, 1066–1067). Generally speaking, the approach is one that does not give due weight to Arabian conditions in any but a general and formulaic way (in contrast to which, see Chabbi 1997). Much of this is, on closer scrutiny, somewhat anachronistic, and tends to overload the reading of the Paleo-Muslim scripture with later interpretative and glossatorial elements that include crucial input from Jewish and Christian texts in the folds of exegetical, theological,

and other elaborations of doctrine, ones that were only tangentially and fragmentarily in evidence at the Paleo-Muslim point of inception. Qur'ānic biblicisms are manifest, but in complex ways, and are far more interesting and significant than is usually supposed by scholarship that seeks to trace real or imagined textual filiations and quotations (Neuwirth 2010: 567ff; Al-Azmeh 2014a: 270–272, 350–351, 452–453, 460–461, 475–477, 488–497). What theology did exist, and whatever allusion was made to previous scriptures during the career of the Paleo-Muslim founding hero Muḥammad, is likely to have been understood in different ways by different constituencies, and was more in the nature of theologoumena whose apprehensions and interpretations were very context-specific. The imposition of a unitary sense or interpretative direction, of an invariant theological template, bears little historical verisimilitude.

In fact, the local Arabian polytheistic locutions, manners of worship, etiological and other ethnogenetic legends, epithets, and epicleses, and indeed notions of divinity and of the economy of the preternatural, are on closer scrutiny constitutive of much of the Qur'ānic text and its contents (Rezvan 1996, 1997; Sinai 2011; Frolov 2013: 87–91; Al-Azmeh 2014a; Al-Azmeh in press-1). For instance, the claim that the evocation of galloping horses in Q, 100:1–3 is derived from the four horsemen of the Apocalypse of John (Neuwirth 2010: 581–583) seems a typical displacement of the issue by looking away from more proximate, indeed immediate occurrences of both motif and image, these occurring in fact, with the use of the very same central images, in a polytheistic oath by Quraysh at Mecca (Q, 100:1: *wa'l ʿādiyāti ḍabḥā*; Ibn Ḥabīb: *ammā wa rabbi l-ʿādiyāti ḍ-ḍubbaḥi*; cf. Ibn Ḥabīb 1964: 116; Al-Azmeh in press-1). Biblicisms were incorporated into the text in complex ways as it evolved, and will have been received differently by different constituencies of addressee.

In a similar vein, it is noteworthy that there is little evidence of a chiliastic mood in Paleo-Islam (most recently restated and amplified by Shoemaker 2012, 2014). Qur'ānic chastisement pericopes might be interpreted rather in the sense of the cataclysmic visions associated with betylic fury and retribution, the chastisement and destruction of peoples by natural calamities in this world unleashed by vengeful deities, and of course paradisical images as well. Though some among Muḥammad's audience might have associated this with biblical scenarios of the End, and although such associations became stronger as the history of the Qur'ān moved forward, there is little reason to assume a univocal reception, and the structure of Qur'ānic pericopes does not sustain a vision of *Heilsgeschichte* normally associated with apocalypse (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 307–310). Apocalypse is a topic whose considerable complexity is often disregarded in this type of scholarship

(Cameron, forthcoming), not least the relationship in it between apocalyptic as a narrative genre, a sentiment, and chiliastic collective action.

Finally, the formation of what was to become Muslim monotheism. Again, there seems to be an implicit consensus that this was a development that requires little explanation, allied to the other assumption, that Allāh was simply the Arabic redaction of biblical divinity whose emergence is somehow self-explanatory, or explainable, in the way customary in monotheistic histories of monotheism, in terms of the inexorable and ineluctable progress, or on the still-common assumption of a primeval monotheism. It is assumed, for no compelling reason, that the region where Paleo-Islam emerged, western Arabia, was well on the way to monotheism, or, in line with traditional Muslim historiography, that there were monotheistic groups active within it, or that the presence of Jews and Christians in south Arabia, northern Ḥijāz, Syria, and southern Iraq, and in scattered parts of north-central and central Arabia, betokens a systemic move away from polytheism, and constitutes sufficient explanation of what was eventually to become Muslim monotheism.

Building implicitly upon the unreflected "decline of paganism" template, this last point has recently been made all the more forcefully using south Arabian epigraphic material speaking of a Lord of Heaven and of a *Rḥmnn*, and citing the absence of clearly polytheistic epigraphic evidence, or rather that such has not hitherto been discovered, as evidence for monotheism. It is also asserted, despite the carefully calibrated religious politics of Ḥimyarite sovereigns, that Judaism was adopted as an official "state religion" ca. 380 (Gajda 2009; Robin 2012: 303–305; Robin 2014: 48–59), and it is postulated, without evidence or further qualification, that there resulted a "massive movement of conversion" (most recently, Robin 2014: 59). Surely, the assumption of such a monotheistic postulate rests on the evidence of absence in a situation, moreover, where one would have expected triumphalist monotheistic epigraphic evidence.

Despite some awareness of uncertainties pertaining to the nature, character and extent of Christianity or Judaism in the relevant regions—and one default escape route from uncertainty has been the invocation of Judeo-Christian groups whose existence is extremely doubtful—this is nevertheless not taken seriously enough to have narrative and analytical consequence (see Al-Azmeh 2014a: 259–276). Wherever they existed, Judaism and Christianity seem to have been highly autocephalic and particularistic (Hoyland 2011). Christianity especially seems to have been minimalist, hardly at all catechized, and often syncretized with polytheistic cults as a cult of the cross and of Madonna and child, in the usual additive and aggregative way of polytheism, and with only minimal ritual institutes such as baptism, and little evidence for the circulation of scripture, let alone for

Christological controversy (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 259–276). With regard to Yemen, one might at most countenance an ambiguous, uncertain, unsteady and episodic Christianity (and Judaism) as to the constituency to which "conversion" was directed—in the case of Judaism, a number of noble line-ages—in a situation perhaps more reminiscent of the ambiguities of Ethiopian Christianity in its early stages (Bowersock 2013: 71–74) than of the Christianity of bishops in Syrian and Mesopotamian monasteries and cities. There is no evidence whatever, apart for traces of persons *de passage*, of Christianity between Aqaba and Yemen (Villeneuve 2011: 227–228). None of this allows inferences of blanket monotheism, not even tendentially.

Paleo-Muslim Divinity

The resilience and persistence of polytheism, not least in the Ḥijāz, a man-fully pagan reservation resistant to ambient traces of monotheistic faith, is generally much underestimated. Little wonder, therefore, that Paleo-Muslim rituals were *ab initio* compatible with traditional betylism, central to which were pilgrimage, circumambulation, and the black stone at Mecca (Villeneuve 2011: 230). The Paleo-Muslim pilgrimage was an amalgamation of two pol-ytheistic rites, with sacrifice less central than it had been (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 197–204, 224–227, 233–237, 328–338). Matters that might suggest mon-otheism precipitately and without due warrant might better be compared to the late Roman use of *heis theos*, an invocatory formula using a generic epi-thet in a polytheistic world where henotheism and monolatry waxed and waned with changing circumstances. This was an economy of the divine in which all deities received the honors of uniqueness at the right cultic time and place, as indeed did polytheistic Arab deities who received litanies of invocation (*talbiya*) that are almost automatically, albeit without justifica-tion, assumed to have been directed to a monotheistic Allāh (Belayche 2010; Al-Azmeh 2014a: 78, 227–232, 257).

There is no reason to hold that Allāh had emerged in any but such circum-stances, translated from a vague, distant, and sparsely attested and invoked oath deity, apparently without cult, to the master of the Meccan sacred enclave where he was offered monolatrous worship, without implication of a monotheist theology, and on to becoming the one and unique cosmocratic deity who embodied in Himself, exclusively and indivisibly, the very concept of divinity (Al-Azmeh 2014a, chapter 5). He had not been "a great god" comparable to major trans-local divinities such as Isis, Jupiter, or even the Arab Allat, or an otiose 'Il delegating his authority to a Baal, but rather an occa-sional and exotic deity. The transition to monotheism from a polytheistic

universe was abrupt, with time accelerated, and obeyed the general rules and patterns for divine emergence and change that had governed the world of polytheistic divinity.

In this world, religion was in a primary and elementary sense the cultic worship of deities organized by cultic associations, well-defined groups of birth and alliance performing sacrifices at specific times and places. Structure to this form of worship was endowed by times and places of worship and mechanisms of sacrifice rather than by a dogmatic template. This is the precise meaning of *dīn* in polytheistic Arabia (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 204–205), the word used for "religion" in Arabic. The only requisite item of dogma was belief in the uncanny powers of the divinities. Temples or other cultic locations were consecrated and, especially in the case of major, federal cult centers such as Mecca, consecrated together with fairly wide surrounding areas, delimited by cairns and other signs, within which certain rules and prohibitions applied, crucially ones that related to ritual purity. It is little wonder that, upon his migration to Yathrib (Medina), Muḥammad set up such a *ḥaram*, a sacred and protected enclave according to a number of agreements known collectively as the Constitution of Medina (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 130–131, 403; Munt 2014: 73–77 and chapters 1 and 2). The organization of the Meccan pilgrimage involved specific groups related by alliance performing their devotions (allied to trade, like all pilgrimage) in slightly different ways and at different times within this federal sacred region, much like others during Late Antiquity at Manbij (Hierapolis) in northern Syria, Rāmat al-Khalīl (Mamre) near Hebron in Palestine, and Jabal Ithlib near al-ʿUlā in northern Ḥijāz. Attempts to set up rival sanctuaries of this type were sometimes met with military force, as was that of B. Baghīḍ, not far from Mecca, at a time near enough to the life of Muḥammad to have been remembered vividly (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 130).

Divinities might be represented by altars, niches, stelae, betyls (all attested by recent archeology), or anthropomorphic representations (attested by literary sources). As in Nabatean lands, there is no evidence that aniconism was more than partial, or that the situation involved iconophobia (cf. Villeneuve 2011: 220; Al-Azmeh 2014a: 167–168, 217–218, 212–223). Of anthropomorphic or zoomorphic representations of deity, some were of local manufacture and others might be imported, such as Hubal at Mecca. There seems to have been a fairly rapid turnover of the divine, not least during the troubled sixth century, with the three famous deities of the Ḥijāz, Allat, al-ʿUzza, and Manāt, seemingly brought in, the second perhaps not very long before Muḥammad's lifetime (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 171–172, 177–180). Al-ʿUzza was worshipped by Muḥammad's Quraysh alongside other deities (he had sacrificed to her himself), including Isāf and Nāʾila brought with them from

the Red Sea region where their main sections had originated and where they still had a shrine, and the local Meccan deities whose names and location dot the pilgrimage itineraries, as well as long-distance deities such as Buwāna on the road to Syria.

A few deities were particularly distinguished in some specific function, such as cleromancy in the case of the Meccan Hubal and the nameless god at Dhū'l-Khalaṣa southeast of Mecca, beyond al-Ṭā'if, a town generally allied with Mecca at the time of Muḥammad's birth. These divinities nevertheless served, like other divinities, in an all-encompassing and all-purpose function, sustained by devotions and sacrifices punctiliously performed and offered and by votive offerings. Apart from being irascible when cultic infractions occurred or when hallowed ground was desecrated, by theft or murder or sexual delicts or hunting or the effusion of body fluids, they also guaranteed agreements and assured curses and sanctions against their breach, offered sanctuary, healing, prosperity, safety, progeny, regular rain. They also harbored treasuries.

There was no overarching theological template apart from belief in the efficacy of these deities, and indeed the religious situation as we perceive it from the sources conveys the impression of the sheer scatter of divine names across territory. There seem to have been rather convulsive shifts in the topography and social geography of the divine, involving the importation and renaming of divinities, the expansion of the geographical remit of some, by the multiplication of sanctuaries, or the gathering in of a wider territorial spread of worshippers brought into the alliance of cultic associations. There are also shifts due to the renaming of deities, of a complex transfer between names, epithets, and epicleses, and quite a number of other characteristics of polytheistic systems, especially those that were not under the command of stable polities with the institutional means of establishing durable structures of worship, including what would qualify as a priesthood and a body of specialists who might compose mythographies (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 49–64, 167–183).

The ubiquitous Allāt, for whom there is evidence all the way from northern Syria to south Arabia over a period a millennium and a half, would in this perspective seem to have been not so much a single and singular deity, or a specific divine person, as much as a common theonym shared by many local deities, sometimes syncretized iconographically, as with Athena Parthenos at Palmyra and Busra, Athena being the deity with greater trans-local salience and a mythographic template already, or with Isis. Even the so-called great gods—Zeus, Jupiter, Isis—were worshipped locally with local modifiers, geographical, ethnic or functional, becoming part of their theonyms: thus, for instance, Jupiter Heliopolitanus, Zeus Brontios (the thunderer), Zeus

Kassios (of Mt. Cassius in Syria), Zeus Safathenos (of the Safaitic peoples), all syncretized with Baals duly qualified. Similarly, there are qualifiers for Allāt as well, location-specific or otherwise descriptive of her as *Btlt*, *parthenos*, or "Allāt, the goddess, who is in Buṣra" (inscription at Wadi Ramm; Wenning 2001: 81).

A single divine personality is the result not so much of worship in itself, which is more likely to be directed at different names and epithets on specific occasions defined by time and place. It arises rather from the trans-local, institutionalized cult structure with political articulations, maintained by a sodality that might develop into a priesthood. In some but not all instances, a central fund of belief was elaborated, in some instances theologically and philosophically elaborated. In its elementary form, the only belief required is in the efficacy of the deity addressed, and the taxonomy of the divine, including the distinctions between deities and the different types of preternatural beings such as angels, gods, and spirits, was very weakly elaborated. In the late antique context, few divinities approached a status of trans-local constancy and durability, such Isis and Mithras (especially among the military). Later, the gods of the Christians, Father and Son, were to constitute a firmer and less variant template.

Emphasis is here placed on worship at the concrete and immediate point of application, definable in terms of both time and place. Nevertheless, the polytheistic religion of the Arabs, albeit bereft of creed or dogma, and endowed with priestly functions only occasionally, was not haphazard. Durable form and structure were endowed by forms of sacrifice and invocation, supplication, thanksgiving, and propitiation organized by the undertow of sacred times and places (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 183–204). Major devotions tended to occur at specific moments and in specific places, the Meccan pilgrimages being virtually the only ones known to us in any detail. Overall, it can be asserted and inferred that devotions involving cultic associations, that is, the specific constituencies of particular devotions, occurred in specific places and at particular moments in a reckoning of a complex social time dependent upon the seasons and seasonal movements, on which also depended the all-important seasonal markets all across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. The coordination between the rhythms of trade and transhumance, markets, seasons, and a variety of lunar calendars in use involved both negotiation (including the negotiation of intercalation) and monitoring the rise and movement of specific stars—it has been often asserted without clear justification that star worship was known among the Arabs, but indications are that stars were venerated as cultic auxiliaries that signaled the inception and termination of ritual times, the times of particular devotions incumbent daily or seasonally, rather than worshipped in their own right (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 183–204).

The worship of Allāh during the early stages of Muḥammad's Apostolate occurred within this context: cultic worship of Muḥammad's initially nameless Lord, *Rabb*, also Lord of the specific place that was the central Meccan enclave and the Ka'ba. This was initially and for a number of years monolatrous worship, which involved no denial of the worship of other deities, and there are clear indications of Muḥammad's henotheistic diplomacy of the divine as his career progressed, and before he was sufficiently motivated and emboldened to embrace monotheism determinedly and uncompromisingly. Nevertheless, the late antique path whereby in the late Roman empire, and over a period of centuries, a politically favored and hence cultically central deity became the monotheistic God of empire was yet to be accomplished, but the Muḥammadan period played this out in microcosm and on the west Arabian margins. The insinuation of the opaque, obscure, and occasional oath deity Allāh into the Meccan system (Chelhod 1958; Pavlovich 1982; Simon 1991) and his promotion during Muḥammad's lifetime to indivisible primacy, then to the unique manifestation of all divinity, constitutes this particular transition to monotheism at the point of application, a situation that would favor historical–anthropological over theologically driven considerations of Muḥammadan Paleo-Islam.

Mythological elaboration, and whatever elements of primary dogma there were, evolved gradually and will have been received differently by different constituencies. The overall trend, expressed in the approximate chronological sequence of the Qur'ān, indicates a move from a purely nominal object of worship to the semantic motivation and conceptual connotation of a divinity increasingly more elaborate and increasingly attuned to some of the basic motifs shared by Judaism and Christianity (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 293–295, 306–326). A gradual process is attested whereby Allāh became increasingly self-referential and self-predicating as the Arabian taxonomy of the preternatural was revised with the demotion of other deities, first to positions of inferiority, ultimately to being regarded as entirely chimerical (Welch 1980). This process saw the erection of increasingly clearer categorical boundaries than had earlier prevailed between gods, angels, devils, and the *jinn* of various kinds (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 293–294, 338–346; Al-Azmeh, forthcoming-2).

Muḥammad's Paleo-Muslim Allāh, apart from his concrete local and quite possibly betylic character, came to acquire another more ample texture that wove together the actions and epithets that had earlier characterized Arab divinities. This emergent god came increasingly to be construed in a way associated with biblical and related templates, mythemes, and theologoumena, involving elements of the biblical mythological lore of cosmology, anthropogeny, and prophecy. During the latter part of Muḥammad's career, Abraham came to acquire a central and indeed archetypal position, being a

prefiguration of Muḥammad and his monotheism, and a geneological figure for the Meccan pilgrimage rites adopted as central, and modified by Muḥammad (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 334–336).

Ultimately there developed a notion of the universal sovereignty and celestial transcendence of Allāh, in a passage from an animate noumen at the corner of the Meccan Ka‘ba to an extensive and ubiquitous, but functional rather than abstract or fully mythological notion of divinity. Various theologoumena—rather than theology as such, which was a later development— were entering Muḥammad's teaching and preaching as well as the text of the Qur'ān, in a connotative expansion of divinity increasingly monopolized by Allāh. These contained some of the basic motifs existing in Judaism and Christianity, but also embodied in increasingly biblicizing language the powers and privileges of polytheistic divinities, including fate.

All the while, it might bear repetition that different audiences will have received these theologoumena differently and variously, and it is unlikely that what was later to become an abstract notion of divinity would have had much purchase initially at the expense of monolatry and henotheism. Allāh and His synonyms—Rabb and al-Raḥmān—inhabited a world where the categorical divisions and boundaries of the preternatural were still uncertain, a world that admitted of transmogrification, and one in which a deity might be at once betylic, jinnic, and transcendent, and might, as the God of the Qur'ān or as Yahweh through his *mal'ak* or his appearance as a storm or a fire, or in the aspect of the Metatron, transmit His energies through a variety of media and forms, through angels and the Spirit, through his spirit as breath animating clay or impregnating the parthenogenetic body of Mary. That anthropomorphism is not excluded in this situation but is rather an integral part of the possibilities offered is manifest (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 181–182, 306–326, 334–336, 346–357; van Ess 1992, 1999).

Polity and Cult

Traditional Arab paganism was organized, as has been suggested, as cultic associations, based on inter-group alliances both socio-political and territorial, cemented by oath—what the Swiss were later to call *Eidgenossenschaften*. The earlier history of Paleo-Islam is the history of Muḥammad's charismatic leadership, first of a body of acolytes worshipping the new deity in Mecca, later the rapidly expanding and aggressive embryonic polity at Yathrib (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 368–403).

Especially pertinent to the purposes of this discussion is the way in which this Paleo-Muslim polity, emblematized by the worship of Allāh, was constituted as

a religious sect divided, not always sharply, from religious practices around it, and evolving a distinctive body of beliefs that distinguished it even more sharply from its environment, and set on its way to become what might be described as a new religion or denomination, what was later to be known as Islam (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 360–368). The crucial point of transition is constituted by Muḥammad's so-called Farewell Pilgrimage shortly before his death in 632. Following upon the conquest of Mecca, and the barring of pilgrimage to all but adherents of Muḥammad, he decreed the end of intercalation in Arabian calendars. As has been suggested, intercalation was a negotiated arrangement aiming to synchronize the social rhythms of pilgrimage, trade, and transhumance with the lunar and solar calendars. The ending of intercalation severed the relationship between the ritual time of religion and the social time of trade and transhumance, and rendered the religious calendar standing alone apart from, and above, social time, as an instance of self-referential control, all the more abstract and manifestly arbitrary as it was severed from the solar calendar and hence from the seasons and social processes associated with them (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 194–197, 332–333).

In the usual way of sectarian formations, the cultic association that we call the Paleo-Muslim community went through a process of devotional development and came to acquire a ritual habitus at once continuous with previous practices and distinct from it at a number of signal points. This habitus came in the usual manner to distinguish this group from others, without regard to the rigor of its application, which appears to us on available source material to have been erratic but not to have been excessive by any measure. A form of regular, ritual prayer at set times, first three times daily, later five (this may have become standard after Muḥammad's lifetime), was introduced in a manner that was distinct from previous practices of supplication, but continuous with some of their bodily movements, the repetition of litanies, and other common aspects of prayer. A month of fasting was introduced, somewhat continuous with irregular previous practices of asceticism that had been associated with doing penance for ritual infractions, sometimes associated with a calendar that was later associated with the fasting month of Ramaḍān. Procedures of ritual purity were associated with acts of prayer as well as with pilgrimage; Paleo-Islam retained clothing conventions of pilgrimage, but it is unknown if its ablutions corresponded to polytheistic practices.

There were also alimentary prohibitions, of swine, blood (the Arabs ate a variant of blood pudding), and carrion, but also regulations of ritual slaughter. While this last had been associated previously with sacrifice, it was with the Paleo-Muslims extended to all slaughter, with the need to pronounce a formula of consecration before the victim is killed, and relating also to the

permissibility of consuming flesh provided by Jews and Christians. What may originally have been intended to bar Paleo-Muslims from partaking of polytheistic sacrificial flesh was to become what is today known as *ḥalāl* slaughter. The consumption of alcoholic drinks remains a vexed question: praised as well as prohibited in the Qur'ān, a blanket prohibition was to come quite late, and then only with regard to grape-based drinks; drinking was only sporadically suppressed by the authorities in the Paleo-Muslim period. Quite apart from these matters, the norms required for membership of Muḥammad's cultic association and polity were, with the exception of political loyalty, minimal—political loyalty expressed in allegiance to Muḥammad (*bayʿa*), individual as well as collective, and the payment of tribute in the Arabian manner, which Muslim jurisprudence was later to classify under acts of charity.

Finally, Paleo-Islam, both cult and polity, found durable expression in a canon of scripture, the Qur'ān (Al-Azmeh 2014a, chapter 7). One needs be careful about undue concentration on the content of this scripture at the expense of its composition, transmission, and circulation as a devotional phenomenon emblematic of the emergent Paleo-Muslim cultic community, later religion. Such concentration, correlative with attempts to extract a *Leittheologie*, is heavily impregnated by conditions that have become familiar after the Reformation, conditions conducive to regarding integral texts as stand-alone objects, "study Bibles" as distinct from "liturgical bibles" (Barton 2003; Chapman 2003; Folkert 1989). Matters were far more complex and interesting than might be had by adopting a simplified version of the "oral-to-the-written" template or the assumption that the Qur'ān was a stenographic transcript (Al-Azmeh, in press-1).

Rather, the Paleo-Muslim canon might be seen as a series of events of beatific audition, a function that is well provided for by the rhetorical and acoustic features of the Qur'ān. It was a series of pronouncements, presumably all of Muḥammadan inception or with Muḥammadan support, that, irrespective of their moment of inception, were reiterated on various occasions and by a variety of voices and hands, preserved in a number of redactions, mostly fragmentary ones, or ones that were later to constitute subdivisions of the integral text. This condition implied two primary moments of delivery and circulation: first, various forms of declamation, and storage and dissemination of declamations by means of repetition and reiteration, self-reference, and self-authorization (Sinai 2006; Boisliveau 2014), and second self-reflexive semantic and commentarial expansion, interpolation, occasional adaptation and reformulation, narrative and allusive reference to contemporary and non-contemporary events, the use of para-Qur'ānic material, and arguably intertextual references to both Qur'ānic and extra-Qur'ānic texts, in both the written and the spoken media.

This condition prevailed and persisted in the main until a definitive canonical skeletal-morphemic text was collated from collections and fragments available under the Caliph 'Uthmān (r. 644–656) and at his initiative (see, conveniently, "Canonization of the Qur'ān," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, third edition). The text was to continue serving as both the emblem of the emergent cultic association rapidly becoming a new religion for a new empire, and as the source for liturgical and other occasions of devotional pronouncement. It was quickly to attract exegetical and scholiastic comment, and to feature as the source of proof-texts in the elaboration of Muslim dogma, theology, jurisprudence, and much else. The text's many lives constitute the most tangible and abiding product of Paleo-Islam.

Late Antiquity and After: Toward Classical Islam

The Umayyads concerned themselves much with the Qur'ān, as text to be subject to greater standardization, as ornamental object and highly ornamented emblem. Inheritors of the Romans and the Sasanians in what they took to be universal dominion (Al-Azmeh 2014a: 18–30, 500–508); they made central a new ecumenical currency that was to be of long duration, the epigraphic gold *dīnār* of 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), starting in 695, and consolidated the use of the Hijra calendar. With them, the Muḥammadan cultic association of Paleo-Islam is carried forward with expanded geographical and ethnographic remit very far beyond what Muḥammad's horizons would have pictured, toward becoming an imperial religion and a religion of empire. They were also involved in the further development of cultic and ritual practices, and in their consolidation, continuation, and confirmation, including the centralization of ritual space around Mecca and the Meccan *qibla* as the direction of prostration in prayer universally.

Crucially, it was the Umayyads who started cultivating a cult of Muḥammad as a geneaological paradigm for empire, religion, and ruling house, and as a cultural hero, prophet, and Umayyad kinsman, the point of genealogical reference for emergent Islam. While until around the middle of the Umayyad dynasty's lifetime ca. 690 Paleo-Muslims were a cultic association comprising Arabs and their newly acquired clients, things were evolving in such a way that Islam was now no longer restricted to the ruling Arab elite. The new religion was no longer based upon geographical and genealogical proximities, coherences, and intimacies, but the religion of an imperial state, responding to a vast change of scale requiring the construction of virtual connections and the greater formalization and abstraction of social and political relations.

Paleo-Islam was, as we saw, constructed partly of a habitus of ritual and idiom, with time partly routinized under conditions of intensive and direct interaction and conflict. With the disengagement of a ruling class properly so called, and the vast spatial dilation of this polity and the dispersal of its human armature across territories with very differing conditions, a new kind of habitus was called for, one based upon an abstract point of reference, set up at a mythological distance, beyond the pressure of evolving circumstance. A skeleton of habit was required to uphold the frame of a polity together: such emerged, with time, with the formalization of ideological reference to the Apostle, with a formality allowing for great diversity, based upon exegetical and other interpretative possibilities, reflected, in the fullness of time, in divergences within what was to become Muslim law, theology, exegesis, all authentically Islamic because all equally Muḥammadan, buttressed by proof-texts relating the Apostle's words and deeds. With historical distance from Muḥammad, and with much water having flown under the bridge since his lifetime, he could now be construed not only as the fount of enduring and renewed charisma through a virtual cult of the prophet, but also as the topos around which the routinization of charisma—Muḥammadan, Umayyad, and, later 'Abbāsid—could be woven.

In short, Muḥammad was henceforth to figure as the emblematic founder, acquiring the usual lineaments of an eponymous and etiological hero in an epic romance, involved in a sense of history that preserved much veridic material, some retrieved by antiquarians, but one that also worked toward the construction of a discourse on a past that was not only epical, but also mythical. Muḥammad the hero was emblematized in the *maghāzī* sections of the *sīra*. This began with al-Zuhrī (d. 741/2), rapidly to be inserted into a mythical narrative, salvational-historically and typologically recorded in the *mubtada*' of the *sīra* and in works of the history of Prophecy, the whole lot encrusted with premonitions, anticipations, wonders, and miracles. He was the hero of an ongoing imperial concern, a figuration made into an obvious, perhaps an inevitable, option. It might be said that this new figuration of Muḥammad constituted a move from the immediate, concrete, constrained, and personalized preoccupations of a small and expanding cultic association and ruling caste and its leaders that was the element of Paleo-Islam, to the limitless possibilities and freedoms afforded by an emblematic genealogy, affording an abstract point of reference, in this sense impersonal and rational, as was required by the vast change of scale from Arabian beginnings to empire. A sense of history over and above immediate preoccupations is a crucial constituent of this transition to Islam, and what made this both possible and imperative was empire.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Hermetism

Claudio Moreschini

Hermetism is a modern name that indicates the theosophy attributed to Hermes Trismegistos (in Latin, Mercurius Termaximus) and emerging from Egyptian origins in Greco-Roman Antiquity. Such a theosophy appears in various forms: philosophy, alchemy, astrology, magic. This chapter deals with terminological questions, discusses the question of the origins of Hermetism, the main structures and elements of philosophical Hermetism, and its history in Late Antiquity, including its role in early Christian and Patristic thought. Because of the continuing influence of the latter there will also be a brief section on the presence of Hermetic thinking in the Middle Ages.

Introductory Questions

Terminology

Hermes/Hermes Trismegistos

Herodotus (fifth century BCE) identified the Greek Hermes with the Egyptian god Thoth (2.67) and called *Hermopolis* the center of his cult; there was a temple of Hermes in Boubastis (2.18). Thoth was both the god of the wisdom concerning divine things and a magician. These features were well known to the Greeks: Plato (fourth century BCE), who spelled Thoth's name as Theuth, states that he was an Egyptian god, to whom the Ibis was sacred, and who had invented numbers, counting, geometry, astronomy, drafts,

gambling, and in particular the art of writing (*Phaedr.* 274c–275b). Plato (*Crat.* 407e–408b) also connects him with the word *hermeneus* ("interpreter") and attributes him with both the positive and negative power of speech. Cyril of Alexandria (*C. Iul.* 1.41) asserts that the writer of the fifteen-book treatise entitled *Treatises of Hermes (Hermaikà)*, as the inventor of all kinds of sciences and arts, had measured Egypt, divided it into provinces, and built the irrigation canals.

The name "Trismegistos" also reflects Egyptian usage. In literature, it is first attested to at the end of the second century CE by the Christian writer Athenagoras (*Legatio* 28.6). In Egyptian the superlative was expressed by repeating the positive two or three times, so "Trismegistos" (three times greatest) simply means "greatest." In an oracle text from Saqqara (168–164 BCE) mention is made of "the greatest and greatest and great God Hermes."

Hermetism

Here the evidence can be divided into testimonies and source texts. The most ancient testimonies on Hermetism are provided by Diodorus Siculus (about 24 BCE) (*Bibl.* 1.27.4) and Strabo (*Geogr.* 1.71.46), who mention astrological and philosophical Hermetic texts; later on, Plutarch (first to second century CE) records a book of Hermes on the sacred names of Egyptian gods (*Is.* 61.375F). Iamblichus (*Myst.* 8.5 and 10.7) mentions an unknown prophet Bitys, who found Hermes' original texts written in hieroglyphics in some Egyptian temples, and translated them into Greek.

In terms of source texts the following works are essential:

Corpus Hermeticum. A modern name for a collection of seventeen treatises from the second and third centuries CE, although they can rest upon older sources. Treatises one to fourteen were assembled into a *corpus* during the Byzantine era, then translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino in 1463 under the title *Poimandres* (*Poimander*, *Poemander*): Poimander was interpreted as "the shepherd of men," but its real meaning comes from Egyptian "p-eime nte-re" ("the intelligence (or understanding) of Re") (Mahé 1978–1982, vol. 2: 3–43; Büchli 1987; van den Broek 2005). Ludovico Lazzarelli in 1482 dedicated to Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio a manuscript he had completed, which contained Ficino's *Pimander*, the Asclepius (see later), and three Hermetic treatises not contained in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Turnebus, in his 1554 edition, published the Greek text and inserted an additional treatise after number fourteen: it was composed of four texts, three of which were taken from Stobaeus' Anthology and one from the Byzantine "Suda" lexicon. Modern scholars have not accepted the insertion of the fragments, maintaining, however, for the sake of clarity, the numeration

that had been prevalent for three centuries. The title of the collection remained *Poimandres* until G. Parthey's edition (1854).

Stobaeus' *Anthologium* (sixth century CE) contains twenty-nine fragments of varying length and content that differ from those of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (the most important—XXIV—has a specific title: *Kore Kosmou*).

Then there exists a Latin treatise entitled *Asclepius*, which is incorrectly attributed to Apuleius (Wigtil 1984; Gersh 1992); it is the translation (fourth century CE) of the Greek *Logos teleios*, that is, "perfect discourse," now lost; part of it is also preserved in a Coptic translation in the Nag Hammadi Corpus (NHC).

Coptic texts discovered at Nag Hammadi (1946): *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (NHC VI.6.52.1–63.32); *The Prayer of Thanksgiving* (NHC VI.7.63.33–65.7, parallel to *Ascl.* 41); the translation of *Ascl.* 21–29 (NHC VI.8.65.15–78.43).

Quotations of the philosophical and religious doctrines attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (no mention of titles), collected by Nock—Festugière vol. 4, *Fragments Divers* 1–36: from Tertullian, Lactantius, Cyril, bishop of Alexandria (*Contra Iulianum*, 416–428 CE) and others. In addition, Cyril mentions (*C. Iul.* 1.41) a work entitled *Treatises of Hermes (Hermaikà)*, which had been written in Athens, in fifteen books; a work entitled *Detailed* (*diexodikà*: see later) *Discourses (of Hermes) to Tat*, in more than one book (1.46); and a work entitled *Discourses to Asclepius*, in at least three books (I.48–49).

Then there are Armenian texts entitled *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistos for Asclepius* (Mahé 1978–1982, vol. 2). They were translated from Greek into Armenian, probably in the second half of the sixth century CE.

Finally, there exist Arabic Hermetic texts, which are listed in Festugière, *Révélation* (1, 384–400), and Papyri and Syriac fragments collected by Mahé (1974, 1981, 1978–1982, 1984; cf. van den Broek 2005: 498–499; van den Kerchove 2012: 1–4, 399–400).

Hermetic theosophy

A.-J. Festugière (1967) divided Hermetic writings into two categories, "popular" or practical (i.e. astrological and alchemical), and "learned" (i.e. philosophical), although he admits (1950) that there are traces of astrology in learned Hermetism and traces of alchemy in the *Kore Kosmou*; Stobaeus' Excerpt VI deals with astrology. Magic too is present in certain passages of the *Asclepius* that discuss the "construction of gods" (chapters 23–24; 37–38). The alchemist Zosimus is influenced by the speculations of learned Hermetism. The conclusion of the *Asclepius* (chapter 41) can also be found in a magical

papyrus (*Papyrus Mimaut* XVIII). Moreover, the medieval interpretation of Hermes takes into account alchemy and astrology, which lost favor during the Renaissance, when the "philosophical" system was preferred. Nowadays scholars generally agree that such a distinction, if strictly observed, is not acceptable. "Technical" knowledge is not merely at a low level of instruction, but is a prelude to gnosis; medicine, magic, and alchemy are connected to the search for salvation that comes from gnosis, that is, the knowledge of God. As a conclusion "there is no reason to attribute the alchemical and magical recipes or astrology to the masses" (Mahé 1978–1982, vol. 2: 22; cf. Gonzalez Blanco 1984: 2242 n. 3); on the contrary, they derive from what was then considered a science, exactly as philosophy was considered. In point of fact, the so-called "occult sciences" and astrology show the continuity between the Egyptian Thoth and the Hellenistic Hermes (Festugière 1950; cf. van den Kerchove 2012: 1; Moreschini 2013: 8–9).

Another distinction appears in the Hermetic texts, the one between *genikòi* (general) and *exodikòi* (or *diexodikoi*) *logoi* (*leçons générales* and *exodica*: Mahé, *On the Eighth and Ninth* p. 63.3). *Asclepius* (chapter 1) states that Trismegistus had written many *physica exoticaque* dedicated to Ammon and many others to his beloved son Tat; Cyril (*C. Iul.* 1.46 = fr. 30 Nock— Festugière) mentions some treatises called *diexodica*. The *genikòi logoi*, which are *General Discourses* (or *Lessons*), probably contained general instruction of Hermetic doctrines; then the Hermetist progresses to a higher stage, that of the *Detailed Discourses*. In *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (NHC VI.62.33–63.14), the master explains to the disciple that the *General Lessons* (the *genikòs logos*) provide general instruction for those who have not been generated in God, while the soul can be purified thanks to the *Detailed Lessons* (*diexodikòs logos*); only afterwards can knowledge of higher reality be attained. This is attested to in the opening sentence of *CH* 13.1: "My father, you spoke indistinctly and in riddles in the General discourses […] but after you talked with me […] I asked to learn the discourse on being born again […]" (translated by Copenhaver; see van den Broek 2005).

The Question of the Origin of Hermetism—Greece or Egypt?

Hermetism was developed in the Hellenistic world and its origins can be found in some forms of Egyptian civilization. Hermetic texts are set in Egypt (e.g. Hermopolis: *Ascl.* 37) and the main characters bear Egyptian names. One is Tat (an alternative form of Thot), Hermes' son; another is Asclepius, which is the Greek name of the Egyptian Imhotep, god of medicine and

considered to be the personification of wisdom (*Asclepius* 37); king Ammon (king Thamus in Plato, *Phaedr.* lc.); Agathodaimon, who is not present in the philosophical Hermetica; and Isis, the goddess who teaches Horus (in Stob., *Extr.* XXIII–XXVII). The Hermetic writings of Nag Hammadi have a flavor and mythological content that are typical of Egypt, and the *Asclepius* exalts the ancient Egyptian civilization and religion. Non-Egyptian and non-Greek elements are scarce. Jewish elements are found above all in *CH* 1 (Dodd 1935; Pearson 1981; Mahé 1978–1982, vol. 1), which contains a cosmogony similar to the Book of Genesis. Mahé thinks that Jewish influences are also present to different degrees in other treatises. Comparison has been made between the myth of the fall of the soul in *Kore Kosmou* and that of the fall of the angels in the *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch* (1 Enoch) (Mahé 2005). No elements of Christianity or Neoplatonism can be detected. A hostile attitude to Greek is visible in *CH* 16.

The Egyptian origin of the Hermetic texts was asserted from Late Antiquity, through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and, in spite of Isaac Casaubon's doubts (1614), up until the nineteenth century, although with no secure philological basis. A scientific demonstration for this hypothesis was then provided by Reitzenstein (1904). Yet, up until about 1970, the interpretation that received the widest acceptance among scholars was that proposed by A.-J. Festugière. According to him, the Hermetic writings contain very few Egyptian elements, that is, basically only the names of the characters. The philosophical and religious doctrines, on the contrary, belonged to trivialized Greek philosophy. Egypt was only a literary artifice, employed without any doctrinal coherence. No new religion was preached in the Hermetic treatises (cf. Festugière 1950 and 1967). Consequently, there was no Hermetic "doctrine" in the modern sense. What was attributed to Hermes could have been equally attributed to Ostanes or to Zoroaster. "It would suffice to change the names of the sages: priests of Egypt, magicians of Chaldea or Persia, gymnosophists of India" (Festugière 1950).

In the middle of the 1970s Mahé arrived at an important conclusion, which had been partially anticipated by Derchain (1962) and Doresse (1972): the Coptic translation of the Greek *Logos teleios*, preserved among the writings of Nag Hammadi (VI.8), and its teaching on the soul's ascent and judgment after death drew on an Egyptian background, not a Greek one. The Armenian collection of sentences (the *Definitions*) was the model for the fundamental form of the Hermetic discourse in Greek, which actually proceeds as a continuous series of statements. The Egyptian sentences circulated in Hellenistic literature in the form of the *gnome* ("sentence"), which was a typical Greek literary genre: actually the Hermetic treatises do not contain rational demonstrations, but suggestions and sentences. Therefore,

the origin of the Hermetic logos is not rooted in the Platonic dialogue, as posited by Festugière (1950), but in the gnome (Mahé 1978–1982, vol. 2: 408–436; cf. van den Broek 2005: 496; Moreschini 2013: 6; against: Fowden 1993: 71–72).

In the same years, Iversen traced nearly all Hermetic concepts back to the literature of ancient Egypt. His work is based on similarities and parallels that require greater evidence, but it nonetheless merits more attention than it has hitherto received. Fowden (1993) recognizes the value of Mahé's research and arguments, although he is not convinced by Mahé's interpretation of the "sentences" as the literary form of Hermetism.

Thanks to these studies, it has now been ascertained that Hermetism in its various forms (philosophy, alchemy, astrology, magic), did indeed arise in Egypt and represents the Hellenistic transformation of an ancient cultural and religious heritage. Greek Hermetic texts link interest for Hellenism with a deep awareness of its own Egyptian roots: it is not simply a Greek philosophy to which a touch of Egyptian color was added. "How this contact (scl. between Greece and Egypt) was established, we do not know but it can hardly have been based on the original Egyptian texts which would have been inaccessible to foreigners, but probably on oral communications or literary expounding" (Iversen 1984).

Even if it is of Egyptian origin, the theosophy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather an aspect of the broader diffusion of Egyptian culture and its influence on the Greek world. The same figure of Hermes Trismegistos has Greek features, because, if the Egyptians considered Thoth a god, for the Greeks Hermes Trismegistos was not a god: he was a human being teaching divine wisdom. According to Cicero (*Nat. deor.* 3.53), who summarizes some Hellenistic philosophical doctrines, there are five gods going by the name of Hermes (Mercurius), of whom the fifth is the Egyptian Theyt, that is, Thot, who after killing the monster Argos, had fled to Egypt and given the Egyptians the laws and the art of writing (3.56). Such an identification of Trismegistos with the fifth Hermes was adopted by Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 1.6.1–3) and subsequently became widespread in the Renaissance. According to Augustine (who draws on the *Asclepius*, chapter 37), the elder Hermes was the son of Zeus and Maia, while Trismegistos taught philosophy in Egypt long before the Greek philosophers, yet after Moses: he lived three generations after him, whereas it was instead Atlas, maternal grandfather of the elder Mercury, who lived at the time of Moses (*City of God* 18.39). Simplifying Augustine's interpretation, in the Renaissance Trismegistos was considered "contemporaneus Moysi," as is written on the floor mosaic of the Cathedral of Siena. The Byzantine chronographer George Syncellus (eighth to ninth century) attested (*Chron.* 1.72) that Thoth was

the first Hermes, as was stated by the Egyptian historian Manethon (third century BCE): he had engraved his wisdom on steles in the "sacred language," that is, in hieroglyphs. After the flood, the second Hermes, who was the father of Tat and was surnamed "Trismegistos," translated these texts into Greek and deposited them in the interiors of Egyptian temples. The *Kore Kosmou* does not make any distinction between the two Hermes; Tat was his son and successor; Asclepius one of his pupils.

From its Egyptian origins, Hermetism spread into the cultural milieu of the Hellenistic age. Doctrines of non-Greek origin were expressed in formulae derived from Platonism and Stoicism, in a popularized and simplified form, due to the inability of the Greek Hermetists to synthesize Egyptian and Greek elements in a rational and systematic manner. Hermetism spread in those social strata that spoke Greek instead of the local languages, but that did not participate in high culture and were open to "Oriental," or at least non-Greek, influences (Festugière 1967).

Philosophical and Theological Hermetism

Hermetic theosophy is a form of revealed knowledge, "between the Greek rationalist tradition and Eastern wisdom" (Filoramo 1993: 15). Hermes considers his doctrine as a divine "revelation," as certain parts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* attest to (*CH* 1.27–8; 5.8; 7.1). The devotion typical of a revelation is clear in the final prayer of the *Asclepius* (chapter 41). The principal aim of Hermetic revelation is to give salvation to man, and this salvation is granted by God himself (*CH* 9.5; *Ascl.* 41), thanks to his feelings of compassion and love (*CH* 13.8; 6.4).

Festugière has observed that Hermetic treatises, composed in different periods by different authors, were not systematic.

> Hermetic schools were not philosophical schools in possession of a system, but schools of piety, i.e. of devotion, that took a random scholastic problem for their point of departure and, without lingering on the discussion of the problem in itself, sought the first available pretext for digressing into the realm of the homily and spiritual direction. (Festugière 1967: 37)

In the various treatises, and sometimes within the same treatise, Hermes professes the most contradictory opinions on all the topics; conversely, repetitions from one treatise to another can be detected; internal references among the various treatises are rare. This attests a lack of consistency and systematic organization of the doctrine.

Nevertheless, there are some constant doctrines that are common to more than one treatise. Kroll's synthesis (1912) is admittedly "philosophical," but Greek philosophy still remains a useful way to approach Hermetism.

God and matter

God and matter are completely separated: as good comes from the former, evil comes from the latter (*Exc. Stob.* 11.2.18–48). Light is the realm of God (*CH* 1.4 and 21; 7.2), darkness of matter (1.19).

God's transcendence is absolute. He is "without essence" (2.5) and "prior to existence" (*Exc. Stob.* 21.1). Defining God is impossible, because definitions limit him (*Ascl.* 20). He is "the good alone" (*CH* 2.14; 4.1; 6.1), the "immutably good" (*Exc.* 11.2.48), cause and father of all things (*CH* 2.12 and 17; 5.8). A Gnostic definition of God is "Forefather," which is found, not coincidentally, in the "Egyptian" and more pagan *Kore Kosmou* (chapter 10).

Matter receives its forms from God through ideas, which are united in the Logos (1.10–1; 8.3) (an element of contemporaneous Middle Platonic philosophy), and is the substratum for the sensible world (cf. *Ascl.* 34).

The world

Given that the first God is absolutely transcendent, the creation of the world is the work of the second God. This God is the Logos, who comes from the Father and is his son; it creates all things (Cyril of Alexandria, *C. Iul.* 1.46). Again, this doctrine is mostly likely to be paralleled to the Middle Platonic doctrine of the creation of the world by the second God. The son of God is also called Nous (Mind) (*CH* 1.2 and 6); he is light (1.6) or fire (10.16.18), a subtle and intelligent spirit (3.1) that moves everything (1.11; *Kore Kosmou* 14). In succession, the demiurge creates Eternity, which is a hypostasis; Eternity creates the world; the world, time; and time, in its turn, becoming (*CH* 11.2; *Ascl.* 31–32).

The world, too, can be considered the second God (8.1–2; 9.8; *Ascl.* 8 and 10), according to a tri-partition that is peculiar to Hermetism: God, world, man. The relationship between God and the world is often described as a kind of pantheism ("unus omnia": *Ascl.* chapters 2; 9; 20; 29–30; 34; *CH* 5.9: "for there is nothing in all the cosmos that God is not;" 3.4; 9.9; 11.20). God creates and conserves the world (8.2; 9.8; 11.17).

Since it was created by God, and in the image of God (8.2; 12.15), the world is beautiful and good (*Ascl.* 10 and 25; *CH* 6.2; 9.8); it is a living being (*CH* 11.5) (the Platonic doctrine of the *Timaeus* might also be present in this conception); it is therefore also called "son of God" (*CH* 9.8; 10.14, *Ascl.* 8), it is immortal (*CH* 11.3; 12.18). Below the supreme God there are

other gods, such as the stars, the planets, and the heavens (*Ascl.* 3): these are the seven "governors" of the life of men (*CH* 1.9, 13 and 25). The sun has the first place among the planets (solar theology: *CH* 16; *Ascl.* 29; *Exc.* 21.2: "The sun is the image of the creator-God, who is in the heavens; indeed, as he created all things, thus the sun creates living beings and generates plants and oversees spirits"; *CH* 5.3: "The sun, the greatest God of those in heaven, to whom all heavenly gods submit as a king and ruler" (transl. Copenhaver); see also 10.3; 16.5 ff.). The stars' rule over the world is destiny (*heimarmene*) (*Ascl.* 19. 39–40; *Exc.* 7.3: "Men are subject to destiny, as a consequence of the activities of becoming"; see also *CH* 1.15; *Exc.* 12.2). Thus, each of the twelve constellations of the zodiac produces a specific passion in us (cf. *CH* 1.9 and 16: nature creates seven kinds of men, corresponding to the nature of the seven planets). Other gods of Hermetism are probably of local origin, like Jupiter Plutonius in Africa (*Ascl.* 19; 27).

Some treatises consider the world good and beautiful, so that its contemplation is a way to reach God (*Ascl.* chapter 8; *CH* 5.6–10 and 13.17–20); it is "the plenitude of life" (12.15). Other texts, on the contrary, see in the world the origin of evil, so that God can only be reached by fleeing the world and feeling at a remove from it (*CH* 1.4.6.7.13; Mahé, 2005). Scholars have spoken of an "optimistic" and a "pessimistic" attitude of Hermetism to the world (Bousset 1914). Fowden resolves this duplicity by theorizing that the optimistic interpretation of the world was the consequence of a first level of gnosis, whereas the pessimistic interpretation, and its necessity to flee the world to attain gnosis, pertains to a higher doctrinal level (1993). Sfameni Gasparro (1995a: 19) interprets the duplicity of levels, stating that

> the "optimistic" tendency is justified by the fact that the universe itself is often identified with divinity itself […] Although regulated by the inflexible law of *heimarmene*, the planetary destiny under the power of the seven Governors, creation in large part retains the positive values expressed by the idea of *kosmos* according to the traditional canons of Greek thought […] Consequently, since the world was only created in the image of predetermined archetypal forms, Hermetism does not arrive at the radical condemnation of it that characterizes the Gnostics. The dualism that opposes the divine, intellectual principle with matter emerges, especially regarding the composition of man. Indeed, the negative aspect of reality is found in the innermost structure of man. (Sfameni Gasparro 1995a: 19)

In the same vein Filoramo (1993) thinks that "Hermetic pessimism is essentially psychological, as far as it is the interpretation of the origin and destiny of the soul and not of the cosmos. Hermetism never proceeds to the

blasphemous condemnation of the cosmos that is characteristic of the Gnostics." In conclusion, Hermetic dualism is not radical like Gnostic or Manichaean dualism.

> There is not the slightest indication in this story (scl. of the creation of man in the *Poimandres*) that this creation is bad […] In Gnosticism the creation is bad, in Hermetism it is not. It is the old and very widespread idea that the senses, and sexual desire in particular, draw the soul deeply into the world of matter and make him forget his divine origin—an idea which was found among pagan platonists, Christian theologians, gnostics and hermetists alike. (van den Broek 1996)

The connection between Hermetism and Gnosticism has been reproposed, in any case, by Quispel (1992).

Man

Man has a central place in the universe, between God and matter (*Ascl.* 6–8; exposed in a mythical narrative by *CH* 1.13–15). His body derives from the latter, whereas his soul, which constitutes his essence, his inner self, has been given to him by God (*CH* 4.2ff; 12.12). A more detailed gradation is provided by *CH* 10.13: *nous* (i.e. intuiting mind) is found in *logos* (reasoning mind), *logos* in the soul, the soul in the (material) spirit, the spirit in the body. God created man so that he could contemplate his works in the world (*CH* 1.12; 14.7–8; *Ascl.* 6 and 8), and thus become lord of it (10.25). For this reason man can also be considered a third God, after the first God and the world (*Ascl.* 10).

Man consists of a "substantial" (*ousiodes*) part—that which is most specifically his own and is divine (*CH* 1.15; 9.1 and 5; *Ascl.* 7–8)—and a material part—the body is therefore the instrument of ignorance, the basis of wickedness: reason tending to good, the body to evil (*CH* 4.5; 9.5; 10.15; *Exc.* II.B.7). Not every man possesses intelligence (*nous*), but only logos. Nous is distinguished from *logos* insofar as it constitutes the faculty of intuitively knowing God, whereas *logos* is the rational faculty (*Ascl.* 7: *sensus*, and 9: *mens*; *CH* 4.3–4; 12.1 and 4). Few men, the elected ones, know God and are separate from the masses (9.4), while the other men are material (9.5) and are unable to contemplate God (*Exc.* 7.3); they do not know what the true purpose of their existence is (*CH* 4.4). The elected can arrive at the gnosis of God (*CH* 4.2; 9.4; *Ascl.* 5 and 7); as a result of contemplation he is joined with God or becomes God (*CH* 1.26; 4.7; 10.6 and 23f.; 11.20; 12.20); he is the mortal God (*CH* 10.25; 12.1). This knowledge of the true essence of man and of his goal, which is the true gnosis, is a *religio mentis* ("religion of

the mind") (*Ascl.* 25). Gnostics are perfect (*CH* 4.4) and pious (*CH* 10.19): they are few (*Ascl.* 22; *Exc.* 11.4–5). One of their prerogatives is that they are not subject to destiny (*CH* 12.7 and 9; *Exc.* 18.3; *Ascl.* 11; Lact., *Div. Inst.* 2.15.6). The perfect ones however, are not such by nature, as is the case in Gnosticism; the divine element is not present in human nature: men reach perfection thanks to their free decision. Free will is not absolute, however. The movements of the heavens are responsible for the difference between essential and material man (*CH* 1.9), and destiny can still hinder and threaten the perfected ones (*CH* 12.4–6; *Exc.* 11.3).

The salvation of man is an essential theme (perhaps the most urgent) for Hermetism. Quispel (2000) has emphasized the Hermetic tone in one of Christ's statements: "And this is life eternal, that they might *know* thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent" (John 17:3). A pre-requisite for salvation consists in possessing "reverence" (*eusébeia*), which results from learning the true doctrine: "And I began proclaiming to mankind the beauty of reverence and gnosis" (*CH* 1.27); "reverence united with gnosis permits to reach the beautiful" (*CH* 6.5); "reverence is knowledge of God" (*CH* 9.4; see also 10.15 and 19; Wlosok 1960; Sfameni Gasparro 1982); through reverence the human race might be saved by God (*CH* 1.26; 9.5). Reverence and gnosis—that is, perfect life—protect the perfect man from the attack of demons, and those who know God are not bound by fate (Hermetic text cited by Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 2.15.6 = fr. 10 Nock—Festugière); *Asclepius* (chapter 29); Cyril of Alexandria (*C. Iul.* IV.23, PG LXXVI 701AB); Zosimus (fr. 20–21 Nock—Festugière). As a conclusion, salvation is provided only by God (*Ascl.* 41: "For this is mankind's only means of giving thanks: knowledge of your majesty").

After death the perfect can reach a second way of purification. The soul, returning to the sky, crosses the seven celestial spheres, where it leaves the various forms of wickedness the stars had stained her with during her descent into the material world (*CH* 1.25–26; 4.8).

Salvation may also be a palingenesis, thanks to the admission of divine powers in man. This is narrated by *CH* 13, which from the sixteenth century was considered "pre-Christian" and even has the title "On Palingenesis." The perfect man, it is said (13.15), must hasten to strike his tent, thanks to a transformation. Such a transformation, granted by God, is a mystery. "Grant me what I need and give me—whether aloud or in secret—the discourse on being born again that you said you would deliver" (13.1 tr. Copenhaver), Tat asks Hermes. This is the palingenesis that must be accomplished gradually, thanks to Hermes' teaching and Tat's progress in the instruction of that mystery; it is the conclusion and the aim of all revelation. It unites man with God; indeed, it transforms him into a god. Ten divine powers enter into him. In Christianity, too, "rebirth in water and the spirit," that is, baptism, is a mystery and an illumination.

While in the *Poimandres* the purification of the soul and its ascent to God are fulfilled after death, in *CH* 13 they are the result of a transformation in this life (Reitzenstein 1904). The essential fruit of regeneration is neither the temporary gift of prophecy nor preaching (as in *CH* 1.27–30), but a new state, in which man knows God as his father and knows himself as the son of God. His old self, its vices, and the tortures of matter have been substituted with a new self, that is, by the powers of God, his "virtues." The ordinary state of man has been changed, because now God inhabits him. "The mysticism of *CH* 13 is a mysticism of renewal: it is necessary to be saved from without by means of a new birth. It is not a moral improvement, in the sense of man trying to approach God and imitate him solely with his own forces, like the stoic sage who lets himself be guided by *logos*, or the sage of the *Timaeus* who harmonizes his thoughts with the order of the universe, or the sage of the *Theaetetus* who forces himself to resemble God. It is being itself that must be changed. Returning to oneself does not suffice; a new being must be born through the action of an external cause that lets its seed fall in the soul that is prepared for it. This presupposes an operation which is indicated in the phrase (*CH* 13.7): "'Draw' this principle 'to you,' and it 'will come'" (Festugière 1954). Mahé too saw a close connection between the conception of palingenesis in *CH* 13 and Nag Hammadi VI 6 (*The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*): Tat wants to hear the hymn of the Ogdoad (chapter 15); Hermes composes a hymn to the Lord of creation, which cannot be taught (chapters 16–20). Thanks to this hymn and the eulogies, Tat's mind is fully illuminated (chapter 21). Sfameni Gasparro (1965) finds in *CH* 13 the tripartite structure typical of a mystery, namely the state of initial imperfection, crisis, and successive rebirth in a new and divine condition. Therefore we are not dealing with a "mystery of reading," that is, entrusted to reading, as Tröger (1971) thought, but with a witness to the initiation ceremonies that actually took place in Hermetic confraternities (Mahé 1978, 1991). The existence of a "Hermetic Church" had been asserted by Reitzenstein and denied by Festugière. Recently van den Kerchove (2012) has studied the relationship between liturgical and doctrinal aspects in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Asclepius*, and the Coptic fragments.

Another kind of salvation depends on the judgment that man encounters after death. The mind (*nous*), once purified, gains freedom from the body, for it is divine by nature and has received a body of fire, whereas it abandons the soul to judgment and to the justice it deserves (*CH* 10.16). Indeed, Hermetism distinguishes between soul and mind, but

> the human soul becomes wholly mind after getting free of the body and fighting the fight of reverence. (Knowing the divine and doing wrong to no person is the fight of reverence.) The irreverent soul, however, stays in

its own essence, punishing itself, seeking an earthly body to enter—a human body, to be sure. For no other body contains a human soul; it is not allowed for a human soul to fall down into the body of an unreasoning animal. (*CH* 10.19; translation Copenhaver)

Therefore an intestine war arises in the soul, and the soul must allow itself to be conquered by the intellectual part (*Exc. Stob.* IIB 6–7). Two souls exist in man, or, in alternative, two parts of the soul (Iamblichus, *Myst.* 8.6; *Exc. Stob.* 8.5; 16.6 and 17.1).

The punishment of the soul consists—here on earth—of sin itself (*CH* 10. 19–21), or, after death, "the avenging demon wounds the evil person, assailing him sensibly with the piercing fire and thus arming him the better for lawless deeds so that greater vengeance may befall him" (tr. Copenhaver) (*CH* 1.23). The *Asclepius* (chapter 28) also states that the righteous man will be rewarded with freedom from the chains of the world's prison; his bonds to the mortal condition will be dissolved, so that God might restore him to his most divine part. On the other hand, those who have lived irreverently are denied a return to the heavens, and a horrible transmigration, unworthy of a holy soul, will put them into other bodies (see also *NH* VI.8.76.20ff; Mahé 1978–1982; Camplani 2000: 91; John the Lydian, *De mens.* 4.32 and 149).

Metempsychosis is not foreign to Hermetism: souls have been enclosed in the body as a punishment for earlier misdeeds (*Kore Kosmou* chapters 34–37; *Exc. Stob.* 24.4). Tertullian (*An.* 33.2) proposes a different explanation: clashing with Plato and Pythagoras, he quotes a passage of Trismegistos, which is the oldest Hermetic quotation in Latin. According to Hermes, human souls after death are subject to a judgment, and are to be held to account for their good or evil deeds. As a consequence, they will not be reabsorbed into the cosmic soul, but will keep their individuality inviolate. Such a statement denies the doctrine of metempsychosis, according to which the soul loses its peculiar characteristics as a consequence of its transmigration from one body to another.

Palingenesis can pertain not only to the individual, but also to humanity in its entirety. As narrated in the *Asclepius* (chapter 26), when the evils of the world, that is, irreligiousness, disorder, and blasphemy, reach their peak, God will turn to look upon man's wicked behavior and crimes, and oppose these vices with an inundation, or with fire, or with pestilences. In this way the world will return to its former beauty and will appear still worthy of adoration and wonder. And this will be *the birth* (the text is often corrected by scholars to "the rebirth") *of the world*, that is, the re-establishment of all good things. These words of the *Asclepius* appeared to Augustine and the

medieval philosophers as an imperfect form of apocalypse (modern scholars have spoken of a "Hermetic apocalypse," which must be put in the context of the apocalyptic literature of Egypt.).

Christian Hermetism

The Christian transformation of Hermetic doctrines represents one of the most interesting cultural phenomena of the modern world, which influenced European thought up until the nineteenth century.

Christianity soon became interested in the Hermetic revelation, to a deeper extent even than contemporary paganism, whose literature does not display much knowledge of Hermetic texts. Christianity employs some philosophical and religious tenets of Hermetism by applying them to a theological (mainly Christological) context. Tertullian defines Hermes Trismegistos as the "master of all the philosophers that study nature" (*Val.* 15.1), therefore as a predecessor of pagan philosophy. Tertullian knows some medical texts as well (*An.* 15.4–5): the dominant or rational part of man is found in the soul, that is to say, in the middle of the body, as was taught by the Egyptians and by those who wrote of divine matters. In *Exc.* 24.13 it is stated that the heart is at the center of the human body, just as the holiest doctrine, Hermetism, is located at the center of the earth, namely in Egypt.

Hermetism in the Patristic period

In the Christian era Mercurius Termaximus is presented in opposite ways by Lactantius and Augustine. In *Divinae Institutiones* Lactantius sees Hermes as an ancient prophet of Christian revelation, who in a mysterious way taught a revelation similar to the Christian truth, and acceded to the mysteries of the Father and the Son (the Holy Spirit is almost completely excluded). Although critical toward philosophy, which he considered a *falsa sapientia*, Lactantius has a favorable opinion of the revelations of the *Oracula Sibyllina* and that of Hermes, whom he regards as forerunners of Christianity. Some doctrines of Lactantius, like theology, ethics, gnosis and the dignity of man, cosmology, demonology, and eschatology can be traced back, with few alterations, or with additions apparently of little meaning, both to Christianity and to Hermetism. For Lactantius, theosophies represent the pagan correspondent to Christianity, because they contain a revealed truth, without which wisdom cannot exist. Christianity, however, reveals a full and absolute truth, whereas Hermetism had revealed only a partial truth, although ancient and respectable. The *Asclepius*, too, was considered by Lactantius one of the most important Hermetic treatises, and its historical significance has been great.

On the contrary, Augustine (*City of God* 8.23–26) asserts the demonic origin of Hermetic theurgy and in particular the doctrine of the animation of statues (*Ascl.* 24 and 37), and the "palingenesia" of Egypt is interpreted by Augustine as the end of ancient religion, substituted by the Christian one. Lactantius' interpretation prevailed over Augustine's condemnation of Hermes: Quodvultdeus, Augustine's pupil and bishop of Carthage, in the *Adversus quinque haereses* followed Lactantius' interpretation instead of his master's, and this is what passed down to the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages

From the twelfth century onwards, Hermes is almost unanimously considered as a forerunner of Christ. Only John of Salisbury, when dealing with the nature of the demons capable of foreseeing the future, makes an allusion to the prophecy of Trismegistus on the dawn of idolatry (*Policraticus* II. 28). John therefore repeats Augustine's interpretation, although he does not mention his condemnation of Hermetic idolatry.

Before the discovery and the Latin translation of the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* by Marsilio Ficino in 1463, the *Asclepius* was the only complete Hermetic text accessible to western readers. Abelard has a particular interest in Hermes, indicated as a bearer of ancient wisdom and precursor of Christianity. He employs the same passage of *Ascl.* 8 that had been used by Lactantius and Quodvultdeus as a testimony to the generation of the Logos from God the Father (*Theologia Christiana* 1.61–65; 67): If Hermes had spoken in an imprecise way, saying that the Son had been "created" or "made" instead of "generated," this is due to the fact that Hermes was not aware of Christian doctrine yet (1.67); but when he says that the Son is *secundus dominus* after the Father, he means that the Son is *dominus* and comes as a second after the Father (1.101).

In the *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus*, Theoderic of Chartres explains the biblical account of creation by means of Platonic cosmology, mentioning *Asclepius* 14 (the existence of God, of matter and of the spirit that accompanied God and was in the world) and 16–17 (the spirit who moves all the sensible species). When commenting on Boethius, Theoderic employs the *Asclepius*, therefore creating a conflation of Platonism and Hermetism. In *Commentum super Boethii librum de Trinitate* (4.3.8, p. 97, 88–90) he asserts that, if one accepts the Hermetic doctrine of God's presence in matter (*Ascl.* 14), for God is extraneous to nothing and, conversely, everything dwells in him, one cannot but conclude that God is everything (*Ascl.* 1.2.9)— an unacceptable tenet. In his *Lectiones in Boethii librum de Trinitate*, Theoderic uses the statement (*Ascl.* 20 and 31) that God possesses all names and at the same time is nameless, because he is unknowable (4.6.11 and 28).

Hermetic elements are also numerous in Bernardus Silvestris's *Cosmographia*: the existence of unformed matter, which is neither good nor evil (1.2.6 = *Ascl.* 15); the beauty of the created world (1.2.11 = *Ascl.* 10); the heavens, source of life for all beings (1.4.1 = *Ascl.* 2–3); the continuity of the universe (1.4.9 = *Ascl.* 2); the distinction between eternity and time and the continuous passing from one to the other (1.4.11–2 = *Ascl.* 31); the fertility of the sexes, which imitates divine fertility, the fact that sexual union is welcomed by God (2.14.157–164 = *Ascl.* 21); the hierarchy of the intelligible, or *ousiarchai*, gods (2.3.11 = *Ascl.* 19). Man is capable of worshipping gods and ruling over the earth (cf. *Ascl.* 6 and 8 = *Cosm.* 2.10.11–12); he is endowed with the *status rectus* in order to contemplate the heavens and allow that its rational laws represent a paradigm (*exemplar*) for his life (2.4.29–32). God is *summus et superessentialis* (2.5.1), *summus et exsuperantissimus* (2.2.13, cfr. *Ascl.* 41). Near him is the divine intellect (*nous*): "As indeed he is pregnant of divine will, so the nous, gave shape to the endelechy by means of the models of the eternal images which he bears in himself" (1.4.14 = *Ascl.* 17).

Similarly, Alanus of Lille is greatly interested in Hermetism. Mercury, he asserts, despite being a pagan philosopher, provides important arguments for theology. In the *Summa quoniam homines* 1.4, he quotes the final prayer of the *Asclepius* in ch. 41 to assert the uniqueness of God. God's nature is unknown (1.8e, cfr. *Ascl.* 31: *hoc ergo quod tale est (Deus)* [...] *incertum est*); that the species is subject to death, whereas genus is immortal (I 6, p. 132 = *Ascl.* 4); that the void does not exist (*Summa* 16a, cfr. *Ascl.* 33); regarding the Father's power and will, Alanus asserts (*Summa* 95): "likewise, the pagan philosopher Mercury says that his will is accompanied by actuation" (*Ascl.* 8).

In stating that the soul is immortal (*Contra Haereticos* 1.30, *PL* 210, 332CD–333A), Alanus is once again influenced by Hermetism: Mercurius in the *Asclepia* [*sic*] (chapter 2) says: "Yet, every soul is immortal [...]" Likewise, Mercury in the *Asclepia* says (chapter 28) that after the dissolution from the body "after they have done wrong, the unbelievers will be forced to believe, not by words but by example, not threats but real suffering of punishment" (tr. Copenhaver). In a passage of the *Anticlaudianus* (*PL* 210, 505BC) it is said that "Phronesis speaks like Fabius, perorates like Cicero, thinks like the philosopher of Samos, is wise like Plato and investigates the realms like Hermes … she completes the thoughts of Mercury."

The *Summa* and the *Contra haereticos* make use of Lactantius and Quodvultdeus in explaining the generation (making, in Hermes' words) of the Son of God. In order to avoid these errors, Alanus suggest a different interpretation, which derives from the fact that he considers the *Asclepius* different from the *Logos tileos*, namely the Greek *Logos teleios*. Philosophers

(*Summa* 16b, which follows Abelard) foresaw the signs of the Trinity. In God exist power, wisdom, and love, which designate the three Persons. Despite not being able to distinguish them with appropriate notions, philosophers have said about God, his intellect and the world-soul many things that can apply to the divine Persons. They have attributed to the world-soul many concepts that can be applied to the Spirit (*Summa* 31; see also the *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili*). Alanus also adds that Hermes spoke in a defective way, because he used the plural form *dei* (*deus deos fecit aeternos*), as all pagans did; instead, he should have employed the term "persons" (*personae*), since God is one.

The *Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum* is a collection of twenty-four definitions of God, each of which is pronounced by a wise man and is followed by a philosophical–religious explanation. The *Liber* summarizes doctrines taken from late antique Neoplatonists such as Macrobius, Augustine, Boethius, pseudo-Dionysius, as well as from the *Asclepius*. The first two sentences are the most meaningful, but they are not attributed to Hermes.

Thomas Bradwardine employs Hermetism in the *De causa Dei*, a work meant to confute the doctrines of the so-called modern Pelagians, who assert that free will is enough for human salvation and therefore limit God's salvific role. Bradwardine defends his own opinion by means of the "father of the philosopher, Hermogenes (i.e. Hermes), the triple Mercury, triple Trismegistus, three times great in philosophy, king of Egypt, philosopher and prophet" (this is his explanation of the term Trismegistus). Hermes proclaimed the infinite greatness and perfection of God in his treatise *De verbo aeterno* (namely, the *Verbum perfectum*, the title used by Quodvultdeus to translate the Greek *Logos teleios*). To this doctrine of the *Asclepius* Bradwardine also adds the fifth sentence of the *Liber vigintiquattuor philosophorum*, according to which "God is the one beyond whom nothing better can be thought of." Apuleius, who wrote the *De Mundo*, and Hermes, who in his *De verbo aeterno* calls God under the name of Jupiter (ch. 20), however, had the fault of professing astrology. Therefore Bradwardine, like the twelfth- and thirteenth-century philosophers, interprets the passages of the *Asclepius* about the supreme God by referring them to the Christian God and attributes to Hermes the merit of having perceived, although in a confused manner, the existence of the Holy Spirit.

Cusanus also asserts that Hermes was one of the pagan wise men who rightly believed in the oneness of God and to whom idolatry was thus utterly foreign—Augustine's condemnation of Hermes, then, would seem to find no echo. In the homily *Ibant magi* (*Sermo* 2.26, of 1431) he distinguishes between natural magic and necromantic magic, and he knows that there exist "certain books on divination and miracles, books carved into stone

before the flood and discovered by Hermes; they reached Ham and his son Canaan, Zoroaster, and Aristotle." In the homily on *In principio erat Verbum* (chapter 11), Cusanus refers to Hermes' statement from the *Logos teleios* that God generated his Son and loved him, as Lactantius had stated (*Divinae Institutiones* 4.6.4). Hermes says that this Son is ineffable and is the cause of the existence of the universe; the reason for his generation was the goodness of the Father (cf. Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 4.7.3). And, in confirmation of this will to generate the Word that is greater than human language, on account of which it cannot be pronounced (here Cusanus employs *Verbum* to mean both "word" and Person of the Son), Cusanus again cites Lactantius and his comparison of the Christian Logos with Zeno's Logos (*Div. Inst.* 4.9.2), and he emphasizes Hermes' authority and wisdom (4.9.3). Cusanus takes up the statement in *Asclepius* (chapter 20) that God possesses all names and, vice versa, should not be called by any name (*De beryllo* 13; *Idiota de mente* 3.69). In the *De docta ignorantia* (1.24.75) he asserts that God's name is unutterable, precisely as is signified by the Hebrew tetragrammaton. Therefore, the affirmation *unus et omnia* in the *Asclepius* must be interpreted *secundum essentiam propriam*, i.e. according to the real nature of God: thus *omnia uniter* is a better definition, because God is everything in everyone, but is not mankind. God is both sexes (cf. *Ascl.* 20) and is love: the *sapientes* (i.e. the Hermetists) thereby intend to explain, in the best way possible for them, "the most fertile Trinity of the creator" (*De pace fidei* 10.27). On account of its lack of forms, matter "nurses" souls (*De docta ignorantia* 3.8.134). Drawing on two well-known passages in the *Asclepius* (chapters 6 and 8), Cusanus also argues (*De beryllo* 7) that man is a second God.

It is the Renaissance that must be credited with the rediscovery of Greek Hermes, as well as the rediscovery of the full breadth of what Plato had to offer.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The "Pagans" of Late Antiquity

Jan R. Stenger

Rise and Fall

Paganism in Late Antiquity is a paradox. On the one hand, for the first time in the history of Greco-Roman civilization there seems to be such a thing as "paganism." Before Christianity increasingly permeated the society of the Roman empire, it made no sense to speak of paganism because the cults of the ancient gods were simply the norm and no one would have thought of identifying a person as "pagan." On the other hand, hardly had paganism entered the stage in the fourth century CE did it apparently peter out and finally die. For, as the emperor Theodosius II firmly asserted in 423, there were no pagans left in the Roman empire (*Cod. Theod*. 16.10.22). So we are faced with the conundrum that *pagani*, though making their first appearance in Latin sources not before the middle of the fourth century, were already extinct a few decades later. The problem is compounded by the fact that the fate of pagan religion and its practitioners in that period is, as it seems, inextricably linked to the rise and ultimate triumph of the Christian Church. After the emperor Constantine had shifted his religious allegiance to Christianity, polarization increased rapidly up to the end of the century when Theodosius I in 380 declared Catholicism the official state religion and mounted pressure on those who continued to worship the Greco-Roman deities. The period from ca. 300–600 CE, in regard to which it is for the first time appropriate to speak of paganism proper, was arguably a critical phase in the history of the traditional cults and their followers.

Yet this view is not without its problems. The reason for this is that the history of the demise of paganism and, even more fundamentally, the nature of pagan religion itself is largely shaped by Christian perspective. Only in the context of the narrative of the triumph of Christianity do the late antique pagans and their practices play a role, as a necessary foil to the process during which the followers of Christ, with the support of the state, rose from a persecuted minority to dominance and then tried in turn to eradicate all other forms of worship. This triumphant narrative, mostly based on literary evidence, depicts the encounter of Christians and polytheists as one of inevitable conflict, oppression, and violence. The Church Father Jerome, for instance, could claim in 403 that every temple in Rome was covered with soot and cobwebs and that also in other parts of the empire the pagan shrines lay deserted (*ep.* 107). Modern scholarship eagerly adopted the Christian viewpoint and enhanced the teleological image that pagan observances, an inherently weak and moribund religion, had to give way to the ever growing new faith (Momigliano 1963). Still in more recent years scholars have been inclined to accept the superiority of Christian religion, against which paganism due to its lack of conceptualization and spirituality could not compete (Fowden 1998). From this angle the pagans of Late Antiquity seem only to matter in so far as they are the passive object of Christian action and discourse but not in their own right. Other scholars, although following this trajectory, evidently sympathize with the last pagans as the defiant standard-bearers of Greco-Roman civilization and tradition, an idealized view ultimately derived from Gibbon's somber depiction of the late empire (Chuvin 1990). In the face of the dominant narrative we may wonder whether paganism in that period was a proper religion in the first place or, as one article has argued, rather a tolerant attitude toward religious issues (O'Donnell 1979). And if it was a religion, was it really doomed to death?

One major obstacle to an accurate understanding of pagan religion is the difficulty of conceptualization. The majority of our sources being literary, we need to acknowledge that they have been written almost without exception by interested parties, that is, mostly by Christian authors. It is easy to see that they did not intend to give an impartial account of their pagan contemporaries but, as Jerome in the letter, wrote with a bias, often with an ecclesiastical agenda. Nor can pagan authors of the period, when they deal with religious affairs, be considered objective as they tend to extol their own "martyrs" while combating their Christian enemies. As a consequence, the surviving evidence for the most part focuses on religious conflict and displays a strong interest in cases of erupting violence such as the symbolic demolition of the Serapeum in Alexandria in ca. 392. By highlighting seemingly significant incidents like the removal of the Victory altar from the Senate house in

Rome the sources have given rise to the notion that the religious landscape was divided between two antagonistic camps.

Matters become even more complicated when we realize that the term that we are accustomed to use for the adherents of the traditional cults has been coined by their detractors. Much ink has been spilled in recent years on whether it is appropriate to retain the term "pagan," which occurs in fourth-century religious legislation and literature, because of its derogatory and hostile connotations. Indeed, when legislators and Church leaders labeled the followers of the traditional divinities *pagani* (e.g. *Cod. Theod.* 16.2.18) they did so in order to define them as "others," to erect boundaries, a purpose that also lies behind other expressions current at the time. Apart from *paganus*, whose meaning is still not completely clear, in the Latin west *gentiles* and *nationes* were in use for those who worshipped the ancient gods, while in the Greek speaking east *ethne* and *Hellenes* were common labels (Kahlos 2007). The problem with all these expressions, apart from their ambiguities and polysemy, is that they did not have a precise and identifiable counterpart in religious reality. Instead, they are umbrella terms with which Christians lumped together a great variety of cults, rituals, and beliefs, from the priesthood of the Vestals in the city of Rome to the Mysteries of Eleusis in Greece, to the cult of Isis in Egypt. "Pagans," thus, is a relational term that denotes anything that is not Christian, whereas the category of paganism had hardly any meaning for the pagans themselves. On account of its polemic use in the Christian sources scholars have discussed whether it is acceptable to keep the expression, while some have suggested "polytheism" as an alternative (Cameron 2011; Jones 2014). However, "polytheism" is itself problematic because it also subsumes a wide range of diverse observances and can hardly count as more neutral than "paganism." However we may judge the terminological issues, we should be fully aware that we cannot completely escape the perspective of our sources, but always need to take into account their bias, communicative purposes, and agendas.

For all these reasons, current scholarship has moved beyond the grand narratives, though those are still being written, and acknowledging the inherently local character of pagan cults paid attention to chronological and regional variation among the traditional forms of worship. Looking more closely at material remains, studies have detailed our knowledge of, among others, cultic activities in North Africa and Egypt, which has shown that pagan cults stayed vital in Late Antiquity, contrary to the notion of wholesale decline (Frankfurter 1998; Leone 2013). Further, instead of foregrounding fight and antagonism recent publications have emphasized areas, for instance in the imperial administration, where pagans and Christians were able to cooperate fruitfully and shed light on the shared culture that still was available

to both sides alike (Salzman *et al.* 2016). Before, the rising polarization in the course of the fourth century had obscured how much Christians and pagans had in common, including the cultural systems of rhetoric and philosophy, mythology, and the arts, as well as magic practices and forms of popular entertainment. In addition, we are increasingly becoming aware of the complex nature of religious affiliation and identity in the late empire. Not only is it hard for a modern observer to pin down whether Constantine was a Christian in the strict sense, whatever that means, but also people in Late Antiquity did not necessarily define themselves in terms of either pagan or Christian (Frakes and DePalma Digeser 2006, Jones 2014). That is why ecclesiastical leaders like John Chrysostom in the fourth and Jacob of Serugh in the fifth to sixth centuries so vehemently warned their flocks not to attend pagan festivals or observe Hellenic customs; according to them such behavior was incompatible with true Christian faith. These preachers sought to delineate identities where in fact the boundaries were fluid and self-definition was flexible. Finally, we cannot but acknowledge that for the ancients religion was not always the main concern. When the emperor appointed high magistrates or the Roman aristocrats pursued their literary interests they often followed other considerations, such as administrative efficiency or status distinction, than religious ones.

The Invention of Paganism

If we accept that "paganism" was a cultural construct and, thus, to some extent an artificial category, it does not automatically follow that it had no bearing on late antique reality and perceptions. Quite the contrary, the discursive construction of what was considered pagan had considerable effects on the possibilities to practice cults and display religious identity in public. Therefore, in studying the pagans and their observances we always need to take into account their interaction with the others, the Christians, because that defined the space that was available to their religious experience. One crucial factor in the invention of the pagans was Christian rhetoric. From the beginning of the period, ecclesiastical writers and preachers through their treatises and homilies defined what paganism was and how it differed from Christian belief, and in most cases they did so in an aggressive manner (Kahlos 2007). Among the first authors who mounted fierce rhetorical attacks on pagans was the Church Father and supporter of Constantine, Eusebius of Caesarea. Especially in his *Life of Constantine* he propagated the image that the first Christian emperor was firmly resolved to extirpate the pagan cults and erase all visible signs of pagan worship from the face of

the globe (2.44–48, 3.48, 54–58). Other clerics followed suit, denouncing the adherents of the gods as the complete "other" of Christians, not only in terms of theological speculation, but also with respect to everyday habits of ordinary people. A new height in the anti-pagan polemic was reached when around 345 the Roman senator Firmicus Maternus, a convert himself, directed his work *On the Error of Profane Religions* to the emperors Constans and Constantius II, appealing to them to convert their pagan subjects even by brute force. "The ruinous error of this stubbornness," he said about paganism, "may no longer stain the Roman world, […] the wickedness of this pestilential usage may no longer gain strength" (16.4). What the black-and-white picture drawn by Christian rhetoric reveals is that the enemies of the pagans homogenized the diverse forms of worship into one uniform religion and focused on what differed most from Christianity: polytheism, the use of idols, and animal sacrifice.

When Christian authors described pagan rituals and practices they often maliciously misrepresented them in order to demonize their antagonists. The poet Prudentius, for instance, depicted in extremely glaring colors the *taurobolium*, the sacrifice of a bull, claiming with disgust that the priests had the animal's blood flowing in streams over them (*Peristephanon* 10.1011–1050). In actual fact, the author had no first-hand knowledge of the ritual, which in all likelihood was simply a traditional sacrifice (Cameron 2011: 159–163). In the east, the priest John Chrysostom drew a similarly distorted picture of the oracle of Apollo in Daphne, the famous suburb of Syrian Antioch, and what he claimed was going on in the precinct (*On the saint Babylas, against Julian*). This case is particularly fascinating because not only did Chrysostom launch a rhetorical strike against the devilish debauchery taking place in Daphne, but his sermon was part of a religious struggle over a significant space. After the Caesar Gallus had ordered the interment of the saint Babylas' remains in Apollo's sanctuary, his energetically pagan half-brother Julian in 362 removed the martyr's bones in order to restore the purity of the oracle site. However, soon after the temple caught fire and collapsed, which later gave Chrysostom the opportunity to extol the triumph of the Christian God over the pagan demon (Stenger forthcoming). What is remarkable about this incident, which aroused much attention well into the fifth century, is that anti-pagan polemic within a polarized religious landscape was an excellent vehicle for Christian self-definition. That the demonization of polytheists often served to demarcate their own religious camp is clearly brought out in another of Chrysostom's homilies that says, "There would be no pagans if we were such Christians as we ought to be" (*Homily* 10.3 in *1 Tim.*, PG 62.551). Aggressive rhetoric, to be sure, did not directly reflect religious reality, but also pagans could no longer ignore that tensions

increased in the second half of the fourth century but had to find ways to deal with them.

While polemic of Christian intellectuals did not necessarily have immediate impact on the pagans' lives, it was a different matter with imperial legislation. Taking edicts as evidence for the conditions under which the traditional cults could be practiced is, however, not without its problems. For one thing, the imperial rulings have not come down to us in their original form. What has been transmitted is the collection in the *Theodosian Code*, a compilation of edicts assembled between 429 and 435 under emperor Theodosius II. Since the compilers did not simply gather the material that was available to them, but revised, abbreviated, and arranged it, it is difficult to establish how the original decrees would have looked like (Matthews 2000). Therefore, the imperial edicts have to be studied with proper caution. What emerges from the surviving legislation is that, after the emperor Constantine had taken the first steps in favor of Christianity and against pagan worship, his immediate successors tried to implement stricter measures in order to draw narrower limitations to the practices of "superstition," as they used to denounce the traditional religion (Curran 2000: 181–193; Sandwell 2005: 90–97). Constans and Constantius II banned sacrifices and the latter ordered that pagan temples be immediately closed in all places to prevent public worship (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.6, 16.10.2, 4–6). Whoever ventured to infringe these rulings had to face severe punishment, up to the death penalty. Apart from sacrifice, the laws focused on idolatry, divination, and magic, further they prohibited oracles, so that also hitherto unobjectionable religious practices that had been part of public worship became outlawed (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.4–5). Theodosius I took the oppression of paganism to even higher levels when he not only issued a comprehensive ban on sacrifice, but also declared pagan worship in every form as illegal (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.10–12). Under Theodosius II, with the renewal of these rulings and the exclusion of pagans from imperial service, intolerance toward non-Christians was complete (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.21, 16.10.25). Later on, Justinian validated all previous limitations placed upon pagans.

The repeated religious rulings from the fourth to sixth centuries seem, on the surface, to support the view that the freedom of non-conformist religious behavior was diminishing and it is beyond doubt that legislation impaired the pagans' ability to perform their ancestral rites according to the traditions. Contemporary evidence confirms that in the face of official oppression pagans often preferred to keep a low profile and continue their sacrifices only secretly (Libanius, *Or.* 1.27, 18.114, 24.36). What the intolerant measures against "superstition" show is that the empire was on the road to de-paganization: while in previous centuries the welfare of the

state was bound to the public worship of the deities, the connection between the empire and the pagan cults now broke up. The emperors withdrew official support for the cults and deliberately accelerated the decline of the sanctuaries to disrupt the unity of state and traditional religion. Inevitably, visible forms of paganism were receding from the public sphere. Having said that, it is hard to gauge the direct impact and effectiveness of religious legislation (Errington 1997). Decrees reflect a normative discourse and often lagged behind reality. As the repeated bans on sacrifice suggest, the effects of imperial encroachment were limited, which should not surprise us, given the virtual absence of a standing police force. In addition, the imperial rulings were directed to specific addressees and related to limited occasions, so that we should be careful not to attribute too readily to the emperors a systematic policy against pagans. After all, the *Theodosian Code* also contains a number of decrees that make concessions and exhibit religious tolerance, because the emperors wanted to avoid public unrest and needed the cooperation of pagan aristocrats (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.9, 16.10.3, 16.10.8, 16.10.15). Nonetheless pagans could no longer be in doubt that the tide was turning for Christianity.

This they could not fail to notice also because not only the state but also individuals, and the masses, took their hostility toward religious dissenters from words to action. Late Antiquity saw a series of violent eruptions in which Christians seized the opportunity to take action against pagans, their cult images, and their shrines. In Rome, for example, the urban prefect Maecius Gracchus in 376/7 destroyed a shrine of Mithras (Jerome, *Ep.* 107.2), and in Gaul bishop Martin of Tours, according to his hagiographer Sulpicius Severus, traveled the country to erase pagan precincts and convert pagans wherever he could (*Life of St Martin* 12–15). Similarly, in the east bishop Porphyry of Gaza around 400 is said to have secured support from the imperial court and, on his return to his hometown, razed the temple of Marnas to erect a church instead on the site (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry* 64–78; Trombley 1993/4). The cases of anti-pagan violence that have commanded the greatest attention are those in Alexandria. There in 392, after Christians had provoked pagans by mockingly parading cult images, a riot broke out in which the great sanctuary of the god Serapis and then also other shrines were overturned (Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists* 6.11; Rufinus, *HE* 11.23; Sozomen, *HE* 7.15). Although Christian sources claim that bishop Theophilus in the demolition had the backing of Theodosius I, it is evident that the emperor had not ordered the act, but that the local Christian population was responsible for the aggression (Hahn 2008). Anti-pagan rage was unleashed against individuals, too. In 415, also in Alexandria, in a clash between the prefect of Egypt and the city's bishop Cyril, the pagan

philosopher Hypatia, a respected public figure, who was known to be a friend of the magistrate, was mutilated and lynched by a crowd of the bishop's supporters (Socrates, *HE* 7.13–15). Such cases illuminate rifts in the urban population, which resulted in open aggression more widely since the end of the fourth century, while the accounts of attacks against temples and images document a transformation of the material religious landscape that stretched also to more rural areas. However, it is important to stress that religious violence is mainly known from the literary record, which tends to exaggerate the significance of these events. As far as we know, violent eruptions were the most striking actions of extremists, examples of the intolerance of fanatics, and thus isolated incidents rather than the norm (Hahn *et al.* 2008). But they certainly contributed to the increasingly hostile atmosphere to which pagans were now exposed.

From Accommodation to Resistance

Although the impact of legislation and violent clashes is hard to measure, it becomes evident from textual and material evidence that pagan ritual gradually disappeared from public and became largely confined to the private sphere. Animal sacrifice, the main target of Christian polemic, seems to have declined in Late Antiquity, though this decline cannot be attributed to one single reason. For one, we know that blood sacrifice began to drop already earlier and, at least in the eastern cities, it had virtually disappeared from civic festivals even before the emperor Julian's attempts at a revival (Bradbury 1995). By the 380s if not earlier public rituals also in the west no longer routinely featured animal sacrifice. However, this process does not simply indicate a general decay in pagan religious life nor can it be interpreted as a submission to official oppression. Blood sacrifice had long since been criticized also by pagan philosophers and not every follower of the traditional gods considered it essential to his religiosity. Those pagans might have found it easier to accommodate to the imperial policy, pointing out, as Libanius did, that butchering animals was no longer a religious act (*Or.* 30.19). Echoing decrees about pagan temples and idols, some worshippers of the gods also held that shrines and images were to be appreciated as cultural artifacts and symbols of past achievements, instead of being used for religious rites (Libanius, *Or.* 30.22). A similar argument was made by Libanius' western peer Symmachus when he attempted to dissociate traditional spectacles from their pagan connotations so as to ensure their survival as secular entertainment in an increasingly Christianized society (*Relatio* 6; Lim 2009). These attitudes are evidence that not all pagans were keen to foreground

religious discord. We sometimes all too easily forget that not every pagan wanted to make religious observance and ritual the cornerstone of his self-definition. Otherwise, Symmachus, who is often considered the spearhead of Roman paganism, would not have complained about his peers' lack of commitment and interest in the traditional priesthoods (*Ep.* 1.47, 1.51, 2.34; Cameron 2011: 163–164). The religious life of pagans was more diverse than we tend to think.

The massive evidence of the *Theodosian Code* and Christian accounts also should not induce us to underestimate the continuity of ritual practice. If, as they want us to believe, traditional worship had virtually vanished, the repeated issuing of edicts against idolatry and sacrifice would hardly be understandable. On account of the series of decrees against pagan temples and sacrifice we can surmise that the traditional cults in many places of the empire had not completely lost their vitality; at least for the fourth century that should not surprise us because the majority of the population still revered the traditional gods. That the general bans of Constantius II and his successors were widely ignored up to the end of the fourth century is also suggested by a letter of bishop Ambrose of Milan which claims that pagans in Rome continued to sacrifice at altars in temples all over the city (*Ep.* 18.31). And Sulpicius in his *Life of St Martin* by relating the bishop's often aggressive conversion practices (12–15) betrays that while the Christianization of Gaul had made little progress before, pagan rituals were still performed in rural areas of the western empire, with pagans offering resistance to Martin's incursions. Admittedly, these accounts have to be taken for what they are, that is, tendentious exaggeration, but nonetheless it is fairly clear that especially in the countryside pagan cults and practices persisted, in some parts up to the end of antiquity. We know, for example, from textual and material evidence that in Egypt, despite the dilapidation of monumental temples, the traditional religion remained alive (Frankfurter 1998).

Yet we cannot fail to notice a significant shift in the continuation of ritual practice. As official repression gained momentum, the emperors confiscated temple land and withdrew public funding from the ancient cults, the center of activity of pagan religion moved from public to private. One of the main results of the state's privileging of Christianity was the impoverishment of the traditional cults; even the most famous temples of the old deities experienced financial difficulties (Caseau 2011). As far as possible potent individuals stepped in to fill these gaps and funded cultic festivals so as to keep the religious customs alive. Such private gestures became also vital for the physical maintenance of pagan shrines. In Rome in the middle of the fourth century, the senator Vettius Agorius Praetextatus and other magistrates undertook the restoration of deteriorating temples and buildings

related to them (Salzman 2002; Gwynn 2011). Another consequence of the growing hostility toward paganism was that the adherents of the traditional observances often preferred to continue their worship in private and secretively, rather than taking risk with public celebrations. Public cultic activity, to be sure, did not disappear immediately, as the dedication of an Apollo temple in Rome by Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus in the 350s shows (CIL 6.45); but Libanius and others document that, because of the fear of persecution and severe punishment, pagans decided to worship the gods only in private. Furthermore, it seems that in the face of mounting pressure divination and prayer became more popular because such practices did not necessarily catch the attention of the authorities and Christian fanatics.

A new age seemed to dawn for pagans when in 361 Julian ascended the imperial throne. A convert from Christianity to the ancient gods and driven by infinite zeal, his reign hailed the resurgence of the pagan cults (Smith 1995; Watts 2015: 110–116). Paradoxically, this revival would have been inconceivable without Julian's Christian socialization. This comes to the fore already in his attempt to furnish paganism with a more systematic doctrine and compete with the Church on the field of charity. To begin with, he adopted the techniques of Christian apologetics when he wrote a fierce polemic against, as he labeled them, the "Galilaeans." In this work, which has come down to us only in fragments, Julian vigorously condemned Christianity and, like earlier polemicists, denounced it as error and disease, whereas Hellenism, his understanding of pagan religion, represented true *theosebeia* (religion). As an accompaniment to this rhetorical attack, Julian's intimate supporter Salutius put together a short introduction to the essentials of paganism, in which he, from a Neoplatonic perspective, laid down the principles of the divine world order, sacrifice, festivals, and mythology (Clarke 1998). Apparently, Julian and his partisans wanted to compensate for the lack of conceptualization that they felt hampered the successful resistance against the rise of Christianity. In addition, the emperor attempted to make pagan priests observe proper moral conduct and implement care for the sick and the poor so that paganism would have even more resembled the Church (*Ep.* 84).

Yet this was but one side of Julian's religious policy. Further measures included the restoration of dilapidated temples and the revival of public blood sacrifice, whose steep decline the emperor repeatedly had occasion to bemoan (*Ep.* 78, *Misopogon* 361d–363c). It was, however, exactly the issue of animal sacrifice that revealed the limitations of his program. From inscriptions and Libanius' enthusiastic praise we know that Julian's change of course in fact enjoyed some support in the quarters of the traditional worshippers (CIL 8.18529, from Numidia; *L'Année épigraphique* (2000) 1503, Israel; Libanius, *Or.* 12.90–96, 13.1–2). But the butchering of

droves of animal victims also offended pagans and provoked public scorn; even Libanius and the historian Ammianus, otherwise an admirer of Julian, did not conceal their lack of understanding for the emperor's obsession with bloody rituals (Libanius, *Or.* 12.80, 18.170; Amm. Marc. 22.12.6–7, 25.4.17). Other than one might have anticipated, Julian's energetic promotion of the ancient cults did not resort to a state persecution of Christians. Although he was crystal clear that Christianity was a detestable error Julian tried to calm down disturbances between the religious groups, ordering the citizens to live in concord with one another (*Ep.* 114). What he had in mind was, not the eradication of Christians as people, but the marginalization and ultimately elimination of Christianity as a social and cultural force. For this purpose he in 362 issued an edict on teaching that forbade Christians to teach classical literature, on the grounds that the classics were inseparable from the pagan gods and mythology (*Cod. Theod.* 13.3.5; *Ep.* 61c; McLynn 2014). With the emperor's premature death on the battlefield in Persia in 363, the pagan revival remained a short-lived attempt. Overall it can be regarded as a manifestation of the polarization that had already set in between pagans and Christians in the empire. As a response to the Christian construction of religious dichotomy, his program will have contributed to the pagans' or Hellenes' becoming aware of themselves as a distinct group.

While in general pagans had to accept the state's withdrawal of support for their religion and adapt to the changing conditions, there are a number of cases in which those who clung to the Greco-Roman gods were not prepared to concede without energetic resistance. However, we need to bear in mind that incidents where pagans took their cause into their own hands are relatively infrequent and, again, mostly recorded in Christian accounts. One dramatic incident occurred during Julian's reign in Alexandria. No sooner had the news of Constantius II's death in 361 broken than a pagan mob grabbed the opportunity to lynch, mutilate, and burn the city's Arian bishop, George (Amm. Marc. 22.11; Socrates, *HE* 3.2–4; Sozomen, *HE* 5.7). The new ruler Julian, though disapproving of the murder, sympathized with the Alexandrians and let the crime go unpunished (*Ep.* 60). Yet the incident had had a prelude. In the events leading up to the murder, bishop George had insulted the pagan cults of the city and instigated Christians to parade pagan idols in a triumphant procession through Alexandria, which caused riots between Christians and pagans. Similar eruptions of religious violence, in which people were killed, took place in 399 in Sufes and in 408 in Calama in Northern Africa. In both cities, only documented by Augustine, the riots had been provoked by Christian attacks against a pagan festival and a statue of Hercules, respectively (Augustine, *Ep.* 50, 90–91). Further, pagans are

known to have put up resistance to the activities of Martin of Tours as he on his missionary journey destroyed cult places in Gaul (Sulpicius, *Life of St Martin* 14–15). However, we know very little about pagan violence and such incidents can hardly have been the norm (Gaddis 2005: 118–119, 186–187). What emerges from the available evidence is that pagans in the late empire responded in various ways to the changing conditions, from accommodation and cooperation to occasional acts of opposition. It would be mistaken to assume that there was one unified pagan movement that eagerly took up the gauntlet against Christians.

Self-assertion

This becomes also apparent when we look more closely at the ways in which pagans in the east and in the west articulated their religious allegiance. Among scholars of the late Roman west the general consensus of opinion has been that in the second half of the fourth century there was some kind of "pagan revival" orchestrated against the state repression by a circle of erudite pagan aristocrats (Chuvin 1990). The noblemen and officeholders Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, and Flavius Nicomachus have been said to have, as a response to Christian aggression, intensified their commitment to the traditional cults by ostentatiously engaging in the respectable priestly colleges, commemorating in inscriptions their sacred functions and initiations, and displaying a keen interest in classical literature. The *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, composed in the early fifth century, but depicting a feast of these pagan figures with a dramatic date of 382, is commonly seen as a key document for these acts of elitist dissent. And indeed, Symmachus and his pagan peers had a strong concern for Roman tradition, of which religion was an integral part, and the preservation of the old state cults. In 384 Symmachus delivered his third *Relatio* to the emperor Valentinian II, trying to convince him to restore the altar of Victory in the Senate house that had been removed by Gratian; he also made an appeal for the continuation of imperial support of the civic cults (Sogno 2006: 45–51). Inscriptions for Praetextatus and his wife Paulina further illustrate that the leading pagan senators not only manned the venerable priestly colleges but also were initiated in mystery cults such as the Eleusinian Mysteries and practiced the rites of so-called oriental cults, for example those of Magna Mater (ILS 1259, 1260). One of these inscriptions commemorates Vettius Agorius Praetextatus as "augur, p[o]ntifex Vestae, pontifex Sol[is], quindecimvir, curialis Herc[u]lis, sacratus Libero et Eleus[inii]s, hierophanta, neocorus, tauroboliatus, pater patrum."

However, it is far from self-evident that all these activities as well as the restoration of sacred buildings point to a heightened public commitment to paganism, let alone to a deliberate strategy against Christian domination. The re-erection of statues, for instance, may have represented a statement of religious identity, but the precise motives in each case are difficult to pin down. Support for the civic priesthoods and rites did not automatically imply that the pagans saw themselves fighting a battle against Christianity. Quite the reverse, when Symmachus spoke on behalf of the pagan senators for the restoration of the Victory altar he advocated peaceful coexistence between religious groups, claiming

> We look on the same stars, the sky is common, the same world surrounds us. What difference does it make by what pains each seeks the truth? We cannot attain to so great a secret (*tam grande secretum*) by one road; but this discussion is rather for persons at ease, we offer now prayers, not conflict. (*Relatio* 3.10)

Furthermore, holding priesthoods, maintaining temples, and antiquarian scholarship had always been part of aristocratic status culture so we can be sure that the social functions of these activities were at least as important to the pagan notables as their religious meanings (Salzman 2002: 61–62). Regardless of the vagueness of the label "revival," we should therefore abandon the notion of a close-knit political party in the Senate vigorously joining battle with Christians. Yet it would be rash to deny that the pagan Roman aristocrats of the fourth century considered their religious allegiance as in any way important. What their statements and demonstrations do suggest is that, in their encounter with the Christian environment, they developed a clear consciousness of their own religious identity and, in addition, felt the need to articulate this selfhood vocally.

A similar sense of pagan self-awareness emerged at the same time in the Greek east, though again its religious component is sometimes hard to ascertain. We already noted that the emperor Julian when he attempted to restore pagan cult practice across the empire also went so far as to charge Greek culture with religious significance, in a clever move to drive Christians to the margins of society. It seems that the idea of an indissoluble link between traditional religion and Hellenic *paideia* resonated among intellectual circles. Orators and philosophers who felt sympathy for Julian's endeavors were inclined to postulate the unity of Greek learning and adherence to the pagan pantheon so that religion would become a cornerstone of cultural identity. On one occasion, the sophist Libanius stated, "sacred rites and letters, I think, are related and of the same kin" (*Or.* 62.8). However, such a "Hellenism," a cultural paganism as it were, may have been more to the taste

of men of letters than of ordinary people. Like their western counterparts, exponents of the pagan elite repeatedly intervened in religious conflicts showing a rather moderate than fierce stance. In an address directed to Theodosius I that has attracted similar attention as Symmachus' plea, Libanius tried to persuade the emperor to protect pagan shrines against the aggression of Christians, in particular of monks (*Or.* 30). Libanius here also made the case for internal peace and rejected religious coercion as inappropriate in order to restore the bond between state and pagan religion. His Constantinopolitan colleague Themistius had earlier expressed similar concerns when he delivered a eulogy on the emperor Jovian's consulship in 364. In his panegyric he claimed that Jovian already followed a policy of religious toleration which allowed everyone whatever their belief to search for the supreme god without being subject to religious enforcement (*Or.* 5).

Themistius' speech is also significant for another reason. To argue for religious coexistence he, in a similar way as Symmachus, speaks of the divine in very general and abstract terms so that both pagans and Christians can recognize their notion of the highest god. Since long pagan philosophers had advocated a theology that revolved around a sublime concept of a single divine entity, instead of a multiplicity of gods, and late antique intellectuals, in particular Neoplatonic philosophers, also showed the tendency to subsume all deities under the principle of one supreme god (Mitchell and Van Nuffelen 2010). This theological thinking was, to be sure, not monotheistic in the strict, Christian sense of the word. But it is evidence that the term "polytheism" that has been suggested as an alternative for "paganism" does not solve our problems of conceptualization because it does not do justice to the existing diversity among pagan observances. It is, moreover, also not possible to discount monotheistic tendencies as purely academic preferences because in the eastern Mediterranean at least into the fourth century a pagan cult is attested by inscriptions that made much of the humility of its adherents in the face of the supreme power of the Highest Deity, the *Theos Hypsistos*.

It is, further, important to stress that the paganism of Neoplatonic philosophers was not confined to theological speculation. The philosophical *Lives* that Eunapius of Sardes toward 400 depicts in vibrant colors demonstrate that figures such as Maximus of Ephesus saw rituals as an essential part of their religiosity. Following the lead of Iamblichus, who had attempted to reshape Greco-Roman polytheism as a coherent system, they performed theurgic rites, including purifications, initiations, and magical rites such as the manipulation of physical objects, the main goal being an encounter between the worshipper and the divine (Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013). The image of the Neoplatonic philosopher as a proponent of paganism was enhanced by hagiographical portraits such as the *Life of Proclus*, the fifth-century head of the

Athenian Academy, composed by his successor Marinus. This biography not only gave an account of Proclus' scholarly career, but showcased the philosopher-cum-theologian as a charismatic pagan "saint," guided by divine providence, experiencing encounters with the deities and working miracles. Dear to the gods, Proclus, Marinus tells us, "lived according to both modes that characterize the divinities […] and made use of the conjunctions and supplications of the Chaldaeans, together with their divine and ineffable magic instruments" (*Life of Proclus* 28). To what extent such idealized, and in places anti-Christian, portrayals appealed to a wider audience we cannot know. However, they support the hypothesis that in Late Antiquity those who continued to revere the pantheon sometimes thought it expedient to deliberately manifest their own Hellenism and maintain sacrificial practice. Forced by religious polarization, they more profoundly reflected on their beliefs and practices, thus developing a greater awareness of their religious allegiance.

The "Last Pagans"

The triumphant narrative of Christianization should not obscure the fact that across the empire pagan cults continued to exist in various ways up to the end of antiquity, from England to Egypt, in towns as well as in rural areas, and among elite circles as well as ordinary people. However difficult it is to define "pagan survivals," we need to acknowledge the vitality of traditional rituals and cults in numerous places if we want to form an accurate picture of the religious diversity in that period. Sometimes the persistence of practices could be remarkably tenacious. Harran at the border between the empire and Persia, for example, remained a seat of pagan religion deep into the Islamic period (Hämeen-Anttila 2006). The cults there exhibit a syncretistic nature, uniting Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Hellenistic traditions, and are greatly influenced by Greek philosophical speculation. According to the Syrian John of Ephesus (ca. 507–588), the wealthy and influential pagan community of Heliopolis (Baalbek) in Lebanon was still powerful enough to make life difficult for the Christians (*HE* 3.3.27). And for the later fifth century, Zacharias of Mytilene attests that in Carian Aphrodisias oracles were still being consulted and pagans continued to perform sacrifices, while in the Egyptian village of Menouthis a secret temple maintained its activities (*Life of Severus*, PO 2.27–32, 39–41). Of course, these Christian accounts exaggerate and distort the pagans' tenacity, but there is no reason to dismiss them altogether. Neither did the pressure diminish to which the pagans were exposed. The Palestinian monk Barsanuphius in the sixth century testifies that there was the risk of death if one were outed as a pagan (*Ep.* 822).

To determine how far "survivals" can count as predominantly religious is another matter. One area where this difficulty becomes particularly clear is festival culture and spectacles. Civic festivals, such as the celebration of the Kalends or theater shows, had always been part of urban culture and as such been connected with religious activities. Since many Christians were not prepared to abandon the custom of partaking, it became a major concern for authorities and Church leaders to define what was allowed as neutral, that is innocent entertainment, and what had to be banned as pagan idolatry. While imperial legislation repeatedly salvaged festivities provided they did not include superstitious rites, ecclesiastical figures tended to decry spectacles as idolatry and perilous to Christian souls, thereby underscoring the religious dimension. Numerous clerics from John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo to Barsanuphius and Jacob of Serugh sought to deter their flocks from attending such devilish processions, though with limited success as people continued to frequent the theater. What these attempts and the continuance of traditional celebrations in countless places document is that festivities, shows, and banquets could be dissociated from their religious origins so that they became secular events compatible with Christian faith (Lim 2009).

This may serve as a reminder that what was considered as pagan, or Christian for that matter, depended on the perspective of the observers and their intentions. In particular with regard to intellectual culture and popular habits, the boundaries were not fixed or constant, but had to be constantly redrawn. All the same, we can conclude that political and cultural space remained available for pagans at least up to the fifth century, and they often used this space to formulate their religious identity. However, we cannot overlook a transformation process. As the state detached itself from the traditional cults and oppression created a hostile environment, paganism was becoming a feature of private life, instead of a public religion, and secrecy became the habit of those who were strongly committed to the traditional cults. That must have made an enormous difference to the religious experience of the pagans. Finally, for all the aggressive talk of the ancient sources, there was considerable room for religious coexistence and peaceful social interaction.

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FURTHER READING

Fowden (1998) gives an overview of pagan religion in Late Antiquity. More recent overviews can be found in Salzman (2008) and Maxwell (2012). The contributions in Salzman *et al.* (2016) explore competition, coexistence, and conflict between religious groups in Roman society. Leone (2013) considers archeological evidence, from North Africa, to understand the transition from paganism to Christianity in the

late antique city. Mitchell and Van Nuffelen (2010) is a collection of essays that critically discuss the concept of pagan monotheism. Cameron (2011) challenges older assumptions about a "pagan revival" among aristocrats in fourth-century Rome, while Jones (2014) shows the persistence of traditional religious practices long after the decisive shift in the fourth century.

Ancient Philosophy Transformed: The Religious Turn in Philosophy

Daniel King

Introduction

This chapter will explore questions surrounding the relationship between religion and philosophy throughout Antiquity, primarily in the Greek sphere. In order to understand what was distinctive about this relationship in Late Antiquity, it will first be necessary to look back to Plato and Pythagoras, and those who followed them in the philosophical traditions of the schools. In particular, we are concerned with religion as a category that describes social behaviors rather than beliefs, and that views religion as the sum of various activities that could loosely be described as "religious," such as sacrifice, prayer, and liturgy. We shall be looking at the stances of various philosophers toward these religious activities and their ideas about them. It has often been said that the philosophers of Late Antiquity were substantially more "religious" than their predecessors. The reality is rather more subtle, although there certainly are ways in which their attitudes to religious ritual constituted a new move within philosophy that was to have far reaching implications.

If "religion" is to prove a useful analytical category in thinking about premodern societies, it cannot be taken simply to refer to "man striving after God" or as "man in his spiritual dimension." Not only would this be far too

limiting an account of the enormously diverse phenomena of human cultures, but also far too broad a description of human endeavor more generally. To say that a philosopher is "religious" simply because he reaches out for God will not enlighten much our understanding of the inner dynamics of either philosophy or religion.

Instead of thinking of religion in this broad sense of "spirituality," this chapter will rather focus on activities and lifestyles that might usefully be analyzed as religious, those performances that *function* in some way within a given community to link that community, or the individual within it, to the realm of powers that are beyond their normal reach, whether or not these are referred to as "divine." This approach also does not need to make any awkward distinction between religion and magic. In particular, therefore, our question will revolve around whether, and to what extent, and in what ways, philosophy intersected with late ancient religion (thus understood). We shall need to start with a brief consideration of the relationship between religion and philosophy in earlier Greek tradition before analyzing in further detail the positions of some of the principal representatives of late ancient philosophy.

Philosophy and Religion in Plato

In one sense, as we look back across the long history of Greek culture, its philosophy appears above all as a triumph of scientific method over the superstitious beliefs of the archaic age, that "Socrates, insisting on the phrase, 'What is it?' definitely destroyed mythical thinking" (Burkert 1979: 24). Before the modern era, philosophy was neither an academic discipline confined to the theoretical and the abstract, nor was it divorced from the religious factor in human life. Religion was integral to the thought-world of Plato himself. Religious activities were so pervasive a part of ancient Greek life that there is nothing surprising in the fact that Socrates moves directly from participating in a religious festival to engaging in the dialogue reported in the *Republic*. Moreover, Plato's attachment to Greek religious life was not merely an example of a philosopher seeking the "good life" in the sense of following an ethical code, but rather of achieving some form of spiritual transcendence, by which a man may become "as like God as possible … when he becomes just and pious" (*Theait.* 176b).

The religion being discussed by Plato in this positive light was neither the everyday civic religion of the Athenian masses, nor some private ethical religion of the philosopher. Rather, it frequently related to the Dionysiac and Orphic mystery rituals of contemporary Athens in which the personal

transcendence of the soul was tied up with communal rituals, sacrifices, and initiations. There are many aspects of Plato's thought that are tightly allied to these practices of the "mysteries." In the *Symposium*, Socrates is represented as an initiate into the mysteries, a seeker after blessedness who experiences trance-like states and engages in Bacchic role play. It is true that Plato's appropriation of this cultural stream is strictly limited, the limitation lying precisely in his preference for a philosophical rather than an ecstatic approach to achieving the soul's salvation; yet however different his own ideas of achieving this state through rational inquiry may have been from the thoughts and actions of "everyday" initiates, there is no doubt that through his dialogues, Plato shows both a close relationship to this religious tradition and a healthy respect for it and all it stood for. He describes true bacchants as "no other than those who have practiced philosophy in the right way" (*Phaedo* 69d).

Significant also is Plato's relationship to mainstream civic religion and especially the myths that underlay it. The myths he reinterpreted in terms of natural theology in a manner that was not new with him but which was already standard practice among the Presocratics. To this extent the outward literary forms of "traditional religion" are indeed rejected, but these reinterpretations (which in later ages became highly sophisticated allegorizing, a major preoccupation of many philosophical schools; Lamberton 1986) themselves affirm the antiquity and truth of what they contain, and even Aristotle affirms the inspired nature of the ancient myths, or at least their core statements about divinity (*Met.* Λ 1074b).

Philosophy's "rejection" of the general validity of civic religion predates Plato. The popular religious activities of the masses were frequently derided, especially by Xenophanes (sixth century BCE), who dismissed out of hand the possibility of divination but stopped short of full-blown atheism. Socrates himself held opinions about civic religion that could be, and by many were, interpreted in similar fashion. In later centuries the Skeptics, for example, regularly rationalized the origins of belief in God.

In the *Laws*, Plato attacks religious charlatanry and the notion that a religious expert can, through sacrifices and prayers, "buy off" the God who is angry against a sinner. Yet even so, such forms of civic religious life had their value within the ideal state, something with which those may be content who cannot grasp the higher forms of the intellectual life.

> If a good man sacrifices to the gods and keeps them constant company in his prayers and offerings and every kind of worship he can give them, this will be the best and noblest policy he can follow; it is the conduct that fits his character as nothing else can, and it is his most effective way of achieving a happy life. (*Laws* 716d)

Plato's ideal state used religious activity as a means of controlling the populace and was certainly not to be engaged in by the guardians (*Laws* 799–801), nor was "private" religion to be practiced in the home (*Laws* 909d–e).

Albeit that there is a substantial difference between the expected lifestyles of the masses and of the philosopher-guardians, nonetheless we are by no means constrained to defining only the former as "religious activity." Although he aimed to abolish ritual purificaton as a religious activity in his ideal state, the reason is that, for the philosopher, purification is something effected upon the soul through dialectic and rational inquiry. Now we can just as easily offer a religio-cultural interpretation of the latter process as of the former. Plato's notion of purification involves the "few" working in isolation from wider society, but it does not follow that his idea of "purification" does not in fact fall into the same category of phenomena as the purifications carried out as part of traditional civic culture; both are equally susceptible to a religious–analytic account.

The Pythagoreans

Yet more crucial for the developments that were to occur in Late Antiquity was the melding of philosophical rationalism with religious practice characteristic of the Pythagoreans. The founder himself was a semi-legendary figure around whom miracle-stories often arose and whose teachings were hidden from non-members just as in the Orphic or Dionysiac mysteries.

To the extent that Pythagoreanism may be analyzed socio-anthropologically as a religious sect, its religious activity was hardly of the "polis" type, but rather was intended solely for the group's "insiders." It was commonly believed that the group's religio-philosophical notions originated in Egypt whence Pythagoras had brought them (Isocrates, *Busiris* 28). At the same time, every philosophical discovery, every mathematical observation or demonstration, was intended to become the grounds of religious belief and practice, and the secrecy surrounding the group's doctrines functioned as a boundary marker much like those of any religious grouping.

If one of the foremost features of religious communal life is the observation of taboo, then in this too must the Pythagorean group be deemed a religious one. Their various and apparently arbitrary taboos, such as never stirring a fire with a knife, were well-known characteristics, frequently lampooned on the comedic Greek stage. Many "explanations" for these taboos were offered in the ancient literature (Cicero supposed that Pythagoreans refused to eat beans because this foodstuff might impede the pure thought of the soul, *On Divination* I,62), but these are *post eventum* rationalizations

and cannot have been any part of their true origin. Even these "scientific" explanations, however, betray a religious, rather than a "strictly philosophical" character, since they often appeal to the universal sympathies of magical rites. In fact, it appears that it was religious rite and taboo that was the ultimate aim and grounds of Pythagorean philosophical and mathematical thought (as Aristoxenus said of them, "their whole life is ordered with a view to following God").

That is to say these taboos were not quaint traditions maintained while pursuing the "real" goal of abstracted philosophical thought; rather they were constitutive for the very identity and the nature of what the Pythagoreans believed they were doing. This is also rather more than to say merely that they pursued philosophy with an eye on "the good life," or as a means to discover how a person ought to behave. Their "philosophy" was aimed at religion in the sense already mentioned, namely at activities and rituals of a religious nature that served to give cohesion to the group's sense of identity and at the same time served to "create" the group as such in contradistinction to the polis-identity of the masses, itself grounded upon polis-religion.

The Pythagoreans were thus quite different from the "schools" of philosophy founded in Athens in the fourth century BCE, and at the same time not unnaturally came to function as the inspiration for the "turn to religion" that characterized certain streams of philosophy in the fourth century CE. In the same way, the Pythagoreans ought to be distinguished from groups such as the Orphics who flourished in the same era, and whose religious activities greatly resemble theirs, yet who differed insofar as they lacked, in support of that religious life, any concept of philosophical endeavor or rational thought.

Equally to be avoided is the notion that movements such as Pythagoreanism and its later reflexes were "orientalizations" of true Greek philosophy. It was once commonplace that in Hellenistic times, "philosophy tended to lose itself in religion and mysticism" (Guthrie 1962: 252). It turns out to be more useful to analyze religion in more phenomenological terms than this, to keep in mind always that religion is fundamentally a set of shared activities and behaviors that marks out a particular community or society. Seen this way, the Pythagorean taboo may be seen to have preceded the belief that appears to "explain" it, and not vice versa.

Hellenistic Period

Superficially, the attitudes of the philosophers of the Hellenistic era appear to stand in continuity with their forebears. Belief in the gods was rationalized in systematic fashion by Cleanthes, for example (Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*,

11.13–15). Moreover, philosophy is often presented as an antidote to the religious superstitions that hold the masses in thrall: "If we had never been molested by alarms at celestial and atmospheric phenomena, nor by the misgiving that death somehow affects us … we should have had no need to study natural science" (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* X:142).

Yet it appears paradoxical that the "schools" of Hellenistic philosophy resemble in many ways contemporary religious societies (Most 2003: 319–321), and that many of their internal activities appear to be as susceptible to a religious interpretation as do the cycles of sacrifices and prayers offered by the devotees of civic religion and the initiation ceremonies of the followers of Isis. It certainly would appear that the philosophers of this era had, to a degree, turned in upon themselves, the few "wise men" in contradistinction from the masses. They isolated themselves from social and political life in a way that Plato, for all his social snobbery, did not (Dodds 1951: 192).

Almost an opposite perspective was represented by the Academics who, being of a skeptical bent, tended to disavow Stoic or Epicurean arguments regarding the divine and yet, perhaps for this very reason, tended also to acquiesce in social and religious norms (as did the academic but priestly Gaius Cotta who vociferously defends his attachment to tradition regardless of philosophic argument in Cicero's dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods* III.5). They were thus religious conservatives, who diverged more in their rationalizations of religion than in their practice. They were not on the whole irreligious people, but they felt readily able to separate the two aspects of life, the religious from the philosophical.

The Stoic philosopher Cleanthes famously wrote a *Hymn to Zeus*, a type of prayer that could be read either for its "theological" content or explained merely as Stoic thought clothed in a culturally traditional dress (Festugière 1949: 310–325). For the historian of "religion," however, the really interesting question would be to know in what sorts of contexts Cleanthes expected his hymn to be used: was it to be read aloud in Stoic gatherings in the context of ritual? Was it designed for personal prayer, offered up in a designated "cultic" space or time? Or was it just, as seems most likely, simply a poem designed to put into practice Cleanthes' belief in the philosophical facility of poetry while being couched in the literary form of the ancient hymns?

Marcus Aurelius' philosophy was in the same vein. Although seeming barely to talk about the place of religious actions within the philosophical life, in fact they play an important role: "If the gods do not take counsel at all [in our favor] then let us have no more of sacrifices, prayers, and hymns" (*Meditations* VI,44). They have a value, but it remains civic and social, while the philosopher is quite capable of following the god of his own reason in the absence of the social glue that is constituted by those self-same sacrifices and

hymns. Thus civic, and even private corporate and family religious practice, not only remained a part of every philosopher's life, but was often a central part of that life and one to which great significance was often attached. If we are to speak of a "religious turn" in late ancient philosophy, then it was a turn not in the significance for philosophers of religious life, but a turn rather in the specific *way* in which religious activities were understood.

The Neopythagoreans

Nonetheless a new wind does seem clearly to blow through the halls of traditional philosophy when we turn our attention to those who brought Pythagoras back from the dead. In fact, reverence for Pythagoras had never quite died out. As early as the first generation of the Academy, Plato's immediate successors showed an interest in matters of magic and religion closely comparable to that of the Neoplatonists (Merlan 1975: 2). From the first century CE onward, interest and attachment to the old Pythagorean doctrines increased further. Moderatus, whose *Lectures on Pythagoras* were read and followed by some Neoplatonists, developed a monistic ontology in which the Indefinite Dyad functioned as source for the derivation of matter, in which therefore matter came to be seen increasingly as an irredeemable evil. These "Neopythagoreans" attempted to give philosophical rigor to a worldview in which religious performance, and the religiously conditioned construction of identity boundaries, might once again function, as it had for the "original" Pythagoreans, as an inherent part of the philosopher's search for personal contemplation of the Good.

The most famous among these philosophers who revived interest in Pythagoras was Numenius of Apamea: "Just as when someone sits at a certain vantage point and sees … some small fishing vessel … alone, solitary, derelict, caught amid the billows, in just this way ought one to retire afar from sensible things to join company with the Good, alone with the alone" (Fr. 2.7–12; cited in Eusebius, *P.E.* 11.21). In one sense philosophers had always sought some such retreat from the world, and in the Hellenistic era especially so, but Numenius intends something more, a desire not just to contemplate the Good as an intellectual goal, but to "withdraw" from society, to create a sense of sacred space or time in which access to the divine might be sought free from the cares of the world.

Numenius' cosmology too owes much to religious speculation of the sort found in the *Chaldean Oracles*, for instance that souls make their descent into the world through the heavenly spheres and by means of the gates of the Zodiac, which he read allegorically out of Homer's description of the Cave

of the Nymphs (*Odyssey* XIII.102–112). His understanding of the evil nature of the world as arising out of its inevitable multiplicity owes more to the new rising Gnosticism than to a close reading of the *Timaeus*. There is among the Neopythagoreans a tendency to treat philosophy as being about the salvation of the individual soul, quite apart from the philosopher's place in society and civic religion, which is also a distinctive mark of the Neoplatonist enterprise whose predecessor it was.

A knotty question remains: that of whether Neopythagorean philosophy, or religious outlook, was in any way influenced by religious traditions from the eastern provinces of the empire, from which Numenius himself origi-nated, or even from Persia or further east. To the extent that his concerns and aims share something with the Gnostics and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, we may say that there does seem to be a shared nexus of origins, impossible now to disentangle clearly. His philosophy, however, is best interpreted as a vari-ety of Platonism, entirely comprehensible from within that tradition and not requiring the factor of external influence in order to explain its genesis (Edwards 2010: 124–125).

Plotinus (ca. 204–270)

"The philosophy of Plotinus is, more even than other philosophies of the first centuries of the Christian era, not only a philosophy but a religion, a way for the mind to ascend to God" (Armstrong 1962: 23). In this quotation is summed up a common way of regarding the program of the Neoplatonist philosophers of Late Antiquity of whom Plotinus is probably the best known. If it were true that Neoplatonism was a religion "more even than other phi-losophies," then this difference can scarcely lie in its emphasis upon "a way for the mind to ascend to God," for such a goal had been a Platonist and Pythagorean commonplace for centuries. Yet these Neoplatonists have always somehow had the "smell" of religiosity about them. The American transcen-dentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson called Plotinus and Porphyry "the high priesthood of pure reason, the Trismegisti … of the old religion … which makes the sanctities of Christianity look parvenus and popular" (Emerson on "Intellect", cited in Uždavinys 2009: vii).

At first glance, our picture of Plotinus' religious stance appears rather inconsistent, or at least difficult to pin down. Porphyry tells us that he cared nothing for sacrifices or astrology (*Life of Plotinus* 10), and yet he himself wrote that for us to make a faithful picture of this world in our thought we must first call upon "the god who made that of which you have the mental picture. Pray him to come. And may he come, bringing his own universe

with him" (*Enneads* V,8[31],9), which however metaphorically intended, cries out for a religio-phenomenological analysis. Thus it is not a question of *whether* his philosophy was "religious" but *in what way* it was so.

Plotinus' attitude to the basic realities of civic ritual and the myth that accompanies it is little different from that of Plato (*Enneads* II,9[33],9). And, as with Plato, he tries to keep this world of popular belief quite separate from the philosopher's quest for the ecstatic experience of being united to the One, an experience we are told that Plotinus himself enjoyed. We may, however, draw a line from this basic rejection of popular religious myth and ritual to a rationalization of that myth in the terms of a philosophical system, thence to a belief in the mystical nature of that philosophical system to which the religious rituals pointed, and finally to an active personal engagement with such a mysticism, a desire to enact (or be enacted upon), which might be said again to constitute religious activity.

Plotinus, then, appears to be a true mystic, in the sense the term has carried in western religious discourse. By this we mean that he sought out, and apparently received, intense personal "out of body" experiences of union with the One, which he could describe as being in a state of "drunkenness," that is, a state in which it is of benefit for rational thought to be suspended. The person who "sees" the One in this way is "carried out of" the beauty of the intelligible world "by the surge of wave of intellect itself … the vision fills his eyes with light and has not made him see something else through it, but the light itself was what one sees" (*Enneads* VI,7[38]36).

Modern interpreters of Plotinus have always, and continue, to sweat over how to treat this "irrational" and "non-discursive" side of his philosophy, how to somehow reconcile it with the thoughts of a great metaphysician; or else they have discarded these aspects of his work as of no value for the history of philosophy. Lloyd Gerson, for example, has attempted to rescue Plotinus from this world of seemingly "unphilosophical" activity.

> The elements in Plotinus' thought that can usefully be labelled "mystical" are rather easily isolated from his other epistemological doctrines… It is important to stress that, in sharp contrast to the doctrines of many mystics, Plotinus' own experience or even a claim he might have made that such an experience is possible for anyone are logically disengaged from his entire philosophy. (Gerson 1994: 188–189).

Thus Gerson has argued that if there is any part of Plotinus' system that is mystical, in the sense that it is not reducible to basic philosophical observations and deductions, then that part is not really central; and in fact most of his ideas are not especially "mystical" at all. This point is important insofar as

it emphasizes that the "religious turn" was, at least in Plotinus' case, something added-on, as it were, to the philosophical system, rather than something entailed by it.

Other scholars have afforded Plotinus' mysticism a much more central place in his philosophy, or point to the abiding influence of his ideas on the intellect upon German idealism and continental philosophy (Corrigan 2005: 33, 171, 232–233). But however this debate works out, there will always be a sense in which Dodds was right to claim that Plotinus was the last member of the "old school" of rationalist Greek philosophers who wholly rejected the theurgic tendencies that were just around the corner (Dodds 1951: 286–287). While it is hard to know just what types of religious activities he himself engaged in or saw as crucial for the achievement of union with the One (and his dismissal of sacrifice would suggest that on the whole he gave such things a minor place in his scheme), there can be little doubt that he differed a great deal on such matters from his successors Iamblichus and Proclus.

Plotinus also had another infamous encounter with "religion" in his work against the Sethian Gnostics. It seems that certain of his pupils had been tempted to follow the route of the increasingly popular Gnostic teaching, which multiplied intelligible principles and viewed matter as a false image of the divine *pleroma* constructed by an evil demiurge, known as Yaldabaoth, and hence inherently evil. To Plotinus, all this appeared both as unnecessary superstition and also as a blasphemous rejection of the Platonic heritage. The Sethian doctrines were partly built upon the same Middle Platonic doctrines as were Plotinus' own, which to some extent explains the draw they exercised upon his pupils and why he felt the need to refute them, as he did in an extended treatise known today as the *Great Work* (hereinafter cited as *Treatise*; cf. Narbonne 2011; Spanu 2011).

The Impact of Christian Philosophy

However, just as the intense engagement of Gnostic thought within Christian theology became a catalyst resulting in conceptual developments that might not otherwise have occurred, so for Plotinus it appears that some of his ideas developed in their unique way precisely as a result of his dialogue with the Sethian Gnostics. It is a controversial question just how much of Plotinus' developed thought he owed to the Gnostic impulse—for instance, it may be that his late view (*Treatise* 51) that the weakness of the soul is the cause of evil, was not his original view but was forged only in the fires of the Gnostic polemic (Narbonne 2011). The well-known Neoplatonist doctrine of the partially undescended soul may have similar origins. A number of detailed

studies have shown in general the productivity and creativity of this particular dialectic (Corrigan 2013, and other essays in this volume).

This active engagement of philosophy with various religious traditions appears as a distinctive feature of philosophy in Late Antiquity, often with significant impact on both sides. Champions of Christian asceticism dubbed the eremitic monks of the Egyptian desert as the "new philosophers" while leading bishop-theologians such as Basil of Caesarea or Gregory of Nyssa developed and propagated a sophisticated theological system that incorporated elements of Middle and Late Platonism. These thinkers had a profound impact upon Christian theology, but a limited one within secular philosophy. Some, such as Celsus and Porphyry, resisted what they saw as attempts by Christian theologians to claim philosophy as their own, and wrote treatises specifically against it. Plotinus' interaction with the Gnostics is of the same general type. Philosophers of the Classical and Hellenistic eras had contended with religious belief's skepticism of philosophy's grandiose claims upon truth, but never, before the rise of Christian and Gnostic theology, had those representatives of religious belief challenged the right of the Hellenic philosophers to their title deeds.

From time to time in Late Antiquity there arose also figures who could claim to be contributors to philosophy as such, as well as being leading theologians of the Church. Such were Marius Victorinus, a convert of the fourth century who was a leading influence on Augustine; Boethius, who wrote Latin commentaries on Aristotle in the Alexandrian mode as well as defending the doctrine of the Trinity; and John Philoponus, a writer of extensive philosophical commentaries and one of the leading philosophers of his day who turned toward the end of his career to explicating the Trinity in a novel way. Philosophers of this type were as comfortable in the traditions of Hellenic philosophy as any of their pagan counterparts, and their deployment of that philosophy to be the handmaid of religious dogma initiated a tradition which was to flourish in medieval Christian, Islamic, and Jewish theologies, especially through the use they made of the Aristotelian as much as the Platonist tradition.

Porphyry (ca. 233–309)

Plotinus' pupil Porphyry can act for us as something of an intermediary between the early Neoplatonism of Plotinus and the theurgical interests of Iamblichus and Proclus. He was one of the most important figures in late ancient philosophy, if only because it was he who set the terms for the future curriculum of philosophical studies by uniting Aristotelian and Platonic

traditions under a single "harmonizing" umbrella. He departed from his master in a number of key areas of thought, but certainly did not see himself as veering away from the basic tradition he inherited or as in any way incorporating into it non-philosophical "religious" elements.

For Porphyry, as for any Neoplatonist, "the foundation of purification is to know oneself, to realise that one is a soul bound to a foreign being, of a different nature" (*Sententiae* 32 Lamberz). Here we are reminded that, in a sense, all Greek ethical philosophy was an attempt to expound upon the formula "know thyself" (a subject on which Porphyry also wrote a long treatise).

Much of the time, Porphyry's talk of his quest after God seems to be cut from the same cloth as that of the long Platonic tradition to which he attached himself. To his wife he wrote that, "the divine is present everywhere and in all men, but only the mind of the wise man is sanctified as its temple, and God is best honored by him who knows Him best" (*To Marcella*, 11). Nor does Porphyry consider God to be a circumlocution only for some higher but impersonal principle: "Let God be at hand to examine every act … let us consider Him the author of all our good deeds" (*To Marcella*, 12). In his exhortations to virtue as the only way to reach God, ritual or communal religious activities are nowhere in view, or not seen as in any way helpful, though at the same time the philosopher is no iconoclast—in no way does he hope for a world without religion: "We are not harmed by reverencing God's altars, nor benefited by neglecting them" (*To Marcella*, 18). There is a sharp distinction between the philosopher's self-purification, which has both ethical and intellectual edges to it, and the religious rites performed publicly by the many.

Yet in Porphyry's world there is a religious element that was present in Plotinus, only in a much less pronounced manner. He was especially interested in oracles and in the mystical meanings they hid (Callanan 1995). He certainly made collections of such oracles and may have been the first philosopher to make use of the later infamous *Chaldaean Oracles*. He seems to have written a commentary on them, and Augustine attacks him vociferously for his "constant references" to them (*City of God* 10,32). For all the late ancient Platonist philosophers there was no doubt that many archaic texts were in fact repositories of philosophical wisdom in disguise. This was especially true of esoteric works falsely ascribed to remote antiquity such as the *Chaldaean Oracles* or the *Orphica* and *Hermetica* (see Chapter 17 in this volume). But anything with an especially ancient air about it could qualify, as it was frequently assumed that the ancient, pre-civilized peoples had understood things about the world that had since been lost, and that could only be expressed in the language of poetry or myth.

In reality, this attitude was merely an extension of the way in which Homer and the other archaic poets had always been treated by philosophers. It was the task of philosophy to make explicit through allegorical readings what these "divine revelations" had hidden in their mythical religious idiom. And they were not only written traditions either. Porphyry argues that before men built temples to the Gods they used to dedicate caves to them, and he explains allegorically why caves are good symbols for the universe as metaphysically conceived by Platonist philosophy. The ancient mysteries of Apollo and Dionysus were also read as philosophical truths deeply hidden, and in this the late Platonist interest in mystery rites was the direct descendant of the Pythagorean doctrine and its later incarnation in thinkers such as Numenius.

In all this, however, Porphyry remained fundamentally the pupil of Plotinus. His extended allegorical exposition of Homer in his *Cave of the Nymphs* shows us the intricacies of the method and the veneration in which the classics were held, but the secrets that the cave reveals are not a new form of metaphysics or a radically different way of "doing" philosophy; they do not constitute a religious turn in the philosophy of Late Antiquity.

In his explanation of how souls can remain somehow "spatial" even after the death of the body, Porphyry developed a theory of "spirit," a semi-physical "light" substance in which a soul can reside, and in which it may also reside when it is informing the higher celestial beings (*Sententiae* 29). It is via the positing of this "ethereal" substance that Porphyry is able to explain the genuineness of prophecy and oracles in traditional religion, for which he evidently had great respect (*Cave of Nymphs* 5, and as quoted by Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* III,14). He was far more skeptical, however, of the "theurgy" of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, by which any man may attain "salvation" by (as Porphyry saw it) manipulation of the divine. In his famous *Letter to Anebo*, Porphyry refuted these notions and in effect drew a line in the sand as to the dividing point between pure intellectual philosophy on the one hand and religious rituals and acts on the other. To this extent, Porphyry was a traditional Platonist, though he has also been accused of "opening the door" to the irrational mythological speculations of the next generation of Neoplatonists (Dodds 1951: 287).

Iamblichus (ca. 242–327)

Porphyry's contemporary Iamblichus is often written into the histories of philosophy as the main culprit who turned Neoplatonist philosophy into an exercise in ritual magic. In *On the Mysteries* he refuted Porphyry's objections

to theurgy and attempted instead to defend his activities within the context of the ancient Pythagorean program. Like the Pythagoreans, and inspired by the *Timaeus*, Iamblichus saw number theory as the key to unlocking the secrets of the universe and of ontology.

For Iamblichus, true union with the One could not be achieved by rational thought alone. In introducing his method, he states that "some [philosophical problems] require experience of *actions* for their accurate understanding, it will not be possible to deal with [them] adequately by words alone" (*On the Mysteries* 1,2). This is more than merely to point out that the highest things of the intellect are ineffable; it is to say that philosophical speculation needs to be supplemented by ritual acts actually carried out or experienced by the philosopher him/herself.

Iamblichus is at pains to defend what Porphyry attacks, namely invocations (*klêseis*), propitiations (*exilaseis*), and expiatory rites (*ekthuseis*) (1,13ff); not merely to defend them as acceptable but to urge their supreme importance within the philosopher's work. For example, he distinguishes the general benign influence of regular music from the ritual effects of properly ordained "theurgic" music (III,9–10). In one sense his defense of sacrifice appears to be an extension of the allegorical interpretation of myth, since for him anthropomorphizing and "popular" explanations are to be rejected and replaced with a "meaning" derived from a Platonist metaphysics involving the "sympathies" pertaining between creator and creature. Insofar as he interprets ancient religious ritual in this way, Iamblichus is doing no more than developing Platonist ideas already extant. He differs more significantly, however, in that he clearly understood that philosophy did not, as a result of its allegorizing, rise *above* all these things but rather *explained* their efficacy and hence gave them substance. Hence whereas Porphyry rejected sacrifice as absurd, Iamblichus deems it necessary for the philosopher's goal of uniting with the divine.

The key theory underlying Iamblichus' idea of theurgy is that the soul has fully descended into the material world, has become enmeshed in materiality, yet that through participating in the world of symbols, which are themselves reflections of the higher beings, it is able increasingly to rediscover its originally divine status. This complete descent of the soul entails that thought alone is insufficient for union with the One. This doctrine contrasts with that held by Plotinus, who argued that the soul was in fact not fully "descended" into the material realm, but rather retained its divinity to such a degree that the trained philosopher could achieve higher contemplation directly. In a sense, then, Iamblichus was a more "down to earth" philosopher than was Plotinus—his approach is both less elitist and more realistic to the weaknesses of the human condition.

Theurgy as a philosophical practice is the really new element in the world of Iamblichus and Proclus. Proclus' student Damascius tells us as much: "Some honor philosophy more highly, as do Porphyry and Plotinus…; others honor more highly hieratic practice [i.e. theurgy], as do Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus" (*On the Phaedo* 172, Westerink). This theurgy, together with its holy scripture, *The Chaldaean Oracles*, had its origins in the second/third century when a certain Julian the Chaldaean combined magical and oracular practices with a Middle Platonist epistemology and metaphysics. For Iamblichus theurgy was an essential part of the philosophic enterprise, without which the fallen soul was incapable of attaining the level of divinity.

Now theurgy appears clearly to bring philosophy into the realm of religious practice, or at least religious practice of a new sort, one that gives to ritual a key role and which relies on divine love (a point on which Iamblichus insisted) for human salvation. In this worldview, philosophy is not merely a matter of *thinking*, but also of *performance*, as is evident from the title of one of Proclus' works, *On the Hieratic Art of the Greeks*. The power of human thought is no longer sufficient. The superior power of the gods appears to have overcome the self-confidence of human philosophy.

Iamblichus is significant not just for his own theories and school but for his profound influence on the young emperor Julian, who esteemed this philosopher above all others, excepting only the author of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, "compared with [these two] the other [philosophers] are nothing" (*Ep.* 2 Wright). Julian, rejecting the Christianity confessed by his predecessors, attempted to recreate, and then to impose, an idealized pagan religious system undergirded by an Iamblichean philosophy. There can be no doubt of the importance to Julian of "religion" in the very fullest sense. In the name of Neoplatonist teaching he established priesthoods and cults, ordered sacrifices and rituals of all sorts, both of the civic type, for the ordinary folk, as well as the mystical type for the more "advanced" initiates. "When the soul abandons herself wholly to the gods … and then follows the sacred rites," he said in his *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, "straightaway the divine light illumines our souls" (*Or.* 5,178; cf. Athanassiadi 2014: 159).

Iamblichus had championed the idea of an elite community of theurgic specialists devoted to their art and the religious rituals that he had perfected. His admirer Julian preferred the idea of establishing theurgy, or "Hellenism" as he increasingly called it, as a state religion, complete with priesthood, scriptures, and ethical codes. Thus was Iamblichus unwittingly co-opted as the father of the last revival of pagan religion within an increasingly Christian world.

Through his influence on the philosophical school of Athens, Iamblichus became a new starting point within Neoplatonism. The head of that school Plutarch (d. 432) seems by some means to have adopted Iamblichus' system

and his successor Syrianus (head from 429–436) expounded the Iamblichean understanding of the *Chaldean Oracles* at great length. From here the influence spread even further. One of Syrianus' most significant pupils was Hermeias from Alexandria, whose son Ammonius became in time the acknowledged father figure of a new school in that city. Ammonius was very careful in his teachings not to aggravate the mostly Christian population of Alexandria, hence we hardly know to what extent he himself continued the theurgic practices he must have learned in Athens, and he may have made a pact with the city authorities on this matter. But one of his successors Olympiodorus (mid-sixth century) was much more open about the special place that theurgists hold in the philosophical pantheon.

Proclus (Head of the Athenian School 437–485 CE)

However, it is Proclus who stands out as the Iamblichean student *par excellence* and in his impact on both Christian and Islamic philosophy and theology we may discern a significant long-term influence within European and Middle Eastern thought and tradition. The result is that Iamblichus' idiosyncratic reinterpretation of Platonic–Pythagorean tradition did not remain an isolated idiom of his own.

In his commentary on the *Republic* [378a], Proclus quotes Plato's opinion that, "the hearing of myths should be restricted to a few, in secret, after sacrificing not a pig but some large and rare victim." He comments that:

> This sort of mythmaking is not to be scorned, as many would have us believe, when [Socrates] puts hearing it in the same category with the holiest of initiations and the most perfect of mysteries. The fact that such myths are used in secret and after the greatest and most perfect of sacrifices demonstrates that the doctrine contained in them reveals a holy mystery and constitutes an anagogic initiation for the listener. (*On the Republic* 80,17–22 Kroll = Lamberton 2012: 79)

In Proclus' version of Plato's use of myths, some myths at least are not mere allegories for ethical instruction but reveal fundamental truths about how certain rituals and initiations constitute the most effective means of union with the gods: "The other [type of myth] is only revealed through sacrifice and through the mystical tradition" (Lamberton 2012: 81). In Proclus' system, initiation and mystical union were not just a matter of abstracted personal meditation or outer-body experience, but were rather rooted in sacrificial rituals and communal religious activities.

Proclus was also well known as a hymn-writer (Van den Berg 2001), again something we might readily associate with "religion" rather than with philosophy. Be that as it may, Proclus' hymn-writing was not a completely new direction for Platonist philosophers. Some readers have discerned hymnic language even in Plato's *Timaeus* and Platonist philosophers of the Hellenistic age certainly wrote hymns. Moreover, Plotinus and Porphyry differed little from their Middle Platonist predecessors in acknowledging the effectiveness of hymns as part of a lifestyle that makes us like the gods, while at once rejecting any mechanical interpretation of religious ritual. Although Proclus too looked beyond the mere use of human words and actions to manipulate the divine, nonetheless his actual practice as a philosopher differed substantially from Plotinus' practice. He stood squarely behind Iamblichus, and his own teacher Syrianus, on the question of theurgy.

There have been attempts to defend the "purity" of Proclus' philosophy by arguing that for him it was only the "lower" forms of philosophy, those used to control aspects of nature for instance, which involved theurgic rituals, whereas the higher forms, aiming at the union of the soul with the One, were contemplative only. In this interpretation of Proclus we can see at work the modernist fear of sullying the power of the philosophical mind with material ritual. It is only partially true, however. The sources show us a distinction in the Proclean system between three levels of theurgy: a lower, material level; a middle level aiming at union with what Proclus calls the noetic and noeric gods; and a higher level, the goal of which is mystical union with the One à la Plotinus. It is this last which leaves behind all ritual activity of a physical nature and resides in contemplation only (Sheppard 1982; Van den Berg 2001: 78). The middle stage, however, could not be side stepped. Partaking of this type of theurgy was central to the Proclean program, and his hymns were designed not merely for personal contemplation but for use during communal rituals, not at all unlike the hymns of other religious traditions. When we arrive in this world of Iamblichus, Julian, and Proclus, it truly appears as though "the world of philosophy has moved from the armchair to the altar… if we cannot re-connect ourselves to the gods, the gods must perform that service" (Finamore 1999: 85).

Conclusion and Outlook

But this enmeshing of philosophy and theurgy was not a pagan preserve, nor was it intrinsically opposed, as Proclus was, to the growing tide of Christianity with its new set of rituals and performances. Proclus' own conception of theurgy was adopted and adapted again by a novel and revolutionary

Christian theologian, known to us now only as pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In Dionysius' blend of Christian ritual and Neoplatonist metaphysics, the incarnation itself was the greatest piece of "human theurgy" (Stang 2011). When Christians partake of the rites of the Church here below, they partake in the process by which divine illumination (an Iamblichean conception) descends and then re-ascends through the hierarchy of being, a theurgical process of the movement of light from above which is initiated by and depends upon the self-willed love of the gods/God.

Dionysius holds an important place in Christian theological tradition and some scholars have worked hard to absolve him of involvement with the "magical" doctrines of Iamblichus and Proclus. The similarities, however, are substantial and vital to both their systems (Shaw 1999). In a sense, both are rationalizations of "given" religious practice. The invocations and sacrifices of the mystery religions, and the sacramental rituals of the Church, were both facts of existence. Iamblichus, Proclus, and Dionysius saw in their Neoplatonist heritage a means for explaining the efficacy of these rituals in a way that satisfied their intellects. That raised them above the category of common superstition. The world of religious performance, however, hardly depended upon highbrow theurgic theory for its attraction among the regular members of the religious communities that they represented.

Islam too received its share of the "religious turn." Especially significant in this connection was the Alexandrian philosophical school, headed by Ammonius and his successors, which seems to have taken on board the system of Neoplatonism bequeathed by Iamblichus and Proclus, although in a less concerted manner than occurred in Athens. It was the aim of the Alexandrian curriculum to join Aristotle and Plato into a single harmonious set of teachings, with Neoplatonist theology at its head, and having as its final goal the Neoplatonist dream of contemplative union. It was this curriculum and this brand of philosophy that was adapted to Christian theological use by philosophers such as Boethius and Philoponus as described earlier. It was also adopted in the Syriac speaking monasteries of the east and was preserved there even after the Arab invasions of the seventh century (Watt 2011), and it was this same tradition that shaped the early Muslim rationalist philosophy. The works of the ancients were transmitted to medieval Baghdad only piecemeal and in a confused fashion, one result of which was that the works of Plotinus and Proclus came to be assumed to be those of Plato or of Aristotle, and the misattribution gained for their theories a hallowed respect they might not otherwise have received. Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi were thus Neoplatonists in all but name. Further west, pseudo-Dionysius continued to work his way deep into the consciousness of the theological tradition of the

Middle Ages. Then Iamblichus was rediscovered in fifteenth-century Florence by Ficino and helped to power the revival of theurgic mysticism in early modern Europe. The distinctive paths followed by Platonist philosophy in Late Antiquity can be seen to have exerted their force east and west in a manner that was to have a profound influence on the future.

The apparently rather sudden injection of religious activity into the history of philosophy often appears to modern eyes as a step backward in human progress. Robertson Smith, in his famous 1888 lectures on the *Religion of the Semites*, imagined a form of human progress in religion in which myth arose initially as an explanation of ancient ritual, then took on a life of its own, before becoming subject to philosophical reinterpretation, philosophy increasingly ridding itself of its religious origins until it took on a higher form of pure thought, becoming something rather more than religion. Within such an evolutionary schema, Late Antiquity appears as an unfortunate tangent with a dead end, a retardation of human progress that may now be quietly sidelined.

If we wanted to be more sympathetic to the Iamblichean program, we might instead focus on his success in demoting pure contemplative philosophy from the elitist clutches of Plotinus, for bequeathing to posterity a healthy regard for philosophy's limits. In the introduction to *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus clearly distinguishes between human problems that philosophy can solve and those that it cannot. Further, by reintroducing Pythagorean ontology into the mainstream of philosophy, Iamblichus suggested that a unified understanding of the universe must be based in abstract number theory. On both these points, he appears more as a forerunner of modernity.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Astrology and Religion in Late Antiquity

Hannah Mace

Introduction

Late Antiquity, particularly the fourth century, presented many challenges for astrology. As the Roman empire expanded, the number of religions practiced within its boundaries increased, each with its own opinion regarding astrology and with different levels of acceptance. However, it was the arrival of Christianity first as a legal religion and later as the official religion of the empire that created the biggest challenges for astrology and those that practiced the discipline. This chapter will consider the place of astrology within Roman laws and how it changed during Late Antiquity, and how astrology was viewed by the pagan, Christian, and Jewish faiths. The *Mathesis*, a Latin handbook of astrology written by Firmicus Maternus during the fourth century, will be considered as an example of how an astrological author managed to navigate this set of challenges for the discipline.

What is Astrology?

Astrology is a method of predicting events by using celestial bodies such as constellations, planets, and individual stars. The earliest recorded use of astrology is in Mesopotamia, where manuals kept records of celestial omens,

such as lunar and solar eclipses. The Babylonians (also known as Chaldeans) grouped stars into constellations and recorded their movements along with the movements of the planets. The earliest examples of horoscopes were also created by the Babylonians (Barton 1994: 14). The Egyptians made their own contributions to the development of astrology which were linked to their calendar. They developed a system of keeping time, which involved arranging stars into thirty-six constellations, called *decans*, and then observing the journey of each constellation across the skies, which took ten days. This is why this time period was called a *decade* (DeYoung 2000: 482). This system of groups of ten was incorporated into the construction of horoscopes as the system of *decans* where each *decan* presided over ten degrees of the zodiacal circle (Barton 1994: 20). Astrology was later brought to the Greeks, who combined the divination aspects with the principles of mathematical astronomy, for example the Eudoxian system of concentric spheres, which was designed to explain the planets' irregular motions. In turn the Greeks then introduced astrology to the Romans. In the classical world judicial astrology had split into four main forms (Cooper 2012: 2). These are: universal, catarchic, horary, and genethlialogy. Here I offer a brief explanation of these terms:

Universal—Also known as mundane or omen astrology. This is the oldest form of astrology and was the type most used by the Babylonians. Universal astrology considers occasional and unexpected phenomena, and tries to draw an interpretation of these events for the nation or people as a whole. Both celestial and meteorological events are used, such as eclipses and lightning strikes.

Horary—This type of astrology concerns the immediate present and tries to answer questions based on the arrangement of the stars at the exact time and location of the question. The types of question asked would include: the location of lost items, missing persons, whether a lawsuit would be won or lost, or whether a favor should be asked.

Catarchic—This form of astrology is based around a horoscope and concerns the future. It considers when the best time for a desired event would be, for example the start of an enterprise. The astrologer would work backwards from the desired event to work out the best configuration of the sky that would most likely produce that event.

Genethlialogy—This form is also based on a horoscope, and is the reverse of catarchic astrology. The astrologer in this form would consider all the elements of the night sky at the time of a birth (or occasionally a conception) and would then look at the individual components—stars, constellations,

planets, and the relationships between them—in order to see how they would influence an individual's life. This is the dominant form of Greek astrology and is the version that was most prominent in Rome.

A horoscope, also known as a nativity, was essentially a snapshot of the universe at a specific point in time, usually a birth, and produced into a chart. It was formed by first determining the exact position of the zodiac at the moment required. The degree of the zodiac rising above the horizon was known as the *Ascendant* and was the defining element of the chart. From there the location of the planets in relation to the zodiac was marked. In order to interpret this snapshot, the astrologer superimposed various circles onto the horoscope chart: the four cardinal points that serve to provide a framework for the horoscope and direct the zodiac's influence onto elements of human life; the twelve *athla*, or places, which relate to more detailed aspects of life, for example marriage, children, and journeys; and the *decans*, mentioned above, which divided each zodiac sign into three parts of ten degrees and commanded the planets and their influence on an individual. Additional elements included the system of *aspects*, which were relationships between the locations of the planets. These linked the planets into groups of two, three, four, or six depending on their placement within the zodiac. The influence of the planets was linked to their properties. They were considered to follow Aristotelian principles whereby everything is either hot or cold, and dry or wet. To give an example, Mars was considered to be dry and hot whereas Saturn was cold and dry (Barton 1994: 106). This combination of properties in turn influenced whether the planets were masculine or feminine, nocturnal or diurnal, beneficent or maleficent. Other planetary characteristics such as color, size, or the length of the orbit were observed and taken into account. Mars' qualities for example linked to the fiery color of the planet and its proximity to the heat of the sun. The planets were associated with the Olympian deities and consequently the characteristics of these deities were projected onto the planets. Venus' properties of being warm and wet were associated with the goddess' attributes of being nurturing. This association provided a link between astrology and religion.

Astrology was also linked to scientific disciplines. Since astrology used the motion of stars in order to provide predictions, it was necessary to be able to predict where a star would be at a given time, particularly if it was not possible to observe the skies directly in cases of cloud cover or predictions for an event occurring during daylight hours. This meant that astrology, although a form of divination, depended on mathematical and astronomical principles. For much of Antiquity, including within the Roman empire, there was no discernible difference between astrology and astronomy and the two terms *astrologia* and *astronomia* were used interchangeably—both *astrologia* and

astronomia are defined as "the science of the heavenly bodies, astronomy" (OLD 1968: 193). It could be said that astrology formed the mid-point between the scientific disciplines and those of religion and magic, and its exact status oscillated between the poles of science and religion depending on the social and political attitudes of a particular era. Astrology was the most popular type of divination for the Romans in the Imperial era, and it maintained its popularity right through to the fourth century, particularly among the aristocracy. However, due to the combination of science and religion, it was viewed with mixed opinions in Roman culture, at times being the height of fashion, and at others being condemned. The place of astrology in Roman society became even more complicated with the arrival of each new religion, and particularly with the arrival of Christianity as a legal religion in the fourth century.

Astrology and the Laws

The legal status of astrology in the cultural life of the Roman empire fluctuated during the centuries, being dependent on social and political attitudes toward it. Acceptance, tolerance, and condemnation resulting in bans from Rome or across the empire all occurred, sometimes directed at astrologers, sometimes at their clients, and at other times at the discipline itself. It is this separation within the laws about the people concerned and the subject of their inquiry that makes the legal status of astrology difficult to assess. Dickie (2012: 324) notes that, "Roman law governing divination has four aspects to it," which influenced the questions that were permitted, the circumstances behind the inquiry, the person inquiring, and finally the astrologer himself, all of which were affected differently by the laws at different points in time.

Octavian (Augustus) found astrology exceptionally useful in his efforts to secure his position, and promoted the sign under which he was conceived, Capricorn, on his coins. However, there was risk involved in using this strategy as others might duplicate Augustus' route to power. Barton (1994: 42) notes that "the risks were obviously apparent to him," since he started to place restrictions on astrology in order that his place would remain secure. Thus, in 11 CE an edict was passed, which decreed that the death of an individual should never be inquired about, and to enforce this all consultations must take place in front of a witness. This edict formed the basis of the legal status of astrology in Rome. Even during this period, when astrology was imperially endorsed, there were still occasional outbreaks of hostility directed toward the practice. Between eight and thirteen instances were recorded between 44 BCE and 180 CE when astrologers were expelled from Rome and Italy (Cramer 1954: 233). However, these coincided with periods of unrest and conspiracy, and were enacted either as a precautionary measure to stop the unrest or as a means to administer

punishment. Throughout the Principate astrologers were accepted and tolerated, as long as they adhered to the rules laid out in Augustus' edict.

It was during the reign of Diocletian (r. 284–305 CE) that the legal status of astrology first started to fluctuate more wildly. The *Codex Justinianus* (*CJ*) records that in 294 CE a private rescript was passed that stated:

> Emperors Diocletian and Maximian and the Caesars to Tiberius. To learn and apply the science of geometry is to the public interest. But the damnable magician's art is forbidden. (*CJ* 9.18.2: Sirmium August 20, 294)

Here "magician" was translated from the term *mathematicus*, which was a common term for "astrologer" due to the use of mathematics involved in the predictions (OLD 1968: 1084). This was a private rescript in response to a private petition from a certain Tiberius (Corcoran 1996: 111) and although it could be called a *lex*, or law, it was only authoritative for a specific case (Corcoran 1996: 48). This rescript forbids the practice of astrology, but simply knowing the material is not mentioned and presumably held no penalty. This rescript is not incorporated into the earlier collection of laws known as the *Theodosian Code*. It does however indicate that the imperial stance on the topic was moving toward prohibition as early as 294 CE. Laws were then passed later in the fourth century, which banned aspects of astrology but without referencing this rescript. The *Theodosian Code* maps out how the legality of astrology was affected throughout the fourth and into the fifth centuries. At first, during the reign of Constantine (r. 306–337 CE), the edicts passed were aimed at *haruspices*, who were those who predicted the future from reading the entrails of birds, and at the practice of magic, rather than at astrologers:

> Emperor Constantine Augustus to Maximus. No soothsayer shall approach the threshold of another person, not even for another reason, but the friendship, however old, of such men shall be rejected. (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.1: Rome, February 1, 319 (all trans. by Pharr 1952))

> The same Augustus [Constantine] and Caesar [Crispus] to Bassus, Prefect of the City. The science of those men who are equipped with magic arts and who are revealed to have worked against the safety of man shall be punished. But remedies sought for human bodies shall not be involved in criminal accusation. (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.3: Aquileia, May 23, 321–324)

As can be seen from these excerpted laws, the second edict permitted astrologers to be consulted for benevolent matters such as healing. It appears that not much had changed between the passing of the original edict in 11 CE and the early years of the fourth century. Astrology was not under threat from the authorities and continued to be accepted by the people. However,

during the second half of the fourth century this changed when restrictions started to appear and became increasingly strict. The next entry concerning Astrology in the *Theodosian Code* is an edict which states that:

> Emperor Constantius (II: r. 337–361) Augustus to the people. No person shall consult a soothsayer, or an astrologer, or a diviner. (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.4: Milan, January 25, 357)

This had now grown to include the *mathematicus*, and astrology now appears to be grouped with the magical arts, rather than the scientific disciplines. The penalty for consulting an astrologer was now death but this was not directed at the astrologer himself. The definition of astrology as a magical art was cemented a year later when the term of *magus* or "wizard" was expressly defined in an edict:

> The same Augustus [Constantius II] to Taurus, Praetorian Prefect. If any wizard (*magus*), who is called by the custom of the people a magician (*malefici*), a soothsayer (*haruspex*), a diviner (*hariolus*), an augur or even an astrologer (*mathematicus*) shall be discovered in the imperial retinue he shall not escape punishment. (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.6: Ariminum, July 5, 358)

This edict points specifically at those who had a high rank in society or were close to the emperor. It was no longer permitted to be an astrologer in the imperial retinue regardless of rank. The penalty was the same as the one for those consulting the astrologers: torture and death. There was no longer a distinction between astrologer and client. It was still possible, however to be an astrologer outside of the imperial retinue, to possess knowledge, and even to teach the discipline. This soon became the focus of yet another edict:

> Emperors Valentinian (r. 364–375) and Valens (r. 364–378) Augustuses to Modestus Praetorian Prefect. The teaching of astrology (*mathematica*) shall cease. For the crime of learning forbidden doctrines is not unlike that of teaching them. (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.8: Constantinople, December 12, 370)

The penalty for teaching astrology had increased and was now death for both the pupil and the teacher, thus forming the strictest of the edicts so far. There was a brief reprieve the following year when divination was not considered to have a connection with magic and was therefore not a crime. The only restriction was that it could not be practiced harmfully. Finally, the fifth century opened with an edict completely prohibiting astrology:

> Emperors Honorius (r. 395–423) and Theodosius (II: r. 408–450) Augustuses to Caecilianus Praetorian Prefect. We decree that astrologers (*mathematici*)

shall be banished not only from the City of Rome but also from all munici-palities unless after the books of their false doctrine have been consumed in flames under the eyes of a bishop, they are prepared to transfer their faith to the practice of the Catholic religion. (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.12: Ravenna, February 1, 409)

From this point all forms of astrology, be it learning, teaching, practicing, or simply possessing some of the knowledge, were illegal. It is apparent that astrology was grouped firmly with religion as it was necessary to "convert" from astrology to catholic Christianity; it was not permitted to be both astrologer and Christian. The edict is very specific that astrologers must con-vert to catholic Christianity as opposed to Christianity in general, which points to a shift in attitudes toward astrology. The laws of the fourth century slowly moved astrology toward the magical arts whereas the laws of the fifth moved it again toward the heresies, or any religion, cult or practice not authorized by the Church. This was reinforced by the edict:

> Emperor Theodosius [II] Augustus and Valentinian Caesar [Valentinian III] to Faustus, Prefect of the City. We command that the Manichaeans, heretics, schismatics, astrologers (*mathematici*) and every sect inimical to the Catholics shall be banished from the very sight of the City of Rome, in order that it may not be contaminated by the contagious presence of the criminals. (*Cod. Theod.* 16.5.62 Aquileia, July 17, 425)

These edicts show the progression of attitudes toward astrology from the close of the third century to the opening of the fifth century. Astrology changed from being considered a separate discipline to one bound to reli-gion, in particular to the pagan religions that incorporated magic in their practices, and then was changed again into a heretical practice. These changes in attitude were accompanied by tightened restrictions. This progression of attitudes gives an indication as to the popularity and the growing control of the Church in Roman society. While the Christian Church was still illegal, the general attitude toward astrology was not particularly different from what it had been during the reign of Augustus and during the early Principate. Christian writers did attack astrology during this period, for example, Tatian (the author of *Oration to the Greeks*, an attack on pagan philosophy ca. 180 CE), who claimed that astrology was created by demons (Barton 1994: 72). These attacks did not impact the laws however.

The legalization of Christianity provided the impetus for the restrictions against astrology and other pagan practices. In particular the edicts passed by Constantius II (357 and 358) show his strong pro-Christian stance, also demonstrated by his "clear preference for Christians over pagans as consuls"

(Barnes 1993: 167). The Church at this point "was becoming less and less tolerant of rivals as it consolidated its hold on the Roman state" (Barton 1994: 77): as it became secure against external threats such as paganism, it then faced challenges internally such as from Manichaean and Donatist Christianities. Therefore, as the Church reclassified astrology as heresy along with these factions, the laws were changed to match the tightening stance of the Church against its inner turmoil. It should however be noted that the legal status of astrology did not necessarily reflect what was happening within the discipline in practice. The fact that astrology survived this period shows that these laws were not as effective as desired.

Astrology and Religions

During Late Antiquity the theological issue which set fate against free will was prominent in both pagan and Christian discussions about the world in general but also concerned the merits of astrology in particular. It centered on whether celestial phenomena, such as the zodiac and the motion of the planets, could indeed influence the lives of men with the path of their lives being subordinate to fate, or whether man created his own destiny through his own choice of actions. For example, one discussion focused on whether or not it was possible to judge someone guilty for a crime if they were fated to commit it, or if they had done it through their own will. In this debate pagans such as Plotinus (d. 270) aligned their beliefs with those of the Christian theologians (Maxwell-Stuart 2010: 73), resulting in an overall shift in belief; the stars were now considered to be merely indicators of events rather than the actual cause of them.

   Although there were mixed opinions regarding the validity of astrology from those who followed the traditional (pagan) religions, astrology and its symbolism were present in these practices. One example of this is the names of the weekdays, which stemmed from the astrological principle whereby units of time were assigned to the planets such that each planet "ruled" the first hour of a day and therefore had a particular influence over it. Thus, each day was named after its ruling planet, for example "dies Mercuri" would be "the day of Mercury," which was Wednesday. This practice, originating in Babylonia, had been around since the early Principate, joining the eight-day week (Rüpke 2011: 162), but became widespread in the third century. In 321 CE Constantine enacted a law recognizing the *dies solis*, that is Sunday, as a day of rest, which promoted the seven-day week over the eight-day one (Rüpke 2011: 164). Moreover, a number of cults prominent in the third and fourth centuries incorporated star worship into their practices. In Mithraism, a mystery-cult

from the Near East that worshipped the god Mithras, astral symbolism was prominent as "members of the cult passed through seven hierarchical grades, each of which had a special symbol and a guardian planet" (Maxwell-Stuart 2010: 30). Members started at the level associated with the Raven and Mercury and moved through to the level of the Father, which corresponded to Saturn. In addition, there are reliefs from Mithraic sites that depict the tauroctony (bull killing), in which the sun and moon are always placed in the upper corners (Barton 1994: 199). Sometimes the other planets are arranged between them. The Sun-cult, which as its name suggests worshipped the sun, marked the sun's progress through the zodiac. Within the pagan practices the stars were considered as animate beings and gods. Each planet was matched with a god according to their characteristics; for example the red planet was linked to Mars, the god of war. These characteristics of the planets influenced astrological practices: the characteristics of the planet dominant in an individual's horoscope would therefore affect the characteristics of the individual.

Christian views on astrology during Late Antiquity were complicated due to the fact that there was no single stance on the subject. There were different factions of Christianity, some of which were ambivalent to astrology, with some Christians even continuing to practice the discipline. On the other hand there were those who opposed it, sometimes quite vehemently. This difference in opinion centered on the debate mentioned above regarding the concept of fate, although it also considered the question of predetermination, which asked whether man could know the future, or if that knowledge was reserved only for God. This became particularly complicated as astrology was favored more by the Gnostic groups (Cooper 2012: 21) that were to become a challenge for catholic Christianity before and after its endorsement by Rome. Thus, astrology was entangled in this set of debates.

This split in opinion has its origins in the very beginnings of Christianity with the star that led the Magi to Bethlehem. In the Gospel of Matthew 2.1–12, the Magi are portrayed as professional astrologers due to their observance of the rising star. This portrayal is a positive one, with no criticism of them or the discipline they practiced (Hegedus 2014: 201). It simply states that Magi saw the star rise, followed it to find Jesus, and left again. However, even from this point astrology was considered a threat to the Church as it offered an alternative way of discovering the future to Christian prophecy (Barton 1994: 72). There were a number of creative solutions to this problem. Tertullian (d. ca. 240 CE) came to the compromise that astrology was permitted by God until the time that Christ appeared on earth, and stated "that science has been allowed until the Gospel, in order that after Christ's birth no one should thence forward interpret any one's nativity by the heaven" (Tert. *On Idolatry* 9.4). Tatian held a similar view, he thought

that baptism simply freed an individual from astral fate and commented "but we are above fate and instead of planetary demons we have come to know the one lord who does not go astray and we are not led by fate having given up its lawgivers" (Tatian, *Oration to the Greeks* 9.2). The branches of Christianity that accepted astrology into their beliefs included (Maxwell-Stuart 2010: 60ff):

> The **Phibionites** and the **Marcosians** (both "Gnostic" sects) who were recorded as venerating divine beings associated with the decrees of the ecliptic (the path that the zodiac follows across the sky) by Irenaeus. (*Against Heresies* 1.2.268)
>
> The **Peretrae** who believed that the stars were destructive powers. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 5.12–17)
>
> **Priscillian** who taught the astrological theory that body parts were assigned to the signs of the zodiac. (*CSEL* 18 153.21–154.3)
>
> **Manichaeism**, which is the most well-known case. Manichaean theories about the world were similar to astrology and Augustine noted that they worshipped the sun and moon as divine beings in their own right. In addition, they believed that the concept of free will was an illusion and the stars did indeed control the fate of man (Augustine *Confessions* 3.6ff). Faustus of Milevis—a Manichaean Bishop from North Africa—wrote that Christ was created from astral material himself. (Augustine, *Against Faustus* 2.5)

It was particularly the association with Manichean Christianity, and the subsequent classification of Manichaeism as a heretical teaching, that paved the way to linking astrology and heresy: astrology thus becoming classified, along with Manichaeism, as a forbidden discipline.

Those who opposed astrology predominantly followed the Catholic branch of Christianity. Their objections stemmed from the thought that the theories "clashed with Christian doctrines of freedom and moral responsibility and because of its association with polytheism and the pagan establishment" (Cooper 2012: 21). This association between astrology and the pagan religions also had the effect of strengthening the link between astrology and the magical arts. Since the magical arts (such as divination) were condemned by Christianity and associated with demons, astrology was tarred with the same brush. In addition, astrology was now considered to be a "false teaching," which meant that it was considered in a similar way to other heresies, such as Manichaeism, as discussed above. This was due to the belief among catholic Christians that it is only possible for God to have foreknowledge of events: predicting the future was not a skill for mortals. Among the most outspoken against astrology were Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390) and Augustine of

Hippo (d. 430). Gregory linked astrology with heresy and condemned it together with atheism and denial of divine providence (Hegedus 2007: 139). Augustine in his earlier years sought out the Manicheans due to his interest in astrology. However, although the Manicheans worshipped the sun and moon they had their own distinctive astrological system that was not wholly compatible with the mathematical "mainstream astrology" that Augustine sought. He later discarded these beliefs and argued against the practice. Jason BeDuhn (2010: 97) has noted that, "through studying Manichaeism and astrology simultaneously, his astrological convictions may have colored his understanding of Manichaean views of responsibility for sin, tending in an even more fatalistic direction than actually taught by the Manicheans." This means that even as astrology was linked with Manichaeism, the reverse also happened and Manichaeism became linked to astrology, both being condemned together. In particular Augustine did not believe in fatalism, arguing against it with the theory that God had given humans free will and therefore they could not be influenced by the stars (Maxwell-Stuart 2010: 77). Thus he concluded that astrology was not valid for followers of any religion, not just Christianity:

> Those whose opinion it is that the stars determine what we do, or what goods we may have, or what evils we shall suffer, independently of the will of God, must be refused a hearing by everyone, not only by those who hold to the true religion, but also by those who choose to be worshippers of gods of any kind, even false ones. (Augustine, *City of God* 5.1)

In Jewish culture, attitudes toward astrology during Late Antiquity were also complicated due to there being a lack of consensus regarding the topic. This was similar to the situation among the different branches of Christianity, and by the sixth century two completely opposite stances had been recorded. On the one hand, it was claimed that Israel was indeed affected by the influence of the stars, which therefore supported the concept of genethlialogy. The other side took the stance that Israel was immune to the influence of the stars (Barton 1994: 70) and rejected all forms of astrology. These views were mirrored in Christian thought. Some aspects of astral imagery were however used within Judaism. Starting in the fourth century, images of the zodiac were common in synagogues where the twelve signs were used to represent the twelve sons of Jacob or possibly the twelve months of the year.

Therefore, although astrology was being pushed closer toward religion during the late antique period, it was met with some resistance from this area, due to divided opinions. In general, pagan religions were accepting of astrology and incorporated it into their theology. Among Christianity and Judaism the split in opinions caused challenges for astrology. During this

turmoil an astrological handbook was written, which had to navigate this clash of opinions and the swift changes within the laws. How the author managed this will be the focus of the next section.

The *Mathesis* of Firmicus Maternus

Julius Firmicus Maternus was a Roman author who wrote during the early—mid-fourth century CE. There are not many records of him and details of his life are found only in his writings. These show that he was originally from Sicily and spent his early life as a lawyer before becoming disillusioned with the career and turning his hand to astrology. There are mentions of the texts that he wrote, or intended to write: the *Mathesis*, which is the focus of this section; the *Myriogenesis*, a second text on astrological matters, which was either not written or was lost—either way there is no further record of it apart from Firmicus' mention of it at *Math.* 5.1.38; the *Ruler of the Chart* and the *Chronocrator*, which were written for a certain Murinus and contained some astrological topics (*Math.* 4.20.2), but have not survived either; and the *De Errore Profanarum Religionum (Err. prof. rel.)*, a polemical work against various cults and traditional religious practices. This last text is generally considered to have been written sometime after the *Mathesis*, after Firmicus converted to Christianity, although this is debated. The *Mathesis* has been dated from between 334 and 337 to 355 CE, whereas the *Err. prof. rel.* has a conclusive date of 346 CE. The *Mathesis* is split into eight books and considers the elements of horoscopic astrology and how to interpret a horoscope. It is one of very few astrological handbooks written in Latin and the last one to be written in Antiquity. This text was very popular during the medieval period and was considered the most authoritative of astrological texts, until Marcus Manilius' *Astronomica* was rediscovered in the early fifteenth century. Bram (1975: 2) somewhat oversimplifies when she notes that "the *Mathesis* can be regarded as a summation of the trends of the fourth century," since the text was written in the first half of the century and therefore cannot reflect the latter half. However, it is a significant text for mapping how astrology tried to adapt to the changing attitudes around it.

Firmicus Maternus on Legality

The second book of the *Mathesis* closes with a section on the life and training of an astrologer. It is in this section that Firmicus makes some references to the legal situation surrounding astrology, which can be compared to the

various edicts found in the *Theodosian Code*, as discussed above. There are three laws that can be seen here, the first one is where Firmicus notes: "see that you [the reader] give your responses publicly in a clear voice so that nothing may be asked of you which is not allowed either to ask or to answer" (*Math.* 2.30.3). The note to give all responses publicly correlates to the Augustan edict of 11 CE in which it is stated that all consultations with astrologers must be done in front of a witness. This is repeated later in the section with "do not bring forecasts to anyone by stealth, but openly as we have said before, and in the sight of all exercise the discipline of this divine art" (*Math.* 2.30.10). Firmicus does not specify that a witness is needed but instead insists that all responses be public, which in effect ensures multiple witnesses and safeguards that the astrologer is practicing within the confines of the law.

The second law that can be linked to Firmicus' text can be found just before this repeated warning in the text. He advises "never be present at nocturnal sacrifices, whether they are held publicly or privately" (*Math.* 2.30.10), which echoes the edict in the *Theodosian Code* stating that "no person shall attempt during the night time to engage in wicked prayers or magic preparations or funeral sacrifices" (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.7). This edict was issued in 364 CE, thus after even the latest date considered for the completion of the *Mathesis* (355 CE); however, it is reasonable to think that avoiding nocturnal sacrifice would have been sensible advice to give even before this law was passed. In addition, it can be thought that Firmicus "speaks from the position of someone who knows his calling is suspect" (Dickie 2012: 340), and is therefore possibly planning ahead and trying to ensure that any aspiring astrologer who has read the *Mathesis* will not run into any unnecessary difficulties, whether the particular activity is prohibited by law or not.

The third set of laws that Firmicus can be linked to, also reflect on the original Augustan edict. It is this set which contains the most significant advice of all pertaining to the laws surrounding astrology. Firmicus notes that:

> Beware of replying to anyone asking about the condition of the Republic or the life of the Roman Emperor. For it is not right, nor is it permitted, that from wicked curiosity we learn anything about the condition of the Republic. But it is a wicked man and one worthy of all punishment who, when asked, gives a response about the destiny of the Emperor, because the astrologer is able neither to find out nor to say anything. (*Math.* 2.30.4)

As noted above, Firmicus also warns the reader about answering forbidden questions about any individual. This in part relates to the section of the Augustan edict where it is prohibited to inquire about the death of an individual. Any question relating to death was considered a banned question,

but during the reign of Tiberius this was refined to distinguish the target for these inquiries, placing questions about the emperor firmly out of reach. It was also sensible to avoid any political questions as they were considered more seriously in the Augustan edict (Cramer 1954: 250). Therefore, Firmicus promotes extreme caution by including questions about the Republic itself as well as the emperor to anyone who wishes to practice the art of astrology in order to keep his readers safe.

Although Firmicus gives this advice, he does not mention the reason why he is giving it. He does not show his own awareness of the tightening legal culture surrounding astrology. Similarly, there is no mention of what the penalty is if anyone is found to be attending nocturnal sacrifices or reading a horoscope in secret to someone. There are not even any indications that there may be consequences at all. Firmicus gives the impression that the only reason for not answering questions about the emperor is that it is impossible to find out anything about him rather than prohibited, and states "in fact no astrologer is able to find out anything about the destiny of the emperor. For the emperor alone is not subject to the course of the stars and in his fate alone the stars have no power of decreeing" (*Math.* 2.30.5). Given the links between Firmicus Maternus and the laws, it is interesting that his astrological advice seems to be sheltering the reader from the tightening restrictions placed against practitioners of astrology and other divination arts. He presents these instructions not as orders but more in the way of friendly advice.

In addition, Firmicus also includes some advice focusing more on how the astrologer might behave generally. First, the aspiring astrologer is encouraged to do the following:

> Be modest, upright, sober, eat little, be content with few goods so that the shameful love of money may not defile the glory of this divine science. Try with your training and principles to outdo the training and principles of worthy priests. (*Math.* 2.30.2)

With these instructions Firmicus tries to encourage the astrologer not to behave in an excessive manner and thereby draw the anger or disapproval of the Roman state, the Church, or even of the general public, onto all other astrologers or the discipline itself. In effect, he promotes the idea that if astrologers behave badly, there will be consequences for the discipline as a whole. By being modest and sober there will be little attention paid to astrology and so it can survive unnoticed for a while longer. Later in the passage Firmicus provides more instructions:

> Have a wife, a home, many sincere friends; be constantly available to the public; keep away from all quarrels; do not undertake any harmful business;

do not at any time be tempted by an increase in income; keep away from all passion of cruelty; never take pleasure in others' quarrels or capital sentences or fatal enmities. Employ peaceful moderation in all your dealings with other people; avoid plots; at all times shun disturbances and violence. (*Math.* 2.30.8)

These instructions focus on ensuring that the astrologer lives within the confines of not only the law, but also of social expectations. By advising to have a wife and be involved in a household, Firmicus tries to encourage the astrologer to fit into the normal Roman mode of life and not be at risk of becoming a hermit or following an ascetic lifestyle that could be frowned upon, and thus end up making a target of himself. The idea that Firmicus repeats is to act so as not to draw any attention to either oneself or the discipline in general, and thus hopefully live in peace without any further restrictions. Firmicus' desire is "to make astrology and its practitioners socially acceptable" (Sogno 2005: 169), but perhaps also to show non-astrologers that the discipline and those who practice it are not to be feared but are compatible with the morals of Roman society. Firmicus' own expertise in the subject matter itself is pushed away here and he devotes more emphasis on integrating astrologers into Roman culture. There is one other instruction given which, although following the theme of keeping out of trouble, does not quite stick rigidly to the law. Sogno (2005: 176) notes that "Firmicus' attitude toward contemporary legislation on divination oscillates between strict compliance with the laws and (indirect) criticism of its endorsement of denunciation." This view implies a disagreement with imperial policy. If asked about the emperor, Firmicus advises his reader to gently dissuade the inquirer of the question instead of giving a harsh answer. He then continues to say "nor do I wish you to give a report, if anyone asks you anything wrong" (*Math.* 2.30.7). This is viewed as a criticism of the law: anyone who informed on those asking about the health of the emperor was not considered an informant and was rewarded instead of punished. Firmicus actively persuades his readers not to do this but instead just to point out the mistake to the customer and warn them not to ask these questions. Again, this is Firmicus trying not to draw any attention to astrology and those practicing it.

Firmicus Maternus on Religion

Firmicus includes aspects of religion in the *Mathesis*, including references to gods, a single supreme deity, and also at least two instances in which Firmicus makes a prayer. In Book 1, there is even a theological discussion concerning

the nature of the gods and how this is used to attack those who practice astrology. Firmicus notes the following:

> The essential truth of our doctrine is demonstrated by the fact that they struggle against it with such force of argument. This is not surprising since we know how much difference of opinion there is among them about the nature of the gods, and with how many different theories they are trying to destroy the whole force of astrological divination. (*Math.* 1.1.3)

Here Firmicus indicates the religious situation of the Roman empire, as discussed earlier, and notes that there are many different religions now practiced within the empire, which all have conflicting theories about the world. However, he also notes that astrology is still under fire regardless of this. He then continues, adding more details about the varying theories of the time.

> Some say that there are no gods; others say there are, but describe them as not concerned about the world; some say that they exist and also that they undertake the care and management of all our affairs. (*Math.* 1.1.3)

This discussion continues and Firmicus notes that the gods have shape to some but not to others, that they live in a specific place or not and that the world progresses by their judgment or not, depending on the opinion. Of these opinions, Firmicus does not make his own judgment, nor does he place his own opinion into the mix for the reader to consider, but stays firmly on the outside of the discussion. In response to these various theories he simply states "all these opinions have a certain plausibility which may sway the minds of the credulous" (*Math.* 1.1.4) and regarding his own beliefs he says, "as a matter of fact, we have not made up our own mind as to what to believe" (*Math.* 1.1.6).

This, however, does not signal the end of religious involvement within the text. The *Mathesis* continues to refer to divine beings, but these references appear to link to different religious practices and weave them together. Both singular and multiple deities are mentioned along with an emphasis on the sun at one point. This reflects the confusion of the time concerning religion.

Firmicus makes polytheistic references particularly in the first book of the *Mathesis*, and has a section dedicated to defending astrology against the accusation that it dissuades people from religion. In this section Firmicus states:

> For we make men fear and worship the gods; we point out the will and majesty of the gods, since we maintain that all our acts are ruled by their divine motion. Let us therefore worship the gods, whose origin has linked itself to us through the stars. Let the human race regard the power of the

stars with the constant veneration of a suppliant. Let us call upon the gods in supplication and piously fulfill our vows to them so that we may be reassured of the divine nature of our own minds and may resist in some part the hostile decrees of the stars. (*Math.*1.6.1–2)

This passage makes note not only of many gods and an exhortation to worship them, all of them, but also states that human actions are ruled by their motion. This implies that the planets themselves are considered as animate beings and gods, and that their motion does not merely signify events but actively causes them, a theme of the traditional religions.

Following the theme of traditional religions, a number of references to the sun as a god appear in the *Mathesis*, which could allude to the cult of the sun, Sol Invictus. Two sections are of particular note: the prayers or hymn-like passages concluding Book 1 and the prologue of Book 5, which address the sun. Firmicus opens his prayer in Book 1 to keep Constantine and his descendants safe with "o Sun, best and greatest, who holds the middle place in the heavens, Mind and Moderator of the universe, leader and Princeps of all who kindle forever the fires of the other stars" (*Math.* 1.10.14). This is echoed at the end of the prologue to Book 5 with "and you, chief of stars, who from the monthly courses of the Moon takes away her light, and likewise returns it, Sun, best and greatest … through whom, by divine decree, immortal soul is imparted to all living things" (*Math.* 5, prae. 5). Both of these passages place the sun as the highest ranking divinity. The sun appears to have the most power of the planets and other deities.

However, although the sun appears to hold the greatest power, Firmicus also adds phrases that imply that there is another, greater, entity that has given this power to the sun. These phrases imply that the Christian god is involved. Regarding the planets Firmicus states the following:

The planets have their own faculties and divine wisdom. Animated by pure reason they tirelessly obey that highest divinity, the ruling god who has organised all things under the rule of law to protect the eternal pattern of creation. (*Math.*1.5.7)

This passage indicates that the planets are subordinate to a higher power. Although this could be Sol, another phrase later on in the *Mathesis* also places the sun under this entity "god, the creator of the universe … who has shaped the sun and moon, who arranged the order and courses of all the stars…" (*Math.* 7.1.2). Earlier, in Book 5, there is also a mention of "father and thine own son, bound together by the chain of fate, to thee we stretch

out our hands in prayer" (*Math.* 5, prae. 3). These references are small but consistently appear throughout the *Mathesis.*

Firmicus therefore draws together different religious imagery within his *Mathesis.* He implies that the planets have powers themselves, that the sun is the highest of them, and yet there is still a greater entity that has created the universe and all within it. All of these references are woven together forming a work that is ambiguous regarding religion. By weaving these strands together and by not making an assertion of his own religious thoughts, Firmicus makes astrology applicable and suitable to all religions in the empire. This approach facilitated the survival of astrology regardless of the religious situation.

During Late Antiquity the status and acceptability of astrology received more attention than it had done since the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius: The Church Fathers were condemning the discipline; laws were made that reflected these views; yet a handbook, the *Mathesis*, was written. Although restrictions on astrologers were not new, the laws concerning astrology changed at a much faster rate during this period than they had done previously. These laws served not only to prohibit astrological practices but also to reclassify the discipline, placing it firmly among religious practices rather than between religious and scientific disciplines. The various religions that were present in the empire during Late Antiquity all had their own opinions on the discipline, but since there was not a unified stance, even within an individual religion, this added to the uncertainty surrounding astrology. Firmicus' *Mathesis* indicates this uncertainty and tries to steer its reader toward the best way for avoiding trouble while still being able to read about or practice astrology.

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PART III

THEMES AND DISCUSSIONS

Life and Death in Late Antiquity: Religious Rituals and Popular Culture

Lucy Grig

Introduction

This chapter looks at late antique religion from the perspective of the study of ritual and its function in popular culture. It examines the role of ritual in influencing the rhythms of everyday life in the towns and cities and also the countryside of the period, and the ways in which ritual served to define both quotidian and extraordinary events and activities, such as the key moments of the lifecycle as well as those of the calendar. Rather than looking through the prism of institutions the focus will be on what we might call popular culture and lived religion. The picture that emerges is one of both ritual diversity and ritual creativity, as well as a certain amount of controversy.

The approach taken to religion here will incorporate recent developments in the field of religious studies that have real resonance when it comes to the case of (late) ancient religion. In particular, the concept of "lived religion" is highly germane to the subject of this chapter.

The study of lived religion explores how religion is shaped by and shapes the ways family life is organized; for instance, how the dead are buried, children disciplined, the past and future imagined, moral boundaries established and challenged, homes constructed, maintained, and destroyed, the gods and spirits worshipped and importuned, and so on. Religion is approached

in its place within a more broadly conceived and described lifeworld, the domain of everyday existence, practical activity and shared understandings, with all its crises, surprises, satisfactions, frustrations, joys, desires, hopes, fears, and limitations (Orsi 2002: xiii–xiv).

"Lived religion" is a concept that allows us to bypass the problematic value-laden definition of "popular religion" and allows us to conceptualize ancient religion as definitively *embedded* in society and culture. Religion in the ancient world, as has been widely recognized, was something *experienced*, something that permeated all areas of life and culture, and ritual played an important role in this experience.

"Popular culture" in the meantime should be understood inclusively rather than exclusively: it does not belong to a particular group of the population. It need not (necessarily) originate solely from the "bottom up." "Popular culture" can be shared by various subgroups, and it can have diverse possible relationships to elite and official culture/s. Like religion, "popular culture" was fully *embedded* in the broader sphere of society, economy, and ideology. Ultimately, we can perhaps see "popular culture" as a heuristic model, enabling us to provide a properly "thick" description of [ancient] culture in all its richness (see Grig 2017a). Most of the detailed evidence discussed in this chapter relates to upper class members of society and/or stems from institutional contexts: the challenge is both to read this evidence against the grain but, even more fundamentally, to understand how patterns of ritual and culture intersect class and institutions in various ways.

I shall take a broad approach to the idea of ritual and will consider a range of different types of ritual. Rituals allow for the intersection of the sacred and the profane through practice. They enable groups both to express and negotiate (and sometimes contest) important elements of their social relations and their views of the cosmic order (see Bell 1997). As we shall see in what follows, both the performance and meanings of ritual were frequently challenged and reshaped in Late Antiquity. These rituals did not just *reflect* the diverse and changing religious landscape but also contributed to its ongoing transformation. We will see this across a wide range of rituals and ritual contexts in what follows.

This chapter will range widely across the religious landscape of Late Antiquity, from Egypt to Portugal, Antioch to Rome, including rituals and practices associated with Christian, Jewish, and polytheistic traditions, as well as those that can be categorized only with difficulty. A range of literary sources will be considered; however, the sermons of Caesarius of Arles and John Chrysostom will form a particular concentration, providing as they do particularly in-depth focus on matters of ritual, lifecycle, and indeed popular culture. The analysis of rituals will begin by looking at those calendrical

rituals, including the question of Sabbath observance. Concerns for ritual separation will be examined next before turning to what we might consider "shared" and "blended" festivals in Late Antiquity. After looking at examples of both continuity and innovation the final type of rituals considered are those related to the human lifecycle: birth, marriage, and death.

Calendrical Rituals

The calendar is one of the most basic structuring elements in any given culture. As Meredith McGuire puts it: "Calendrical rituals served to order the experience of time, establishing routines and schedules and creating a sense of *shared temporal regularity*" (McGuire 2008: 30). These calendrical rites comprise both seasonal and commemorative celebrations though some, such as the Jewish festival of Pesach (Passover), for example, combine both types (Bell 1997: 105). The Jewish calendar is an interestingly distinctive example because of the lack of fixity, even in Late Antiquity (see Stern 2001). Indeed, Late Antiquity was a highly fertile period for the creation and development of calendrical festivals, not least for the Jewish calendar (Tabory 2008: 570). It is worth looking at one particularly striking calendrical document in more detail.

The famous "Codex-Calendar of 354," a richly illustrated luxury codex presented to a Roman Christian aristocrat called Valentinus, has been a rich source for the cultural history of Late Antiquity (see Salzman 1990). It includes the public calendar of the city of Rome for that year, featuring traditional polytheistic, imperial, and historical celebrations and commemorations. It also includes a range of other material, much of it historical, chronological, and commemorative in nature including, as has been much discussed, the commemorations of the bishops and martyrs of Rome. As Michele Salzman has commented:

> The Codex-Calendar of 354 allows us the rare opportunity of entering into the world that produced it, of seeing the daily round of social and religious events—the urban rhythms—in the life of a fourth-century resident of Rome. (Salzman 1990: 5)

The calendar gives a list of public holidays and festivals that is striking in both number and duration compared with the early imperial period: 177 holiday/festival days are devoted to *ludi* (games) and *circenses* (circus races), ninety-eight of which commemorated the imperial cult. There are also a number of holidays celebrated without public games, many of which go back to the

archaic Roman religious calendar. The conservative nature of the Roman
calendar is thus very striking (Salzman 1990: 157; 176–177). Nonetheless,
the calendar also contains a number of new festivals, including those mark-
ing seasonal and astrological events, and commemorating Rome itself
(Salzman 1990: 183–184). Overall, the vitality and fertility of the Roman
calendar in the mid-fourth century is clear.

Nonetheless, within the next few decades there would be a concerted impe-
rial attempt to attack "pagan" holidays, as in 395 when Arcadius and Honorius
issued an edict ordering "that the ceremonial days of pagan superstition should
not be considered among the holidays" (*Cod. Theod.* 2.8.22). Even so, there
was no wish by emperors to put an end to the festal calendar (indeed, this
would have been impossible), rather to reframe its key celebrations as inno-
cent, rather than as "profane," as is most tellingly set out in this law of 399:

> Just as We have already abolished profane rites by a salutary law, so We do
> not allow the festal assemblies of citizens and the common pleasure of all
> to be abolished. Hence We decree that, according to ancient custom,
> amusements (*voluptates*) shall be furnished to the people, but without any
> sacrifice or any accursed superstition, and they shall be allowed to attend
> festal banquets, whenever public desires so demand. (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.17)

This attempt to "secularize" these events so crucial to late Roman culture is
just one example of the way in which meanings of rituals and festivals shifted
(and could be contested) in our period, as we shall see below. We shall now
go on to look in more detail at the ways in which the festal calendar shaped
the social and cultural life of the late Roman world.

The New Year constitutes a date for marking and celebration across many
cultures. The Kalends of January was a date of great importance in the Roman
official calendar. It was the date when the consuls were sworn in, and the army
and senate swore allegiance to the emperor, with three days of public rites. It
is only in Late Antiquity that the Kalends shows clear signs of having become
a festival with much more widespread participation, on both the "official" and
"unofficial," formal and informal levels, across the Roman empire (see Meslin
1970). It was officially declared as a public holiday in 389 (*Cod. Theod.* 2.8.19).
Official processions and games were put on in the major cities of the empire,
such as Rome, Ravenna, Constantinople, and Antioch. Unofficial celebrations
took place much more widely, and took a variety of forms, as we shall see.

Among the "unofficial" rituals, one notable feature of the Kalends cele-
brations was the exchange of gifts, known as s*trenae* in Latin. This practice
clearly calls to mind the *sigillaria* exchanged during the Roman mid-winter
festival of Saturnalia, the popularity of which the Kalends clearly overtook in

Late Antiquity. These gifts were exchanged both horizontally and vertically—between friends but also to and from employers and patrons (Versnel 1994: 148–149). At the Kalends the exchange of gifts was accompanied by the exchange of New Year greetings, including kisses. Gaming and gambling as Kalends activities are attacked by Christian preachers (John Chrysostom, *In Kalend.* 2), although dice is not as central a feature as in the case of Saturnalia. Drinking is of course a universal feature of festivities of all kinds, and comes under frequent attack by ecclesiastical critics of the Kalends (e.g. John Chrysostom, *In Kalend.* 2). Alcohol is of course implicated in the singing and dancing, laughter, and general license that were so disparaged in ecclesiastical attacks on the festival (see Grig 2017b).

The Kalends of January had a number of distinctive features, some of which were universal, while others seem to have been locally or otherwise specific. Celebrations took place in city and country alike, across the empire and there were certain features of the celebration picked out by preachers distant in both time and space. For instance both Asterius, preaching in Amaseia in Pontus in 400 CE, and Caesarius, in Arles over a hundred years later, complain about specifically military revels, where soldiers performed obscene skits, involving cross-dressing (Asterius, *Hom.* 4.7; Caesarius, *Serm.* 192.2). One of the most ubiquitous features of the festival was the making of house-to-house visits, which, according to their most severe critics, might involve the extortion of money with menaces (Asterius, *Hom.* 4.6) as well as the donning of fancy dress, including both animal costumes (seemingly a uniquely western phenomenon) and cross-dressing (widespread) (see Caesarius, *Serm.* 192.2). Marking the Kalends also could involve a number of New Year rituals, apotropaïc and prognostic in character, such as putting cloth and bread in a box for mice and moths, and laying out food on tables in order to ensure plenty throughout the year to come (Martin of Braga, *De corr. rust.* 11).

The festival is strikingly ubiquitous both in the tenaciousness of its popularity and the ire it provoked in its ecclesiastical critics. But should we understand it as *religious*? In Ravenna, Peter Chrysologus gives us his congregation's side of the story.

> But one of you says: This isn't the deliberate pursuit of sacrilege, these good luck visits are just for fun; this is a celebration of a new beginning, not a superstition from the past; this is just New Year, not the threat of paganism. (*Serm.* 155)

This line, invented of course by a bishop to serve his own ends, does nonetheless raise some questions about the contested domain of the "religious" in Late Antiquity, as understood both at the time and by scholars today.

Peter obviously did not accept the point and, in common with the ecclesiastical consensus, argued for the fundamentally *pagan* nature of the celebration. To make this argument Caesarius stressed the origins of the festival in the worship of the god Janus (*Serm*. 192.1), while Martin of Braga attacked the "superstitious" rituals that attended the festival (*De corr. rust.* 10–11). What really lay at the heart of the ecclesiastical objections? Distaste for the full-hearted enjoyment of popular culture doubtless played a big role, but a specifically *calendrical* issue is also significant. Celebration of the Kalends of January represented a rejection of Christian ideas of time and renewal, as enacted by Christmas and the related liturgical calendar (Markus 1990: 103–106; Meslin 1970: 109–112).

The late antique Church did develop and promote a liturgical alternative to the Kalends, in the form of commemoration of the Circumcision of Christ:

> And the days between Christmas and Epiphany are feast days so one can eat normally, except the three days when, to trample pagan custom underfoot, our fathers have decreed that on the Kalends of January we should chant litanies at home and psalms at church and at the eighth hour of that day the mass of the Circumcision should be celebrated. (*Conc. Turon.* an. 567 can. 18(17))

It is clear, however, that the feast of the Circumcision was not able to "best" the Kalends of January throughout a very long Late Antiquity. Therefore, the Kalends provides an excellent example to introduce a number of key themes relevant to this chapter: the fertility of the period for the production and development of festivals, the variety of meanings and practices that could be involved in religious rituals, and the religious controversy that was often involved.

The case of the Kalends also nicely brings together a range of issues related to the calendar more specifically. The efforts (and success) of the Christian Church to impose new forms and patterns on the existing Roman calendar were definitely patchy. To take something as basic as the days of the week: the seven-day week, with a special status for Sunday, was made official from Constantine onwards (*Cod. Theod.* 2.8.1; and further laws were made regarding Sunday observance, e.g. *Cod. Theod.* 2.8.20; 2.8.25). The names of the days of the week, however, were not to the liking of the hardliners. Caesarius of Arles complained that some people took Thursday off in honor of Jupiter (e.g. *Serm.* 52.2) and proposed an alternative naming system:

> Let us even disdain to utter with our lips those exceedingly despicable names, and let us never say the day of Mars, or the day of Mercury, or the day of Jupiter. Let us rather call them the first or second or third day, according to what is written. (*Serm.* 193.4)

Martin of Braga makes a similar complaint (*De corr. rust.* 8–9) and has often been given the credit for the fact that Portugal, unlike its neighboring countries *did* indeed take on this numbering system ("Segunda-feira" and so on) although this is entirely unprovable.

Christian preachers frequently enjoined their congregations to observe the Sabbath in what they considered the proper fashion: avoiding work, devoting themselves to pious activities, and even abstaining from sex. Caesarius of Arles went so far as to claim that having sex on Sunday could lead to the birth of lepers (*Serm.* 44.7). It is thereby clear that these injunctions were widely ignored. What is more, despite the official status of Sunday as the Lord's Day, in various parts of the eastern empire Christians were accustomed to observing the Jewish Sabbath, as is clear from persistent injunctions against this, such as at the Council of Laodicea in ca. 360.

> Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be Judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ. (*Council of Laodicea* can. 29)

As we shall see, this is just one example of a number of cases where people did not always stick to the rituals, celebrations, and calendars of their own communities.

In Antioch John Chrysostom was exasperated by the tendency of his congregation to join in with the rituals and ceremonies of their Jewish neighbors.

> If the ceremonies of the Jews move you to admiration, what do you have in common with us? If the Jewish ceremonies are venerable and great, ours are lies. But if ours are true, as they *are* true, theirs are filled with deceit. (*Against the Jews* 1.6.5)

The tendency for Christians to participate in Jewish festivals, rituals, and ceremonies was not of course unique to Antioch. The Council of Laodicea in ca. 360 banned participation in Jewish feasts and festivals as well, as we have already seen, as the observance of the Sabbath (*Council of Laodicea* can. 29, 38). Interestingly, not only the laity but the clergy too seem to have celebrated Jewish festivals (e.g. see the late fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.47.8). These concerns have of course had the effect of letting us see precisely how weak the boundaries of such communities were. Nonetheless, it is also worth noting that concerns around "Judaizing" were not universal: Christopher Haas notes that despite the long-term co-existence of Jews and

Christians in Alexandria (prior to the crisis of 414/5 that is) anti-"Judaizing" preaching does not seem to have been needed there: the self-identities of the respective communities were secure enough (Haas 1997: 125).

Ritual Separation and Blending

John Chrysostom desired his Christian congregation to separate them-selves not just in terms of their beliefs but in terms of their behaviors, perhaps above all *ritually* from their neighbors. However, it is not only Christian texts that express these kinds of concerns, of course—rabbinic sources from late antique Palestine can also enable us to see a lack of boundaries on the one hand, and a perceived need to assert them on the other. One of the most fascinating festivals in Late Antiquity took place in Mamre, near Hebron in Palestine. This was the location of Abraham's angelic epiphany (Gen 18) and a site of religious celebration each summer for Christians, Jews, and "pagans" alike. The Church historian Sozomen tells us:

> The inhabitants of the country and of the regions round Palestine, the Phoenicians and the Arabs, assemble annually during the summer season to keep a brilliant feast; and many others, both buyers and sellers, resort there on account of the fair... Some pray to the God of all; some call upon the angels, pour out wine, or burn incense, or offer an ox, a he-goat, a sheep or a cock ... [and] all abstain from coming near their wives. (Sozomen, *HE* 2.4)

Constantine had attempted to Christianize this site definitively (*Life of Constantine* 2.52–53) but had clearly failed and both the more "religious" celebrations and the lively associated market continued to thrive throughout Late Antiquity. Attending even the market, known as Botna, was explicitly forbidden by rabbinic sources (Sivan 2008: 184).

The festival at Mamre is a fascinating example of a commemorative festival that could be shared by different ritual traditions. Seasonal festivals, as we have seen, provided even more obvious opportunities for different individu-als and communities to participate together, even when against the explicit prohibitions of the religious authorities. There are also a number of cases where we can see the merging or replacement of festivals with new Christian celebrations. The festival of the Circumcision was an attempt that failed, whereas other "blendings" were more successful. Sometimes, nonetheless, it is hard to tell from our polemical, prescriptive ecclesiastical sources

what was actually going on "on the ground." For instance, mid-summer, like mid-winter, had (and still has) festivals of its own. Caesarius of Arles speaks disparagingly about the custom of night-time/early morning bathing on the feast of John the Baptist.

> Let no one on the feast of St John dare to bathe in the fountains or marshes or rivers either at night or early in the morning; that wretched custom still remains from pagan observances. Although not only souls but, so much the worse, bodies, very frequently die as a result of that impious bathing, people who are unconcerned over the salvation of their soul do not even fear bodily death. (*Serm.* 33.4)

Although this bathing was linked with the saint's day, it is clearly also to be related to the mid-summer custom found across Europe, and Caesarius himself paints the practice as residual, as adherence to "pagan observance." William Klingshirn has linked this particular bathing ritual to "the close association of healing waters, rain, fertility, and the sun in Celtic religion," and to the aim of securing a successful wheat harvest. However, Klingshirn also points out that Caesarius' congregation are themselves deliberately making a new Christian connection to this festival, with the bathing also now clearly symbolizing baptism. This is not therefore simply the case of a "traditional" festival having a new Christian meaning "imposed" upon it: instead the development of this ritual provides a clear instance of a "community Christianity … gradually developed … defined as much by local custom as by outside authority" (Klingshirn 1994: 225).

Rituals linked with the calendar, the agricultural cycle, and natural forces had deep and lasting importance, even as both practices and meanings shifted. In Egypt, the rites connected to the surge of the Nile provide a very striking example of what David Frankfurter has described as "a popular ritual tradition bound up so inescapably with the rhythms of the agricultural cycle that neither priestly nor imperial nor, ultimately, Christian institutions could alter its cultural significance" (Frankfurter 1998: 42). It is clear that the key elements of the Nile ritual continued whether under Ptolemaic or Roman rule, and in both polytheistic and Christian traditions: the gathering of local communities with their religious representatives, the performance of hymns, prayers, and invocations, the making of offerings of various types, as well as the erection of Nileometers recording the height of the river in religious sanctuaries. The religious "identity" of any given element of this ritual is not always clear, as with the poem about the Nile copied out by a school student on a wax tablet at the turn of the fourth century: "Men standing at the river mouth/invoke the beloved water of divine Nile/and children all singing together the annual hymn/in prayer" (ll. 9–11; Cribiore 1995).

Egyptian hagiography gives a lively picture of the rituals, here depicted as fully "pagan":

> There was a huge temple in one of the villages which housed a very famous idol, though in reality this image was nothing but a wooden statue. The priests together with the people, working themselves up into a bacchic frenzy, used to carry it in procession through the villages, no doubt performing the ceremony to ensure the flooding of the Nile. (*History of the Monks in Egypt* 8.25, in Frankfurter 1998: 44)

Nile rituals appear in a number of different texts. The Bohairic *Life* of Pachomius tells us that as a child he was taken to the river to sacrifice, while Shenoute was represented in several texts as directing the flood through his supernatural authority both during his lifetime and after his death (Frankfurter 1998: 45–46).

There is clear evidence of attempts to Christianize these ritual practices in Late Antiquity. A church dedicated to St Stephen was constructed inside the sanctuary of Isis at Philae during the sixth century, with its own Nileometer, which used the cross for a measuring device (Kreuzsaler 2004; Dijkstra 2008). The last inscription to Isis at Philae, meanwhile, is dated as late as ca. 456/7 (see Bernand 1969). While Procopius (*On the Wars* 1.19.27–37) tells us that Justinian sent Narses to destroy the deity's sanctuary in 535/7, the substantial archeological remains tell a rather different story: of slow and halting transformation, rather than abrupt rupture and takeover. Finally, it is worth noting that late antique developments did not just involve the Christian takeover of traditional forms, but also of course developments that were new in themselves, including the exporting to the countryside of processions and stational liturgy, in particular in association with the cult of the saints, aiming to construct a Christian landscape, but also constructing Christianity itself through the landscape (Frankfurter 2007: 176–178).

These examples have included instances of competing religious traditions and the clustering of diverse interpretations and practices around particular dates and practices. In several instances we have seen the interaction between the newly potent cult of the saints and other types of commemoration or ritual. If we return to the "Codex-Calendar of 354," we can see this up close. Alongside the civic calendar, Valentinus' manuscript also contains several documents of great importance to the history of the Church at Rome: most relevant to us are the "Depositions" of bishops and martyrs. These lists, organized by month, commemorate the deaths of bishops (starting from 255 CE) and martyrs. The number of martyrs commemorated in this earliest surviving calendar (twenty-four) can be instructively compared with later versions: sixty-nine

in the early sixth-century Calendar of Carthage, and more than 170 in that from fifth-century Syria, showing the exponential growth in the business of martyr feasts in Late Antiquity (Grig 2004: 36–37). Celebration of the cult of the martyrs constitutes one of the most notable features of late antique Christianity—indeed, according to one recent account, it almost constitutes in itself "popular" Christianity at this time (MacMullen 2009: esp. 104–108).

We have a detailed and lively picture of martyr festivals that took place annually across both east and west in Late Antiquity. The commemoration began with the night-time *vigil* preceding the feast day proper, taking place in the basilica, shrine, or chapel associated with the saint in question. A torrent of clerical condemnation attacks the dancing, singing, and drinking that took place at such events (e.g. Caesarius, *Serm.* 55.2). Opportunities for what the preachers saw as fornication were also apparently rife, as Augustine tells us from his own experience:

> When I went to vigils as a student in this city [Carthage], I spent the night rubbing up against women, along with other boys anxious to make an impression on the girls, and where, who knows, the opportunity might present itself to have a love-affair with them. (Augustine, *Serm.* Mainz 5.5)

On the feast day itself there was a special service. The precise form of the liturgy is often unclear, but at least in the case of North Africa we know that the *acts* of the martyrs were read in this service, before the main sermon, before the entire congregation, and the names of the martyrs were included in the eucharistic prayers (Grig 2004: 37–38). The cult of the martyrs clearly included a range of practices and rituals falling both within and outside the parameters of clerical control.

The creation of entirely new rituals in Late Antiquity, responding not just to the landscape and to the calendar of commemoration but also to calamities of various kinds can also be seen in this period. For instance, the Rogations—a ritual that involved a full three days of fasting, sermons, and processions, performed not just by the clergy but by the entire community—is a striking example of a ritual that gained traction during a period of political and military upheaval in late antique Gaul (see Nathan 1998). Sidonius Apollinaris writes in 473 to his friend Mamertus, bishop of Vienne. It is a time of crisis: the Gothic armies are again close at hand. Sidonius writes that he has had imported the new ritual of the Rogations from Mamertus himself:

> Our only present help we find in those Rogations which you introduced and this is the reason why the people of Clermont refuse to recede, though terrors surge about them on every side… (Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 7.1.2; also, *Ep.* 5.14)

According to Sidonius, the rituals in Vienne had successfully stopped disasters ranging from earthquakes to packs of wild animals. Sidonius was hoping that these propitiatory rites would preserve his own congregation from the depredations of the Gothic armies. From a range of literary sources we can see that Sidonius was not the only bishop to find the rituals effective: the Rogations spread fast, and they were sanctioned for the whole of Gaul at the Council of Orleans in 511 (*Can.* 27). This canon specifically requires the participation of the entire community in the ritual, including slaves, while other sources stress the participation of both the aristocracy (Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 5.14) and even royalty (Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* 9.21). Caesarius goes so far as to claim that leaving church during the ceremonies would be akin to deserting an army in battle (*Serm.* 207.3).

Rogation rituals required the entire Christian community to act as one, to atone together for communal transgressions. How the various members of the community actually felt about the ritual is harder to gauge: while episcopal accounts give a picture of unity under episcopal control, it is not difficult to read between the lines and see that things were not always so simple. One of the Eusebius Gallicanus preachers complains that not everyone in the congregation is participating properly: some are abstaining, even expressing skepticism (*Eusebius Gallicanus* 25.2–3). Gregory of Tours includes several accounts of processions that did not go at all smoothly (e.g. *Hist.* 9.6). As Lisa Bailey comments on these cases: "lay people did not always concur with clerical perspectives and a multiplicity of interpretations and response were possible even within a pious Christian framework" (Bailey 2015: 115).

Rituals of the Human Lifecycle

The example of the Rogations is a clear case of an official liturgical rite, directed by the bishop. But the rituals that structured, marked, and shaped the lives of people in Late Antiquity could take a variety of forms and hold a number of different statuses, including what we might think of as para-liturgical, extra-liturgical, or indeed non-liturgical. Rituals associated with the human lifecycle, with birth, marriage, and death also appear as the focus of Christian preachers' ire in our period. John Chrysostom is a particularly lively case study here, as we can observe him struggling to change his congregation's practices in these areas, even while at times admitting the futility of his efforts. As we have already seen, Chrysostom's abiding aim was to get Christians in Antioch to behave in ways that would delineate their separation from their pagan and indeed Jewish neighbors, but it is clear that his attempts were limited in their success (see Maxwell 2006b). From Chrysostom's

homilies we learn of a range of ritual practices related to the lifecycle that he wanted either replaced with Christianized versions, or abandoned altogether. However, we can see throughout his preaching the sense that he knew he could not have it all his own way, the sense of treading a tightrope of what was practicable:

> I know indeed that I shall appear ridiculous in finding fault with these things; and shall incur the charge of great folly with the generality, as disturbing the ancient laws: for, as I said before, great is the deceptive power of custom. (*Hom. on 1 Cor.* 12)

A number of ritual practices were associated with childbirth in Late Antiquity. The use of amulets of various types for protection was common across all the religious traditions. For instance the Jewish *Book of Mysteries (Sefer ha-Razim)* prescribed the hanging of four silver lamellae on each wall of the room during childbirth (Alexander 1986: 349). John Chrysostom was not the only preacher to object to the widespread custom of protecting infants with bells and amulets: he argued that the sign of the cross was protection enough (*Hom. on 1 Cor.* 12). He also attacked the use of traditional rituals to choose names for newborns: in particular the practice of lighting lamps, naming them, and then choosing the name of the longest burning lamp. He prescribed instead the taking of names from saints and holy men (*Hom. on 1. Cor.* 12). (Interestingly this lighting practice persisted in the Coptic Church: on the seventh day after the birth of a child seven candles with seven names are used to determine the name of the infant (Maxwell 2006a: 152).) Traditionally in the Roman world, the child was given its name on the eighth day after childbirth (the *dies lustricus*) and the persistence of this custom into Late Antiquity is suggested by several literary sources (e.g. Ausonius, *Parentalia* 11.8). There does not seem to have been a Christianized version of this ritual and the development of infant baptism was slow and uneven, although it was recommended primarily when children were thought likely to die (see Ferguson 1979).

Weddings constituted an area of ritual practice where the influence of the Christian Church was very much limited in Late Antiquity. John Chrysostom gives an interesting account of the rituals and celebrations of a typical wedding: the nuptial procession was held in public by torchlight, heralded by the singing of (obscene) songs to the accompaniment of music, dancing, and drinking, along with the shouting of ritual insults at the bride, whose face was made up. He objected to these activities as "absurd" (*Hom. on 1. Cor.* 12). There is evidence for clerical involvement in some aspects of the wedding ceremony but it is important to note that there was no concerted or

consistent attempt on behalf of the ecclesiastical authorities to take over marriage rituals for the Church. It was expected that the wedding would continue to take place in the home. Gregory Nazianzen said that priests were sometimes asked to bless the couple while receiving their traditional nuptial crowns but he did not approve of this and thought it should be done by the father of the bride (*Ep.* 231). However, John Chrysostom did advocate the presence of priests to deliver prayers and blessings (*Hom. 48 on Genesis*). There is earlier, stronger evidence for the presence of an actual wedding liturgy in the west (especially in Italy) than in the east (Hunter 2007: 590–592). In some areas we can see the ecclesiastical authorities attempting to enforce marriage blessings (and three days of abstinence after the wedding! e.g. *Life of Caesarius* 1.59; *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua* 101), but overall weddings remained essentially a matter outside the purview of the Church until well into the Middle Ages.

Just like marriage, death provided an important ritual moment where the influence of organized religion remained limited even into Late Antiquity. Again, the central role of the family remained paramount across the diverse religious traditions. Today the scholarly consensus is set firmly against earlier approaches, which claimed otherwise, by projecting back medieval practices, whether Christian or Jewish, into the (late) ancient world (see Rebillard 2009). Once more we see that there was a lack of uniformity across the different areas of the Mediterranean world. Nonetheless, the sermons of John Chrysostom in Antioch again provide a helpful insight into the ritual practices at stake. As with marriage, Chrysostom finds himself trying to find a line that would have a reasonable chance of being accepted by his congregation. He does accept that funerals are necessary and proper rituals. His biggest concern was with what he saw as "ostentatious" mourning practices. The problem with public mourning for Chrysostom was that it implied an impious fear of death and the denial of the resurrection. He objected in particular to the widespread practice of hiring professional—"pagan"—mourners to sing the customary laments. Instead, along with other clerics he counseled the bereaved to invite clergy and the poor to sing for the souls of the dead (e.g. *Hom. on Matt.* 31).

For a closer glimpse at what this Christianized version of the funerary ritual might look like we can turn to the rather touching account of the death of Macrina, sister of Gregory of Nyssa. This is of course a hagiographical account and as such grants us a view of an idealized Christian death, but still raises a number of interesting aspects. At the moment of Macrina's death her religious community begin loudly to wail and lament. Gregory tells us that he joined in this lamentation, saying it was justified as the women were not just bewailing the loss of their companion: "But it seemed as if they had been

torn away from their hope in God and the salvation of their souls" (*Life of Macrina* 988A). He even provides the text of their lamentation, but then describes having a moment of clarity, as it were, after which he urges the sisters to sing psalms rather than lament. Gregory himself, together with a deaconess, prepares Macrina's body for the funeral, to a backdrop of mingled psalms and lamentations.

What follows is clearly the standard practice of the day: friends and neighbors, having heard the news, flock to the house, and an all-night vigil follows. The next morning a thronging funeral procession sets off from the house, made up of men and women, clergy and servants, with crowds joining as it progressed. Macrina's body is borne by priests and the procession sing psalms; according to Gregory, it "resembled a mystic procession" (*Life of Macrina* 994c). Macrina's body is taken to the church and laid in the tomb where her parents were already interred. What is especially striking about the account is the way in which the real human grief keeps on breaking out amidst the pious psalming despite the hagiographic nature of the text.

Gregory's account stops there without mentioning the liturgy of the funeral. Indeed, there does not seem to have been a standard funerary liturgy at this time, and clearly no funerary sacrament. Eric Rebillard states quite bluntly that at least in the fourth and fifth centuries there was no "Christian ritual that the church attempted to impose for lay Christians; the family remained the principal player in funerals" (Rebillard 2009: 139). After the funerary ritual proper, a funeral banquet traditionally followed, and ecclesiastical authorities accepted this, even permitting clergy to attend (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.44.1–3). Patristic writers however did wish these events to turn into opportunities for showing charity to the poor, urging that they be invited. Paulinus of Nola provides an oft-cited account of the funerary banquet given by the Roman senator Pammachius for his deceased wife, Paulina, in St Peter's basilica:

> And so you gathered together the patrons of our souls, a multitude of poor people. All those deserving of alms from the whole of Rome, in the basilica of the Apostle… I seem to behold all the pious swarms of the wretched populace, the nurslings of God's affection, thronging in great lines deep into the huge basilica of the renowned Peter. (Paulinus, *Ep.* 13.11)

The description of the poor as "patrons of our souls" (*patronos animarum pauperes*) is of course important: the presence of the poor at funerals supported their intercessory prayers for the souls of the better off (Grig 2006: 136–138).

Once the funeral was over, late antique Christians seem to have followed the traditional Greek and Roman customs of observing set days of mourning

in the month that followed. The *Apostolic Constitutions* from fourth-century Antioch refers to commemorations on the third, ninth and fortieth days (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.42.1–2). As with funerals, so with the ritual that was paid by the family to the dead: Christians in Late Antiquity continued to commemorate their dead just as they had done in the previous centuries, and just like their non-Christian neighbors. They came to the cemeteries with food and drink and shared these with the friends and family, in remembrance of the dead. The literary evidence makes the ubiquity of this family-centered cult very evident but the archeological evidence from North Africa is even more striking, and certainly less well-known. The cemetery in Tipasa (modern Algeria), for instance, provides highly striking evidence: accoutrements for funerary banquets include tables (*mensae*), dining couches, and plumbing. Sometimes the tables contain a conduit for the pouring of libations but facilities for banqueting are the most ubiquitous (see Rebillard 2015). While it was once thought that the Church worked to extinguish such "pagan" practices, it is now clear that in fact in most cases there was acceptance of the importance of family cult in this way. The *Apostolic Constitutions*, for instance, allowed that clergy could attend such memorial gatherings when invited, but should avoid getting drunk (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.44). As ever, a more nuanced picture of rituals and their position in the lived religion of Late Antiquity is needed.

Conclusion

A nuanced picture of the diversity of the religious ritual landscape is exactly what this chapter has sought to provide. Looking at late antique religion through the prism of rituals and festival has provided an insight into religion as "lived," as performed, as felt, as believed. It has shown very strongly that Late Antiquity was a period of religious creativity, of continuity as well as of transformation, of compromise as well as of controversy. It has shown that ritual brought people together, as well as working to keep them apart.

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Religion and the Body: Asceticism

Hannah Hunt

Introduction

Asceticism in Late Antiquity is evident across a very wide range of different religious traditions. Jainism, Buddhism, and Christianity appear to share some common ascetic practices involving restraint of bodily activities, but their significance within each religious tradition varies. Asceticism was also practiced by influential non-religious Hellenic philosophical schools such as Stoicism, which persisted through Late Antiquity alongside the Christian appropriation of philosophy. Contemporary scholarship has predominantly focused on the manifestation of asceticism within one religious tradition at a time; when publishing findings from the conference on asceticism held in 1993 Wimbush and Valantasis noted that a comparative study of the subject was still lacking (Wimbush and Valantasis 1998: xxv), and this continues to be a consideration when attempting a study of religion and the body in Late Antiquity. Individual scholars from a number of different disciplines (theology, religious studies, psychology, sociology, and socio-biology) have contributed insights into various religious perspectives. From their work we can piece together a definition of asceticism as constituting a concern for the right use of and attitude toward the human person, especially its physicality, within the context of religious experience or doctrine that features a spiritual or non-material dimension in addition to the physical. Asceticism consistently

involves disciplined approaches to bodily appetites, desires, and modes of expression. This chapter will explore late antique asceticism through some of the shared practices such as meditation on corpses, and the decay and instability of the human body; fasting and restraint concerning consumption of food; solitude; motionlessness; sleep deprivation; and attitudes to gender and social equality. It will explain that while mainstream religious traditions (and less prominent ones such as Manichaeism and Gnosticism) appear to share similar ascetic disciplines, the significance of these can only be understood by exploring the religious anthropology that underpins them.

Understanding asceticism requires a consideration of the concepts of self and non-self, and these concepts are related to divergent understandings of physical life and death. Furthermore, religious and philosophical traditions are not always consistent or clear about the relationship between self and non-self, or the dialogue between the physical body and the other components of the human person. Christianity posits that humans are made in the image of God, were originally perfect and became flawed through misusing the divine gift of free will. They may be redeemed through faith in Christ who is uniquely both God and Man. Hence, the ultimate goal of Christian asceticism has been described as "the reconstitution of the pre-fall state through withdrawal (anachoresis) and self-mastery (enkrateia)" (Flood 2004: 145). Relinquishing the subjectivity of self enhances this process. Within Christian Late Antiquity, we find simultaneously an apparent disgust for the physical body and the affirmation of the full bodily nature of Christ. Desert Spirituality abounds with statements such as that from the Desert Father Dorotheus who is reported as saying "I am killing the body because it kills me" this was modified, according to *Saying* 184 of Father Poemen (Ward 1975: 193), to the desire to kill the passion that eroded the purity of the body and led it astray. Monks contributed to some extent to the fourth- and fifth-century ecumenical councils' deliberations that led to creedal statements insisting on the full humanity of Christ, an affirmation of the physicality of the human condition. The doctrine of the Incarnation was seen as so important that it was used as the criterion for distinguishing between Christian orthodoxy and heterodox (even heretical) misunderstandings of the dual natures of Christ such as found in Arius and Apollinarius. In Indian religions the question of doctrines relating to the physicality of the human person is far less dominant, reflecting a more phenomenological category of religion; in these traditions, enlightenment is achieved by "realising [the] non-agency [of self]," according to the Advaia Vedānta; in Buddhism self-understanding entails an appreciation of its "non-essential nature" (Flood 2004: 2). In Buddhism and Jainism (as in Stoicism) the unreality of the physical world must be acknowledged. Marcus Aurelius inherited a philosophical

understanding of *askesis* or training of the soul as consisting primarily of seeing this unreality (Francis 1995: 12).

Within Indian religions, asceticism and how it is articulated by the body has been described as "the cornerstone of Indian religion" (Olivelle 1998: 188). However, religions from this geographical area are sometimes described by outsiders as being either "world-renouncing" and "world-affirming," suggesting varied approaches to the ascetic body in relation to the broader social creation of the human body. The more dualistic interpretations of Christian asceticism might correlate to "world-renouncing," especially as the withdrawal (anachoresis) from the world was seen as the starting point for ascetic endeavor. Christian asceticism evolved from its desert roots into an understanding of the world as redeemable through belief in Christ but with a preference for rejection of the more worldly aspects, and transformation of physical and mental appetites that were shackles. Buddhism and Jainism treat the physical world as, to some extent, an illusion hence their understanding of self and non-self depends on a different conception of reality to that held by Judeo-Christian religions. The extent to which the bodily aspects of the human person are seen as essential to the whole person varies; in a holistic understanding of the human person, the self is seen as comprising body and mind. Both of these must be addressed and employed in order to achieve enlightenment, salvation, or other higher forms of existence. Common to Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Stoic writings is the concept that freedom *from* bodily limitation comes *through* bodily limitation (Flood 2004: 14). In Christianity this is developed from scriptural and desert eremetical roots into a rule for monks who live together, through the Rule of St Basil established at the end of the fourth century. This included a number of proscriptions about how to live communally but also specifies that details of ascetic discipline will be guided by the abbot.

Given the very different understandings of self and the nature of reality and humanity's place within it, one might wonder why asceticism is found so readily across divergent traditions. Bronkhorst has posited that there exists "a universal, shared, innate human predisposition towards ascetic activity" (2001: 374). He attributes this human impetus to Darwinian evolutionary elements, drawing on socio-biology and evolutionary psychology to explain the presence of ascetic practices in traditions as divergent as classical Indian and late antique Christian. He concludes that the presence of asceticism across the traditions was due to an innate human characteristic, associated with prefrontal cortex developments in the human brain, and not because of any suggestion of Indian religions borrowing from Christians (not least because there was no large-scale missionary activity among Indians in the Roman world). He suggests that symbol construction led to language

construction, indicating that there are links between the language instinct and the ascetic instinct.

Further common ground may be found in the fact that all the religious traditions explored in this chapter place human beings within a cosmological framework. In some instances this inevitably leads to a very negative perception of the role of the physical person, which in turn affects the type of asceticism practiced. For example, in Manichaeism, the presumption that the material world had been composed from the dung of demonesses led to an insistence that purification be achieved through physical asceticism since this was the only way to renounce an inherently corrupt world, and achieve salvation. In this context asceticism becomes a *raison d'être*, and much of its manuscript tradition is devoted to illustrating (diagrammatically as well as in words) the "battle for the body" (BeDuhn 1998: 514). This worldview leaves little space for the transformation of the human person. In the case of Marcionism and other Gnostic writers, a dualist cosmology was almost certainly a major contributing factor to their condemnation as heresy, since they promulgated a view of the material world as utterly irredeemable because it was contaminated and this in turn contaminated mankind. This was irreconcilable with the Christian emphasis on the redemption of humanity through the physical incarnation of Christ. Syrian encratism, as viewed through the condemnatory perspective of Vööbus, veers toward a dualistic understanding of creation and humanity's role within it. In Jainism strict adherence to *ahimsa* articulated a worldview in which minute invisible organisms and lifeforms are held to have as much value as human life, and the consequent ascetic disciplines restrain human beings from engaging in many activities that would otherwise be acceptable. The human body has no more merit or value than any other organism (a totally different perspective to the concept of humans being made in God's image and thereby privileged and charged with responsibility for stewardship of the rest of creation). A byproduct of *ahimsa* was that it facilitated the cessation of being bound by *karma*, which enables the human person to be released from the illusory nature of the material world. This belief in *karma*, found within Jainism and Buddhism, suggests a radically different cosmology to the Judeo-Christian one in which the material world is seen as the work of an all loving, good God as outlined in Genesis. Christianity's core doctrine of the salvific work of the divine human Christ, the Son of God, depends upon an acceptance of the material world as essentially acceptable, however flawed and degraded through human error.

Before turning to look at particular examples of ascetic practice we will look briefly at the periodization of Late Antiquity and consider the nature of extant and non-extant sources within the range of religious traditions under

scrutiny. Whilst it is relatively easy to date early Christian sources, and even the rejected heretical offerings of the Gnostics, Manichaeans, and others (if only through their detractors), the issue of dating sources becomes more problematic when considering Central Asian and Indian religious traditions. This is especially true when a religious tradition is predominantly manifest through phenomenological features, whereby the events and lifestyles of paradigmatic figures and how their teachings are experienced and practiced inform the tradition as much as any written evidence by or about them. The roots of Buddhism go back 2500 years in present-day Nepal. Buddhist scholars do not always distinguish between original teachings and their particular manifestation at later periods, which makes it difficult to date the original "source." The Pali texts that record the Buddha's insights have been described as arguing *ad hominem*, as the Buddha was disclosing teachings in response to questions from a range of individuals (Gombrich 1996: 18). It is believed that the oldest Buddhist manuscripts, found in present-day Afghanistan, date from the first century CE. As with midrash on Jewish Scriptures, so (between the third and seventh centuries) Buddhists continued their practice of composing new *Sutras* and *Avadanas* in response to questions that had been passed on to them (Robinson *et al.* 2005: 103). Sometimes the interpretation of a prior source took place some considerable time after the event; for example, the philosophical texts of Dignada (who taught Buddhism at Nalanda in the fifth century CE) were commented on by the seventh-century monk Dharmakirti (Robinson *et al.* 2005: 102).

Other challenges are presented by the disappearance or deliberate suppression of sources. The vast majority of teachings that were deemed to disclose a heretical understanding of the full humanity of Christ were only preserved through citation or polemical rhetoric by their detractors. The Jain tradition maintains that "its most important scriptures have all been lost, and that those which survive were first written down imperfectly, nearly a thousand years after the events they describe" (Laidlaw 1995: 6). Jain literature is based on Mahāvīra's prescriptions about how to lead an ascetic life, but the interpretation of these by his first disciple, Jambu, introduced some changes and this newer exegesis then became the tradition that was followed (Dundas 2002: 129). Changes in social and political circumstances can affect the transmission of teaching. Much of late antique Christian spirituality is articulated by the Desert Fathers of the Palestinian, Egyptian, and Syrian deserts, where it was practiced by hermits; the practices and teachings inevitably underwent changes when hermits began to gather together and coenobitic monasticism was added to the eremitical model. Another factor to bear in mind is that while in Christianity there is, theoretically, a strong doctrinal basis to ascetic practice and attitudes to the body (the Incarnation, teachings

about the Resurrection), in other religious traditions the articulation of asceticism is more through shared and continued practices involving the body rather than written rules: not all religious traditions feel bound by an expectation to provide proof texts for their practices. Asceticism is frequently disseminated through following the advice or example of an elder or superior practitioner within the religious tradition, for example the spiritual father/son dynamic within the Christian Desert Fathers, obedience to the abbot within Christian monasticism, the guru teacher figure in pan-Indian religious traditions, or the *digambar* (the so-called "sky-clad" branch of Jains who renounced clothing), whose advanced asceticism would be emulated by less experienced ascetics (Laidlaw 1995: 395).

Although all the religious traditions explored here acknowledge the existence of bodily and non-bodily components or aspects within the human person, there is no consensus about the relationship between these differing aspects, or the extent to which any of them are real or illusory. Some traditions take a holistic approach, affirming a co-dependency between the physical and non-physical elements. For Stoics such as Marcus Aurelius, the rightly ordered "self" relied upon interior disposition; hence asceticism was seen less as a discipline of the body than of the mind, with the body perceived as neutral, rather than a battle ground for virtue or a source of evil (Francis 1995: 19, 33). Stoicism of this period shares with pan-Indian religions a sense that the body is not so much the enemy as unimportant (Francis 1995: 29). The Christian Desert Fathers' spirituality risks being reduced to a dualistic state in which the body is the enemy of the soul, and therefore needs to be disciplined. The fourth-century monk Evagrius of Pontus explained how only God can separate the body from the soul, whereas the ascetic can himself separate the soul from the body; this ability "lies as well in the power of the man who pursues virtue. For our Fathers gave to the meditation of death and to the flight from the body a special name—anachoresis" (*Praktikos* 52, Sinkewicz 2003: 106). According to Evagrius, both the body and soul have passions from which the ascetic should flee (*Praktikos* 35, Sinkewicz 2003: 104). Ascetic practice will help with both these tasks. However, this holistic approach to the yoking together of body and soul is not universal. The Bhagavadgītā suggests that body, speech, and mind each have a separate type of asceticism (Flood 2004: 82). In this religious tradition, the unreality of existence is shared by bodies and souls: if the soul does not exist, it does not do anything; non-attachment to the consequences of one's actions will achieve the separation of soul from body. Once this non-attachment has been achieved, then material nature, which includes body and mind, will "act according to its own devices, no longer involving the soul" (Bronkhorst 2001: 384–385).

In Christianity, the embodiment of the "self" as a physical entity is strongly articulated, and corroborated, by a doctrine of Incarnation, and the doctrine of the Resurrection of not only Christ but all his faithful followers suggests a reworking of the physical body into a spiritual entity. Paul's letters to the Corinthians provide numerous proof texts for this. For example, "The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption… It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). Late antique Christianity does not explain exactly what the new "self" of the resurrected person will constitute but does affirm that it is the flowering of the seed of human existence on earth. Attitudes to physical decay and death are a main route into understanding asceticism. This is extended to physical deformity or even quite mild imperfection: Jains and Buddhists, while affirming the irrelevance of the physical self, enact their disinterest in it by excluding from the higher stages of religious preferment those whose physical bodies are seen as imperfect or blemished in some way. Brāhmaṇical teachings do not permit deformed or ugly people to become ascetics—even having black teeth or bad nails were sufficient cause for exclusion, according to the Brāhmaṇical Yatidharma-samgraha (Chakraborti 1973: 100). Scars were not acceptable, according to the Theravāda tradition, and Buddhists do not permit the deformed, including eunuchs, nor debtors, to receive "the Pabbajjā ordination" (Flood 2004: 126). Perhaps paradoxically, meditation on death (including one's own) and decay were encouraged throughout late antique religious traditions.

Meditation on Corpses and Decay: The Instability of the Human Body and its Existence on Earth

Religious traditions diverge in their views of the body's role in asceticism because of the perception of materiality as contaminating, but also in their understanding of what happens to the human person after physical death. This connects to a concern about the ephemerality of the human body, and the instability of the physical world. Whilst Pauline eschatology talks of a resurrection body, Indian religions conceive of an eternal reconfiguring of material existence activated by *karma*. Their ascetic practices therefore appear to be undertaken not so much in order to avoid the body's current desires as to escape the fluidity and changes imposed through *karma*. Regardless of the divergent understandings of the place of death, reincarnation and resurrection manifest in the religions being considered here, ascetics from divergent traditions are encouraged to meditate on dead bodies, and to imagine their own body or self as no longer living in the physical world.

This can be a means of exhorting humility (man's place in the world is ephemeral); or of emphasizing the facts of elimination and decay as being disgusting; Marcus Aurelius describes the substance of everything as "rot… The puny soul is just the same, changeable from this to that" (*Meditations* IX, 36, cited in Francis 1995: 30). Meditation on death may be used to incite fear of divine judgment leading to repentance. Dying in a state of grace would mean one would avoid going to hell. Christian asceticism frequently advocates remembrance of death: John Climacus devotes Step 6 of his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* to it, reflecting previous desert spirituality. For Christian martyrs, who under Roman persecution were the precursors of the earliest eremitical ascetics, death was welcomed with enthusiasm because it meant making the ultimate sacrifice of your will (Chryssavgis 2003: 9). Inviting or accepting martyrdom was, according to St. Antony, effectively turning the day of your death into your "birthday," into new life in Christ. The *Life of Antony*, chapter 8, details the practice of Egyptian monks living in or frequenting tombs. This was a seminal and influential text for later asceticism.

In chapter 6 of the Buddhist *Visuddhimagga* we find the advice that monks meditate on corpses; the practice of mindfulness even required the contemplation of one's own body as a corpse (Olivelle 1998: 193). Living in cemeteries, besieged by the groans and cries of mourners, and inhaling the stench of physical decay, was applauded as an ascetic practice in various traditions. Indian culture linked corruption and decay to the instability of the human body. The body is seen as a metaphorical house, which must be kept clean, and its stability is a measure of ascetic achievement. In the *White Lotus of the True Dharma* text, the Buddha describes an affluent man who has a large house in disrepair, overflowing with excrement and wild animals, and corrupted in every way. This represents the human body. The house is set on fire and the affluent man rushes in to rescue children who had entered it. The Buddha's explanation of this shows how the image of the body as the house is demonstrative of the need for non-attachment to things of the world—including your physical body:

> All sentient beings are my children.
> They are deeply attached to worldly pleasures
> And have no wisdom.
> There is no peace in the triple world,
> Just like in the burning house. (Lopez 2015: 295)

The instability of the human body is sometimes emphasized by a metaphor of homelessness or exile, or a deliberate choice to live without a home or as a beggar, as found in Buddhist, Jain, and Brāhmaṇical traditions where

mendicancy and wandering are the norm (Olivelle 1998: 192; Thurman 1998: 112). This is similar to the Christian concept of *xeniteia*, a state of being in exile, alienated by sin from one's true self and God. Christians built this idea on Hebrews 11:13 and 13:14; they followed Jesus' expression of the homelessness of the one who followed divine not earthly desires (Luke 9:58). St Paul developed this concept further: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Stability and the ending of vacillation and change is a desideratum in Indian tradition, and this is why the cessation of being bound to *karma* is so desirable in their ascetic tradition. Around 300 CE yoga was defined as "the cessation from mental fluctuation" (Flood 2004: 73). The ultimate aim is to achieve cessation from change. The word "Jina," from which Jain is derived, means conqueror, and it refers specifically to those who have conquered their own desires and passions and so escaped the cycle of death and rebirth (Laidlaw 1995: 31, 396). For religions which teach *karma*, maintaining purity as far as possible becomes imperative. The process of repeated rebirth is envisaged as "endless wandering," a perpetually flowing river (Keown 2013: 32). The belief in *karma* means that in religions such as Buddhism and Jainism, what happens to the person after death dictates or shapes how people behave in their earthly life; this teaching also governs a sense of "the true nature of the self encountered" (Bronkhorst 2001: 386).

By contrast, for a Christian the wandering through the world is not endless; the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection represents the triumph of "stasis over decay" (Flood 2004: 145). At death, the "self," which was made by God, and lived temporarily on earth, returns to God in a spiritualized form. Death is welcomed because it leads to resurrection, a being permanently in the presence of God. For all religious traditions, one of the key means to obtaining purity was to consider very carefully what went into your body and this is why fasting is such an important aspect of asceticism.

Fasting

Christian fasting is frequently described in the writings of and about the Desert Fathers. As with many aspects of asceticism, the practices among Christian hermits in the desert were inspired by Jesus' life, whose fasting for forty days in the wilderness was the model for *anachoresis* as well as fasting. Actual practices varied but common to all was a dull, meager diet, limited to simple foodstuffs prepared with the minimum of fuss. Rather than precise proscriptions, the monastic quality of discernment, allowing God's spirit to

inform your thoughts and actions, informed the detail. Motivations for fasting included it being a means of mortifying the human body; it also enforced a providential way of living in which, given the hostile physical environment of deserts, the hermit or monk was thrown on God's mercy in order to survive. Fasting was not universal, though. It was necessary to suspend fasting when traveling, and in order not to make guests feel uncomfortable a monk would eat a little to keep a visitor company. It was also important not to be ostentatious about fasting. One account, of Father Ammon, describes hermits sitting at table for the sake of appearances, or eating no more than three spoonsful of soup (Russell 1980: 65). Obedience to a spiritual elder might also affect a pupil's fasting as he might advocate a less (or more) strict regime. A brother told Abba Poemen that he consumed a lot of vegetables, and the elder's advice was: "That does not help you; rather eat bread and a few vegetables, and do not go back to your relations for what you need" (Poemen 186, in Ward 1975: 193). Abstention from animal foods was not obviously related to a desire to avoid harming living creatures; rather, a simple, vegetarian or vegan diet adopted by Christian ascetics owed more to the need for a simple way of life and avoiding luxuries such as kindling a fire. The so-called "grazing" monks reputedly ate only raw leaves, but it is not specified in the tradition why or when this interpretation of the practice of fasting might take place. On the Holy Mountain of Athos where many monasteries were set up, avoidance of animal foodstuffs was likely due to an abhorrence of the presence of anything female, so female animals who might produce young, or milk, were excluded. This reflects the profound misogyny of the tradition. Once monastic communities became established, they developed idiorhythmic rules about eating. Basil's *Rule* specified only that you should eat what was provided and if you missed a meal time you had to wait until the next one. Later monastic orders became more prescriptive about types of food to be consumed on particular days and stricter period of fasting ahead of major religious feasts.

Within Christianity, the integrity of physical and non-physical elements within the human person meant that as well as physical fasting from food it was seen as equally important to "fast" from "all other kinds of sin so that as our stomach keeps fast, so also may our tongue as we abstain from calumny, from deceit, from idle talk, from railing and anger and all other vices which arise from the tongue" (Wheeler 1977: 218). Fasting is therefore primarily about restraint and denying the appetite satisfaction.

Within Jainism, almost everything to do with food is problematic (Laidlaw 1995: 153). The practice of *ahimsa* is the highest religious duty, without which any ascetic behavior is worthless (Dundas 2002: 138). As it is believed that at

least 8,400,000 different life forms exist, all of which must be protected from harm, even consumption of water or its use for growing crops is problematic. All water should be strained to avoid consuming any life forms (Laidlaw 1995: 211). Jains (and Buddhists) were required to practice stability of residence during the four-month rainy season, because at that time it would be impossible to avoid killing the many water-borne life forms. Fasting for Jains also entailed a providential approach to the acquisition of food. Since their teachings did not permit the actual production of food themselves they depended upon the charity of others for their daily sustenance. The acceptance of food from laity, without which ascetics would die, was not considered to be a form of begging, but rather a gracious acceptance of food that is humbly offered by the lay person who begs them to accept their tribute (Dundas 2002: 151).

The classical model of a Jain ascetic would be one who walked daily, holding their right hand curved back over the shoulder to indicate that they were hungry and would accept gifts of food. This, and the seasonal need to remain in one location, meant they were obliged to lodge with or near laity who could provide for their basic needs (Dundas 2002: 148–149). The cultivation of crops is to be avoided by Jains as it potentially destroys micro-organisms in the soil (Dundas 2002: 138). In order to practice *ahimsa* Jains would limit themselves to one meal a day, and avoid consuming green vegetables after dark as after dusk it is harder to see if there are any insects among the leaves (Laidlaw 1995: 211). Additional to the demands of *ahimsa* is the belief that reducing the consumption of food effects a "scouring out" of the negative factors of the body, and thus helps to avoid binding further *karma*.

The ultimate example of this is the relatively rare practice of fasting to death (Laidlaw 1995: 153). Since a Jain is literally a "conqueror" of emotions and passions it is inappropriate to see fasting to death as suicide, as that would imply a conscious decision to engage in violence, antithetical to Jains (Bronkhorst 2001: 397; Dundas 2002: 155).

In Brāhmaṇical myths and theology food is problematic for a different reason; it is believed to be productive of semen, which in turn produces human creatures (Olivelle 1998: 199). Fasting from noon to dawn was mandatory for Tibetan Buddhists (Thurman 1998: 112) and in Buddhism the ascetic's withdrawal from food is seen as an expression of his withdrawal from "social and cosmic engagement" and thus a step along the way toward enlightenment (Olivelle 1998: 202). In Brāhmaṇical traditions, as in Jainism, not owning, producing or even storing food (as all of these were seen as problematic) meant that mendicants were revered and lay people saw it as a blessing to be able to provide for them (Olivelle 1998: 201).

Solitude

Although total solitude was not practiced by Jain monks and nuns, there were restrictions placed upon the society they kept. There was, in fact, no privacy in their lifestyle (Dundas 2002: 133): Jains were required to live in community to the extent of never traveling without a companion. As explained above, fasting practices and showing *ahimsa* toward other life forms dictated a mendicant lifestyle in which their food was provided by laity (Dundas 2002: 148–149). This division of responsibility between the ascetic who consumed food and the lay people who grew and harvested it was described in animal terms: the monk as a deer and the layman as a hunter (*Nyāyasūtrabhāṣya* 1649, cited in Dundas 2002: 149). This form of coexistence was a discipline on both parties. It was seen as "highly inappropriate" for an individual to detach him or herself from the ascetic band they were traveling with, and isolation from fellow ascetics was used as a penance, or sometimes a temporary state for other reasons (Dundas 2002: 131).

Buddhism has models of solitary monks and monks living communally. The Buddha records periods of solitude, when he withdrew to a forest, and would avoid seeing other humans. After achieving enlightenment, he at intervals announced his intention of retreating into solitude, only allowing contact with others in order that they bring him food.

Christian asceticism is based on the narratives of Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness where he is tempted (Matthew 4:1–11). It is after this experience that his public ministry begins, this being punctuated on occasions when he withdraws to pray (Mark 1:35), often before performing a miracle. The solitary existence of John the Baptist, who lived in the wilderness in Judea (Matthew 3:1), was also an important model; he is frequently represented in icons. From the time of Antony onwards withdrawing from society was seen as appropriate and necessary for *hesychia*. The Desert Fathers lived in caves and other primitive dwellings, and avoided other human society, although they did (sometimes reluctantly) offer "a word" of advice to those who visited them in hope of spiritual succor. Such "words" might be terse instructions to dwell alone: "A brother came to Scetis to visit Abba Moses and asked him for a word. The old man said to him, 'Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything'" (Moses 6, trans. Ward 1975: 139). Hermits would sometimes gather in order to share communion, and from the fourth century onwards, semi-eremitical and then coenobitic forms of monasticism meant that ascetics lived increasingly in community, but with an expectation that much time was spent alone in prayer. The point of asceticism was to withdraw from the world in order to become closer to God; spiritual

intimacy replaced human intimacy. Withdrawing from the world was manifest by withdrawing from the body and therefore bodily stillness was an important aspect of asceticism across the traditions.

Motionlessness

Stillness of mind and body was much valued in late antique Christianity, and is related to stability of location. The concept of *hesychia* implies both mental and physical stillness. The Desert Fathers offer many examples and the Syrian monks John of Apamea and Isaac extol its virtues. The *Lausiac History* gives an account of Adolius standing all night on the Mount of Olives, praying, immobile even in rain or frost; Elpidius is recorded as remaining standing all night whilst fasting from Monday to Friday for twenty-five years. The first stylite, Symeon, stood on a pillar for thirty years, impassive to all weathers and another stylite, Daniel, spent thirty-three years on three pillars by which time his feet had been gnawed away by maggots (Bronkhorst 2001: 387). While we might allow for hagiographical elements in these records, they do indicate the contemporary valorization of immobility. At a non-physical level, stillness of spirit and the ability to focus fully on God through extended uninterrupted prayer was highly valued. It echoed the injunction in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing." As communal monasticism developed the establishment of monastic "offices" (services of prayer and worship) ensured that throughout the day and night prayer was taking place. The development of monastic orders also enabled regulation of ascetics' whereabouts and right to travel; while hermits could roam the desert, within coenobitic monasticism there grew an expectation that the monk or nun would remain in one religious house for their lifetime, and remove only as directed by the abbot.

In Buddhism, the ascetic's body was seen as the locus for the inscription of religious traditions, alongside any doctrinal texts; it enacted the memory of the Buddhist tradition. This meant that the demeanor of the body was crucial in transmitting Buddhist thought and ethics (Flood 2004: 137). Prolonged physical motionlessness was found in Jain practice and also in the teachings of a contemporary of the Buddha, the Jain teacher Mahāvīra. A means of mortifying the body (through muscular discomfort and even atrophy) it was also envisaged as a means of inviting death because it enabled an escape from the effects of action and engagement with the physical world; as in Christianity the desired motionlessness was both physical and mental/spiritual. Physical stillness was believed to reduce or defeat the impact of *karma*; it entailed a cessation to the binding of new *karma*, and even potentially destroys that which was previously bound, according to an early

Jaina text, the *Uttarajhayaṇa*, 29.37 (cited in Bronkhorst 1993: 37; Bronkhorst 2001: 378).

Within Jain asceticism, motionlessness is articulated though a specific posture; the ascetic stands with arms hanging down in such a manner that they do not even touch the sides of the body. This avoidance of touching the body reflects a decision to abandon it, and in some cases extended to not washing the body since this would entail touching it (Dundas 2002: 148). Within the Shvetambar tradition of Jainism, abandoning the body in this manner is seen as one of the six "necessary duties" or *avashyakas* to be performed every day (Laidlaw 1995: 195). Presumably the extreme manifestations of motionless (one posture maintained for months or years) was not that practiced by the lesser levels of ascetics, who would walk every day from village to village (except in rainy seasons) to beg for sustenance. In common with Christianity and other religions at the time, the highest levels of ascetic endeavor were restricted to an elite, with less intense variants being practiced by the majority of ascetics.

Sleep Deprivation

The concept of night vigil within Christianity mirrors Jesus' night of prayer and solitude in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–42). The New Testament channels examples of vigil in the Hebrew Scriptures, and, as in other instances of ascetic behavior in Late Antiquity Jesus' focus on God through solitude, fasting, and so on was a powerful model for future "spiritual athletes." Going without sleep was valorized in the Desert Tradition: "Abba Theodore said, 'Privation of food mortifies the body of the monk.' Another old man said, 'Vigils mortify it still more'" (Ward 1975: 80). Brother monks might ask their fellows to keep watch with them to ensure they did not fall asleep while practicing night vigils (Ward 1975: 19). In Jain and Buddhist tradition, strict regulation about sleep and postures used to avoid falling asleep are part of the formation of the ascetic self, attested in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Yoga-sūtras* (Flood 2004: 65). In common with other ascetic practices, voluntary sleep deprivation was practiced in order to release the body of the ascetic from binding with *karma*.

Gender and Equality

In all the religions explored here a patriarchal hierarchy is assumed, manifested through restrictions to levels of asceticism and in particular attitudes to women. For ascetics all bodily fluids are problematic. Blood

taboos meant that menstruation was universally seen as contaminating. Mistaken ideas about human physiology even assumed menstrual blood was somehow implicated in the production of semen, another bodily fluid to be shunned. According to Brāhmaṇical ideology, the body's quintessential purity is continually threatened with impurity, which occurs through the discharge of bodily fluids and excrement (Olivelle 1998: 188–189). Tantric traditions encourage the preservation of semen; spilling it, even involuntarily while asleep, was regrettable (Laidlaw 1995: 239, 255–256). Christian ascetics were likewise advised about how to avoid seminal emissions (Russell 1981: 105).

Many religions see women as inherently problematic because their attractiveness is seen as alluring to men, and an evil incitement to temptation. Underpinning this is an unspoken assumption that the "norm" is male and the "other" is female; also that women's sexuality represents the main or sole aspect of their whole self; their intellectual, spiritual, and other dimensions are largely ignored. Although the New Testament states that in Christ, "There is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28), this is not borne out by the ascetic traditions of Late Antiquity. Tertullian's famous reduction of women to "the devil's gateway" (Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, chapter 1) articulates a misogyny previously found in the Desert Tradition where male ascetics were urged never to eat with a woman (Evagrius, *Praktikos* 96, Sinkewicz 2003: 113) or to cross the road if they were in proximity to a woman, and where the only women who were deemed to have ascetic status were reformed prostitutes such as St Mary of Egypt (see Hunt 2012: chapter 5). Not only were women blamed for leading men astray, it was believed that their gender prevented them from achieving salvation or liberation (Jaini 1992: 35). The Buddha stated that, "In all things, there is neither male nor female"' (Thurman 1994: 61–62). However, this equality is not manifest in how women ascetics are regarded. A female nun is expected to bow down before a monk even if he has only been ordained a day, whereas this is not reciprocal. *Ahimsa* can be disregarded if a group of monks need to kill a lion to protect other monks, whereas *ahimsa* was demanded if nuns were under attack; the lion should not be killed in order to protect them (Dundas 2002: 140).

Where it is accepted that ascetics may be either male or female the two are not regarded equally and this is a matter of late antique social and class expectation as much as gender discrimination. Transformation from femaleness to a quasi-male status (reflected in the backhanded praise of St Macrina as having a "manly soul") might achieve some success for women; they thereby sublimated their gender. Similar advice is given in the

Mahayana Buddhist *Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, which raises the issue of transforming from the female gender to the male (Flood 2004: 126–127). One wonders why the same expectations of transcending gender were not placed upon men.

There is, however, a paradox that much religious art, sculpture, and literature (especially in Asian religions) is highly eroticized (Olivelle 1998: 196–197). At one and the same time, the physical human body is to be put aside, and images of it represent an idealized perfection, a practice which comes to the fore in idol worship (Laidlaw 1995: 152).

Closely related to the relegation of women ascetics to lower status are the class and caste issues inherent in late antique society. The Digambaras do not permit low caste people to be initiated into the elite of ascetics (Dundas 2002: 132). Presumably the taboo on deformed or unclean people receiving ordination, mentioned above, also had social and caste implications since higher status people would be more likely to have access to means of maintaining good personal hygiene.

Conclusion

Late antique asceticism across religious traditions evinces a concern for moderating, suppressing or transforming the physical human being in order to attain closer relations with a divine being or with an ideal state. The differences between Christian and Asian religious traditions and their interpretation of ascetic practices (which contain many similarities) are underpinned by differing understanding of the nature of reality, self, and eternity. The ideal state aimed at may be resurrection after physical death, the cessation of binding of *karma* or enlightenment. Gavin Flood distinguishes between Christian asceticism as aiming to eradicate "subjectivity through the self becoming wholly passive" and religions following the teachings of Advaia Vedānta, which teach the importance of the self "realising its non-agency." In Buddhism higher levels of self-understanding also entail an appreciation of "non-essential nature" (Flood 2004: 2). Perhaps the most divergent of the late antique manifestations is that found in Christianity, where the full humanity of Christ as a core doctrine enforces an acceptance of the full physicality of human beings as composite physical and non-physical entities; this militates against the excesses of encratism and self-loathing that might otherwise pertain. Whether drawing on sacred and revered texts or the practices of religious observers, asceticism is found in different guises throughout the geographical and temporal boundaries of late antique civilization.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Demons and Demonologies

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Introduction

Among the magical papyri of late antique Egypt are a number of formularies or handbooks that were compiled by itinerant ritual experts traveling around temple libraries, collecting and copying diverse spells in Greek, Coptic, and Demotic (Dieleman 2012). Within one such handbook of the fourth century CE, now known as the "great magical papyrus of Paris" (PGM IV), can be found a dizzying number of demons (*daimones*). In some cases their names assimilate them to deities such as the Greek *agathos daimōn* associated with good fortune and wine (PGM IV.1607); they are also invoked in epithets which place them close to, or even among, Egyptian and Greek gods of the heavens, earth, and underworld (PGM IV.1345–1379). In other cases they seem to be more closely related to humankind, as for instance corpse-*daimones* summoned from the restless dead of the underworld (PGM IV.335–350, IV.2061). More rarely, they seem to overlap with the unambiguously evil demons of Christian scripture and tradition, as for example in an exorcistic formula that drives out the "unclean *daimōn* Satan" by the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and "Jesus Chrestos" (PGM IV.1231–1238). Overall, demons perform a striking number of different roles in this collection of spells: they are summoned as powerful agents to assist or perform rituals of divination and erotic attraction (e.g. PGM IV.1–25; IV.154–285; IV.296–466; IV.1323–1330; IV.1331–1389), and they are also adjured

as malevolent possessing forces in rituals of exorcism (PGM IV.86–87; IV.1227–1264).

This single magical handbook assembled spells that drew on diverse and even contradictory notions about demons' identity and functions—notions that were themselves shaped by Greco-Roman, Egyptian, Jewish, and Christian traditions. It thus exemplifies something of the complexity and porosity of late antique demonologies. Belief in the existence of a category of intermediate spirits was one of the areas where religious communities otherwise divided by their increasingly distinctive theologies, scriptures, and rituals, arguably shared a good deal in common in Late Antiquity, and these commonalities can be ascribed in part to shared influences and the transmission of ideas. For example, the demonology encoded in Jewish apocalyptic exercised a decisive influence on the Gospels and Paul, and on patristic thinking on the topic, and a long tradition of philosophical thinking about demons informed both Christian and non-Christian (especially Neoplatonic) demonologies. Of course, it is vital to recognize that not all texts and ideas in Late Antiquity can be neatly classified as "Jewish," "Christian," or "non-Christian." The magical papyri are not the only texts to co-opt and intermingle diverse demonological traditions to syncretistic effect; this can also be seen in apocalyptic literature (Frankfurter 2013b).

Although demons can be said to have been common objects of belief among different religious communities and traditions of Late Antiquity, ideas about them were inflected in different ways and slotted into different cosmologies, theologies, and histories. Notions about, and ways of dealing with demons, were often locally isolated or distinct. This vigorous, locally differentiated plethora of ideas about demons—their origins, nature, motivations, habits, and activities—provoked numerous attempts by ritual experts, leaders, and writers to exert some kind of control through universalizing and taxonomizing the chaotic multitude of demons, often in written form (Frankfurter 2006: 13–15). This chapter aims to explore both how attitudes to and ideas about demons were shared across religious cultures, and also where religious and philosophical thinkers diverged in their accounts of the origins and activities of the demons.

I begin by surveying some of the most common ancient terms regularly translated into English as "demon," before outlining some of the problems of evidence and approach that late antique demons and demonologies pose to modern historians. In the second part, I tackle the range of late antique definitions of and stories about the origins and nature of demons, in particular their relationship to gods and humans. Such ideas clearly shaped notions of how demons operated in the contemporary world, which forms the subject of my third section on living with demons. Here, I concentrate on descriptions

of evil demons' characteristic activities—from magic, to temptation, possession and attack of humans—and techniques for countering those activities, focusing on exorcism. In the fourth and final section, I explore how late antique peoples thought "with" demons, using them to describe and patrol human behavior and group identity. In particular, I explore how demons functioned as a powerful polemical "other" that continues to haunt religious and political rhetoric. Overall, this chapter focuses on Jewish, Christian, and non-Christian ideas about demons in the period from the early third century to the sixth century, but I offer some brief concluding remarks about early Islamic ideas of *jinn*, *shayāṭīn*, and *Iblīs*.

Approaching Demons

Anglophone scholars regularly refer to the "demons" of Late Antiquity, but this English noun evokes a problematic modern "etic" category, rather than an "emic" idea, even if it is one that is drawn directly from Greek *daimōn* and Latin *daemon* (Frankfurter 2013a: 2; Kalleres 2015a: 260–263). Nonetheless, a number of late antique religious cultures and communities seem to have had overlapping ideas about a class of spiritual beings hovering somewhere between god(s) and men, and late ancient texts of different religious stripes share common and proper nouns to label such beings. *Daimōn*, *daimonion*, and *pneuma* are found in Greek texts written by Christians and non-Christians. They enter Coptic as loanwords, and have close equivalents in Latin *daemon* and *spiritus*. In Syriac, terms regularly translated as "demon" include *šyd'* and *rwḥ'*, as well as *dyw'*, a loan-word from Persian. The shared semantic field of *pneuma*, *spiritus*, and *rwḥ'* indicates some significant common ideas about the fine, "aery" material of these beings. The identity and moral qualities of these spirits was often further qualified by adjectives signaling them as "bad" and "evil" (*kakos* and *ponēros* in Greek, *malus* in Latin, *byš'* in Syriac), or "unclean" (*akathartos* in Greek, *immundus* in Latin). Others were identified by proper names and sometimes ascribed individualized biographies, such as Abraxas/Abrasax (commonly invoked in the magical papyri and on gemstones), Lilith (who features in rabbinic literature and Babylonian incantation bowls), and the chief demon, the Devil, known under many other names, such as Satan (found broadly in and beyond Judaeo-Christian tradition).

    Ancient evidence for demons presents particular problems of interpretation. Many key literary texts, from Christian sermons to Neoplatonic philosophical treatises, have been transmitted under the names of particular scholars and clerics. Although this is no guarantee of authenticity, such "authored" texts

can often be placed and dated, allowing us to read them in a particular geographical and social context, and to locate their demonologies within specific intellectual and cultural traditions. However, demonological ideas are also preserved in texts that survive only in translation, in fragments, or have been interpolated. Parts of Origen's influential treatise *On First Principles* survive only in Rufinus' Latin translation, making it hard to determine his precise views on the primal fall of the demons, or whether the doctrine of the salvation of Satan was authentically Origenian (Russell 1981: 144–148; Forsyth 1987: 369–372). To gain a full understanding of the demonology of the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry, we must rely in part on the reportage of his texts by later writers like Proclus (Johnson 2013). More diffuse still are the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, one of the richest resources of Christian demonological lore, which purport to record oral traditions and cannot be tied to a single author or a precise place and time of writing (Brakke 2006: 145–156). Rabbinic literature presents particularly complex problems of approach, for it is transmitted almost entirely in much later medieval manuscripts, and preserves oral traditions of the sages in multiple versions that were probably repeatedly redacted; even though it is possible to identify the rough location and period of activity of a rabbi to whom a particular saying is attributed, this does not allow us to conclude with certainty that the saying itself has not been altered in transmission. Furthermore, from the Middle Ages onwards, learned commentary on and study of rabbinic works has tended to suppress or marginalize its magical and demonological aspects (Ronis 2015: 96–99).

For all of our texts, the very fact of their being written identifies them as products of a small literate elite, raising questions of how far they represent broader communities of thinking on the demonic. The unrepresentative quality of written texts is especially sharp in Jewish literature of Late Antiquity, which survives only in Hebrew and Aramaic, even though Greek and Latin were clearly in common use among diaspora communities. Furthermore, although late antique texts and objects of ritual power can often be dated and situated in a relatively specific locale, identifying their cultural and cultic sources can be hard, let alone the social background and religious affiliations of the individuals who variously commissioned and performed them (Swartz 2006: 718–719). There is also an important difference between texts that mention demons almost in passing and as part of broader discussions of say, cosmology and moral evil, and those whose primary focus is the description and taxonomizing of demons. Tempting as it is to try to organize the scattered thoughts of the former into some kind of coherent system, it is important to remember that this is a creative, constructive enterprise on the part of modern scholarship, and one that is not perhaps so far away from the attempts of ancient ritual experts to number, name, and tame a realm of multiple unruly spirits.

Where textual descriptions of the variously elusive and terrifying appearance of demons were both very ancient and widespread, the development of a recognizable demonic "iconography" in the visual arts was both regionally differentiated, and comparatively late. Several frescoes in the fourth-century mithraeum at Hawarte in Syria contain small black figures, chained up and attacked by lions, which have been identified by scholars as demons related to Mithraic and even Zoroastrian traditions (Gawlikowski 2007: 353–355). Within the Christian Roman empire, it seems to have taken until the sixth century for anthropomorphic images of demons to develop, as seen for instance in a tiny winged figure sprouting above the head of the Gadarene demoniac on the Murano diptych, which probably originated from a workshop in Alexandria or Antioch; in the Rabbula Gospels, produced a little further east, the same story was illustrated with similarly homuncular *daimones*, though these ones were reddish-brown in color and had more monstrous wings and claws (Lunn-Rockliffe 2012). Such images may have drawn inspiration from classical representations of the souls of the deceased on Greek *lekythoi* as tiny winged humans. The mingling of human and animal attributes may also draw on the iconographic tradition of hybrid figures like the rooster-headed anguipede found on magical texts and gemstones (Dieleman 2012: 339). Further images of demons can be found in the humanoid figures, male and female, which feature on some of the thousands of sixth- to eighth-century incantation bowls found in Sasanian territory; these are often bound, providing a concrete illustration of the pressing and sealing of demons commanded in the accompanying text (Hunter 1998). In all cases, the identification of particular figures as "demons" tends to depend on relative contextual and textual information, creating circularities of argument.

Defining Demons

Were all demons evil, and had they always been evil? Different religious and philosophical traditions of Late Antiquity developed overlapping and sometimes competing accounts of the origins and nature of demons. A powerful set of mythic origin stories for "evil" demons developed among Jewish pseudepigraphal texts originally composed in the Second Temple Period and circulated as the visions of Enoch, which proffered a creative exegesis of the description of human wickedness before the flood in Genesis 6:1–4 (Reed 2005). Enochic literature interpreted the elusive account of the "sons of God" reproducing with "the daughters of men" in cosmic terms as about a group of "Watcher" angels who rebelled against God and fell to lustful union

with human women; these angels were said to have been banished for their sins from heaven, and their offspring became evil demons engaged in violent warfare against God's forces, and hence also against mankind (Forsyth 1987: 160–181).

This tradition owed much to contemporary Jewish anxieties about conquest by external powers, and about betrayal and division within Judaism (Pagels 1995: 35–62). However, the Enochic origin story for the demons was noticeably absent from Talmudic texts of Late Antiquity, so much so that it seems to have been actively suppressed by the Tannaitic and Amoraitic sages, before re-emerging in post-Talmudic Jewish texts (Reed 2005: 205–213; Rosen-Zvi 2011: 53). Indeed, rabbinic discussion of the origins of demons is relatively scanty. For example, while the creation of demons on the Sabbath is mentioned—suggesting that the demons were created as such at the very beginning of time, rather than falling into the status of demons from a higher category of being through some transgression—this episode features primarily as an explanation for their bodiless state in the present, rather than as a fully fledged etiology (*Genesis Rabbah* 7.5). Furthermore, Jewish demons were not always thoroughly evil and hostile, but were sometimes more ambiguous in their behavior and functions (Frankfurter 2011: 127).

Enochic stories about demons as fallen angels may have fallen out of favor among sages in the Talmudic period, but they circulated and spread among Christian exegetes like Justin Martyr from the second century onwards, before being progressively eroded in the third to fifth centuries (Reed 2005: 160–232). In this period, Christians began to espouse another demonic origin story that also posited a primal fall, but this time of Satan and his armies, earlier in creation, whether through pride before the creation of Adam, or in a fit of envy after and about the creation of man (Lunn-Rockliffe 2013). This account emphasized that no creature was created evil, and preserved the essential goodness of creation and its Creator, although theologians were divided about whether or not the demons would ever be forgiven and saved (Ludlow 2012: 183–185). Of course, notions of primal rebellion against the divine and of subsequent punitive fall on the part of spiritual creatures were older and more culturally diffuse than the Enochic or "Adam" books; lineaments of it can also be identified in a range of classical and ancient Near Eastern combat myths (Forsyth 1987).

The stories about the watchers in Enochic literature assumed a "dualist" cosmology, dividing the contemporary world on the lines of an ancient division between the sons of wickedness and darkness on the one hand, and the angels of light on the other hand. According to this worldview, all demons were evil. By contrast, the *daimōn* encountered by late antique readers in classical Greek

philosophical and literary texts was a rather more ambiguous figure. Plato famously described Eros as "a great *daimōn*," an intermediate being that, like every *daimonion*, was "between god and mortal" (*Symposium* 202d13–e1), shuttling prayers, ordinances, and sacrifices between gods and men; elsewhere, he embedded *daimones* in a hierarchical vision of the cosmos (*Timaeus* 39e–40e). The Neoplatonist Porphyry provided an account of a theological hierarchy in which there existed both good demons (who operated as messengers between gods and humans, and who at their best were themselves ambiguously "divine"), and bad demons who pursued their own appetites and sought to corrupt humans through activities like blood sacrifice (Johnson 2013: 72–101).

According to Porphyry's taxonomy, all demons had descended from the world-soul, and lived in the sphere below the moon in "soul-vehicles" of *pneuma*, a peculiar body which was not visible but nonetheless central to their existence. Demons who could maintain a rational relationship over their soul-vehicle were good, and continued to act without self-interest as intermediaries between gods and humans. Bad demons, by contrast, had lost control over their soul-vehicles, and were driven into passions and appetites by them, particularly to the desire for food and sex; the former, in particular, impelled these demons to seek the fumigations of animal sacrifice. Furthermore, their moral lapse was not contained, for they spread evil among humans, both in the form of natural disasters, and in attempts to inflame humans' appetites. According to Proclus, Porphyry's demonology was derivative of his predecessors Numenius and Origen, whether the Christian Origen or another, and his characterization of sacrifice as feeding demons certainly chimes with Christian anti-pagan polemic (Marx-Wolf 2010).

Porphyry and Origen agreed that demons had very thin bodies, made of *pneuma*, a fine aery stuff; in this respect, demons resembled pneumatic human soul-vehicles (Smith 2008: 483–490; Smith 2012: 533–538). Solidarity between human and demonic existence was also suggested by the long-established tradition, visible in Hesiod and Stoic writings, as well as in later Platonist works, that identified demons with the souls of the dead (Algra 2011: 82–83). However, this close connection between demons and the dead had valency well beyond the realm of philosophical discussion. In Late Antiquity, corpse-demons regularly appear in the Greek magical papyri and other texts of ritual power: they were summoned from among those violently killed, such as gladiators, and the untimely dead, such as unmarried girls, to assist in rituals ranging from divination to erotic enchantment (Nemeth 2013). The fact that the Christian bishop John Chrysostom attacked the "popular" belief that the souls of the dead became *daimones* suggests that this view was actually widespread among his congregation (John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew* 28.3).

Another understanding of demons that put them into yet more intimate proximity with humans was as indwelling spirits. The notion of the "internal demon" had an ancient philosophical pedigree in Socrates' *daimōn* and in Stoic thought (Timotin 2012: 52–61; Algra 2011: 77–83). Comparable ideas can be discerned in certain strands of late antique Christian and Jewish tradition, although the demons in these cases are emphatically evil. A group of ascetically minded Christians from the Syriac speaking world dubbed "Messalians" ("the praying ones") by their opponents, were reported to believe that a demon was immediately and substantially joined to each person at birth, and that baptism could not rid humans of these demons, which could only be exorcized by constant enthusiastic (in the sense of "spirit-infused") prayer (Dehandschutter 2011). Rabbinic thought evinces a comparable idea in *yetzer hara*, "the evil inclination" this was long read by scholars in purely psychological terms as the lower parts of the human psyche, but can also be seen in more demonic terms as a "sophisticated antinomian enticer" dwelling inside the human heart (Rosen-Zvi 2011: 1–8): R. Joshua b. Levi, explaining that Prov. 16:7 referred to the "evil *yetzer*," described how "it grows with man from his youth until his old age and yet if he can, (the *yetzer*) strikes him down even in his seventies or eighties" (*Genesis Rabbah* 54.1). However, we must be careful not to overexaggerate apparent resemblances between Jewish and Christian ideas: rabbinic homilies make it clear that the *yetzer hara* was not a consequence of Adamic sin and fall, but was rather part of God's original creation (Rosen-Zvi 2011: 65–74), whereas the Messalians apparently linked the phenomenon of a demon indwelling in each human to the fall of Adam (Dehandschutter 2011: 188).

Living with Demons

Late antique ideas about the origins of demons were inextricably connected to thinking about how they operated in the here-and-now, and about the kind of threat they posed to the humans around and among whom they lived. Evil demons, whether created as such or fallen to this state, were regularly portrayed as concentrating their efforts on leading and inspiring humans to sin. Their motivations were presented as both pathetic—demons wanted company for their evil, being sociable creatures—and malevolent—demons could not bear for man to live virtuously or achieve salvation. The extent to which demons were thought to be implacably hostile and powerful differs between and within different intellectual and religious traditions, but there are also some striking resemblances on topics such as the intimate relationship between demons and human evil thoughts, suggesting that ideas were

being communicated across community boundaries, or that they shared a common source or inspiration—or both.

Manuals and treatises from different traditions stressed that demons were numerous and ubiquitous. Rabbinic sayings stress their remarkable numbers:

> Abba Benjamin says, If the eye had the power to see them, no creature could endure the demons. Abaye says: They are more numerous than we are and they surround us like the ridge round a field. R. Huna says: Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand. (*BT Berakoth* 6a)

Christian hagiographers similarly disclose the multiplicity of demons harassing holy men in "multitudes," "armies," and "crowds" (Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 8.2, 23.3, 28.8; Sulpicius Severus, *Life of Saint Martin* 22). However, despite their large numbers and immanence, demons were all but invisible in their own "thin" pneumatic bodies (as opposed to in illusory disguises). Their fine material constitution also made it easier for thousands of them to fit into tight spaces, as emphasized in some exegetical accounts of the Gospel story of the Legion demon(s) (Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 5.7–8). Demons in rabbinic literature were even more emphatically disembodied, as seen in sayings which attribute their lack of bodies to their being created on the Sabbath, and which explain the fact that they do not cast a shadow by their very incorporeality (*BT Gittin* 66a).

Demons' bodily constitutions determined their habits and behaviors. For Porphyry, as for Origen, the subtle bodies of evil demons were sustained by the smoke and fumes of animal sacrifice, rendering such rituals impure and dangerous to all, including humans (Marx-Wolf 2016: 13–37; Johnson 2013: 85–96). Porphyry and the anonymous author of the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* both argued that demons actually envied humans their thicker bodies which allowed them to consume a more solid kind of food, and that it was in part their greed to sample more substantial fare that motivated them to possess human bodies (Marx-Wolf 2016: 20–21). Several anecdotes commented on the strange distention of the demoniac's appetite effected by his indwelling demon (Paulinus, *Carm.* 26.309–323; Palladius, *Lausiac History* 17.11), perhaps explaining why fasting could be promoted as an effective exorcistic device: it starved the possessing demon out of its human host (Sorensen 2002: 218–219).

As well as allowing them to fit into tight spaces, demons' thin bodies also allowed them to move extremely quickly, and thus to operate particular kinds of magic: prophecy and divination. Such practices were characterized with

varying degrees of positivity. Augustine, like other Christian leaders, denounced the trickery and evil of demonic magic (Augustine, *Divin. daem.* 3–6). By contrast, the Babylonian Talmud regulated when demons could be consulted, implying that this was, albeit at restricted times, licit (*BT Sanhedrin* 101a). Perhaps connected to their lack of a firm body, rabbinic demons were presented as skilled shape-shifters, taking on human or bestial disguises (Hirsch *et al.* 1903: 516–517). Christian texts contain many descriptions of the Devil and his demons appearing in disguise, for example successively as a woman, black boy, and assorted wild animals to Antony (Brakke 2006: 23–47). These disguises reflected both the widespread association between dangerous human "others" (such as seductive women) and the demonic realm, and the influence of specific exegetical traditions (such as Satan possessing or taking on the guise of a serpent in Eden).

The power of the illusory disguises was that it allowed demons to trick humans into committing sins. However, they could also achieve this without even taking on a visible appearance, by infiltrating human minds unseen to instigate or encourage wicked thoughts and actions. Augustine deployed and transformed Stoic models of the genesis of the emotions or passions in an explanation of how demons could infiltrate human thoughts through imaginary impressions, to persuade them to sin (Augustine, *Divin. daem.* 3.7 and 5.9); elsewhere, he attributed a version of this demonic dynamic of temptation—through mixing with human thoughts—to a learned pagan, Fonteius of Carthage (*Div. qu.*, *Question* 12). The association of demons with a sequence of eight wicked thoughts was systematically catalogued by Evagrius, who demonized gluttony as the first and worst demonic vice, leading on to fornication (Brakke 2006: 56–59); this reminds us of the close association between demons, food, and sex found in Porphyry and Origen (Marx-Wolf 2010: 224).

Possession was perhaps the most dramatic way in which evil demons interacted with humans. The phenomena of divine and demonic possession were ancient and widespread in the pre-Christian Mediterranean and Near East (Sorensen 2002), but demonic possession acquired intense soteriological significance in Christian communities of Late Antiquity. Stories about possession, sometimes resolved by successful exorcism and sometimes not, were especially prominent in saints' lives, ecclesiastical histories, and ascetic literature, where they often serve to highlight saintly virtues and ordinary human vices. Responsibility for demonic possession is correspondingly variable: for example, in one of his birthday *Carmina* for Felix, Paulinus explained that the saint punitively prolonged episodes of possession in people who deserved it (Paulinus, *Carm.* 23.51–54); by contrast, Prudentius describes a demoniac, foaming at the mouth and rolling his eyes, who is to be cleansed of sins "which are not his own" (Prudentius, *Peristeph.* 100–102).

Performances of exorcism, and in turn the dissemination of stories about such performances were powerful ways of promoting the holiness and spiritual authority of the exorcist, whether an urban bishop or desert-dwelling ascetic (Grey 2005; Kalleres 2015b). The ritual of exorcism had an important place in ecclesiastical life, particularly in the days leading up to, and during the climactic ceremony of baptism itself (Kelly 1985). Demoniacs flocked to sites made holy by the relics of saints like Felix at Nola, or Gervasius and Protasius at Milan (Kalleres 2015b: 226–235). Exorcisms were also performed outside church, whether by bishops and holy men or by more marginal figures, such as the "drunken hags with amulets" and Jewish healers stigmatized by John Chrysostom (Kalleres 2015b: 70–73). Chrysostom's criticisms of Christians seeking relief through Jewish magic, as well as the earlier claim that non-Christians and Jews used the names of the Christian God in their exorcisms (Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.6; 4.33) suggest that there was, in practice, a good deal of exchange and interaction between religious traditions and communities, and that clients seeking ritual expertise were not necessarily concerned that it cohere with a single religious identity. Indeed, as we can see from the "insider" evidence of the magical papyri, spells aimed at exorcizing or taming demons tended toward the all-encompassing: demons were adjured by the names, epithets, and *historiolae* of multiple powerful god(s), and the demons themselves were identified in long lists of names (Sorensen 2002: 120, 181–182). Anti-demonic rituals performed as part of Christian liturgy, as well as those effected outside church in more "private" contexts, were not just "talking cures", they also involved ritualized actions such as spitting, blowing, and breathing of the baptismal candidate (Kelly 1985) and fumigation (Faraone 2011: 16–23). Such activities dramatized the otherwise invisible conflict with the demons. Of course, exorcism itself offered more than just relief from bodily and psychic affliction: in social terms, it also allowed for the restoration of the demoniac into her community (Brown 1970; Grey 2005).

Possession and exorcism are much less visible in rabbinic literature, despite the plethora of evidence that Jesus and his Jewish followers were skilled in exorcism (Sorensen 2002: 118–167), and notwithstanding famous earlier descriptions of apparently Jewish exorcists and the iconic status of Solomon and Moses in Greco-Roman culture as exorcists (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.42–49; Lucian, *Lover of Lies* 16; Swartz 2006: 699–700). Instead, demons in rabbinic texts are troublesome creatures who harass and discombobulate humans but rarely possess them. However, the material evidence of dozens of metal amulets inscribed in Aramaic and Hebrew, which exorcize and adjure demons, and thousands of Babylonian incantation bowls, which regularly refer to the need to ward off or expel demons, suggest that demons continued to pose a

threat in Jewish communities (Bohak 2008: 370–376), and Jews were strongly associated with wonder-working in the non-Jewish world, whether through the transmission of historical anti-demonic lore such as the *Testament of Solomon*, or in accusations made against Jewish magicians by Christians like John Chrysostom.

As well as tempting humans by infiltrating their thoughts, and taking them over by possessing them entire, demons were also sometimes able to attack and afflict human bodies in other tangible ways. The connection between demons and disease was commonly made (Dieleman 2012: 347–348; Ludlow 2012: 181–182). In texts and objects of ritual power, possession was sometimes construed as a kind of illness, and that illness, or even trouble-some human organs like the womb, could take on a demonic dimension (Faraone 2011). Jewish amulets and incantation bowls regularly list demons and disease together (Swartz 2006: 709–713). As well as operating through disease, on some occasions demons were able to attack human bodies physi-cally, as famously against Antony in the desert, although here the demons seem to oscillate between having the power to assault and not; here, the scriptural model of Satan against Job was key, since the Devil could only attack his targets on license from God (Brakke 2006: 45–47). Demons were held responsible not just for dramatic assaults, but also for more mundane difficulties. A common concern of Jewish and Christian teachers was the tendency of demons to distract those studying. Evagrius described the sensa-tion, familiar to monks yawning over their books, of an icy brush on the eyelids by a demon (Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 9), and the rabbis ascribed fatigue in the knees, bruising of the feet, and even the wearing out of scholars' clothes, to the activity of demons (*BT Berakoth* 6a).

Thinking with Demons

Demons have always been good to "think with" (Clark 1997). Reflecting about the history and place of demons in a hierarchy of created beings allowed philosophers, teachers, bishops, and magicians to reflect on and exert control over their own worlds (Frankfurter 2006; Kalleres 2015b). One of the most famous demonological texts in circulation in Late Antiquity, the *Testament of Solomon*, classified demons by numerous features such as their names, origins, appearances, and preferred pastimes (Swartz 2006: 700). This text contains both Christian elements and material, which can be paralleled in the Talmud, exemplifying the hybrid quality of much anti-demonic lore (Bohak 2008, 179–182). Furthermore, although the demons listed therein reveal their various hostile activities against humans, they are

subjected by Solomon to his control and put to work building the Temple, testifying to the immense power of the ritual expert with proper knowledge, and to the essential ambiguity of demons, which could be turned from malign to benign purposes (Frankfurter 2011: 127). Vivid examples of this "convertibility" of demons can be found in stories of saints who cast demons into (rather than out of) deserving sinners (Kalleres 2012). Rabbis also had the power to curse and call down the evil eye, but this did not regularly involve the co-option of demons (Neusner 1969: 351–352).

Describing the habits and habitats of demons was a powerful way of dividing and classifying the world. For example, demons were thought to favor particular kinds of landscape and building, and the description of these preferences operated as a way of demarcating dangerous or sinful demonic space. Rabbinic literature inveighs against the dangers of (among other things) roofs, gutters, and privies (Broydé *et al.* 2003: 516). The fact that incantation bowls were buried under domestic thresholds suggests that ordinary houses were vulnerable to demonic attack; it is even possible that these bowls were deposited upside down in order to act as a demon-trap (Bohak 2008: 183–193; Swartz 2006: 711–712). Christians regularly identified demons as haunting urban buildings of secular and sinful entertainment like theaters (Webb 2008: 197–216), as well as being drawn to marginal wild spaces of uncultivated or abandoned land—something that endures to the present (Stewart 1991: 164–171). Christians also argued that pagan temples and statues were particular haunts of the demons (Augustine, *City of God* 8.24), drawing on the notion that the pagan gods were in fact demons fueled by the noxious fumes of blood sacrifice. This idea was derived in turn from scripture, from the "daimonization" of the gods of the gentiles in the Septuagint (Psalm 96:5), and from Paul's re-deployment of such tropes (1 Corinthians 10:20). Ascetic literature, hagiography, and historiography abound in vivid episodes demonstrating the demonic quality of pagan shrines (Wiśniewski 2015); for example, the destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 395 was said to have been initially resisted by a "black demon," which fled only after the site was doused in holy water (Theodoret, *HE* 5.21).

The "demonization" of political and religious enemies was a powerful polemical tool in late antique Christian discourse: accusing one's opponents of being under the influence of evil demons, or worshippers of demons, served to expand their threat beyond the earthly to the spiritual plane (Pagels 1995). Pagans, heretics, and Jews were regularly accused of being the servants or instruments of demons and of Satan himself, bringing the apocalyptic vision of cosmic conflict between forces of good and evil into the earthly present (Lunn-Rockliffe 2015). Such accusations fueled a powerful and sometimes violent Christian anti-Judaism, visible for example in John

Chrysostom's demonization of the synagogue and Jewish rituals and life at Antioch (Kalleres 2015b: 60–70). Beyond the ecclesiastical sphere, in the domain of secular political invective, orators deployed similar techniques of associating one's opponents with evil supernatural creatures, with for example Claudian denouncing Rufinus as a creature spurred on by the monsters of hell, and Themistius casting Procopius in similar terms (Cameron 1993: 278–281).

If humans could be smeared as demonic instruments, then the demons themselves were regularly assimilated with earthly human "others," particularly "barbarians." In ascetic literature from Egypt, the specification that particular demons appeared as "Ethiopians" or with "black skin," was underpinned by the metaphorical and moral identification of darkness with sin, and also helped to explain how holy men could discern diabolical presence (Brakke 2006: 157–181). Demonic "otherness" was flagged through linguistic, as well as visual markers. In the Syriac speaking world, Paul the anchorite reported being harassed by demonic apparitions of Huns on horseback, shouting in their own language (John of Ephesus, *Life of Paul the Anchorite*), and in Britain the holy man Guthlac was able to identify demonic armies marauding the Lincolnshire fens as British by their sibilant speech patterns (Felix, *Life of Guthlac* 34). The idea that demons had natural affinities with particular territories is also visible in the *Testament of Solomon*; Asmodeus, for example, confessed himself to wander Assyria because of his fondness for a fish found in rivers in that region.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illuminate some of the particularities of local demonological traditions, but also to underline the kinds of ideas and practices that were shared across cultural and religious boundaries. It has stopped short of the Arab conquests and Islamic ideas about demons, but these seem to have been in considerable continuity with the spirits of pre-Islamic Arabia (Waardenburg 2002: 23–44; Henninger 2004: 27–43). The *jinn* were ambiguously divine, liminal creatures who favored desolate places and could shape-shift into the forms of animals at will; they were also mischievous creatures that co-habited with, tempted, and sabotaged humans (Al-Azmeh 2014: 205–212; Bodman 2011: 126–134). Here, it is also possible to discern connections with Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian traditions about demons and the Devil. *Jinn* were also known as *shayāṭīn*, drawing on Greek *satanas*, which was in turn a transliteration of Hebrew *satan*. Furthermore, a singular demonic enemy of Adam, and then mankind, appears in the Qur'ān

under the names of Iblīs and Al-Shayṭān in narratives, which owe something to the Adamic fall legend of Judaeo-Christian tradition (Awn 1983: 18–44; Bodman 2011).

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Religion, Medicine, and Health

Heidi Marx

Introduction

This chapter explores a number of the many intersections between religion, medicine, and health in Late Antiquity. It does so by both focusing on continuities with earlier periods and by highlighting the ways in which religious, cultural, and social change in the late Roman Mediterranean affected the profession of medicine, approaches to healing, and notions of sickness and health.

Health and healing in Antiquity were, to a significant extent, within the purview of religious ritual and practice, certainly when compared with the modern world. This was the case whether one sought out the help of a local midwife, a wandering healer, or the assistance of a god or goddess in a large temple complex such as the Asclepion at Epidauros or Pergamum. Professional doctors were just one health care option among many others. Hence, it is important to keep in mind that individuals in Antiquity seeking respite from illness and suffering or just seeking continued health, fertility, and well-being, had many options available to them, and many of these were what we might call religious. Although the range of options remained as rich in Late Antiquity as ever, some of them were affected and transformed by the Christianization of the Roman empire, the development of Rabbinic Judaism, and the waning of traditional forms of ancient polytheism.

Methodological Considerations

Before proceeding with a consideration of specific topics, a few points need to be made regarding our approach to the subject matter. The main point to keep in mind is that many of the terms under discussion in this chapter, both general terms such as health, the body, gender, disease, and specific illnesses and bodily conditions, were constructed very differently in Antiquity than they are today. For instance, where we tend to think of disease on the model of germ theory and health in terms of the effective functioning of our immune system, illness was conceived on at least two possible models in Antiquity. The first model, which we can refer to as the "medical model," was based on an understanding of health as balance (Martin 1995: 139–162). The predominant example of this model focused on a balance between the four bodily humors (blood, phlegm, yellow, and black bile) and their attendant properties (hot, cold, wet, and dry). Disease was the result of humoral imbalance arising from specific interactions between the body and its unique "temperament" and what Aristotle called the "non-naturals" or what we would likely call environmental factors and lifestyle choices such as food, sex, drink, sleep, weather, air quality, and so forth. The other competing "non-medical" model, what some scholars refer to as the "invasion model" or "pollution model," tends to understand disease as the result of spiritual forces in the cosmos oppressing or possessing the individual (Martin 1995: 139–162). The spirits in question were either understood to be responsible for meting out punishment for impiety or immoral behavior or they were characterized by capriciousness and ambivalence, and the chance that one might come under their sway or cross their path was part and parcel of living in a "world full of gods," a cosmos chock full of spirits (Frankfurter 2006: 13–15). Although philosophers and medical writers, along with other elite intellectuals, may have debated over the ontological and moral status of various sub- and supra-lunary spirits, very few held the view that humans were unaffected by the cosmic activities and interventions of these beings (Marx 2016: 1–8). In other words, even those ancient thinkers who rejected the "invasion" or "pollution" model of disease were not atheistic, and at times engaged in theological reflection within their medical writings (see, for instance, the Hippocratic work, *On the Sacred Disease*) (Marx-Wolf 2015: 80–98). Given both of these ancient models of disease, the futility and anachronism of retrospective diagnosis, that is, the search for modern disease in earlier epochs, also becomes clear (Laes *et al.* 2013: 1–15). Terms such as leprosy, cancer, blindness, virginity, even pregnancy all meant something very different in Antiquity than they do today (Marx-Wolf and Upson-Saia 2015: 266–268). Furthermore, even if we were able to span the centuries

and identify certain ancient conditions with modern diseases or disabilities, the lived experience of any of these would have been importantly different from our own based on a wide range of factors from life expectancy, general living and work conditions, systems of health care, systems of meaning, and so forth. Hence, this chapter will take an emic approach to its subject matter and will attempt to stay as close as possible to ancient understandings of health, the body, gender, disease, and disability.

It is also important to emphasize that the kinds of disciplinary boundaries we are accustomed to using today were far more permeable and fluid in Antiquity. This is especially the case when we look at the intersections between what we would identify as medicine, natural science, philosophy, and theology or religion. The *Timaeus* of Plato is a revealing example. In it, Plato not only discusses issues of cosmology and cosmogony, he also outlines a tripartite human anthropology that maps onto the human body and its organs and systems of digestion, emotion, and ratiocination. It is also a theological work in so far as he explains the differences between the role of the highest god in the genesis of the cosmos and the role of the demiurgic creator and other lesser gods. We find a similar kind of disciplinary overlap in a medical treatise by the third-century student of Plotinus, Porphyry of Tyre, *To Gaurus on the Ensoulment of Embryos*. In this work, he argues that the embryo must be a plant prior to birth, because only once its body is completely formed can it call down to it the appropriate sort of soul from the astral swirl of the supra-lunary cosmic realms (Wilberding 2011; Marx-Wolf 2015). In other words, Porphyry combines philosophical, embryological, and astrological thinking in a manner that modern readers tend to find rather foreign. Another late ancient example illustrates the way in which this disciplinary ambiguity could also intersect with religious praxis. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius relates information about a sect of Christians at Rome called the Theodotians, who denied the divinity of Jesus, and admired the philosophy of Aristotle and Theophrastus, the geometry of Euclid, and the philosophico-medical ideas of Galen, who was likely their contemporary (Secord 2017). If this account is in any way true, it indicates that it was not only non-Christian polytheists who tended to see salvific wisdom and knowledge as transcending boundaries between disciplines, Christians themselves also found this hybrid approach useful and attractive. Finally, many Patristic writers invoked medical metaphor and imagery to talk about the care of the soul and spiritual healing and salvation. Some of these theologians went even further to address sermons and letters on topics that highlight the inseparability of psychic and physical health. The works of John Chrysostom are a good example. As Wendy Mayer has argued, his attempts to take responsibility for the total care—spiritual, psychological, and physical—of his congregants and correspondents can be seen to follow in the

lineage of Galen, who also presented himself as a master diagnostician and healer of both physical illness and psychic distress (Mayer 2015b). Galen relates stories of detecting and curing love sickness, melancholy, and excessive anger, to name but a few conditions (Mattern 2008: 132–136). All of these examples serve to highlight the difficulty in ancient studies of drawing clear boundaries between medicine and other disciplines.

Overlapping Systems of Health Care and the Medical Market Place in Classical Antiquity

In order to understand some of the most important changes and trends in Late Antiquity with regards to religion, health, and medicine, it is necessary to talk briefly about these subjects in earlier epochs. How did people pursue health, deal with illness and disease, and what was the relationship between healing, religion, and medicine? If one were to attempt a general description of healing options and health care systems in the classical Greek and Roman worlds, one would be forced to contend with a most unwieldy diversity of personnel and treatment alternatives (Nutton 1995). When one was sick, one could enlist the services of a doctor, a surgeon, a midwife, a pharmacist, a "root cutter," or a healer, whether local or itinerant, working in what might be called a shamanistic mode. Alternately or in conjunction with the care of these professionals, one could also travel to or be taken to the shrine of a deity known for his or her expertise in healing, whether a shrine close to home or far away depending on one's resources. If one wanted to promote optimal health instead of pursuing healing for an existing condition, one could also enlist the expertise of a range of other health care professionals such as massage therapists and sports trainers (Bond 2015). In light of all of these options, it is important to keep in mind both the considerable overlap between medical and miraculous (what some scholars call "magical") forms of healing and the multiple paths professionals could and did take in order to establish their expertise. For instance, one could become a doctor by undergoing formal schooling in medicine, by spending time as an apprentice to another physician (often a family member), or simply by hanging up one's shingle and trying to build a reputation, something all doctors needed to do no matter their training. This was done, for the most part, by endeavoring to treat more elite clients. Some of these treatments would have been quite public given that, according to many literary depictions, the sick rooms of wealthy patients would have been crowded by multiple competing physicians, their students, friends of the client, and members of the household, all of whom could be counted on to "spread the word" for better or worse

(Nutton 1995; Mattern 1999). Some doctors also sought to build their reputations on the basis of public anatomical performances of dissections or vivisections of animals, and by publishing works of medicine (Gleason 2009; Mattern 1999). In general, as Nutton notes, the social status of doctors "depended to a large extent on the community in which they practiced, but for the most part, doctors associated, or were presumed to associate, with craftsmen of moderate wealth and were rarely part of the local elite" (1995).

As mentioned earlier, in addition to consulting with doctors, the sick and suffering would seek the help of gods and goddesses by making vows to them. Many of these individuals would incubate in the temple precinct of the deity in the hopes of either receiving a cure while asleep or a dream in which the god or goddess would reveal a therapeutic program for attaining a cure (Cilliers and Retief 2013). Some temples, such as the Asclepion at Epidaurus, kept records of the cures performed by the god or goddess (LiDonnici 1995). Once cured, the individual would also dedicate a votive offering to the god in thanks for healing. The nature of this votive depended on the means of the patient, and could be as simple as a terracotta representation of the affected body part and as elaborate as a marble statue with an inscription honoring the god. Any god could function as a healing deity, however, in the fifth century BCE, Asclepius gained popularity as the healing god *par excellence* (Wickkiser 2008: 1–9). Around the same time, physicians began to worship him in many places around the Mediterranean as the patron deity of medical professionals, and doctors would leave medical instruments and other dedications in the temple as evidence of their vows relating to a flourishing practice, and so forth (Nutton 2004: 103–114). There were even medical contests conducted in his honor at Ephesus (Nutton 1995: 7–8). Hence, although one might think that doctors and priests of healing cults found themselves in direct competition for the same set of "patients," inscriptional and textual evidence points to the fact that doctors identified strongly with the worship of Asclepius. Nutton even goes so far as to hypothesize that the rise of the Asclepius cult and the development of professional medicine in part through the canonization of the Hippocratic corpus were both part of a larger movement to discredit and marginalize what he calls "magical" alternatives, the ad hoc, shamanistic healing practitioners present in every urban center in the ancient Greek world (Nutton 2004: 113–114).

Despite these efforts to marginalize other more ad hoc healers who may have identified the cause of illness and suffering with pollution and divine disfavor, there is evidence that such professionals continued to exist and operate on the medical marketplace. The shamanic or ritual healer may be more difficult to trace in either literary or archeological sources, however, we do have access to the nature and ubiquity of their services in the form of

amulets and books of healing spells, especially from Egypt in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Betz 1996). Furthermore, a figure such as Jesus Christ was recognizable to his first-century contemporaries precisely because he was not the only itinerant healer and exorcist performing miracles in Roman Palestine or the larger Roman empire at the time.

As we will see, all three categories of healing expertise (medical, divine, and shamanic/ad hoc/"magical") persist in the Christian Mediterranean, albeit with some important changes in terms of the kinds of sacred figures invoked and the personnel who perform certain ritual healing practices. For instance, the traditional Greco-Roman healing gods will give way to martyrs, as well as other holy men and women, both living and dead (Brown 1981). And Christian priests and monks will, on occasion, take over the practice of the amulet maker (Mazza 2007).

The Changing Status of Doctors and the Medical Profession in Late Antiquity

Although, as noted, the status of doctors in Antiquity tended to be on a par with what Nutton calls "craftsmen of moderate wealth," there is evidence that their fortunes and social standing increased in Late Antiquity (Jones 2009: 252–260; Blockley 1980). This change does not seem to be the direct result of the religious changes occurring during this period. However, as we will see later, Christianity emphasized the care of the sick and disabled, especially among the poor, as part of its larger commitment to charity. This shift in attitude toward society's less fortunate classes may have contributed to a greater value being placed on the healing work of physicians more generally. Another contributing factor may have been the development of a canon of medical works, mainly Hippocratic and Galenic, in the medical school at Alexandria (Andorlini 2007; Duffy 1984; Nutton 2007). This canon was then exported to other centers of medical learning, such as Ravenna. Given that many of these works address themselves to issues of professionalization and self-definition, doctors trained in these schools may have had a clearer guide to their own self-fashioning as experts (Marx-Wolf 2017). In other words, they may have been better equipped to project a clearer and more convincing professional identity on a par with other experts such as orators, but also bishops who likewise studied a canon and commented on it as part of their engagement with society more generally. This is an area where more scholarly work needs to be done. Part of the reason why it has not yet been done is likely due to the fact that many historians of medicine have tended to see Late Antiquity as a period of decline or, at the very least, stasis.

This estimation of the period is based, in part, on the fact that few medical writers in this period were engaged in producing new and completely original work arising from their own research, experiments, and practice. Nutton has described this period as one in which a "near monolithic" Galenism predominated (Nutton 2004: 292). And other scholars have noted the preference for digests, handbooks, and commentaries on earlier medical works (van der Eijk 2010). Only recently have historians begun to look at this literature on its own terms in order to discover the ways in which individual commentators and handbook writers innovatively engaged with earlier material (van der Eijk 2010). Furthermore, scholars are also considering the ways in which medical knowledge is evidenced more broadly across genres in this period, for instance, in the writings of Patristic authors. There is no doubt that attitudes to medical knowledge and what we might call research changed in Late Antiquity, but historians are now beginning both to see many of these changes as continuous with certain trends that began in earlier periods and to take note of the entrepreneurial and creative ways in which late ancient authors engaged with existing medical knowledge and deployed it in new and exciting ways. One example of the aforementioned continuity between, for instance, the time of Galen and Late Antiquity can be seen in the impulse to order and master all medical knowledge by creating a canon of writings and digests or handbooks. This trend is anticipated in the efforts of Galen to order his own medical corpus and the opinions of other theorists in a number of his works (Flemming 2007; König 2009).

The Relationship of Christianity and Judaism to the Medical Profession and "Secular" Medical Knowledge in General

Late Antiquity was a time of considerable religious and cultural change. In general, it was a period when traditional polytheisms waned and Christianity became the religion of the Roman empire. It was also a time when Jews were forced, as a result of the destruction of their temple and the transformation of Jerusalem into a Roman capital, to develop new ways of constituting a communal religious identity and enacting their devotion to their god. The main form that developed to answer the challenges of the late first century CE was Rabbinic Judaism.

The question we need to address in general, then, is how did these religious developments impact medicine, health care, and conceptions of health and illness in Late Antiquity? Our approach to this line of inquiry will be necessarily complex. One of the ways in which scholars have approached it is

by asking about whether or not changing attitudes to the body and the development of ascetic practices and institutions impacted late ancient views of the value of medicine for healing the body, or whether Christians continued to make use of the services of professional physicians when they fell ill. Some scholars have argued, on the basis of a handful of texts, that Christians preferred what Ferngren has called "religious" healing over "healing by natural means," that is, medical healing (Ferngren 2009: 13–41). As we have already noted, this juxtaposition is itself somewhat problematic, because there existed significant overlap or continuity between religion and medicine in Antiquity. But scholars have tended to read writers such as Tatian, who rejected the use of drugs (pharmaka) "which he believed allowed demons to gain entry to the body" (Ferngren 2009: 27–28), as representative of a much larger cross-section of Christian attitudes toward medicine for which we, in fact, have little evidence. Some scholars also point to the ways in which certain hermits and ascetics treated their bodies, rejecting basic hygiene, engaging in extreme fasting and sleep deprivation, and even more radical practices that led to severe illness, including necrotic infection and gangrene, as evidence of Christian rejection of ancient Greco-Roman medico-scientific definitions of health as balance. According to Owsei Temkin, "[t]he ascetics' diverse attitudes toward their own diseases corresponded to the ambiguous attitudes within Judaism and Christianity to disease and secular treatment" (Temkin 1991: 156).

This assumption, namely that Christianity radically changed everyday attitudes about the value of medicine in alleviating human suffering, has been convincingly challenged by Gary B. Ferngren. He has argued rather vociferously that despite certain negative views among Christian writers concerning medicine and its practitioners, the majority of Christians tended to understand illness in what he calls "naturalistic terms" thereby rejecting the belief that "ordinary disease was caused by demons and that healing was affected by exorcism" and that most Christians maintained accepting and positive attitudes to medicine and physicians, continuing to employ the latter's services in cases of illness (Ferngren 2009: 2). Further, he argues that religious healing in the context of early Christian veneration of martyrs and other saints, both living and dead, was primarily a phenomenon of the fourth century and later (Ferngren 2009: 76–85). This is a topic we will need to turn to later in this chapter. Thus, we see that Christians generally continued to value medicine as a remedy for illness and suffering and as a path to continued health and well-being.

A similar situation developed in the case of Rabbinic Judaism. For instance, there is little evidence that Jewish leaders were critical of medicine and doctors, nor did they seek to create alternative health care systems or healing

options. Hence, in general, both the Christianization of large portions of the Roman population and the development of Rabbinic Judaism seem not to have negatively impacted the practice of medicine and its standing as a profession in Late Antiquity. Its cultural value was neither challenged nor diminished in any significant way. Furthermore, many of the aforementioned Patristic writers who expressed suspicion or criticism of medicine or doctors were themselves steeped in the language and theoretical insights of ancient medicine. This is likely because many of these writers had been immersed in the philosophy and natural science of their broader context as a result of ancient systems of education. The Second Sophistic ushered in a new intellectual ethos that tended to emphasize polymathy, a polymathy that is evidenced in the works of individuals such as Galen, Plutarch, and Apuleius, but which did not abate in subsequent generations.

We see this sort of polymathy evidenced in the works of theologians such as Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Jerome, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, and many others. For instance, both Origen and Clement seem to have been aware of even obscure medical models, which they invoke in the course of making theological arguments (Lavalle 2015; Somos 2017). Engagement with medical ideas surfaces in particular in theological debates about Christian ritual, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Mary's virginity, and bodily resurrection (Kelto Lillis 2016; Penniman 2015; Petrey 2016; Pouderon 2002).

In addition to the intense engagement among early Christian writers with medical knowledge, there is plenty of evidence that Christians became doctors. They also became teachers of medicine and compilers of medical knowledge. But in addition to the presence of Christians among the corps of medical professionals and the continued engagement with medical thought by polymathic intellectuals and theologians, we might ask in what other ways did both Christian and Jewish authorities make use of, or even co-opt, aspects of ancient medicine in entrepreneurial or innovative ways in order to further their own religious and social agendas.

Recent scholarship on bishops and rabbis has demonstrated that both groups made use of the "rhetoric of medicine" in their construction of religious authority (Balberg 2011: 325). Part of the reason this rhetoric was so serviceable in this context is that by the time Christians and Jews were focusing on questions of authority in the second and third centuries CE, elite doctors had come to take on increasingly more responsibility for the total care of the self, both physical and psychological or spiritual. Doctors such as Galen and Oribasius presented themselves as "ultimate caretakers of the Self." Thus, "[t]he doctor was both a healer and a mentor, and functioned as a watch-person and a guide to right living" (Balberg 2011: 324). In this

respect, doctors competed with leaders of philosophy schools in their claims to be able to offer guidance for sane and healthy living; they became life coaches who claimed to be able to assume responsibility for moral and mental as well as physical hygiene in the domain of ascetic practice. Given the totalizing claims of doctors, it is possible that both bishops and rabbis who sought to assume greater influence, authority, and even control over the everyday lives of the faithful, found a useful model in the image of the good physician (Marx-Wolf 2017).

Furthermore, longstanding intersections between ancient philosophy, natural science, and medicine allowed for doctors and philosophers, along with later ecclesial and rabbinic authorities, to offer systems of total care to their students, patients, congregants, and adherents. In the case of late ancient Judaism, Rabbis interwove the hermeneutic traditions of their biblical training and expertise with "Graeco-Roman medical and pseudo-medical ideas and practices" in domains such as menstrual purity and skin afflictions (Balberg 2011: 324). Charlotte Fonrobert, for instance, considers ways in which rabbinic interpretations of the laws concerning menstrual purity led rabbis to engage in examinations of menstrual blood that resembled medical examinations of bodily excretions, at the same time as they incorporated contemporary medical literature in order to "formulate a unique rabbinic system of gynecological knowledge" (Balberg 2011: 324; also, Fonrobert 2000).

In other words, rabbinic utilization of medical rhetoric and knowledge bolstered their claims to be authoritative interpreters, not just of texts, but of bodies as well. Mira Balberg demonstrates that rabbis used medical knowledge and practices of examination, "reading bodies like books" (2011: 325), in the case of *Tractate Nega'im* of the Mishnah, which addresses skin afflictions in order to make determinations of a body's ritual status (2011: 326). Balberg writes: "In the very setting of *Tractate Nega'im*, the rabbis, who proponed themselves as the ultimate interpreters of biblical texts, situate themselves also as the interpreters of bodies" (2011: 326). She argues that this ability to read bodies for diagnostic purposes was a claim that doctors such as Galen made, someone who likewise claimed to be a skilled interpreter of texts (2011: 327). The rabbinic adoption of this dual reading strategy won rabbis, "a quasi-medical prestige – the prestige of those who hold the key to the mysteries of the body" (Balberg 2011: 327).

In the case of Christian leaders, who endeavored to consolidate and extend their authority in more totalizing ways over Christians under their care, medical rhetoric and concepts served as a powerful tool. For instance, in his work on Christian comportment, the *Paedagogus*, Clement of Alexandria uses medical concepts and theories in the majority of his discussions about good

manners, right conduct, and moral habits in the domains of food, drink, sex, attire, laughter, and so forth. John Chrysostom employs medical ideas in numerous homilies and letters also devoted to providing guidance on the details of everyday life for the Christians under his care, including entertainment, sexuality, family life, and emotional responses to loss and sin (Leyerle 2015; Mayer 2015b; Wright 2015).

In sum, both rabbis and bishops extended medical theories into the domains of theologizing and ritual practice as one strategy for establishing themselves as religious authorities and master diagnosticians of a wide variety of conditions, characterized by spiritual, psychic, and physical dimensions.

From Asclepius to Cosmas and Damian: From "Pagan" Cult to the Cult of the Saints

Although in Late Antiquity "natural, particularly rational medicine persisted as the primary mode of health care" (Meyer 2015a: 11), as in earlier epochs, certain cult sites also functioned as places devoted to healing. However, where in earlier Antiquity these sites were devoted to gods and goddesses, in Late Antiquity they were devoted to saints, both living and dead. Holy men, such as the Syrian pillar/stylite saints, Daniel and Simeon, were sought out not only for their spectacular ascetic feats and their willingness to mediate social and political tensions and conflicts (Brown 1981), their reputations as intercessors on behalf of human health were also signaled by the fact that they could heal and exorcise demons. The healing cults of dead saints took on many of the features associated with the worship of a god such as Asclepius. The afflicted would incubate in their shrines, make use of water that had been poured over the relics of the saint, or dust collected from their tombs, or oil used in lamps within the shrines, and so forth (Johnson 2006: 147–148). The *Miracles of Saint Thecla* as well as the *Miracles of Saints Cosmas and Damian* provide instances of many of these standard practices. The latter accounts also include miraculous healings in which the doctor saints use medical procedures in the dreams of supplicants. The most spectacular example is when the two replace a gangrenous leg with one amputated from a recently deceased man.

Although many of these miracle accounts include polemical statements about rapacious or incompetent doctors and their ineffectual practices, there is little evidence that such polemic had much of an impact on the afflicted, who continued to avail themselves of any and all means of healing on offer, both secular and sacred. As with gods and goddesses, any saint could be sought out for healing. However, some saints, who according to legend had been doctors in life, such as the aforementioned twins, Cosmas and Damian,

were among the best known for their cures. Furthermore, some saints tended to specialize in certain kinds of disorders. For instance, Saint Artemios, was known for his ability to cure testicular diseases and conditions (Llewellyn 2017). Starting in the late fourth century, Christians took to creating miracle collections for individual saints. What becomes clear is that the procedure for supplicating a saint and awaiting a cure at his or her shrine closely resembled earlier polytheistic practices. What differs significantly about the veneration of the saints, however, is the eagerness of Christians to engage physically with the remains of the saintly dead in service of procuring cures and improvement in life circumstances in practices that would have been considered polluting and dangerous in earlier epochs.

Changing Notions of Health and Changing Meanings of Illness and Physical Suffering

Healing was just one way that living holy men and women established their sanctity. Their own endurance of pain, suffering, and illness (frequently the direct result of harsh ascetic regimes) was another means by which they could prove their extraordinary relationship to the divine. The ability of saints to endure extreme pain and suffering, saints such as Syncletica, whose jaw bone completely rotted away such that the stench was unbearable to others, or the monk Stephen (Palladius' *Lausiac History*) whose diseased genitals were amputated while he calmly wove palm branches into rope, increasingly became a sign of sanctity. But in earlier hagiographical literature, such as the *Life of Saint Antony*, sanctity was signified by extraordinary and preternatural health (Crislip 2013: 60–66). Some authors have noted that this shift toward assigning more positive valuations to saintly illness, suffering, and disfiguration signals an interesting development in late ancient Christian understandings of holiness (Crislip 2013: 81–108). These long-suffering saints certainly served as models for other Christians. But one should also keep in mind that many of the conditions experienced by these monastic athletes as a result of their ascetic choices were conditions that were present more generally in society as a result of economic disparity, dangerous work conditions, and other factors, and would have been experienced by the less devout individual as something for which to seek remediation.

It was certainly comforting to have models of suffering that allowed one to experience pain and illness as a form of spiritual exercise and to know that the way one suffered could serve as a redemptive act. But the vast majority of people, we should assume, also sought alleviation from their illness and pain from medical professionals and saintly healers.

Changing attitudes about illness and suffering within Christian society can be seen as part and parcel of a more general tendency within Christian culture, likely the result of its early origins in Judaic traditions, which enjoined charitable care of less fortunate members of society such as widows and orphans, to emphasize the importance of caring for the poor, sick, and oppressed. This, along with the aforementioned change in attitudes toward illness and suffering, can also be seen as contributing factors to new institutional developments in Late Antiquity.

Institutional Developments: The Rise of the Hospital

The question of the origin of the hospital in Late Antiquity is one of the most contentious and debated in scholarship that focuses on the intersections of religion, health, and medicine in this period. There is little doubt that from the late fourth through the sixth centuries, new institutions developed that were devoted to the care of the sick and needy, and that provision for these groups "in the Christian world differed considerably from what was available earlier to non-Christians" (Nutton 2014: 371–372). As Vivian Nutton writes:

> From the middle of the fourth century onwards more and more reference is made to Christian institutions that offer food, shelter, sustenance and occasionally, medical assistance to those in need, particularly the poor, the elderly, travelers and those, especially widows and orphans, who lacked family support. By the end of the century, such institutions were common in the Eastern Mediterranean, although they spread only slowly in the Latin West outside Italy and were long recognized as something deriving from the East, and not only because of the common name "xenodochium", a direct takeover of a Greek word. (2014: 374)

However, historians disagree about almost all of the important details relating to the so-called birth of the hospital in Late Antiquity. Some attempts to grapple with the question focus on identifying specific historical foundations as a kind of "first hospital." Examples of these attempts include studies which argue that Basil of Caesarea's extra-urban facilities in Cappodocia established around the year 360 CE were the first of their kind (Nutton 2014: 372). Alternately, Andrew Crislip's work identifies the Pachomian Monastery in Egypt as the birthplace of a health care facility and health care system that functioned like a hospital and could serve as a model for other foundations

of its kind (2005). Nutton has recently discussed archeological evidence that may point to two possible non-Christian precedents at Rhodiapolis and Allianoi, where some physicians, perhaps working together, may have been providing long-term, in-house care for patients (2014).

These different positions on the "first hospital" point to the problem of what we mean when we use the term "hospital" in Late Antiquity. Early Christian institutions such as hostels, poor houses, lodges, and hospices (the Greek terminology is diverse and somewhat ambiguous), were all devoted in some way or other to the "collecting, housing, feeding, and caring for the poor and sick" (Rhee 2017). If we mean by "hospital" an independent institution, that is, one without an ecclesiastical affiliation, solely for the care and cure of the physically ill and staffed largely by professionally trained doctors, then we will likely be hard pressed to find such a thing. This should come as little surprise given that notions of both health and care of the self involved a more total understanding of the human person than just the physical body, as pointed out earlier in this chapter. Hence, early Christian foundations that were in some way devoted to caring for the sick had much broader mandates than solely curing the body. As Helen Rhee argues, both *xenodochia* and monastic infirmaries had clear guidelines for patient behavior in keeping with Christian concerns about moral reform and salvation (Rhee 2017).

Historians of late ancient health and medicine also disagree about the degree to which the early hospital was "medicalized," that is, the degree to which it "provided assistance for the sick under the guidance of recognized medical practitioners" (Nutton 2014: 372). Some, such as Timothy Miller, feel strongly that it was medicalized in this sense (Miller 1985). Others express doubt about how universal this feature was (Horden 2006).

Although most scholars assume that early hospitals were associated with ecclesiastical foundations, whether urban churches or monasteries, Serfass has argued that "private hospitals predominated" at least in late ancient Egypt, "and that they functioned for the most part independently of local ecclesiastical authorities" (Serfass 2008: 97). Serfass makes his argument on the basis of papyrological evidence.

It is likely that debate on all of these questions will continue especially in light of new evidence that may emerge from both archeological and papyrological research. However, for our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the development of such foundations for the care of both the poor and the sick was a remarkable one in terms of institutional history on a par with the development, for instance, of the medieval university. It involved what we might reasonably call the development of a kind of centralized health care system. When we think of the history of ancient medicine as a study, we may be

inclined to think first and foremost of the history of medical discoveries and important cures. But institutional changes such as the creation of late ancient hospitals are by no means less important to this discipline of historical study.

Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed a number of the most important intersections between religion, medicine, and health in Late Antiquity. It has hopefully demonstrated that rather than being a period of decline, it was characterized by intense continuity with earlier epochs, as well as by innovative approaches to the universal problems of disease and suffering and important institutional change.

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Religion, Warfare, and Demography

Mischa Meier

Religion(s) and Disasters in Late Antiquity: A Dynamic Field

"All beheld the same image of death" (*eadem omnibus imago mortis*; Pelagius, *Ep. ad Dem.* 30; PL 30,44B). These grim words uttered by the preacher Pelagius represent the only contemporary testimony of someone who personally experienced the Gothic sack of Rome in 410 CE—an astonishing fact in light of the intense, still ongoing debate over blame and responsibility for this epoch-making event, which shook the ancient world to its core. Already in the immediate aftermath, the sack of Rome inspired texts of such high intellectual quality that they continue to fascinate modern readers (see Meier and Patzold 2010; Pollmann and Harich-Schwarzbauer 2013). The fact that these writings (examples include Augustine's *City of God*, the historiographical work of Orosius, the commentaries and letters of Jerome, and the elegiac hymn to Rome by Rutilius Namatianus) concentrate primarily on religious aspects—specifically, on whether and to what extent the Christianization of the Roman empire and the concomitant rejection of the ancient cults were responsible for the catastrophe—should not mislead us into concluding that the sack of Rome was regarded foremost as a religious event or perceived primarily in religious categories. Besides the lack of relevant sources, the

influence of the religiously colored debate in contemporary and later intellectual elite discourse and the prominence of its protagonists may be responsible for giving us this impression. It has long been known that what at first glance appear to be predominantly religious debates also contain highly topical and controversial political affairs and positions: thus, Augustine's *City of God* specifically considers the status of earthly rule—that is, no less than the role and authority of the emperor—while Orosius embeds his character sketch of the Christian Goth Alaric in a penetrating discussion of the relationship between Romans and barbarians. There is no disputing that the sack of Rome raised many questions concerning the religious sphere—for instance, on the justice of God, the relationship between sin and punishment, and even that of collective versus individual guilt. The sermons of Augustine (Fredouille 2004) and the first books of the *City of God* document such questions in all their detail. Orosius even steers his depiction of events toward a "pious procession" (Oros. 7.39.8: *pia pompa*) of conquerors and conquered, in which the Goths protectively escort the terrified Romans to the church (Oros. 7.39.10: *Romani confugientes—barbari defensores*), and thus tries to strip away the calamitousness of the disaster and instead stylize it as a salvation-bringing event (Oros. 7.39.9: *personat late in excidio urbis salutis tuba*). But precisely this effort, running contrary to all historical experience, vividly shows how the contemporary perception of the event might be anything but predominantly religious, although a contemporary author might find a religious connotation extremely constructive.

Matters were entirely different about 200 years later: only with immense effort and abundant luck were the defenders of Constantinople able in August 626 to save the eastern Roman/Byzantine capital from a siege by Avars, Slavs, and Persians. In contrast to Rome in 410, we have extensive contemporary testimony on this event—above all the detailed eyewitness report of Theodore Syncellus (on which, see Howard-Johnston 2010: 146–148). Theodore's account is utterly different from the texts that tell us about the sack of Rome. The entire course of events is perceived, processed, and transmitted (not merely interpreted) in religious, apocalyptically charged categories. As a city blessed by God, Constantinople is under divine protection from the start; the protagonists—the (absent) emperor, his representative in the besieged city, and the patriarch—plead again and again for this protection in prayers, processions, and with the images of the Virgin Mary that adorn the city gates. It ultimately manifests itself when the Mother of God personally comes to lead the defense of the capital, throwing herself into the fray on the city walls against overwhelming enemy forces (Theodore Syncellus 25 p. 308.29–40; 32–33 p. 310.37–311.40 Sternbach; see *Chronicon Paschale* p. 724.18–19 Dindorf; George of Pisidia, *Bellum*

Avaricum 1–9; 135–136; 403–501; Theophanes a.m. 6117 p. 316.21–23 de Boor). No contemporary, at any rate, would seriously have dared to dispute the fact that Mary had personally freed Constantinople—and what is more, countless observers had personally witnessed her hurling weapons at the enemy. "Everywhere," Theodore Syncellus maintains, "the Virgin was at hand," and even the Khan of the Avars allegedly saw "how a woman in noble clothing hastened about all alone on the walls" (Theodore Syncellus 19 p. 306.8–9; *Chronicon Paschale* p. 725.10–11 Dindorf).

More than 200 years and a distance of 1700 km lie between Alaric's march on Rome and the failed attempt of the Khan of the Avars to capture Constantinople. This fact alone highlights the considerable dynamics that must be taken into account in exploring the connection between religion and events or developments that contemporaries perceived as turning points or indeed had far-reaching consequences (it is in this sense that I define the concept of a "disaster" here and below). As a coherent epoch— in the sense that reactions to comparable phenomena consistently followed the same patterns—no one Late Antiquity exists. Attempting to explain this diversity merely with the gradual Christianization of the Roman empire would undoubtedly fall short of the mark. Instead, we must take into account the complex interplay of different developments and dynamics in their various chronological and geographical contexts throughout the late antique world.

Coping with Disasters and the Role of Religion in Antiquity

Even in Late Antiquity, the ca. 2000 cities (*civitates*) of the Roman empire remained the fundamental units on which all forms of political, social, and economic organization were based. Consisting formally of an urban core and a rural hinterland, cities were self-administered and, most importantly, carried out the key task of collecting taxes. They thus served as the economic, political, and institutional focal points of social and sometimes even political processes. As religious entities, normally under the supervision of a bishop, they maintained the tradition of autonomy that had marked the Mediterranean world for centuries. Every unit was capable of developing its own religious self-understanding—and this ability persisted in modified form both during and after the Christianization of the Roman empire. It is thus particularly in the cities where we can observe which perceptual and coping mechanisms sprang into action when devastating disasters in the form of wars and other catastrophes befell the population.

The basic structure of these mechanisms had been established long ago. Since unusual phenomenal or catastrophic events were generally understood as signs (Greek: τέρας, σημεῖον, οἰωνός, φάσμα; Latin: *prodigium*), that is, as communicative acts by the gods, they called for interpretation and appropriate action. These interpretations were by no means fixed, as already contemporaries had observed. Thus, at the end of his description of the plague that befell the polis Athens in the years 430–426 BCE, the Greek historian Thucydides concludes:

> Such was the affliction which had come on the Athenians and was pressing them hard—people dying inside the city, and the devastation of their land outside. In this time of trouble, as tends to happen, they recalled a verse which the old men said was being chanted long ago: "A Dorian war will come, and bring a pestilence with it." People had disputed whether the original word in the verse was *limós* ("famine") rather than *loimós* ("pestilence"): but not surprisingly in the present situation the prevailing view was that "pestilence" was the word used. Men accommodate their memories to their current experience. I imagine that if at some time another "Dorian war" comes after this one, with famine coinciding, the verse will in all likelihood be recited with that meaning. (Thuc. 2.54.1–3; trans. M. Hammond)

The fact that, at the beginning of the *Iliad* (1.62–67), Achilles calls the army to an assembly to deliberate over why Apollo had sent a "plague" upon the Achaeans also indicates the basic openness with which the ancient Greeks interpreted signs. The reasons for divine acts of communication and potential reactions to them first had to be discussed and determined from case to case. For example, ritual purifications might be performed (cf. Diod. Sic. 12.58.6–7; Thuc. 3.104), foreign cults introduced (*IG* II² 4960), popular assemblies called off or adjourned (e.g. Thuc. 5.45.4; 5.50.5), and campaigns ended (e.g. Thuc. 3.89.1; Diod. Sic. 12.59.1) or put off (e.g. Thuc. 7.50.4; Plutarch, *Nicias* 23). A sign might also be interpreted in the opposite way, as encouragement: the army that invaded the Argolid under King Agesipolis in 387 BCE interpreted an earthquake on the first evening of the campaign as an admonition to bravely continue their undertaking (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 4.7.4–5).

In Rome, unusual events at first were considered signs that the peaceful equilibrium with the gods (*pax deum*)—the basis for the continued existence and expansion of the commonwealth—was disturbed. Already under the Republic, we can identify a strictly formalized procedure (*procuratio prodigiorum*) for alleviating such disturbances and thus appeasing the presumed wrath of the gods (*ira deum*). According to the instructions of the Sibylline Books, the Romans held supplicatory processions, made exceptional

sacrifices, and prepared meals for the gods (*lectisternia*)—a complex process initiated by the consuls and senate that involved the entire citizen body once strict social hierarchies had been partly abolished (MacBain 1982; Waldherr 1997: 157–165; Rosenberger 1998: 23f; 38ff; 127ff; Linke 2003, 2014: 30f; 116f). This highly emotional, collective manner of coping with disaster as early as the Roman Republic also characterizes how extraordinary events were handled in Late Antiquity. In contrast to the Greek world, where the first question asked was what might be the potential reason for divine displeasure, the Romans always emphasized the correct performance of collective propitiation ceremonies that integrated the entire population. In Late Antiquity, however, these two aspects seem to have merged and can be found at work in different cities of the Roman empire.

The growing tendency in Rome since the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE) to interpret serious incidents, not as signs, but as omens (Waldherr 1997: 160–163) gradually resulted in connecting each *prodigium* with specific events that it could presage or accompany—a practice that had a tradition in the Greek world and would exert considerable influence on the way Christians responded to extraordinary phenomena: the fact that the crucifixion itself was allegedly accompanied by earthquakes and darkness (Matthew 27:45–54; cf. also Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44) caused similar "omens" in Late Antiquity to be invested with eschatological significance and considered signs of the imminent end of the world. Profane events might also become semantically charged and contextualized through particular interpretations of the "omens" that accompanied them—sometimes without regard for chronology. Thus, a comet that appeared in the sky in the year 520 could be interpreted retrospectively as heralding the beginning of the reign of Justin I and Justinian in 518 (Meier 2003: 342–345).

The Christianization of the Roman world in Late Antiquity did not cause coping mechanisms to change in any profound structural way—on the contrary, as a providential conception of history became increasingly widespread, whereby the entirety of earthly history was the manifestation of a divine plan, apparently unforeseen events and developments virtually either had to be attributed to this plan and thus accepted as the will of God (as Orosius attempts to do with his historical-providential treatment of the sack of Rome in 410) or had to be regarded as special acts of divine punishment (or favor, on occasion). The latter view was taken far more often, or rather, this potential interpretation generally appealed to a broader part of the population, especially in preference to "scientific" explanations, which found themselves on the defensive in Late Antiquity (see, e.g. Cosmas Indicopleustes 2.106; also 1.21f; Dagron 1981). It even appears on a terminological level: thus, from the fifth century CE (first in Sozomen, *HE* 2.4.4), historiographical texts use the Greek term *theomenia* (literally,

"wrath of God") to mean "earthquake"; and in the sixth century, the chronicler John Malalas can even call the plague the *eusplanchnia tou theou* ("mercifulness of God"; Malalas p. 407.18 Thurn). The appeasement of an angry, vengeful God was achieved by collective measures, just as the *pax deum* had been restored in the pre-Christian centuries.

A sermon by the Antiochene presbyter and future bishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom (†407) gives us a vivid example of this phenomenon. The sermon was delivered after an earthquake in Antioch (modern Antakya, Turkey) the exact date of which is unknown, but may have occurred in 396 (Downey 1961, 438, note 152; more cautious, Mayer 2005: 255–260). John's depiction of how the people of Antioch cope and his remarks about the reasons for this major seismic event can be read as a virtually normative model for coping with catastrophes in Christian Late Antiquity, and not merely in the way the ascetic clergymen demanded. He thus provides valuable background for the interpretation of other sources. According to John, during the two days of tremors, the population of the city—at any rate, the part to which John was speaking—gathered on the agora in nightly prayer, traversed the entire city in supplicatory processions, and sang hymns and psalms to God (John Chrysostom, *terr. mot.* PG 50.714; 715). John also evokes the opposite of this exemplary behavior: the profligate, even "satanic" drinking parties of the rich (*terr. mot.* PG 50.714). Every form of shamelessness was supposedly swept away by the earthquake and the pious reactions it provoked; formerly disreputable figures dedicated themselves to piety, and just a few brief moments of shock brought about a lasting change of attitude—the earthquake was thus a cathartic instrument employed by God out of his love for mankind (φιλανθρωπία): "great profit has come from the earthquake," the preacher concludes with satisfaction (μέγας ὁ καρπὸς ὁ ἀπὸ τῶν σεισμῶν; John Chrysostom, *terr. mot.* PG 50.714). While the sins (ἁμαρτίαι) of the wealthy in the form of greed (πλεονεξία), injustice (ἀδικία), lawlessness (παρανομία), arrogance (ὑπερηφανία), lust (ἡδονή), and deception (ψεῦδος) had brought the earthquake down upon them, it is the pious conduct of the poor, their psalms, prayers, and night vigils, that have saved the city (John Chrysostom, *terr. mot.* PG 50.716).

Sources such as this illustrate the ambivalent social function of religious coping mechanisms in Late Antiquity: John uses the earthquake in order to discuss social discrepancies in highly schematic terms and thus may have exaggerated pre-existing tensions—that is certainly typical of John as an ascetic preacher especially reckless in the way he formulates his desiderata. However, the collective religious response to the disaster also exhibited immense integrative power: in John's words, "You have made our city into a church" (John Chrysostom, *terr. mot.* PG 50.714).

Source Problems

We seldom can glimpse reactions to disaster or war experiences as vividly as in John Chrysostom's words. The sources generally give only sporadic and very selective insight into the events, and many aspects that would take center stage in modern accounts, such as specific indications of the extent of a catastrophe (i.e. the number of victims, the cost of material damage, institutional consequences) are normally neglected entirely. Ancient observers were primarily concerned with different aspects. They were preoccupied with the causes, interpretation, and methods of coping with disaster, or their descriptions of disasters served other, overarching narrative goals. For this reason, ancient accounts of wars and disasters—with few exceptions—provide us with virtually no usable quantitative information, and none at all that could be analyzed statistically. When we are given specific figures, they usually prove to be hopelessly inflated; instead, they are generic sums that stand for "unimaginable" or "immeasurable," such as John of Ephesus' claim that imperial officials in Constantinople gave up counting the victims of the epidemic of 541/2 after reaching a figure of 230,000 (John of Ephesus in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* p. 87 Witakowski) or Procopius' broad claim that the plague wiped out half of humanity (Procopius, *Secret History* 18.44).

The idiosyncrasies of precisely the literary genres in which reports about dramatic events play a prominent role (epigraphic, numismatic, and papyrological sources contribute little to our topic)—hagiography and chronicles—make it considerably more difficult to assess individual passages. The events depicted in hagiographical sources are intended primarily to illustrate the extraordinary power of the holy and accordingly appear as part of God's divine plan. Hagiographical texts are frequently constructed according to traditional models with varying content and literary and dramaturgical set-pieces (hence the historical reliability of saints' lives has been fiercely debated in recent years). Christian chronicles also pose genre-specific problems of interpretation. On account of Hellenistic, early Roman, and Christian tradition, the cataloguing of events considered relevant for various reasons was put in a religious–historical straitjacket that steered the genre toward a definite *eschaton*. Despite the long tradition that the chroniclers of Late Antiquity could look back on, this aspect remained particularly important. By virtue of their integration in a providential, eschatological framework, the events recorded in Christian chronicles were significant in a markedly different way from those in "profane" historiography. This in turn affected the way events were depicted and contextualized: while, for instance, the pagan chronicler Phlegon of Tralles (†138) merely notes a solar eclipse in the reign of Tiberius (FGrHist 257 F 16), this phenomenon was put in a completely new context

in Christian chronicles as an epiphenomenon of the crucifixion and thereby
invested with far more significance (see, e.g. Malalas p. 182.60–66 Thurn).

Local Disasters and the Empire

The first group that had to cope with serious disasters was that which was
immediately affected, that is, normally the population of a city or prov-
ince. We cannot presume broad, let alone empire-wide solidarity. Even
though the Roman empire was capable of creating a strong superregional
identity in various respects, this was not enough to put long-distance relief
measures into motion (leaving aside the fact that the lack of infrastructure
would have made the expedited transport of goods impossible). There
also was the problem of often fierce traditional rivalries between neigh-
boring cities. Isolated cases of broad solidarity and helpfulness are attested
in Antiquity, but they remain the exception and generally pertain to other
contexts. The extensive donations, for instance, that Rhodes famously
received after it was devastated by an earthquake in 227 BCE (Polybius
5.88–90) were the product of rivalry among Hellenistic rulers, striving to
present themselves as generous *euergetai*, not of any intrinsic need to
show solidarity. In Late Antiquity, the only central authority that not only
could perform a coordinating function, but also actually bring real relief,
was the emperor (see Meier 2007).

A canon of measures had become established since the time of Augustus
that gave a ruler a variety of options in the event of a disaster. These included
supporting the affected communities with specific sums of money, remitting
taxes for devastated cities and provinces, dispatching specialists to coordinate
rebuilding efforts, and making symbolic gestures that demonstrated the ruler's
solidarity with the victims and his personal sympathy. Such gestures normally
had religious connotations. Thus, for example, when Justin I learned of the
destruction of Antioch after an earthquake in 526, he called off the games
that were currently being held and, to indicate his mourning, sympathy, and
humility, laid down his purple robe and diadem before God in his anger: that
is, his insignia as emperor and the symbols of his sacrally exalted status. On
Pentecost, he entered the church without his diadem or robe and broke
out into dramatic cries of grief before the senators and citizens gathered
there (Malalas p. 349.8–350.18 Thurn). Gestures like these were by no
means ineffective. They reinforced (especially through yearly repetition, that
is, integration into local liturgical calendars) widely shared identities,
strengthened superregional solidarity, and thus also reinforced the stability
of imperial rule.

Collective religious responses to disasters frequently functioned as a medium. After an earthquake in 447, for example, Theodosius II humbly and penitently led a supplicatory procession of the people of Constantinople and transformed—or so at least contemporaries believed—a "great threat, such as has not been from the beginning of the world" (ἀπειλὴ μεγάλη, οἵα οὐ γέγονεν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) into proof of "God's forbearance in his love for man" (τῆς τοῦ φιλανθρώπου θεοῦ μακροθυμίας; *Chron. Pasch.* p. I 586.9–12; 589.12–15 Dindorf). It is no coincidence that we encounter similar conclusions in comparable situations, just as John Chrysostom had articulated them: the entire city was transformed into one great church (Socrates, *HE* 7.22.17; 7.23.12). Yet again we see in sources such as these the old conception of the city as a closed, individual cult community, a notion that reached back far into the pre-Christian era. It can still be detected in Late Antiquity to a varying degree, as for instance in the conviction that Edessa (modern Şanlıurfa, Turkey) enjoyed the special protection of Jesus Christ and thus could not be captured by foreign enemies (the legend of King Abgar), that Sergiopolis (modern Resafa, Syria) was protected by St Sergius, Thessalonica by St Demetrius, and Apameia by a relic of the True Cross, or even the claim that Constantinople was the city of the Virgin Mary—culminating in her personal intervention on behalf of the metropolis during the Avar–Persian siege of 626, mentioned above. We need not view such ideas as the result of Christianization; rather, they stretched far back into the pagan past, as illustrated by an episode during Alaric's campaigns—when Alaric appeared before the walls of Athens in 396, his effort to take the city failed on account of the intervention of the goddess Athena and the mythical hero Achilles (Zosimus 5.6; Price 1999: 169–170).

The interests of the local population and the imperial central administration intersected when disaster struck; sometimes they clashed (see below) and had to be delicately balanced. At the local level, religious responses to serious disasters were predominantly made by influential ascetics (so-called "Holy Men"), who generally lived outside the city and were viewed by the population as miracle-performing guardians, intermediaries of God, and influential patrons; and by local bishops, some of whom possessed qualities similar to those of the Holy Men. Jacob of Nisibis (†338) was one such person—a miracle-performing ascetic who after he had been consecrated as bishop faced an attack on Nisibis (modern Nusaybin, southeastern Turkey) by the Sasanid king Shapur II in 338. As God's intermediary (πρεσβευτής), he set a good example by leading supplications, reinforced the solidarity of the city population through collective prayer, organized the rapid repair of a section of the walls that the Persians had toppled, and at the people's behest confronted the enemy himself on the walls of the city, begging God to smite

the Persians with darkness and swarms of mosquitos. God granted his wish, the Persian army was scattered and retreated with heavy losses. The hagiographer only mentions incidentally what was potentially the real reason for the Persian retreat (which was apparently lost in the general perception of a Christian miracle): Jacob appeared on the walls wearing a diadem and imperial purple (a punishable act of arrogation!) and thus gave the attackers the impression—quite contrary to their expectations—that the emperor himself was present in the city with a formidable army (Theodoret, *Historia religiosa* 1 *PG* 82.1304A–1305A).

Extreme situations like the siege of a city by a hostile army or devastating episodes of plague created collective religious experiences that could result in the growth of legends and even obscure the actual events in the subsequent tradition, that is, the difficult struggle for aid and other solutions, the potential rise of factions, complex communicative and social processes, and so on—and not only in the case of Nisibis in 338 or Constantinople in 626. A heavenly host (*militia caelestis*) supposedly saved the modern city Marsas (Gironde, France) from advancing Saxons (Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum* 59), and a miracle-performing image of Jesus Christ saved Edessa from the Persians in 544 (Evagrius Scholasticus, *HE* 4.27). The Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome acquired its name when pope Gregory I organized a humble supplicatory procession during a devastating epidemic in 590 and personally saw the Archangel Michael, as the agent of God's anger, sheath his bloody sword there (*Legenda aurea* 46; 145.1.3). Overcoming a threat in a collective religious fervor reinforced civic identities; at the same time, however, each case must be viewed as the product of highly complex communicative and social processes. Such situations could also provoke bitter rivalries between secular authorities and their coercive forces (usually troops), on the one hand, and charismatic leaders and their powers of influence (miracles, mobilization of the people) on the other. When, for example, the resident praetorian prefect in seventh-century Thessalonica won a conflict with the local elite, who believed they were under the protection of the city patron St Demetrius, he was subsequently stricken with a serious disease by the saint himself (*Miracula S. Demetrii* p. 118.1–120.19 Lemerle). The inhabitants of the city moreover refused to transfer a relic of Demetrius to Constantinople, contrary to the demands of Emperor Maurice (*Miracula S. Demetrii* p. 88.1–90.17 Lemerle). Every city claimed its own local protective power— a development that emerges ever more clearly from the sixth century on— and was not prepared to share it with other cities, let alone with the entire Roman empire. This was a potential source of political conflict, which became particularly acute in the event of disaster, when high-pressure choices had to be made between few options. Religious responses to disaster thus always—this

at least should be clear by now—had political and social implications. This was particularly true of Constantinople, which from ca. 400 became the permanent residence of the emperors in the east and developed its own highly idiosyncratic socio-political structures (the so-called *Akzeptanzsystem*, "acceptance system"). These structures meant that the stability of imperial rule depended to a great extent on demonstrations of piety and humility before the citizen body (Pfeilschifter 2013). In this connection, disasters were important occasions on which an emperor could meet this expectation, and rulers such as Theodosius II, mentioned above, or Justinian sometimes deftly exploited dramatic disasters to shore up and strengthen their own position. Contemporaries were well aware that the collective response of the emperor, bishop, and people (e.g. in the form of joint suppicatory processions, masses, and prayers) to disasters was a peculiarity of the capital: Augustine, for example, attributes the successful escape from a cloud of fire that supposedly appeared over Constantinople to a collective act of penance and implicitly regrets that comparable mechanisms were not applied in Rome for the threat posed by Alaric in 410—which incidentally is clear evidence that contemporaries really perceived this event primarily in political terms and less so in a religious sense (Augustine, *De excidio urbis* VI.7; see Meier 2014).

Vulnerability, Resilience, and Religion

The conditions of living in Late Antiquity—and in pre-modern times generally—were dramatically different from those of modern western societies. Wars, earthquakes, floods, plagues, and other forms of devastation were not everyday happenings, but they nonetheless were always present in some form and profoundly marked contemporaries' experiences. It may be significant in this context that the earliest piece of Greek literature, the *Iliad*, begins precisely with an ominous plague. The poet Hesiod, who composed his *Erga kai hemérai* (*Works and Days*) only a few decades after the *Iliad*, also laments that human life is now marked by suffering (*erg.* 101–104), and his words are but part of a chorus of similar voices. The pervasiveness of potential disaster made itself felt everywhere. Every society gradually learns over time to prepare itself as well as possible for whatever specific threat it is exposed to. Seaside village communities automatically devise mechanisms to deal with floods, just as settlements near active volcanoes accumulate experience in dealing with eruptions, and so on. In doing so, societies define a kind of "pain threshold" that determines their ability to cope in the event of an earthquake, flood, volcanic eruption, violent plundering raid, and so on—in

other words, their "vulnerability." On account of its ability to measure such "pain thresholds," the sociological concept of vulnerability gives us a tool that makes comparisons possible and thereby, albeit approximately, permits inferences about ancient societies, for which we otherwise have few direct sources. The concept of "resilience" is complementary to that of vulnerability. Resilience enables us to describe to what extent individual groups or societies are able to overcome disaster or to what extent they are capable of adapting to external circumstances so that damage can be either avoided or compensated. If we investigate individual societies with respect to their vulnerability and resilience, we can make inferences about their respective "cultures of disaster," that is, the mechanisms and processes of adapting with which they respond to recurring threats in daily life. Societies frequently exhibit a highly individualized rhythm of disaster, collective response, rebuilding, preparation for the unknown, and so on. Different late antique sources allow us to identify the existence of such cultures of disaster, and they also reveal the important part played by religious patterns of perception, action, and coping.

The region of northern Mesopotamia and Syria, for example, was struck by a series of serious disasters around the year 500 (Wiemer 2006): earthquakes, comets, plagues, swarms of locusts, famines, and finally the devastation of the Roman–Persian war 502–506 constituted an almost uninterrupted series. The so-called chronicle of Joshua Stylites (composed in 507) is the idiosyncratic testimony of an eyewitness to the events that also gives us instructive insight into the vulnerability of the Roman cities affected—especially Edessa and Amida (modern Diyarbakır, Turkey). The author confronts us with a society in the grip of real fear of the end times, a society that interprets every extraordinary event in the years around 500 as a clear sign of the imminent end of the world; the chronicler energetically attempts to counter these expectations by interpreting the escalating disasters, culminating in a famine and the devastating war between the Romans and Persians, as signs that God was angry with the Romans on account of various sins (especially the celebration of a pagan festival in May 498 in conjunction with theatrical shows) and therefore had sent a series of progressively more dire warnings to the sinners (Jos. Styl. c. 33; 38). With great vividness, the text not only describes the particulars of life in difficult times, but also shows that the eastern Roman population in 500 had developed specific mechanisms for dealing with catastrophe. Besides the charitable work of the local clergy, wealthy landowners, and Roman officials, as well as favors granted by the emperor (especially in the form of tax remissions), these mechanisms also included religious coping measures—such as funeral processions for the victims of the famine prior to the war, led by the provincial governor and wealthy civic

authorities alongside the bishop, Peter of Edessa. Yet again the author stresses the collective character of the event: the entire city, he says, accompanied the deceased to their final resting place with psalms, prayers, and hymns (Jos. Styl. c. 43). Since the population had plausible, albeit competing ways to interpret an event (end of the world versus divine punishment; see Jos. Styl. c. 49), and since the religious and profane technical tools for coping with disasters that had evolved over the centuries functioned within the realm of possibility, the victims could survive these difficult years as a community despite their great individual losses, and the usual resilience measures could be taken—in this case, generous donations of money and a rebuilding program financed by the emperor, patriarch, high officials in Constantinople, and the provinces affected. Even the temporary disputes that arose over the quartering of unruly Gothic troops (Jos. Styl. c. 88; 93f; 96) could be tolerated against this background, so that the author of the chronicle can look forward to the future full of confidence (Jos. Styl. c. 101).

The victims of the catastrophic earthquake that reduced the Syrian metropolis Antioch to rubble on 29 May 526 appear to have successfully coped with the disaster in very similar fashion. The capital of the wealthy province Syria I, an economic center and the seat of the *comes Orientis*, had already been devastated in 525 by a fire that raged for six months, claiming numerous victims. Just as Joshua Stylites had interpreted the events prior to the famine in Edessa as warning omens, the chronicler John Malalas, the most important witness to the events in Antioch, likewise interprets this fire as a threat, warning of coming disaster sent by an angry God (Malalas p. 344.52–55 Thurn). This disaster came in the form of the earthquake in 526, the fifth in the long list of catastrophes that befell Antioch. Malalas describes the extent of the destruction as sheerly inconceivable (Malalas p. 346.95–347.20 Thurn). A total of 250,000 people fell victim to the quake; the city was "unusable" (ἄχρηστος) after the disaster. And yet: also in this case, the established measures of coping with disaster were applied, because serious earthquakes—as the list of disasters in Antioch in Antiquity amply attests—were nothing new to the population, but rather were part of their local culture of disaster. Again, in the case of the major seismic event of 526, real expectations of the end of the world (widespread among the population) competed with the interpretive pattern of the wrath of God; as was the case with the famine and wartime devastation in Edessa, both alternatives were sufficiently plausible, and thus the limits of the vulnerability of the local society were not exceeded—on the third day of the earthquake, a Sunday, when a cross appeared in the sky over the northern part of the destroyed city, the suffering people found new hope and confidence, because God had apparently entered into direct communication with them and indicated the end of their suffering.

And in fact, the tremors ceased, and the survivors were saved (Malalas p. 349.89–84 Thurn). In commemoration of the divine punishment that they had survived, the people of Antioch named the northern part of nearby Mt Silpios "Staurin" and thus preserved the miraculous appearance of the cross forever in their collective memory (Procopius, *De aedificiis* 2.10.16). After receiving this heavenly message, they overcame the disaster in collective prayer and lamentations. The traditional religious coping mechanisms (accompanied by imperial relief measures and gestures, as usual) had worked—and once again collective action or rather collective self-assurance stood at the heart of the response. This emerges clearly in Malalas' account of the fate of individuals, especially the godless, during the earthquake; they were supposedly punished by God in particularly brutal fashion (see Malalas p. 348.54–75 Thurn). The earthquake thus takes on a cathartic function in this case, as well, insofar as it purges society of harmful deviants.

What happens, though, when a society capitulates to the violence of a catastrophe, when its coping mechanisms no longer work, when the limits of its vulnerability are exceeded and its resilience gives out? Are there such cases?

There are, and we may stay with Antioch for a moment for an illustration of one: precisely eighteen months after the earthquake described above, the city, which was still in the process of rebuilding, was convulsed yet again on November 29, 528. The number of dead, 4870, seems strangely specific—it is potentially the result of an official count. The distressed population fled from the shaking rubble to the surrounding mountains, where they would suffer appalling winter conditions without shelter. Again, large segments of those affected were convinced that God had punished them for their sins, but the usual coping mechanisms no longer seem to have functioned. Instead, the traditional supplicatory processions were replaced by deliberate measures of self-chastisement. The processions were intensified: now the participants proceeded barefoot through the snow in the bitterest cold and threw themselves again and again headfirst into the snow, weeping and crying for God's mercy. Finally, a citizen dreamed that they should write the apotropaic formula "Christ is with us. Halt!" on the doors of the houses still standing. The earthquakes did not stop until this had been done (Theophanes, a.m. 6021 p. I 177.22–178.7 de Boor). The events surrounding the earthquake in 528 allow us to see how traditional coping mechanisms reached their limits: overlaying the usual penitential processions with unusual (in this context) forms of self-chastisement, and especially the reliance on magical practices and the conviction that they had been used effectively, point to new elements showing that the vulnerability of local societies indeed had limits.

This appears even more clearly in the case of Constantinople during the devastating plague of 541/2: the Church historian John of Ephesus, one of

the key witnesses to the events, reports that a survivor of the plague claimed that the city would only be freed of it when the people threw clay pots out of their windows and let them shatter on the streets. At first only some foolish women followed this advice, but the rumor soon spread through the entire city; finally, for three days, all surviving inhabitants of Constantinople threw clay pots on the streets (John of Ephesus in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* p. 97 Witakowski). Mass hysteria like this indicates the hopelessness in which contemporaries felt they were trapped on account of the pervasiveness of the disaster. In comparison to the situation of Antioch in 528, the plague may have been exacerbated by the fact that apparently the conviction that the end of the world was nigh, which was still plausible for victims in the first decades of the sixth century, no longer sufficed. Contemporaries may have gradually realized that the disasters continued, but the end of the world predicted to occur around 500 had not come. Longstanding interpretive and conceptual patterns broke down on account of this realization; confusion and disorientation ran rampant. Helplessness and perplexity prevailed everywhere (Meier 2003). The situation in Constantinople during the plague is just one of many illustrations of such profound insecurity. The events that allegedly unfolded in the northern Mesopotamian city of Amida in 560/1 give us a far more dramatic example of rampant mass hysteria. The most diverse disasters had befallen the city since the early sixth century: plagues of locusts, earthquakes, solar eclipses, famines, epidemics, and the Roman–Persian war of 502–506, during which the population of Amida suffered terribly; there moreover was ongoing conflict between the Chalcedonians and their anti-Chalcedonian opponents. The people of Amida reached their limit when a (false) rumor of an imminent Persian attack made the rounds in 560. In response to this report, unprecedented mass hysteria broke out, which the sources interpret as collective "madness" (Ashbrook Harvey 1980). People made animal cries, men and women (especially younger ones) fell all over one another, hordes of "afflicted" roamed the region, filled the graveyards at night, sang, and, it seems, deliberately broke standing norms. People bit one another, spoke in a trance, imitated musical instruments; there are reports of hysterical fits of laughter, obscene speech, and cursing; people leapt and scrambled about, hung upside down, and rolled naked on the ground. With great effort, the few "healthy" ones managed to drag the "afflicted" into the churches, where, with shame on their faces, they had made dark threats, insulted Christian martyrs, and held wild orgies. According to John of Ephesus, it took some time for people to come to their senses—Amida was in the grip of this mass hysteria for an entire year; other cities were also affected, if less severely (John of Ephesus in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* p. 104–107 Witakowski; (Joh. Eph.) *Vita Jacobi* PO 19.259–262; Mich. Syr. 9.32; *Chron. ad ann. 1234* LXII p. 157).

The "mass hysteria" of Amida, on close inspection, exhibits the traits of a world turned upside down. The chief intention of the "afflicted" seems to have been to take Christian values and norms *ad absurdum* or openly challenge them: with the open practice of sexual promiscuity, the nightly desecration of cemeteries, and the ridicule of Christian gestures of humility and declarations of faith, the people of Amida turned specifically against the current Christian canon of norms. Roman authorities seem to have been another target: the "afflicted" ran around out of control in conspiratorial groups, imitated military signals, and poured contempt and scorn on the authorities; the public peace was deliberately undermined, there was talk of the arrival of new rulers—and thus actual rule was explicitly up for grabs.

The events in Amida in 560/1 can scarcely be explained without the constant borderline experiences that the population was exposed to in the sixth century. To contemporaries, it seemed as if the order of both heaven and earth had been shaken, and they began to visibly express their doubts, which had gradually transformed into sheer disorientation. Society at large is hardly affected when an individual begins to despair on account of suffering he has personally experienced or observed; hence, with respect to eastern Roman society in the sixth century, we should not, at first glance, overestimate the significance of the struggle of the pious Church historian Evagrius over the justness of God in light of the victims claimed by the plague, or the desperation of the learned historian Agathias over collective divine punishment for the sins of a few individuals. Events like those in Constantinople 541/2 or in Amida two decades later make it clear that the people finally could no longer cope with the ongoing disasters that left so profound a mark on the sixth century: the interpretive pattern of the wrath of God gradually became implausible (because it was obviously stretched to breaking point) and the expectation of the imminent end of the world proved to be mistaken despite all earlier calculations. The fact that the emperor himself could no longer provide adequate relief beyond sporadic emergency measures and symbolic gestures in a situation of mounting misfortune made matters worse; neither earthly nor heavenly authorities could stop the disaster. The entire cosmic order seemed to be out of joint.

The Process of Liturgification

Can a society cope with such challenges at all? A glance at the subsequent course of eastern Roman history shows that it was possible in principle, although it came at a high price.

The term "liturgification" has become established among scholars for the process that I will sketch below. To put it very briefly, liturgification is a complex social process of integration that enabled the population of the eastern Roman empire to adapt to changed external conditions without succumbing to the existential challenges of the times (wars, disasters, the toppling of traditional conceptual frameworks and worldviews). We can perceive liturgification in the accelerated pervasion of all areas of life with Christian forms of communication, action, and representation—in brief, the infusion of the holy into the remaining profane areas, beyond the already exceptionally high level in Late Antiquity. In all areas we can see in the sources, Christian religious aspects (in the broadest sense) dramatically gain significance; from now on, all areas of life seem enveloped in religious contexts and structures—like the imperial monarchy itself, the Roman way of war, for example, undergoes repeated sacralization (Meier 2009). Classicizing tendencies in legislation, literature, and architecture and art, for example, are pushed aside in favor of religious exaltation and transcendence (e.g. the introduction of so-called *nomokanones* and the absorption of classical historiography by ecclesiastical history). Ceremonial functions at court and in the public sphere take on an increasingly sacral cast; time and space became ever more religiously charged, as in the cities processions became even more frequent and their routes grew longer, and new festivals and commemorative days were introduced. And this was no longer exclusively true of individual cities: the Roman empire as a whole was transformed into an eschatologically charged entity, an earthly empire that anticipated the empire of God, or, in the words of the contemporary Corippus (ca. 565) *res Romana Dei est, terrenis non eget armis* (*Laud. Iust.* 3.333: "The Roman Empire is in God's hands; it needs no earthly weapons").

At first glance, it may seem paradoxical that religion in this phase of Roman history—specifically, from the middle of the sixth to the first half of the seventh century—played such a decisive part in the reshaping of eastern Roman/early Byzantine society. It was, after all, primarily religious conceptual patterns that had collapsed and made this reshaping necessary in the first place: from the (perceived) failure of traditional religious social patrons such as the "Holy Men" in specific emergencies (plagues, barbarian attacks, wars, etc.), to greater doubt in the blessedness of the God-appointed emperor and his administration, to the demise of Christian chronology based on complicated calculations (see above). Yet Christianity nonetheless successfully performed and consolidated its function in maintaining social cohesion even as the way in which it was practiced underwent a striking transformation. The Holy Men who had proven increasingly unable to ward off catastrophe were now joined by new, previously less prominent protective forces: the spread of the

cult of icons since the middle of the sixth century (primarily on account of wartime experiences, it seems) and the rise of the cult of the Virgin Mary (probably primarily a consequence of the plague) are the foremost examples. In general terms, we can see that transcendent city patrons become more important than in past centuries—once more, the defense of Constantinople by the Mother of God in 626 is the most famous example of this development. And when the Roman army took to the field, it now ostentatiously put itself in the hands of a transcendent power, as in 591, for instance, when Maurice set out against the Avars under the sign of the cross (Theophyl. Sim. 5.16.11); his general, Philippicus, brought an icon of Christ with him into battle against the Persians (Theophyl. Sim. 2,3; Theophanes a.m. 6078 p. I 255.13–19 de Boor); Heraclius set sail for Constantinople in 610 with the image of the Mother of God on the mast (George of Pisidia, *Heracl.* 2.12–16; Theophanes, a.m. 6102 p. I 298.15–17 de Boor) and advanced against the Persians in 622 with a relic of the cross (George of Pisidia, *Exp. Pers.* 2,252–255). "Maria" became an established rallying cry in the Roman army (Theophyl. Sim. 5.10).

It is not enough to interpret this extremely complex development as merely the result of strategic actions on the part of the emperors to maintain their power or insulate themselves from attacks and criticism. There is no doubt that the emperor could exploit acute threats at least somewhat for his own interests, as for example Justinian used the popular interpretation of disasters as proof of God's wrath to justify rigorous legislation against homosexuality (*Nov.* 77; 141). In principle, though, the process of liturgification must be viewed as the complicated interplay of situational actions, elements of strategic planning, and short-term reactions to the needs or wishes of various social groups in the empire. A relevant example in this regard is the Hypapante procession in Constantinople on February 2, 542: ostensibly moving a festival for Christ from February 14 to February 2, Justinian combined this reform with a fundamental reshaping of the festival's character: the festival for Christ became a penitential festival for the Virgin Mary. In this way, the emperor could not only demonstrate his humble sympathy (through the penitential character of the festival), but also react (and not exclusively with this measure) to the significant spread of the cult of the Virgin Mary by representing himself as a passionate worshipper of the Mother of God (Meier 2002).

Overall we may conclude that the liturgification of eastern Roman/ Byzantine society saved it from potential collapse (whatever one imagines by that term)—in other words the coordinates of its vulnerability had permanently shifted since the mid-sixth century. Thus, the thesis proposed by Averil Cameron over thirty years ago may prove to be correct; namely, that

the liturgification of all public communication created new poles of identification that could serve as linchpins, giving people new strength and a new orientation in a rapidly changing world (Cameron 1979: 4; 14f; 24; 35). But as indicated, this new strength came at a high price. Now the *empire* super-imposed itself as an entity of the greatest sacrality over the cities with their respective patrons. It is no coincidence that the hexagrams issued by Heraclius in 615, in the midst of an acute emergency caused by Persian victories, bore the magical formula "God, help the Romans!" (*Deus adiuta Romanis*; see Hahn 1981: 17f; 98f).

This empire was governed by the metropolis on the Bosporus, which gradually began to claim for itself all relics that were in any way tangible, markedly degrading the other cities of the empire. Constantinople thus turned into the sacral focal point of a sacrally supercharged empire; the Byzantines increasingly believed that not only the fate of the empire depended on the existence of the capital, but also—since liturgification caused it to assume eschatological connotations—that of the entire earthly world. This conviction may provide us with one of the reasons why the people of Constantinople fought so doggedly for their city in 626: the fall of the city would have been much more than a political signal, it would have heralded the end of the world (see Pertusi 1988).

The sack of Rome in 410 was perceived in vastly different fashion: as a political event, it had little meaning, and it was hardly conceived as an event with eschatological implications. When Augustine, Orosius, and others began to debate the fall of Rome in 410, they looked back on it as a catastrophe of previously inconceivable dimensions, but ultimately, as indicated, it was considered significant more politically than religiously.

We cannot identify a development comparable to liturgification in the Latin west—at least, not to the same extent as in the east. Undoubtedly, transfers also occurred; thus, the designated pope, Gregory I, who had spent several years in Constantinople and was familiar with their mechanisms for coping with disaster, staged a new kind of penitential procession in Rome during a severe epidemic in 590, the *laetania septiformis*, which contemporaries believed helped them successfully overcome the plague (Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* 10.1; Latham 2009). But developments like this remained the exception, and it is no coincidence that the city of Rome with its very special conditions (cf. Diefenbach 2007) provided the background for this successful measure of the pope. Overall, though, the political fragmentation of the west largely prevented the formation of overarching religious processes or at least to some extent stood in their way. The factor of fragmentation (on various levels) was a decisive difference between the Greek east and the Latin west since the decades around 500. Thus, overarching "imperial history"

disappears in the west, while it survives in the east (e.g. in the figure of Procopius). Instead, the increasingly regional and local fragmentation also shines through in the religious sphere precisely in historiography and related texts. Thus, the *Vita Aniani*, probably composed in the sixth century, describes how bishop Anianus of Orleans successfully defended his city in 451 from the onslaught of the Huns. The text produces the usual coping mechanisms for threatened cities: collective prayers and churchgoing, as well as a protector—in this case Anianus—who confronts the enemies by singing hymns on the city walls (*Vita Aniani* c. 8f). In all this, the imperial perspective fades into the background; Aetius and the Visigothic king appear as minor characters on a purely local stage. The Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, the event that even today shapes the memory of the defense of Gaul against the Huns, plays no part.

The *Vita Aniani* as a sixth-century document, however, also shows that the traditional coping mechanisms sketched above were still regarded as serviceable in the west, at least in some places, at a time when the transformational process of liturgification had already commenced in the east. However revolutionary the transformational processes unleashed by the so-called barbarian migrations may seem from a modern perspective, they seem to have had a less devastating effect on contemporaries than the swift succession of wars and other catastrophes that plagued the east from the years around 500. A comprehensive liturgification process on a scale comparable to that in the east was not necessary in the west in order to carry late antique societies into the Middle Ages.

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FURTHER READING

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The Scriptural Galaxy of Late Antiquity

Guy G. Stroumsa

Introduction

In the long Late Antiquity, roughly from the birth of Christianity to that of Islam, religion underwent a number of dramatic transformations throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East. The Christianization of the Roman empire highlights the most significant of these transformations: the dramatic victory of biblical monotheism in its new garb, both in the east and in the south, far beyond the boundaries of the Roman empire. The same period saw a surge in literacy rates, as well as a revolution in the material support of books, which moved from roll to codex (Cavallo 1997). Moreover, from the New Testament to the Qur'ān, a number of writings appeared, which would soon become the scriptural foundations of new religious communities. To a great extent, many of the transformations of religion seem to have been related to the enhanced status of books in society and to their new role in religion. More than ever before, books became in Late Antiquity symbols of religious identity. As never before, some books now circulated across vast areas, playing a leading role both in cult and in religious education, and becoming the anchor of large and diversified bodies of hermeneutical literatures.

A traditional taxonomy differentiates between scriptural and non-scriptural religions. Scriptures are revealed texts, whose authorship is divine. While certain books (we may speak of "foundational texts") did play a

significant role in non-scriptural religions (such as Greek or Roman religion), it is usually assumed that it was essentially different from that played by revealed scriptures. This assumption has been convincingly questioned (Bendlin 2005). The phenomenological concept of "sacred scriptures" was developed in the context of nineteenth-century Romanticism and Orientalism in order to discuss Hinduism and Buddhism with terms easily identified in western cultural history; it is not particularly helpful in order to understand ancient religions. While the development of writing had some major impact on religion, the idea of "sacred scriptures" remains a special case in historical development, rather than a necessary consequence of writing. There is no doubt, however, that religions using script (and hence, books) had a major advantage over those traditional religions that did not use writing, either at all or prominently (Goody 2000).

Although we use to oppose the scriptural religions (or "religions of the book") such as Judaism and Christianity, to archaic and traditional religions like those of Greece and Rome, it would be highly misleading to imagine that the latter made no use of books. Sacred books, indeed, were also known in Hellenic religion; one may mention for instance the *hieroi nomoi* or the *Orphic Hymns* in Greece (Bremmer 2010). The same is true for the Sybilline Oracles in Rome. Even Roman religion, which was so much centered upon rituals, was transformed by books (Beard 2004) and could also be called, to a certain extent, a "religion of the book."

The purpose of the following pages is to reflect on the complex role of writing and books in the late antique mutation of religion, through some preliminary forays into the complex dynamics of what I propose to call the scriptural galaxy of Late Antiquity. "The scriptural galaxy" obviously refers to the title of Marshall McLuhan's 1962 cult book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographical Man*. Indeed, Late Antiquity saw a revolution in literate culture the consequences of which, for more than a millennium, would be no less dramatic than those of the invention of the movable type. I am not only referring here to the transformation of the physical support of the books but also, and more importantly, to the redaction of foundational texts of new religions, perceiving themselves as world religions (Manichaeism, rather than Christianity, was the first religion to define itself as such from the very start). These texts circulated almost freely between religious communities throughout the *oikoumene*—and also across religious lines.

In an age of empires, it is by the book, rather than by the sword, that the new world religions conquered, and that would remain true, to a great extent, about the Islamization of the Near East. In this "global village" of sorts, within and without the borders of the Roman empire, it is often in translation that those texts circulated, and that commentaries were elaborated,

often in writing but also orally. Referring to a "scriptural galaxy" offers the double advantage of highlighting both the huge dimensions and the great complexity and dynamics of the patterns involved—and also of dealing with these patterns as reflecting one single overarching phenomenon: the transformation of religious life in Late Antiquity. It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to draw even a succinct panorama of the scriptures of the different religious communities, as well as their hermeneutical literature. I shall not deal here separately with the scriptural systems (scriptures, canonization process, development of hermeneutical rules, etc.) within Rabbinic Judaism, Patristic Christianity, Sasanian Zoroastrianism, or Manichaeism—or among the Neoplatonists. Such presentations, at once broad and detailed, can already be found (see, for instance, Colpe 1987; Sawyer 1999), although they more often than not focus solely on the cognitive aspects of books, while forgetting (or keeping in the background) performative and emotional aspects of books in late antique religions, aspects that we have only recently learned to discover and appreciate.

Until fairly recently, the material side of holy books was often played down, as well as their importance in magical or divinatory practices. Hence, most scholarly discussions of scriptures in Late Antiquity sound rather static. Scriptures, indeed, can be understood properly only as one pole, among others, of religious life, related at once to a series of hermeneutical writings (in different genres), oral traditions of interpretation, rituals, and non-ritual actions, such as divination or magical practices. Moreover, texts do not act in history by themselves, and the question of agency cannot be ignored. It is by someone that scriptures are redacted, copied, memorized, read, learned, copied, taught, transmitted. In the scriptural galaxy, then, scriptures should be understood as representing only one aspect of a complex and dynamic system, and their function in religious life cannot be isolated from oral traditions and from ritual practices. Simultaneously, scriptures of any given religion must be studied in the context of the exegetical polemics of heretical groups, and also in their polemical relationship with the scriptural systems of other religious communities. Such an approach, toward which we grope, is complex to the extreme, but it offers a unique perspective for a global understanding of the dramatic scriptural turn of late antique religion.

Side by side with Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, one should obviously refer those sacred texts of the various heretical trends gravitating in the Abrahamic system, which soon became censored by mainstream theologians, and identified as "apocryphal," as the negative, as it were, of the "legitimate" scriptures. Such heretical books, perceived as particularly dangerous, precisely because of their closeness to the official scriptures, were often set for public destruction, usually by fire. The burning of religious books, indeed,

was a known practice in Late Antiquity (Herrin 2009). A large number of apocryphal texts (in particular Gospels and Acts attributed to the various apostles) redacted among early Christians soon became prized among the various Gnostic and other dualist trends of early Christianity. Similarly, the Manichaeans and Mandaeans published a large number of new texts, either scriptural or hermeneutical, side by side with their generous use of previous literature.

Some other groups, on the borderline between religion and philosophy, such as the Hermetists or the Neo-Pythagoreans, also produced numerous religious writings. As to traditional Roman religion and Greco-Roman cults, the fact that one cannot refer to their "scriptures" does certainly not entail that books played no role in their evolution.

Religious Transformations and Textual Communities

All around the Mediterranean and the Near East, blood sacrifices, although they never completely disappeared, stopped during the first centuries of the Roman empire being the more commonly shared public religious ritual in the Roman empire. There were complex consequences to the deep transformation of the nature of religion that the disappearance of blood sacrifices entailed. One should highlight, in particular, the new, central role played by revealed books in different religious systems, as well as the fresh, strong emphasis on the religious component of identity, usually expressed through participation in a community (Stroumsa 2009).

Although much has been written on the nature of the religious transformations in Late Antiquity, it has not been argued sharply enough that in the history of religion, the end of the era of sacrifice also meant the start of a new era, that of the book. In the first four centuries of the Common Era, the passage from scroll to codex occurred faster among Christians than in other religious communities. This passage did not only have practical causes and consequences—such as making book production much cheaper, by the use of the two sides of the support. It also had a deep impact on religion: smaller, cheaper books were easier to carry, so that their content could travel faster. Moreover, the codex also permitted much easier inter-textual cross-references, thus encouraging the blossoming of new hermeneutical patterns. From now on, books would play a central role in all religions, not only in those often called "the religions of the book." To a great extent, it seems that the last heirs of the Hellenic religious tradition, such as emperor Julian, for instance, were deeply influenced by Christianity,

the winning but despised religion, in their insistence on referring to Hellenic "sacred scriptures." These cults without scriptures, such as the Oriental and Mystery cults, would not survive. We should remember, however, that scriptural books have not only a cognitive content, but also visual aspects. The book is to be seen, as it represents God himself. On its cover, often, a relief icon of God, or of the Son of God. Here lies, in a sense, the root of the medieval concept of the *Biblia pauperum*, applied to the painted windows of the churches.

Can the passage from sacrificial rituals to the centrality of books in religion be described, as has been suggested, as a move from *Kultreligion* to *Buchreligion*? Such a neat categorization would be misleading, however, as one cannot truly say that books *replace* religious ritual. Rather, besides their multiple cognitive roles (such as theology, hermeneutics, or polemics) scriptures (as scroll or codex) also become directly associated with some of the core rituals of religion.

One should insist on this capital fact: from now on, the fate of religion would never be quite isolated from that of books. Liturgy, hermeneutics, theology, polemics: books were now present at all corners of religious life and identity. Religious education could also become a scholarly venture, not only a process of learning the skills for religious praxis, such as sacrifice. Becoming religiously adult could now also entail significant literacy skills: an adult Jew is expected to read the Torah scroll, according to the traditional chanting system (which must be memorized). Religion had also become a matter of learned interpretation, which followed clearly established hermeneutical rules.

The Christians, indeed, soon produced an impressive literature, which went much beyond the texts later canonized in the New Testament, from the vast apocryphal literature to the early apostolic and apologetic texts, and the whole theological library of Patristic writings. In this context, one has even spoken of "the media revolution" of early Christianity (Mendels 1999). What is striking, however, is that this literature did not become the core of Christian education, after the Christianization of the Roman empire. Only a tiny proportion of Christian writings was translated and circulated throughout the Christian *oikoumene*.

This does not mean, of course, that the rate of literacy had become very high. Although such things are extremely hard to measure, there is no reason to believe that many Christian males were highly literate (the only exception to the low rate of literacy seems to have been among the Jews). What it means is that the religious leadership, at least, was now highly literate, and that the whole complex world of scriptural hermeneutics was constantly enriched, and was engulfing the life of communities.

It might be heuristically useful to apply to Late Antiquity the concept of "textual communities," originally coined (Stock 1983) to describe medieval communities in which the scriptural text was at the very core of daily life: the scriptural text was read, copied, chanted, commented or meditated upon (in translation). The members of a textual community, be it a monastery or a *beit midrash* show an active participation with the living text. This term is better suited than that of "reading communities," a term that works well only for those small privileged groups of highly educated people (Johnson 2010). In stark contradistinction with the sociological reality of western medieval Christendom, however, the late antique religious scene remained essentially multiple. Late Antiquity represents a period of increasing complexity in the network of religious communities, which since the Hellenistic times had gradually acquired their independence from ethnic traditional bonds, and even cultural milieus and linguistic environments (in Hellenistic times, such communities had remained highly select). Religious communities of very different obedience, belonging to a number of traditions, were living side by side, either in competition with one another, or ignoring one another, at least in theory. We should be careful to remember, however, that official competition or ignorance never meant practical exchange of ideas, or osmosis of religious practices (with or without giving them a new interpretation).

Communication and Language

In Late Antiquity, religion learned to travel by and with books. One of the obvious characteristics of the late antique world is that it reflects the meeting, and often the clash, of cultures, both within the Roman empire and across imperial boundaries. Cultures and religions interact with one another in multiple ways. This is certainly true in the east, where the conflict between the Roman and the Sasanian empires remained mainly latent for centuries, between outbursts of warfare. In the Hellenistic world, religions had learned to travel, together with Greek culture, as one could convert to a religion other than that of the community in which one had been born. The world of Late Antiquity witnessed a new development: the birth of what we have learned to call "world religions," religions of salvation, that can be adopted independently of one's ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity. Christianity, then Manichaeism, and eventually Islam, are the main examples of world religions in our area (Buddhism, another obvious instance, started earlier, and lies outside our present scope). Within an imperial context, and even more so in a context crossing imperial boundaries, such religions could not possibly have thrived without the constant use of books.

From Paul to Mani and beyond, religious leaders made a constant use of writings, which announced and carried on their mission to foreign places and distant communities. These writings did not replace the scriptures; rather, they supported and highlighted them. Religious leaders made great use of books, but so did, for instance, missionaries, holy men, merchants, or prisoners of war: religious books travel in all kinds of ways. It is essential to note, however, that they did not travel by themselves: the authority of the book highlights that of its carrier, who, in their turn, reinforces the book's authority. One can go further and say that scriptures, copied by the holy men, reflect, like them, the divine presence in the world. In late antique Christianity, the codex of the Gospels, the Logos incarnating the presence of Christ, is often the doorway to contemplation. Both the scriptural codex and the holy man represent the two most striking icons of religious authority in Late Antiquity (Rapp 2007). It is in the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* that we find, perhaps, the most striking representation of the power of scriptures: Christ on the cross is covered not by a tunic, but by a scroll of the scriptures (Kreps 2013).

Books provide the key to the understanding of the religious transformations of Late Antiquity, inasmuch as they permitted communication between communities across vast areas. Written media permitted communication across wide areas, not only cross-regionally, but also across empires. Communication through books was established both between communities sharing a common religious identity and across religious boundaries. Here, the advantage of Christianity, Manichaeism, and eventually Islam over other religions and the oriental cults in the Roman empire (except Judaism) was quite clear: in their books, those missionary religions possessed a major advantage over their competitors (Rüpke 2011).

The use of a *lingua franca* such as Greek or Aramaic, in its various garbs (and in particular Syriac) permitted easy communication between areas separated by political, though not necessarily by linguistic and cultural borders. The increased complexity of the web of religious communities in Late Antiquity is compounded by the linguistic situation. Latin, Greek, and Aramaic were known across large areas, permitting a broad interface of beliefs, stories, and even rituals crossing the boundaries of religious identity.

Just like Jews and Christians, pagans too learned to refer to their own sacred texts. For emperor Julian, the very fact that the New Testament was written in a lower kind of Greek highlighted the fact that it could not seriously be considered to be a sacred text. In that sense, the New Testament reflects a revolutionary attitude to scriptural language, now meant to be accessible to all, even to those with a very modest level of literacy. The same attitude would permit the early translation of the Christian scriptures to various vernaculars of Christian communities, such as Coptic, Syriac, Armenian,

or Gothic. By tradition, a sacred text was written in high, or hieratic rather than in low, or demotic language.

Here as elsewhere, the case of the Jews is rather special: although Jewish communities were dispersed even beyond the boundaries of the Roman and in the Sasanian empires, Judaism was in no way a world religion. Hebrew, for the Jews the hallowed language of the Torah and the Bible, remained for the educated class a *lingua franca*, side by side with the Aramaic vernacular. Although the Bible could be translated, the original text was endowed with a special status: it is only in the Hebrew scrolls that the Torah was read in the synagogue ritual, in striking contradistinction with the Christian approach to the biblical text, which was as valid in translation as it was in the original. For the rabbis, in a sense, the language of the Torah was similar to Qur'ānic Arabic in the (later) Islamic doctrine of *i'gaz al-Qur'an*: the scripture's language remains inimitable.

The sacred character of the language of revelation went up to its very elements: the letters themselves, were granted an ontological status much beyond anything known before. Divine power in books, but also in words, pronounced, read, or written, even in letters, represent an alternative world of reality, parallel to that of the material, created world. The ontological power of words reaches its acme in divine names, as well as in magical texts. Religious diglossia, highlighted by the cohabitation of scriptures in both vernacular and original language, strengthened the perceived power of scriptures in all their components, up to the individual characters. A number of late antique texts reflect this heightened power of the letters (*stoicheia*) of the alphabet, true elements (*stoicheia*) of the whole universe—as well as of the divine body (Stroumsa 2014)! It is not only the case that the scriptures represent the divine revelation. Even the divine, cosmic body is made of those letters.

Canonization Processes and Religious Memory

The early stages of a new religion, such as the two heirs to Second Temple Judaism, the early Christian and the early Rabbinic movement usually show a wave of literary creativity. While some of those inspired writings will soon become integral parts of a new canon of scriptures, through a process of selection by the religious authorities in the making. Those writings included in the canon are considered to be part of the divine revelation, and thus to be subject to a hermeneutical system that will permit to draw from them an infinite number of spiritual and legal lessons, beyond their literal understanding. All other texts, some of them quite similar in their tone and structure to

those now canonized, are either endowed with a lesser value, as their origin is solely human, or even are identified as apocryphal, that is, false scriptures, impure, dangerous, and therefore to be destroyed. As shown by the history of early Christianity, canonization is a process, and the selection process, over a period of time, is parallel to the fight between orthodoxy and heresy. Those texts that appeal most to the various Gnostic and dualist groups, for instance, are those that are soon defined as apocryphal and stemming from Satan.

But apocryphal writings were not the only unsettling texts. Many scriptural verses or passages could be problematic for the believer, for a number of reasons, and create a cognitive dissonance. There are two possible ways to deal with such problematic passages. The first option is interpretation: the problematic verses are deviated from their literal sense, through the established hermeneutical rules, and understood metaphorically. This is, by far, the most common option in all religious traditions. The other, more radical option consists in expurgating the problematic verses or passages from the scriptural text, claiming that they do not belong to the original text, but were a later addition, usually by Satan (hence the Qur'ān's "Satanic verses"). While Marcion applied this method of textual trimming to various books of the New Testament, the Ebionites (a leading Jewish–Christian group of the first centuries) applied it to a number of books from the Hebrew Bible.

In the world of Late Antiquity, the increasing presence and heightened status of books had not eroded the predominance of oral traditions. In such a world, the attitude to scriptures, which often carried the founding prophet's *ipsissima verba*, remained ambivalent, as it had been in Plato's time: was it safer for truth to be transmitted orally, or should one trust only written texts? There was no single answer to this question. An important Manichaean text reveals to us that Mani sought here to avoid the mistake made by the Buddha, Zarathustra, and Jesus, who had satisfied themselves with an oral teaching, trusting their disciples to transcribe their words accurately. Mani would make sure that he himself would redact his own teaching, in his own words.

From the second-century Tannaim, who each learned by rote his own chapters of the Mishnah, to fifth-century Church Fathers such as Augustine, who usually quoted by heart the biblical texts they were referring to, memory played a crucial role in keeping the overwhelming presence of the scriptures in the daily life of religious elites. Some scriptural texts, however, were more present than others. The book of Genesis, with the hexaemeron and the sagas of the patriarchs, the life, passion, and teaching of Christ, as told in the Gospels, and the 150 Psalms of David, which were constantly chanted, both aloud and quietly, by Christian monks and simple Jews alike, were probably the best known among all scriptural texts.

An intriguing case is that of a number of *Books of Mysteries*, written among Jews (already at Qumran) and Christians throughout Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages, then also among Muslims. These books purport to reveal cosmological secrets. Similar writings also existed in pagan context, but did not create a problem there. It is in the monotheistic milieu that such texts strike one as odd, as the revealed scriptures are supposed to deal with all aspects of the cosmos, when interpreted through the appropriate hermeneutical tools. The *Books of Mysteries*, then, offer a shortcut of sorts, evading the control of the traditional religious authorities and revealing the secrets directly to the elect. No surprise, then, that these writings stand at the root of the mystical traditions in the Abrahamic religions (Stroumsa 2016).

Connected Religious History

In Late Antiquity, for the first time, religions seemed to develop a strong interest in the scriptures of one another (Johnson 2004). This interest is usually reflected in polemics: Jews, Christians, Gnostics, Manichaeans, Zoroastrians (not to mention pagans and philosophers) polemicize against one another, but always retain a serious interest in their enemy's scriptures, even when it is mainly in order to blast them. Polemics usually involve two opposing parties. Reality on the ground was much more complex, and such dual oppositions of conflicting parties reflect ideological reconstructions that oversimplify it. One should not forget that religious writings are not always what they purport to be. In a number of cases, for instance, in what appears to be a polemical treatise the enemy is only a straw man, and the text deals in fact with questions of self-definition.

In the scriptural galaxy, there is a multiple interface. The first interface is between webs of texts and stories (midrash, commentary, liturgical poetry). Texts are usually written, and stories are usually oral, although this is not an absolute rule: sometimes, the text is oral (although very precisely transmitted, from generation to generation), while the stories may be put to writing. But this is not the only interface, as these texts and stories also circulate between the different communities sharing a religious identity, and also between communities belonging to different religious groups, which are sometimes rather inimical to one another. These groups can be said to have intertwined histories.

Although it is useful to study together the "intertwined histories" of the different religious groups together, such an approach still retains some of the problems inherent to the traditional history of religions as essentially plural. This common ground among religious groups usually remaining in a polemical

relationship with one another at once permits and demands that we study what I propose to call connected religious history (in the singular), building on the concept of "connected history" developed by the early modern historian Sanjai Subrahmanyam. We should then speak of a connected religious history, in order to emphasize the essential unity of the religious world of Late Antiquity, which I have called the "scriptural galaxy." Only a unified vision of that galaxy permits a full understanding of the movements within it.

Scriptural hermeneutics were of course established upon a written text, but they also received various oral developments. We must remember that the new emphasis on scriptures and books did not mean that late antique society as such was a literate society. In late antique society communication remained to a great extent oral. Stories circulated between religious groups and communities, were transformed, sometimes slightly, sometimes in major ways. But these stories were always dynamic, never static. In this sense, one may speak of a hybrid society, where orality and script function together, as two complementary aspects of the formation and transformation of collective, cultural, and religious memory. In a sense, the demotic aspect of the Christian attitude to scriptures, and to books in general, permits one to speak of a "religion of the paperback" rather than of a "religion of the book" (Stroumsa 2003). A religion of the book for the unlettered.

The Scriptural Movement

In Late Antiquity, literacy had ceased being the privilege of scribes, and played a major role in society, although literacy rates remained rather limited. Our period is often considered to have been a period of growing religious reliance on texts, and in particular on revealed scriptures, as well as on a rich and vast body of hermeneutical texts on these scriptures. One has even spoken of a "scriptural movement," with the implicit claim that more than in other periods, one can follow in the long Late Antiquity, roughly from the New Testament to the Qur'ān, a growing need, or even fascination, for heavenly or revealed texts offering the foundation or legitimation of new religious communities (Smith 1993). To some extent, this trend reflects the implications on religion of the development of writing from archaic societies to the Hellenistic times.

Although the idea of a "scriptural movement" is appealing on first sight, it is less obvious than it first looks, and its heuristic validity seems to be limited by at least two main factors. The first factor is, it does not always work. In some significant cases, such as Judaism or Zoroastrianism, one observes

almost the opposite, namely a turn to oral transmission of traditions that had previously been able to develop significant literatures. It almost looked like one was reluctant to commit religious traditions to writing—this might have been in order to maintain the singularity of the existing scriptures. The Jews had developed a rich literature during the second Temple period, written both in Greek and in Hebrew or Aramaic. Like the Jews, the Zoroastrians were the heirs of a very old religious literature (which they had kept oral). In Late Antiquity, the rabbis, who had become for all practical purposes the sole representative of Judaism, proudly presented their discussions as "Oral Torah," in contradistinction to Moses' "Written Torah." For the rabbis, the revealed scripture was considered to be so special that there was, next to the Torah, no room for any other book, since any other writing was a human creation rather than a divine revelation. Hence, for them, there could be only one Book, the divine and revealed one.

The second factor impinging on the idea of a "scriptural movement" is the fact that the movement of intensive and growing codification during our period remains by no means limited to religious texts. Thus, the sustained effort on the part of the Roman authorities at the integration of legal codification, as it is reflected first in the Theodosian Codex (*Cod. Theod.*) and then, in the sixth century, in the Justinian Codex (*CJ*), or *Corpus Iuris Civilis.* In a sense, this effort may be compared to the compilation of the Talmud (both the Babylonian and the Palestinian highly different versions of the Talmud approximately date from the late fifth or early sixth century), but one can argue convincingly that the Talmudic texts reflect a legal as well as a religious codification.

This second factor highlights the fact that up to the end of the Middle Ages, the categories of religion and law remained much less separately identified than in the modern world, and that there was a very broad interface between the field of religion and that of law. It is indeed only since the Reformation that the sphere of "religion" became essentially identified with that of "faith," in contradistinction with the sphere of law.

With the accumulation of the number of texts available, and that of the religious communities in contact with one another (even though this contact remained more often than not a highly polemical one), the urge increased to collect, organize, and summarize the ever-growing amount of relevant texts in every cultural or religious tradition. Hence, the idea of a religious or of a legal *summa*, reflected for instance in the two versions of the Talmud (the highly different Babylonian Talmud and Palestinian Talmud), the Roman legal codices, or even the Christian heresiological treatises. All such major theological and exegetical corpora constitute secondary scriptural canons.

Self-definition

"Tell me what you read and I'll tell you who you are." The proverb was never truer than in Late Antiquity. The main characteristic of the period, perhaps, was the fact that books became an essential, if not the essential element of self-definition. To a great extent, people were now defined by their books—or, more often, by their book, by the book they considered to be a heavenly or divine, and revealed book. This book (or this set of books) belonged to the members of the community, and only to them, identifying them clearly, setting them apart from all other communities. "Community" is a vague term, fitting at once ethnic groups, proud of their ancestral scriptures in the traditional language, which they might or might not understand anymore, as well as groups constituted around a chosen life pattern and set of beliefs: religious communities but also philosophical schools.

The increasing importance of scriptures as a major element of self-definition of group identity is highlighted by the fact that it is not only religions of revelation that insisted on their holy books. Emperor Julian, who had rejected the Christian faith of his youth for the traditional Hellenic (polytheistic) tradition of his ancestors, was unable to free himself from the Christian attitude to holy books. Similarly, late antique Platonic circles revered almost as divine scriptures some of Plato's texts, such as the *Timaeus*, which dealt, like *Genesis*, with the origins of the world. Among the late Neoplatonists, the *Chaldean Oracles*, to which their mysterious language gave a hieratic echo, were also considered to be a holy text of sorts—something that may well reflect Christian influence (Lamberton 1986). Having a special, holy book became a must for any religious group, a fact well emphasized by the Qur'ānic expression: "the people of the book" (*ahl al-kitab*), which clearly reflects a phenomenological perception—religious groups vied with one another, each one claiming pride of its own book, or *kitab*. A vast web of communities and books was thus obtained throughout the vast area of the Mediterranean and the Near East. This late antique attitude to scriptures as the essence of religious identity would have a powerful echo in the modern study of religion. When Max Müller, in his *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (1873) coined the concept of "religions of the book," he was clearly inspired by the Qur'ānic phrase.

It would be a mistake, however, to conceive of this web as only one of literary texts. It was also a web of stories. Throughout the ecumene, these stories were circulating, mainly orally, between communities of faith, both those sharing the same religious background, and those divided by theological beliefs. These stories either complemented or replaced written texts, often offering commentaries to those texts, in a mode we may call midrashic.

Like in a kaleidoscope, there was a limited number of the individual elements (or mythologoumena) of these stories, but at each small turn of the system, they would become rearranged in what seemed to be an infinite number of different reflections. It is this whole complex web of texts, stories, communities, and religions that constitutes the scriptural galaxy.

Scripture and Books

To what extent was the ancient attitude to books in general, and education in particular, transformed in Late Antiquity, from the Christianization of the Roman empire to the emergence of the Islamic Caliphate, that is, as political power was held by believers in a divinely revealed book? Books remained rather rare in the Ancient World. Even in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, one cannot expect more than 15 or 20% of literate people (in the west, the numbers are closer to 5 to 10%). And yet, the new religious coherence of the Christians, which conquered the Roman empire, was informed not only by their scriptures, but also by the striking status of books for them. As is well known, in the Roman empire, a major factor was the decision, by the newly Christianized elites to go along with traditional educational patterns, with only some adjustments, despite their deep ambivalence regarding some of the essential texts of Hellenic and Greco-Roman *paideia*.

These adjustments were of two kinds. On the one hand, some of the classical Greek texts, judged immoral, were played down. On the other hand, and more importantly, traditional education was supplemented, at all levels, with religious education, that is, the study of scriptures. It should be noted that this religious education was perceived for a long time as essentially remaining outside *paideia*. This is the case, for instance, in Basil the Great's famous pamphlet, *Discourse to the Young, and how they might benefit from Greek literature*. There is here no conception of an educational system directly or solely inspired by Christianity. Similarly, Augustine, who can say (in particular in his *De Doctrina Christiana*), that philosophical culture is not the only one conceivable, ignores the institutional aspect of the problem of culture (Stroumsa 2012). There were indeed in Late Antiquity very few attempts to create a Christian educational canon. What we have, rather, is a highly successful attempt to read together, as on parallel tracks, the texts of the biblical canon and those of the Greek literary canon (Stroumsa 1998).

The intricate rules of hermeneutics of scriptures in Greek, as we know them among Jews and Christians, were first developed in Alexandria in order to interpret Homer, then applied by Alexandrian Jews to the Torah, eventually reaching the Church Fathers through Philo. But while the hermeneutical

rules were applied to the Homeric epics in the Hellenic educational tradition (*paideia*), for the Christians, following the Jews, one dealt with two textual traditions. There are some important connections between Alexandrian book culture and the history of the biblical text (Niehoff 2011). The biblical scriptural canon did not replace the Greek cultural canon. Rather, one learned to read the two canons in parallel to one another. Christian education, at least among patrician families, insisted upon learning the Hellenic classics, side by side with the Christian Bible. It is upon this double footing that *cultura christiana*, and which became the basis of European culture, was eventually established. The establishment of *cultura christiana* reflects the major cultural shift of Late Antiquity, and this cultural shift is exemplified better than anywhere else in the establishment of the monasteries. There were of course a number of highly different coenobitic forms of monasticism, in the west as well as in the east. The learning dimension of some among these institutions is particularly striking in our context, as in some cases (for instance Nisibis in the east, or Cassiodorus's Vivarium in the west), these monasteries became full-fledged academies of higher learning, which played a major role in the transmission of knowledge to, respectively, the Arabic and Latin medieval worlds.

The fact that books and writings now play a major role in various religions, highly different from one another, including in those insisting much more on deeds than on words, on behavior than on reflection, reflects the deep impact of the new presence of literacy in varied levels of religious life. This fact has a direct impact on perceptions of culture. In the Greco-Roman world, Greek *paideia* (which was meant of course only for the higher—and male—layers of society) was a major element of cultural self-perception, but not of religious identity. This *paideia* had been based upon the classics, those texts codified in Alexandria in the third century BCE. It is rather paradoxical that only in Judaism was this *paideia* to have a central impact. "*Talmud Torah*" ("the learning of the Torah") was considered by the Jews to be the greatest possible religious duty, or *mizwah*. Hence Elias Bickerman's brilliant remark, made almost in passing, according to which the Jews inherited from the Greeks their intense interest for books and learning, making it their most important religious duty. It is a striking paradox of late antique Judaism that it took no part in "the scriptural movement." Indeed, it would almost seem that Rabbinic Judaism retreated into a world from which all but one book had disappeared. No sage in the Talmud is ever portrayed consulting a book (Dohrmann 2015). If there was only one, divine *Sefer Torah*, the concept of book (*sefer* in Hebrew) could be rightly applied only to it. All other books were apocryphal, impure, and prohibited, and education could only mean the learning of the "oral Torah" (*Torah she-be-al-peh*), by which the Talmudic tradition is referred.

What emperor Julian seems to have lacked in order to succeed in his attempt to reverse the wheel may well have been the idea of religious education, rather than a holy book. In contradistinction to the Christian bishops, pagan priests did not have at their disposal a system of *religious* education. While the Christians did not reject the main aspects of Hellenic *paideia*, they supplemented it by religious education, which usually amounted to commenting upon the Holy Writ. The major difference between Judaism and Christianity (and then Islam) and the Greco-Roman religions lies not so much in the presence or not of "sacred scriptures" but in the nature of these scriptures. Although this is not really part of my present topic, one may suggest that a more significant difference between these two kinds of religions lies in the nature of those books. In the Hellenic tradition, there is nothing similar to the saga about Abraham and his extended family, as standing at the core of the *historia sacra*.

The holy texts of the scriptural galaxy were not read anymore in the same way as literary texts had been read so far in reading communities in Greece and Rome. Instead of being extensive, and relaxing, reading became intensive and meditative, focused on a much smaller number of texts, studied and "squeezed" for meaning much more seriously than anything else before. Reading, or rather reciting the text, a text that had often been memorized, and seeking to extract from it multiple meanings for daily conduct became a new game, going much further than anything learned in traditional education, or *paideia*. To a great extent, one now lives with the holy book, which has also become the major tool for spiritual and mental health, through a bibliotherapy, as it were: the constant meditation upon God's revealed Word saves one from all the illnesses of idolatry and paganism.

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Proscription of Sacred Texts in Late Antiquity

Mar Marcos

Introduction

The religious landscape of the Mediterranean became increasingly more complex under the Roman empire. Along with traditional polytheism(s), new religions in rapid expansion, like Christianity and Manichaeism, multiplied religious choices, competition, and potential friction. While for centuries the coexistence of diverse religions had not led to remarkable conflicts—in Roman history only the affair of the Bacchanalia of 186 BCE was recalled as a memorable act of intolerance by the state—the spread of Christianity, with its universalist and exclusivist ambitions, caused the first violent encounter continued over time between a religious group and Roman authorities, as well as the first reflection on religious freedom and the possibility or not of mutual recognition. "Tolerance by default" (Garnsey 1984), "indifferent, tolerant pluralism" (Roda 2007), "intuitive, factual toleration" (Schreiner 1990), and "pragmatic toleration" (Marcos 2016) are some of the concepts coined by recent historiography to describe the traditional Roman attitude toward religious plurality, which for centuries had not been seen as problematic.

The Mediterranean in the Roman empire has been compared to a marketplace in which religion was as "a matter of choosing, consuming, marketing, and competing" (Witham 2010: vii; North 1992: 179, with critical remarks).

The expansion and final triumph of Christianity in the post-Constantine era changed that rich market into a highly specialized shop, where the ecclesiastical and political authorities attempted to impose the offer of a single product, while all other religious "delicacies" were vetoed. Although traditional cults and marginalized groups persisted after the process of Christianization was officially concluded in the fifth century, at the end of Antiquity the religious landscape was considerably less polychrome than it had been in a secular history of pluralism, and was indeed more confrontational and intolerant.

Religious conflict has been a strongly and persistently influential paradigm in late antique studies. Since Arnaldo Momigliano published a collective volume entitled *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity* (1963) bringing to the fore the role of religion as a factor in the transformation of the late Roman world, the process of Christianization has been addressed in terms of a dichotomy facing Christians and pagans, on the one hand and, on the other, the various factions of Christians. The rhetoric of Christian texts contributed significantly to the formation of this paradigm of difference and confrontation. Late antique historians have left us trapped by the huge volume of Christian polemical literature (anti-pagan, anti-Jewish, and anti-heretical) pushing us to adopt the patristic point of view.

Much scholarship in the past fifty years has dealt with late antique religious controversies in their various manifestations, from dialogue and debate to coercion, including overt physical violence. In recent years, however, there has been some reaction against the paradigm of "total conflict," turning attention to issues such as interactions (Lieu *et al.* 1992; Fine 1999), the construction of individual and collective identities (Schott 2008; Rebillard and Rüpke 2015), strategies to solve conflict and to reach compromise (Fear *et al.* 2013), and overlapping, osmosis, and loans between the different religious systems (Brown and Lizzi Testa 2011; Salzman *et al.* 2016).

In spite of this recent revisionism, nobody denies that the world of Late Antiquity grew more and more intolerant (Athanassiadi 2010). Mainly it has been blamed on Christianity, with its obstinacy in affirming the existence of a unique way to approach the divine and its combative attitude toward other creeds, which turned into repressive action when it became the state religion (e.g. Drake 1996). The phenomena of tolerance and intolerance, however, cannot be explained by the intrinsic character of one or the other religious system. Neither polytheism, which carried out persecution on several occasions, nor Christianity, which often came to request the intervention of the armed hand of the empire, were by nature tolerant or intolerant; they both, at different times, advocated toleration on the basis of very similar arguments, and equally both acted as intolerant (Marcos 2009).

This chapter discusses one of the manifestations of crude intolerance in Late Antiquity, the proscription of sacred texts, a phenomenon that could be analyzed by means of the two aforementioned paradigms of confrontation and interaction.

I use here the term "proscription" to refer to a variety of actions aimed at controlling book circulation by political and ecclesiastical authorities. This control may include censorship, banning, confiscation, and ceremonial burning. The word comes from the Latin *proscriptio*, plural *proscriptiones*, posted lists with the names of citizens who were declared outlaws during the civil wars of the late Republic. Proscribed citizens were killed or sent into exile and their properties confiscated, while those who sheltered them were severely punished. By extension, the term is used to denote violent forms of political repression, and I would extend it to the field of religion, which, in Antiquity, is inseparable from the political sphere. As will be shown in this chapter, the suppression of sacred texts, which involved the conviction of their authors and severe penalties for those who harbored them, formed part of a coordinated strategy between Church and state to eliminate religious–political rivals.

Conflict and competition involved books both as instruments and as victims of intolerance, implicating several actors (political and ecclesiastical authorities, intellectuals, and common people), and showing that the methods of repression were shared among various religious groups in their attempt to eliminate the "other." As will be seen, osmosis and continuity dominate in this facet of late antique religious conflict.

Sacred Texts, Politics, and Religion in Rome

Censorship, banning, confiscation, and burning of books, either sacred or profane, are practices attested in different cultures through history, following similar patterns. In Greece, the most notorious case concerned the sophist Protagoras in fifth-century Athens. Accused of impiety because of his declared agnosticism, Protagoras' books were said to have been burned in the agora after a herald had taken them from each of their owners, while Protagoras himself was sent into exile (Diog. Laert. 9.52; Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* 1.23. 63; Josephus, *Ap.* 2.37.266; Philostratus, *Vitae Sophist.* 1.10 (494); Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 8.3; Lactantius, *De Ira Dei*, 9; Eusebius, *PE* 14.19.10). The truth of this account has been questioned and, most likely, Protagoras was neither sent into exile nor were his books burned. Not only was this not mentioned by his contemporaries (e.g. Plato and Xenophon), but furthermore everything suggests that Protagoras was held in high esteem until his

death. The records of the episode start with Cicero at the end of the Republic. When Cicero wrote, in a time of great political turmoil, there was a tradition of censorship that made it credible. It is not possible to trace the origin of Protagoras' story, but it may have been forged in the late fourth century BCE as a result of some politico-cultural phenomena, such as the passing from oral tradition to the primacy of the written text, the transition from a democratic community to an authoritarian state, and the new cultural and political role that philosophers had then come to play in Greece (Wallace 1996).

Although orality was always important in Roman culture, from the late Republic writing became an essential element in the practice of administration and in urban life, where books, inscriptions, and other written materials, such as so-called *libelli*, circulated at large. Roman people showed a remarkable familiarity with the habit of reading and writing, and extensively did it during the empire (Cavallo *et al.* 1989; Humphrey 1991; Johnson and Parker 2009). This explains why censorship has been denoted a "Roman peculiarity" (Finley 1977).

Several cases of book proscription are attested in the context of the political disturbances at the end of the Republic and during the empire (Cramer 1945; Speyer 1981; Sarefield 2004). But it was in the sphere of religion where this practice, and in particular book burning, was performed with the characteristics that would define it later, that is, as a public and ritualized act of condemnation and purification involving the book physically and its author symbolically (Sarefield 2006; Herrin 2009). Writings, in the form of calendars, ritual texts, and votive inscriptions, played a significant role in shaping conceptions of divinity in both Greek and Roman state and private religions (Beard 1991; Lardinois *et al.* 2011). Diviners, astrologers, magicians, followers of foreign cults, and all those dealing with suspicious texts were the object of proscription at different times in the history of Rome (North 1990; Dickie 2001; Saggioro 2016).

Records on confiscation of sacred books date back to the Second Punic War. In 213 BCE, after several defeats in Italy during the Hannibalic War, priests conducting sacrifices (*sacrificuli*) and prophets (*vates*)—Livy says—captivated the imagination of the people, and many abandoned traditional practices to offer prayers and sacrifices according to foreign rites. The urban praetor decreed that all those who possessed books of prophecies, prayers, or rituals should deliver them to him on a given date; meetings were also banned (Livy 25.1.6–12). In 181 BCE, the first incident of book burning is attested. At the foot of the Janiculum Hill, two stone coffers believed to contain the remains of Numa and the books revealed to him were discovered. The books were in Latin and Greek. After being examined, it was concluded that the latter were foreign to Roman tradition, and consequently to be destroyed.

The praetor proceeded to burn them in a public place, the *comitium* in the forum, during a civic ceremony. The assistants for sacrifice in Roman rites (*victimarii*) were convened to prepare the fire and throw in the books (Livy 40.29; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 13.84–87; Valerius Maximus 1.1.12; Varro *apud* Aug. *City of God* 7.34; Plutarch, *Numa*, 22; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 1.22. 5–8). Both episodes, which left a lasting trace in the memory of the Romans, involved foreign cults and coincided with a period of crisis.

But it was not until Augustus' time that religious books were the object of systematic proscription (Cramer 1945). One of the first actions attributed to Augustus as *pontifex maximus* (in 12 BCE) was to gather and burn "all the Greek and Latin prophetic texts by unknown or unworthy authors to be found in circulation"; only the Sybilline Books were preserved, while over 2000 texts are said to have been destroyed (Suetonius, *V. Aug.* 31.1). This was an unprecedented act, as Augustus was acting in the role of high priest. Augustus inaugurated also the inclusion of book proscription in the crime of *laesa maiestas* (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.72), whose victims were mostly orators and writers with anti-monarchical feelings. The most famous of them was a certain Labienus, who was accused of attacking the regime. The Senate found him guilty and ordered all his writings to be thrown to the flames. Seneca the Elder, who knew of the case at first hand, said that "a totally new form of punishment was devised for him: his adversaries decided that all his books should be burned. Destroying texts was a new thing and had never been seen before" (Sen. Rhet. *Controv.* 10, prol. 5). Seneca adds that, due to this act, the matter of book burning was debated in the schools of rhetoric, and there was total unanimity against it (Sen. Rhet. *Suas.* 7). Censorship was not well received among intellectuals, who considered freedom of speech (*parrhesia*) to be a right inherent to citizenship.

Persecution and Sacred Books

All religions in Antiquity granted value to written texts, but Judaism, Christianity, and Manichaeism stand out for the relevance of sacred literature in their identity-formation and for the huge quantity of texts that they produced and consumed. Not only holy scriptures but the whole body of texts that accompanied them were read personally and collectively in synagogues, churches, or other meeting places, such as private residences (heretics were not allowed to possess their own meeting places), and used as an instrument of teaching, dissemination, and authentication of doctrine.

The sensitivity of the Jews to their holy texts is well known, particularly the Torah, which became the object of violation in several encounters

between the Jews and foreign rulers. A few examples may serve to illustrate this. As part of the religious misdeeds carried out by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV when he took Jerusalem in 168 BCE (banning burned offerings, sacrifices, and libations from the sanctuary, profaning Sabbaths and holy days and introducing Greek cults with forced sacrifices), Antiochus ordered the books of the Law to be torn up and burned, with the menace of a death sentence for those discovered to possess copies of them (1 Maccabeans 1:56–57); the persecution led the Maccabees to revolt. Under Roman rule, in the years of confrontation that preceded the first Jewish War, a Roman soldier is said to have seized the Laws of Moses that he found while plundering a village and tore them to pieces. This was done with reproachful language and obscenity, producing a strong reaction among the population, who organized themselves and went in embassy to Caesarea to complain before the governor, Cumanus. Out of fear lest the Jews should go into a sedition, Cumanus ordered the soldier to be beheaded, which calmed the multitude (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.5.4; *Jewish War* 2.12.2). Episodes of this tenor are recorded before, during, and after Bar-Kokhba's revolt (132–135 CE). Rabbinic sources, which must be read in this regard with caution, mention many anti-Jewish measures, such as restrictions on Sabbath observance, and the prohibition of circumcision and of gathering in assembly to teach the Torah. Atrocious stories involving holy books circulated, that include wrapping children in Torah rolls and burning them alive. The most outstanding victim of the persecution was rabbi Hananiah ben Teradyon, arrested for having taught the Law in public and sentenced to be burned at the stake wrapped in the roll of the Torah that he had with him when he was captured; his entire family suffered a cruel persecution (Shepkaru 2006: 76–98).

But it was first in the conflict between pagans and Christians, and later in the internal struggles of Christianity, that the proscription of sacred texts became more widespread, although not before the fourth century—at least this is what we gather from late antique sources, many of them produced for polemical purposes (Teja and Marcos 2012). Although there is a vast (Christian) literature on the persecutions, there is no mention that sacred books were targeted. Christians themselves brought the scriptures before the judges as proof that theirs was a harmless religion. This was the case of Speratus, a Christian from second-century Numidia who took with him a chest (*capsa*) to the proconsul during his interrogation. When asked what was inside, Speratus answered that they were books and letters of Saint Paul, a righteous man. However, the books did not help much as Speratus was sentenced to death (*Acta mart. Scill.*).

The emperor Diocletian was the first to decree a general edict ordering the confiscation of Christian books, during the Great Persecution initiated in

303. In the framework of a program of unification and regeneration of the empire, Diocletian had already decreed the proscription and burning of Manichaean books. In a rescript issued at Alexandria in 302, it was laid down that the Manichaeans, who came from an enemy nation (Persia) and attempted to pollute Roman religion by introducing new rites, were a threat to Rome as they disturbed the peace and harmed civic customs: the leaders of the sect therefore deserved to be severely punished together with their abominable texts that should be burned at the stake; those who persisted would suffer capital punishment and their property be confiscated to the imperial treasury (*Lex Dei sive Mos. et Rom. Leg. Coll.* 15.3; see Gardner and Lieu 2004: 116–118). The extreme severity of the anti-Manichaean edict was justified by its purpose, that is, the preservation of the well-being and moral integrity of the Roman citizens. To write it, Diocletian could have drawn on the *Sententiae* of Paulus, a third-century pseudonymous legal compilation, one of whose "sentences" forbade the possession of books of magic and condemned them to be burned in public (*PS* 5.23.18). The effects of the anti-Manichaean rescript are unknown, but since then Manicheans were regarded with suspicion by Roman authorities and were later assimilated to heretics; they became one of the most persecuted groups under the Christian empire.

The same aim of reaching unity around traditional religion guided the persecution of the Christians. The first persecutory edict in the four issued by Diocletian ordered churches to be razed to the ground and the scriptures to be destroyed by fire (Lactantius, *De mort. persec.* 12.2; Eusebius, *HE* 8.2). Multiple testimonies to this aspect of the persecution are extant, among them the accounts of eye witnesses like Lactantius, who was then in Nicomedia where the persecution began, and Eusebius of Caesarea, who says that he personally saw the scriptures and other holy books thrown on to the fire in the middle of the agora (Eusebius, *HE* 8.2.1, *Mart. Pal.*, praef. 1 and 2.1). Details of the persecutory procedure regarding books come mostly from North Africa, where the matter of book surrender (*traditio*) was the cause of the Donatist schism, which divided the African Church for more than one century. The Acts of the Martyrs record that imperial officials came into the churches asking for vessels and books to be handed over. Some Christians preferred martyrdom, many gave in, and some tried to deceive the magistrates who, instead of insisting on an exhaustive library investigation, preferred to end the matter as quickly as possible. Thus, the bishop of Carthage, Mensurius, handed over heretical volumes; when someone pointed this out to the judge, he ignored it and accepted them as good (Augustine, *Brev. Coll.* 3.13.25). Donatist martyr stories record trials in which books were the primary object of inquiry. Felix, the bishop of Thibiuca, was

martyred on July 15, 303, scarcely a month after the publication of the first edict in Africa (on June 5), because of his refusal to surrender the scriptures. When the *curator* in charge of the confiscation asked him to hand over books and parchments (individual pages) he answered: "It is better for me to be burnt in the fire than the Sacred Scriptures, because it is better to obey God that any human authority." The curator gave Felix three days to think it over. As he persisted, he was taken to the governor in Carthage. After a new interrogation that did not make him to change mind, Felix was condemned to death (Tilley 1996: 8–12). At the same time, the bishop of Cirta was compelled to hand over the copies of the scriptures that were kept in a room in church called "the library"; those books kept in the residences of the lectors were also searched for (*Gesta apud Zenophilum* 18a–19a). Similar cases ought to have occurred in other provinces. In Spain, the poet Prudentius (ca. 400) dedicates a hymn to Vincent of Saragossa, who was martyred for this reason (*Peristephanon* 5)—Vincent is represented in iconography holding a book.

It is not possible to estimate the loss of Christian texts during the Diocletianic persecution, but its psychological effects can be appreciated in the Acts of the Martyrs and in other literature produced under the persecution. Arnobius of Sicca, a new convert from paganism and the author of a long apologetic treatise *Against the Heathen*, wonders why Christian books should be thrown into the flames and not so the books of some pagans, such as Cicero's *De natura deorum* and *De divinatione*, which contained criticism of the gods that the same pagans considered as a threat to their religion (*Adv. Nat.* 3.7). For Arnobius, to intercept writings and suppress a published text was an act of cowardice (*Adv. Nat.* 4.36.4).

Constantine's Proscription of Heretical Books: Continuity and Novelty

The conversion of Constantine and the defeat of the last of his opponents, Licinius (a. 324), marked a radical change in the status of the Christians, who not only stopped being regarded as enemies of the state, but gained a privileged position within the new Christian empire. The emperor was now personally involved in ecclesiastical affairs and willing to enforce his Church policy by law.

Although Constantine was depicted (by his supporters) as a pious, humanitarian, benevolent and tolerant ruler, inclined to persuade instead of coercing (the prevailing image created by Eusebius, *Vita Const.*), the fact is that his legislation was extremely severe, with penalties reminiscent of those that had

been put into practice during the Diocletianic persecution. Censorship and book burning are among those elements of strong continuity in Constantine's penalties (Marcos 2015a). The novelty was that proscriptions were extended to a new legal category, the heretics. The term *haereticus* appears for the first time in a law dated to 313 dealing with the Donatist schism, in which heretics are labeled as a "faction" (*haereticorum factio*), and in consequence liable to be punished as political dissenters (*Cod. Theod.* 16.2.1; Escribano Paño 2013a). Exile, confiscation of property, loss of civic rights, book proscription, and, eventually, the death penalty were, as in the times of Augustus and the Tetrarchs, the punishments for this new juridical category of public enemies.

After the Council of Nicaea, Constantine issued a decree (a. 325/6) condemning several groups of heretics. The law is not preserved, but the letter that accompanied it has survived, the so-called Edict against Heretics, in which Constantine explains the reasons that led him to make this decision (Eusebius, *Vita Const.* 3.63–65). Novatians, Valentinians, Marcionites, Paulians, and Cataphrygians are singled out as the target of the edict, while heretics in general are rated beasts, demented, infectious, and poisonous; a polluting plague that should be cut out by the roots. The violence of the language recalls that cradled in the anti-heretic literature that may have inspired Constantine, whose rhetoric marked a trend in later anti-heretic legislation. Heretics are forbidden the right of assembly, both in public and in private, their buildings are requisitioned to be delivered either to the Catholic Church or to the state, and their books confiscated—the letter does not say that they had to be burned (Eusebius, *Vita Const.* 3.66.1). Constantine appeals to the same reasons as Diocletian's for persecuting Manichaeans and Christians: a concern with the welfare of the state, founded on the need to preserve divine favor by maintaining appropriate worship.

Written texts were at the core of the numerous ecclesiastical controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries, starting with Arianism, the most prominent and persistent among the late antique heresies. The Council of Nicaea, gathered by Constantine to solve the schism created in the eastern churches by Arius' teaching, shows the potential of books as instruments and objects of polemic. In a letter sent to Arius and Alexander before the Council (in 324/5), Constantine urges them to stop public disputation and keep silent in order to avoid schism and to reach peace, concord, and unity (Eusebius, *Vita Const.* 2.69–71). Before launching the council, Constantine is said to have ordered the burning of the pamphlets (*libelli*) sent to him by the parties in conflict without having read them. The council condemned Arius' doctrines and his main theological work, the *Thalia* (Socrates, *HE* 1.9.16),

while the emperor sanctioned the synodal agreements by decreeing Arius' exile and the destruction of his writings. The edict, addressed to the bishops and people (dated most likely to 333), is quoted by the fifth-century historian Socrates (*HE* 1.9.30–31): any treatise composed by Arius was to be consigned to the flames, so that not only would his depraved doctrine be suppressed, but no memorial of Arius be by any means left; if anyone were detected in concealing a book compiled by Arius, and did not instantly bring it forward and burn it, the penalty for this offense would be capital punishment. It is not known if the law was ever applied, but apart from indicating the emperor's religious feelings and which side he was with, it may have fulfilled the purpose of terrorizing Arius' supporters.

The same edict orders that Arians should be called "Porphyrians," thus assimilating Arius with Porphyry of Tyre, the Neoplatonic philosopher who had written a treatise against the Christians (in ca. 300), of which only some fragments quoted by his opponents have survived. Before condemning Arius, Constantine had decreed the confiscation and burning of Porphyry's writings (Socrates, *HE.* 1.9.30–31; Gelasius, *HE.* 2; Cassiodorus, *HE.* 2.15). Both Porphyry and Arius were declared "enemies of piety," their affinity possibly being the denial of Christ's divine nature.

Books were involved in several episodes during the long years of the Arian controversy, certainly in many more than those that we know. In the pro-Arian Council of Tyre (a. 335), Marcellus of Ancyra, who had attended the Council of Nicaea as an opponent to Arius, was asked to explain the contents of a book he had written against one of the most prominent of Arius' followers, Asterius the sophist. Marcellus was accused of heresy for upholding that Christ was only a man and asked to retract his opinion, which he did, promising to burn his book. But when the matter was discussed again in a synod held in Constantinople—on the basis of a book *Against Marcellus* composed by Eusebius of Caesarea for the occasion—Marcellus refused to fulfill his promise, and was deposed and sent into exile. Finally, he was reinstalled in his see by the Council of Sardica (343), where his book was re-examined and found free of heretical views (Socrates, *HE* 1.36; 2.20). At the same council Paulinus of Adana was accused of magic: some books that incriminated him were examined by the council and burned by Macedonius of Mopsuestia. Paulinus was deposed and excommunicated (*Collectio Antiariana Parisina*, CSEL, 65, p. 66). Individual acts of book destruction are also recorded during the controversy. Athanasius was accused of having sent his presbyter Macarius to force a Melitian church that had sheltered one of Athanasius' rivals, Ischyras. Macarius was claimed to have overthrown the altar, broken a chalice, and burned the holy books (Athanasius, *Apol. c. Ar.* 63; Socrates, *HE* 1.27).

Both the struggle for orthodoxy and the establishment of the catholic canon contributed to the purging of heretical and apocryphal texts. Athanasius' paschal letter of the year 367, addressed to the churches and monasteries of Egypt, set out which were the books that formed part of the catholic tradition and which did not (Athanasius, *Festal Letter* 39). Athanasius does not say that non-canonical literature ought to be destroyed, but the fact is that only a few of those texts labeled in Antiquity as heretical and apocryphal have survived.

Books of Magic, Heresy, and Law

Magic practices outside state control were severely punished in Roman legislation. Condemnation to the stake (*crematio*), an unusual punishment in Rome, was prescribed for magicians in the third century BCE and, as has been seen, re-stated in the *Sentences* of Paulus, in which both books of magic and their authors were condemned. On several occasions soothsayers and astrologers were expelled from Rome and Italy, while the charge of magic became a common weapon to overthrow political adversaries. In Late Antiquity, the most notorious process involving books of magic, and tangentially the other kind, happened in Rome and Antioch in the years 371–372 under the emperors Valentinian and Valens (Amm. Marc. 28.1; 29.2). Imperial officers searched for suspect books in private residences and proceeded to burn them in public. Their holders, mainly senators, were tortured and executed. Many of the confiscated books had nothing to do with magic:

> Then, innumerable writings and many heaps of volumes were hauled out from various houses and under the eyes of the judges were burned in heaps as being unlawful, to allay the indignation at the executions, although the greater number were treatises on the liberal arts and on jurisprudence. (Amm. Marc. 29.1.41)

According to Ammianus, the fomenter of these acts was Palladius, a man of very low condition who was willing to plunge into anything:

> Like a hunter skilled in observing the secret tracks of wild beasts, he (Palladius) entangled many persons in his lamentable nets, some of them on the ground of having stained themselves with the knowledge of magic, others as accomplices of those who were aiming at treason. (fear led book holders to burn their entire libraries, Amm. Marc. 29.2.1–4)

A law of Valentinian II, Theodosius and Arcadius, dated to 389, ordered that anyone who knew of a person "contaminated with the pollution of magic" should immediately take that person to court as an enemy of the public safety (*Cod. Theod*. 9.16.11). Two decades later, in 409, Honorius and Theodosius II decreed the expulsion of astrologers (*mathematici*) from the city of Rome and from any other city, unless they were willing to convert to Christianity once that the books of their false doctrine had been consumed by fire in the presence of the bishop (*Cod. Theod*. 9.16.12). The bishops, who were the instigators of such legislation, were now involved in its implementation.

In effect, Church authorities seized the effectiveness of criminal prosecution for magic to solve its internal conflicts (Acerbi 2001; Dickie, 2001: 263–274; Kahlos 2016). The case of Athanasius of Alexandria illustrates this. During the Arian controversy Athanasius was accused of magic several times by his theological opponents. First at the beginning of his struggle against the Arians in 332, when he was accused of having killed the Meletian bishop Arsenius of Hypsilis and cut off his right hand for use in magical rites (Rufinus, *HE* 10.16–17: *magicae artis gratiae*). In 335, Athanasius was charged again by Eusebius of Nicomedia, with the serious accusation of using magic to block ships carrying wheat from Alexandria to Constantinople; if the charge had been proven, Athanasius would have been convicted of a crime of *laesa maiestas*, which involved the death penalty. The third time was in 339, when, deposed and replaced in his see by the Arian bishop Gregory, Athanasius managed to escape and reach Rome. He was then accused of having used divination to foresee his fate. Ammianus says that Athanasius was "most expert in the interpretation of oracles (*fatidicae sortes*) and omens of birds (*augurales alites*) and that, on some occasions, he had predicted the future" (Amm. Marc. 15.7). However, there is no hint that Athanasius may ever have been involved in magical practices.

The belief that magical practices were widespread among Christians is found in conciliar canons, which forbid clerics to practice as sorcerers, fortune tellers, or astrologers, and to manufacture or wear amulets (*philacteria*), under penalty of excommunication (e.g. Council of Laodicea, can. 36; see Acerbi 2001, for further references). After receiving an ecclesiastical condemnation at the Council of Saragossa, Priscillian and some of his followers were condemned to capital punishment at the court of Trier (a. 385–386), convicted of malevolent sorcery (*maleficium*) (Sulpicius Severus, *Chron*. 2.50.7–8).

Several constitutions in the Theodosian and Justinian Codes associate heretical books with magic (Escribano Paño 2013b). The first that has been preserved, dated to 389, is against the Eunomian *superstitio* and (only

collaterally) the Montanists (*Cod. Theod.* 16.5.34). Eunomius of Cyzicus (ca. 325–ca. 393), a notorious semi-Arian theologian well connected with the imperial court, had been convicted on several occasions under this law, sent into exile at least four times before the year 379, and deprived of the right of assembly. The law of 389 is intended to put an end once and forever to Eunomian proselytizing, by prohibiting the circulation of Eunomius' writings. His books were equated to magical codices and their possession to a crime of magic punished with the death penalty:

> We command that the books containing the doctrine and matter of all their crimes shall immediately be sought out and produced, with the greatest astuteness and with the exercise of due authority, and they shall be consumed with fire immediately under the supervision of the judges (*iudices*). If perchance any person should be convicted of having hidden any of these books under any pretext of fraud whatever and of having failed to deliver them, he shall know that he himself shall suffer capital punishment, as a retainer of noxious books (*noxii codices*), and as guilty of the crime of magic (*maleficii crimen*). (*Cod. Theod.* 16.5.34.1. Trans. Pharr)

There are no indications, however, to associate the Eunomians with magic practices, or (as far as we know) that trials were carried out against them for this reason, but the fact that none of Eunomius' writings has reached us directly suggests that the order could have been executed. The effort to erase forever Eunomius' memory was completed with the ban on burying him next to his master, Aetius.

That was the first law that catalogued the possession of heretical books as a crime of *maleficium*. A year earlier, Theodosius had prohibited holding doctrinal debates in public under threat of capital punishment (*Cod. Theod.* 16.4.2). The Theodosian regime effected a major qualitative change in the attempt to marginalize pagans and heretics, alongside their writings.

Under Theodosius II a series of constitutions, the first one dated to 435 (*Cod. Theod.* 16.5.66), condemn Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, for his dyophysite Christology (Acerbi 2007). Nestorius had already received ecclesiastical condemnation at the Council of Ephesus of 431, and now the emperor gave this legal force, condemning his followers to be called Simonians, after the name of Simon Magus, the archetype of the heretic. The law refers as a precedent to the aforementioned edict of Constantine, in which it was stated that the followers of Arius were called Porphyrians. Constantine's edict ordered the burning of Arian writings, and so does Theodosius' with those of Nestorius, prohibiting the possession, reading, or copying of his works, enforcing by law the decisions reached at the council.

As in the case of Eunomius, the books of Nestorius should be sought diligently and publicly burned, with the threat of confiscation of property for those who did not comply. The prefect of Constantinople, to whom the constitution is addressed, should make it public in all provinces in Greek and Latin so that everyone could understand it. The order, however, had not much effect and Nestorius' writings continued to spread clandestinely.

In 448, Eutyches, leader of the monastic community in Constantinople, informed the bishop of Rome about the revival of Nestorianism (Leo the Great, *Ep.* 20). This same year Theodosius renewed the order to burn Porphyry's books written against the Christian cult, as well as all Christian books in disagreement with the faith of Ephesus, in particular those of Nestorius (*CJ* 1.1.3). Again in 449, after the second Council of Ephesus, Theodosius condemned Nestorians and prohibited "possessing, reading, transcribing or spreading their doctrine" and ordered the public burning of "their harmful books," along with those of Porphyry and of the philo-Nestorian Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*ACO* 2.3.3).

The reiteration of anti-Eunomian, anti-Nestorian, and anti-Porphyrian legislation, as well as of other anti-heretical constitutions preserved in the Theodosian and Justinian Codes, indicates the difficulty in their enforcement. Penalties relating to book proscription were increased in the next century. A *Novella* of Justinian, dated to 536, orders that the hands of scribes who copy heretical books should be cut off (*CJ* 42.1.2). Christian legislation, with its violent and intimidating language, may at least have achieved the effect of terrorizing those accused of heresy.

A Crusade Against Books: Bishops, Monks, and Students

Anti-pagan and anti-heretical legislation encouraged individual acts of violence perpetrated by bishops and monks. Hagiographical literature in the early decades of the fifth century is a rich source for details about seeking out and destroying sacred books and other acts of iconoclasm, praised as an ascetic exercise, a manifestation of divine will, and a way for holy men to court martyrdom. By including book destruction in the list of ascetic virtues worthy of being emulated, hagiography provided a model of religious behavior that subtly invited its readers to violence (Marcos 2015b).

Three cases may serve to illustrate this. The monk Hypatius, abbot of the monastery of Rufinianae (ca. 400–446), in Bithynia, well known for his violent interventions in the Christianization of the region, required a powerful

magician of Antioch to hand over his books to be publicly burned if he wanted to become a Christian (Callinicus, *Vita Hyp.* 43). Around the same time, bishop Porphyry of Gaza, also renowned for his crusade against paganism, headed a campaign to search for idols, which included investigations within private residences. Magic books were also found and burned with the idols (Marcus Diaconus, *Vita Porph.* 71). Shenute of Atripe, the abbot of the White Monastery, led his monks on several expeditions to convert the villagers in the Panopolis region. During these "razzias," Shenute forced his way into private homes seeking idols and magic books, which he destroyed with his own hands (Besa, *V. Shen.* 83–84, 125–127).

Perhaps more unexpectedly, students also contributed to book destruction for religious reasons. The *Life of Severus*, the monophysite bishop of Antioch between 512 and 518, by Zachariah Scholasticus gives a picture of the life of students of Roman law in the city of Beirut, in the late fifth century (Teja and Marcos 2012: 46–56). The *Life* shows the extent to which late antique Christians and pagans shared intellectual and religious interests, and the use of magical practices to solve personal and group rivalry. An Egyptian student was accused by some Christians of practicing magic to satisfy an amorous passion. When he was found out, the Egyptian burned the books and denounced the names of other companions who practiced magic. One of these was a student from Thessalonica, who was reported to bishop John of Berytus for wanting to copy a book of magic (it was the copier who reported him) and together with him a professor of law (*magistros*) who, the *Life* says, "composed horoscopes, predicted the future, announced to those who consulted him, like prefects and high officials, their selection, and encouraged them to appeal to idols" (Zacharias, *Vita Sev.*, edited by Kugener 1904: 66–67).

The account is a good illustration of the inquisitorial procedure carried out in conjunction between ecclesiastic and civil authorities, a true *auto-da-fe*. Once the bishop received the report, he placed members of his clergy at the service of the denouncers to examine the contents of the books in the presence of state notaries (*demosioi*). Only a few of them could be found, as those who had been denounced succeeded in escaping. When these acts became known, disturbances broke out with the participation of people brought by one or other side, but the zealous students made sure to burn the books they had been able to gather. They lit a fire in front of a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, accompanied, on the bishop's orders, by the town defender (*endikos*), the notaries, and the clergy. This inquisitorial *auto* of public book burning also involved the prior reading of their contents:

Everyone saw the magic books and their diabolical signs burn, and as the one who threw them on the fire read them out beforehand, they were able to know about the nonsense written in them, the atheistic and barbaric pride of the demons, their evil and hateful instructions for men, as well as the arrogance of the devil who taught to promise and fulfil horrible things of that kind. (Zacharias, *Vita Sev.*, edited by Kugener 1904: 69)

A description reminiscent of the burning of Don Quixote's library.

In a more institutionalized way, the Church went on persecuting heretics and performing ritualized public acts of book burning. In Rome, Pope Gelasius (492–496) ordered that the Manichaeans should be sent into exile and their books burned in front of the basilica of St Maria Maggiore (*Liber Pontificalis* 51). Later, Pope Symmachus (498–514) had all their images and books burned in front of the Constantinian basilica, and his successor Hormisdas (514–523) repeated the same act in the same place (*Liber Pontificalis*, 53). The proscription of books continued in Byzantium, as testified by numerous laws and narrative accounts.

Conclusion

The proscription of books, often accompanied by their destruction by burning, reveals one of the most violent aspects of late antique religious conflict. The methods, however, were not new and demonstrate strong continuity in the practices of repression. Pagans, Christians, magicians (or those supposed to be), and heretics were involved either as agents or as victims, often in both roles, in this process of attempted annihilation of the religious other, that, as we said at the beginning, made the varied religious landscape of the Mediterranean a less inclusive and tolerant world, but still a polychrome and effervescent one.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Religious Expression in Art and Architecture

Emma Loosley

Introduction: The Picture in the Third Century CE

The eastern Mediterranean region in the third century CE was the center of a wide variety of social, political, and religious changes that inevitably impacted on the ways that religion was practiced, enacted, and expressed to the wider community. In particular this was a century that saw the Jews adapting to their changed circumstances in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and then to diaspora life after being banished from Jerusalem by Hadrian in 135 CE; in the case of the Christians, they were being sporadically persecuted from the time of Septimius Severus (r. 193–211) via Decius in mid-century through to Diocletian's "Great Persecution" at the dawn of the fourth century.

This is reiterated here because these events inevitably impacted on the freedom of worship of both groups and their psychological reaction to the world around them, imposing on both faiths a sense of "them and us" when viewing the wider cultural and religious landscape. This in turn, had a pivotal influence on the development of religious material culture. With the political and social pressures placed on Jews and Christians, they did not always have the freedom to commission and build large, easily identifiable places of worship on the scale of the publically funded temples raised to the Roman pantheon and the deities of its subject peoples. The consequences of these

events caused two clearly inter-related phenomena; first, the evidence for early synagogues and churches suggests that they were largely modest and unobtrusive in both size and design, and, second, at this early date neither religious tradition took traditional pagan religious architecture as a point of departure when designing their places of prayer.

Because of these issues we have very little securely dated Jewish and Christian data for this century and are forced to rely largely on information from Dura Europos in Mesopotamia (located in contemporary Syria) and the catacombs of Rome for an understanding of third-century perspectives on the religious art of the two monotheistic traditions (Brody and Hoffman 2011; Snyder 1985). Naturally the paucity of material evidence from the period means that we cannot accurately build a comprehensive view of Jewish and Christian attitudes regarding the architectural and artistic dimensions of their faiths at this time, but we are able to glean the popularity of certain themes and motifs and to gain some insight as to how believers may have interacted within ritual spaces.

Dura Europos and Third-Century Inter-Religious Cultural Exchange

For reasons that will soon become obvious, no discussion of late antique art and architecture is complete without a consideration of the cult buildings, frescoes, and stone reliefs found at the town of Dura Europos on the west bank of the river Euphrates in contemporary Syria. Dura was a Seleucid foundation that had changed hands between the Roman and Parthian, and later the Sasanian, empires on a number of occasions. The location of the settlement at the frontier between two world empires and also as a stage on international trading networks meant that it was host to a perhaps unusually cosmopolitan and religiously diverse population. However, a caveat must be inserted here in that we should be aware that it would be a mistake to over-state the uniqueness of the site as a growing body of evidence suggests that the eastern *Limes* is in many ways an illusion and that regional diversity was far more common than previously suggested; therefore, it should perhaps be made clear that the significance of the site lies today primarily in the com-pleteness of its survival meaning it has often been lazily dubbed "the Pompeii of the east."

The site was abandoned by the Romans in the face of a Sasanian attack in 256 CE and was never re-inhabited. Therefore, when it was rediscovered by archeologists in the first half of the twentieth century it was unusually well-preserved and all the evidence excavated on the site could be conclusively

dated as being of no later than 256. While work has been devoted to the strategic and military functions of the town, by far the majority of research relating to Dura has concentrated on the plethora of cult buildings found in the settlement. The range of religious affiliations demonstrated by these remains is breathtakingly diverse and has led to extensive speculation as to how the cosmopolitan milieu of the frontier may have encouraged such religious plurality; of course the reverse of this is that we simply do not know if Dura was typical or atypical and in fact late antique society may, in many cases, have embraced a vibrant multiculturalism. Whatever the truth may have been, Dura is normally taken to have been an unusually varied society that was settled by Jews, Persians, Palmyrenes, *Bedu*, and Roman legionaries of various ethnic origins as well as the native settled Mesopotamians.

This diversity is reflected in the fifteen places of worship excavated at the site, and as the city has never been entirely excavated we cannot rule out the possibility of even more sites being discovered in the future—subject of course to the vagaries of the Syrian civil war. While a number of temples venerated local Mesopotamian and Semitic deities or cults popular with the Roman army, other cults were unexpected: Dura bore witness to a thriving Jewish diaspora community and provided the earliest securely dated Christian religious building yet discovered. What the exact relationship between these two groups was is still the subject of lively debate, but one thing has always been clear—Dura shattered forever the view that Jewish art was aniconic.

To fully contextualize the ramifications of this discovery it is first necessary to explain that many of the places of worship at Dura were decorated with brightly colored frescoes painted on the plaster walls of the shrine interiors. The location of the site, on the banks of the river Euphrates on the edge of the Syrian Desert, meant that it lacked a plentiful supply of high-grade stone to build with. The local gypsum was unsuitable for large architectural elements and therefore, although limestone panels were imported for reliefs in some temples (the Temple of Bel and the mithraeum, for example), in most cases the local fieldstone and gypsum were used with mud brick as a base for construction and then covered in a smooth gypsum plaster. This plaster was painted to replicate marble columns and dadoes, but also used in place of sculpture to recount the deeds of the deity being venerated or to record acts of donation by the faithful. All were painted in a naive, vibrant style that in its frontality and monumental posturing recall the art of nearby Palmyra, but also absorbed elements from Persian art and were stylistically similar to the Sasanian stucco work from sites such as Tappeh Mil south of modern Tehran. The figures depicted reflect this diverse mix of cultures as they are dressed in Palmyrene, Sasanian, and Roman clothing according to

the ethnicity of the donor or the origins of the cult. Therefore, it is unsurprising that in the Temple of Bel donors are dressed in Palmyrene robes with female participants sporting the distinctive box-shaped veil known from Palmyrene funerary reliefs, and in the mithraeum both Mithras and Zoroaster are shown in Persian-style tunics and leggings. Elsewhere, in the Temple of the Palmyrene Gods, the Roman Tribune Julius Terentius is shown making a sacrifice in full Roman martial dress in front of a military standard.

However, when we come to the synagogue identifying the political and ethnic influences of those who worshipped there becomes more complex. Many of the frescoes on the west (Jerusalem-facing) wall that houses the Torah niche center on the life of Moses. Throughout his life he is shown togate in stark contrast to those around him, who are often depicted in Persian attire. This is also the case with the small scene of the sacrifice of Isaac on the Torah niche where Abraham too is shown in the robes of a Roman citizen, and with the Purim scene from the Book of Esther, where figures on the left (Mordechai and Haman) and right are dressed in Persian and figures in the centre in Roman style (see Figure 28.1). Elsewhere, on the north wall of the synagogue, the prophet Ezekiel is shown as a Persian and so we cannot immediately draw the conclusion that here in Mesopotamia we are dealing

Figure 28.1 Purim scene from the Book of Esther; Dura Europos synagogue; dating from the first half of the third century CE; © Princeton University Press

with a group of Romanized Jews who self-identify with the ruling power rather than a group who are more influenced by the vernacular culture of Mesopotamian natives. The reality of the situation is unclear and, regardless of whether the community as a whole had a formative input into the commissioning of these images or whether it represents the preference of one or a small number of influential patrons, it suggests a worldview that was eclectic and syncretistic in terms of cultural reference points. The cycle itself clearly demonstrates that the local Jewish population, or at least their elders, had a detailed knowledge of the Torah and the Prophetic literature and that they could clearly communicate it to local artisans as it appears probable that the majority of the paintings in the town were carried out by the same atelier. It seems far-fetched to suggest that Jewish artists traveled to this relatively remote location to paint the synagogue, especially if the paintings of other cult buildings in Dura are compared with the cycle, however what *is* very clear is that the synagogue cycle utilized the widest range of colors and that therefore the patrons paid a significant amount of money to ensure the use of a range of the most vibrant pigments available at that time.

On the other hand the synagogue paintings are iconographically more sophisticated than those elsewhere in the town and many panels are painted with the narrative unfolding right to left across the picture field in a visual equivalent of Hebrew or Aramaic codices or scrolls. Elsewhere in the temples there is a series of stand-alone, primarily votive scenes, and the fragmentary nature of the survivals from the mithraeum makes it difficult to place the surviving scenes of Mithras and Zoroaster within a coherent narrative—without forgetting that we know relatively little about the "mysteries" of this faith. By comparison the Christian house-church also demonstrates incidents of right-to-left episodic story telling with the stories of Christ walking on water (Matthew 14:22–33) and the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:9–12, John 5:8–14), but these are naive scenes sketched on to white-washed wall using only black and red-brown lines over a brown wash depicting the sea. As with the synagogue, the users of the building appear to have had a sophisticated knowledge of their scriptures and used both Old (David and Goliath, Adam and Eve with the serpent and Tree of Knowledge) and New (miracles, the Good Shepherd, the Samaritan woman at the well) Testament imagery, but generally it was executed in an amateurish fashion with an extremely limited color palette, except for one monumental and enigmatic panel that is severely damaged and appears to show a procession of women heading for a large white structure of uncertain purpose that has been interpreted by many commentators as the women approaching the empty tomb, although there is an alternate less widely accepted view that they are bearing lamps and so represent the wise and foolish virgins of the Gospel of Matthew 25:1–13.

In short, it seems that the most significant conclusions that we can reach regarding the material framing of religious practice in Dura is that finances seem to have dictated the scale and lavishness of each cult site and that, perhaps unsurprisingly, Roman and Sasanian imagery mingled with vernacular Mesopotamian cult motifs in the many temples in the town. The exceptions were the mithraeum, which was overwhelmingly Sasanian in its iconography, and the synagogue and Christian house-church, which employed both Roman and Sasanian visual tropes and a similar narrative technique, but clearly diverged in the level of patronage available to the two communities, meaning that the quality of the work at the synagogue was superior to that of any other religious community within the settlement.

Symbolism or Anthropocentrism: Icons Versus the Aniconic Tradition

This convergence of imagery and the use of the same workshops to carry out work for Jews, Christians, and Pagans has also made it difficult to identify the confessional identity of many catacombs in Rome. As Levine has pointed out in his excellent survey (Levine 2012) there are only a few Jewish symbols such as the menorah, *lulav*, and *ethrog* that unequivocally mark a grave in the catacombs as being Jewish. This uncertainty spreads to Christian memorials where many signs we now take as unquestionably "Christian" such as the Good Shepherd or an orant could mean different things to different people until well into the fourth century. While the evidence of Jewish and Christian practice in third-century Dura Europos suggests a relatively open society with comparatively unobtrusive exteriors to their places of worship, but clear expositions of sacred scripture in the figural scenes within, elsewhere it seems that their co-religionists did not experience the confidence to assert their faiths so unequivocally and this, perhaps unsurprisingly, is where we see the two monotheistic faiths drawing more strongly upon existing artistic tropes from "mainstream" religious culture. The ambiguity of symbols such as the peacock with its connotations of eternal life or the orant signaling piety and supplication meant that they could be understood on a variety of levels and it is through this symbolic language that existing motifs entered the repertoire of Jewish and Christian burial sites and places of worship, thus raising a fierce debate in faith communities as to whether or not any imagery at all was permissible (Judaism) or whether the problem stemmed from the use of figural imagery (Judaism and Christianity). Given the perception until the last

century that Judaism was effectively aniconic, we can surmise that this strand of discourse ultimately dominated the debate, whereas in Christianity these arguments continued until the iconoclasm that sporadically convulsed the Byzantine empire from 726 until 843 finally settled the matter for the overwhelming majority of eastern Christians.

However, to concentrate simply on these two traditions is to distort the vibrant visual culture of the time, as pre-existing faiths did not suddenly disappear and Zoroastrianism and its related cult, Mithraism, were strongly on the ascendant in this period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the same preoccupations that have dominated the study of the monotheistic faiths have also shaped the discourse concerning Iranian religions, and the issue of whether or not it is correct to view Zoroastrianism as an aniconic faith is still being evaluated as contemporary scholars seek to re-evaluate Boyce's seminal article on the subject (Boyce 1975; Shenkar 2008). A large part of this problem is simply because as Shenkar points out:

> In studies dedicated to cultic iconography and aniconism in the Ancient Near East, the Iranian world is always absent. The research tends to focus exclusively on Mesopotamian, Israelite, Syrian, Anatolian, Aegean, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian examples, while the Iranian material remains outside the general discussion. (Shenkar 2008: 239)

This statement, although mainly being applied to an earlier historical period, can fairly be attributed to Late Antiquity as well. Although the past few decades have seen a growth in accessible texts on Sasanian history (see, for example, Pourshariati 2008; Daryaee 2009) we are yet to see a similar synoptic approach to Sasanian art and much work still remains to be done before this material is easily accessible to the more general reader.

So if we accept the most widely held view that Zoroastrianism was largely aniconic with a few exceptions such as figural motifs on Sasanian coinage, then there is a strong argument that Mithraism, which appears to have been at least nominally linked to a Zoroastrian minor deity, was more informed by a Roman visual heritage than that of its posited Iranian roots. The centrality of the Tauroctony—Mithras slaying the cosmic bull—at the heart of every mithraeum firmly establishes that followers of the faith were accustomed to revering images and sculptures of their deity in a manner that would have been easily understandable to the vast majority of people across the Roman empire. What is perhaps the most significant element of Mithraic art is the sophistication of its visual cosmology and it is to this subject that we shall next turn our attention.

Emma Loosley

Lords of Heaven: Cosmological Imagery in Monotheism and Beyond

It was in the 1970s that scholars finally challenged the views of Franz Cumont regarding the origins of Mithraism and moved away from trying to fit the Tauroctony into an Iranian mythology. Mithraic iconography was then radically reinterpreted as a complex cosmological system and the scene was revealed to contain nine constellations in conjunction with each other (Beck 2007: 195). However, this symbolism was not intended to be read only on one level; for example, the bull obviously stood for Taurus when interpreted as a constellation but on another level stood for the moon when Mithras was perceived as the sun (Beck 2007: 198). It is now believed that the Mithras cult was largely a Roman invention that absorbed elements of the exotic, and it is a useful way to enter the subject of astrology in late antique religious art since cosmological imagery is the one element that appears to unite all the disparate faiths under discussion.

The cults of Sol and Luna appeared in various guises across the Greco-Roman world and visually they could be represented by symbols or as personifications. These cults were no less pervasive in the east and the Semitic pantheon echoed the Roman one, and perhaps went further in the primacy awarded to its solar and lunar cults. Sin, the moon god of Harran, was venerated at Sumatar Harabesi in what is now southeast Turkey and is clearly identified by an inscription beside a rock-cut relief of the deity depicted frontally as a male bust within a carved niche and with a crescent moon behind him (Drijvers 1980: 124) (see Figure 28.2).

This attribute is replicated in the famous Palmyrene relief now housed in the Louvre (2015) of Baalshamin, Lord of the Heavens, flanked by Aglibol the lunar deity with a crescent moon piercing his radiate halo and Malakbel a solar deity sporting a radiate halo that represents the sun's rays emanating from his head. Although this particular relief is attributed to the first century CE, it is the largest and most accomplished of a group of such scenes found in the vicinity of Palmyra up until the third century CE. Two Palmyrene triads were revered in this period, the one mentioned above and the second had the principal god of Palmyra, Bel, between Aglibol and a solar deity named Yarhibol. In a variation on this theme a votive plaque dated 121 CE and now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon has seated representations of Bel and Baalshamin with Aglibol and Yarhibol between them. Here we can hazard a guess that perhaps the donor conflated the two triads in an attempt to appease all the gods of his city in his prayer for divine favor.

Figure 28.2 Stone-cut reliefs of Lunar and Solar deities at Sumatar Harabesi, southeastern Turkey; © Emma Loosley

This visual repertoire of solar and lunar devotion was one element of pre-existing cult practice that permeated the art of both Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity before being assimilated by Islam at the end of the period. In the fifth and sixth centuries it appears to have become popular for wealthy donors to contribute to the adornment of their synagogues and churches by paying for the installation of elaborate floor mosaics. Here Jewish congregations sometimes showed a surprising willingness to allow holy scenes to be placed underfoot. Levine (2012: 289–290) has listed seven synagogues that included biblical scenes in their mosaics: the Sacrifice of Isaac/*ʿAqedah* at Bet Alpha, David in Gaza and probably at Merot in Upper Galilee, Daniel at Naʿaran, Susiya in south Hebron and maybe ʿEn Semsem in the Golan, and finally Shem and Japhet the sons of Noah leaving the ark with animals in the vestibule of Gerasa synagogue. The questions raised by the existence of these images reaches beyond their relation to popularly held misconceptions about Jewish aniconism to the more intriguing question of how or why the community elders were able to feel comfortable with the placing of holy imagery, specifically representations of holy personages, underfoot where the faithful would have no choice but to walk over them. The Christians seem to have enacted a total ban on holy figures being included in mosaic floors and, while

both faiths seem to have been happy to employ symbolic allusions to their faiths on their floors, the answer of how to have a meaningful and striking floor to a place of worship without requiring the feet of the faithful to defile a holy image seems to have been solved by employing cosmological imagery as the scheme of choice.

Interestingly it is in the extant synagogue floors that we find the most detailed and well-executed schemes representing the zodiac and these are often in conjunction with a central panel showing Helios driving his chariot. In actual fact the zodiac is found six times on synagogue floor mosaics from the fourth to seventh centuries CE, making it the most popular motif for this artistic medium (Levine 2012: 321). Naturally the fact that Constantine was a follower of the cult of Sol-Invictus and the popularity of other deities such as Mithras, whose followers linked their primary god to sun worship, saw a relative explosion of sun imagery permeate the art of the fourth century. What is worth noting is that this visible evidence of solar veneration reached beyond its own constituency and permeated the visual repertoire of the two monotheistic cults. Although this symbolic language was articulated at its most sophisticated level in the synagogues, the retreat of Jewish art toward aniconism meant that the zodiac mosaics cannot be said to have had a demonstrable line of transmission through to later Jewish art. On the other hand these symbols seem to have become assimilated into a Christianized visual culture so successfully that today we often overlook them.

While many are familiar with the fact that the halo entered Christianity as an adoption from the kind of images discussed above, there are other more subtle references to the heavens in the Christian iconography that had evolved by the sixth century. One of the most famous of these instances is the Crucifixion scene in the Rabbula Gospels, now held by the Bibliotheca Laurenziana in Florence (see Figure 28.3). The manuscript is named after the scribe Rabbula, who wrote in a colophon that the manuscript was completed at "the holy convent of Beth Mar Yohannan of Beth Zagba" (Wright 1973: 205) in the year 586. The precise location of this monastery is still a matter of some dispute and, while Mango has argued for the creation of the book by scribes from Edessa who settled in Syria (Mango 1983), the question is still far from settled as to whether the manuscript originates in Syria or Mesopotamia. Leaving this issue aside, even if the precise location of the manuscript's production remains unclear, northern Syria or the region around Edessa both seem strong contenders for the origin of the codex and, if the reader casts their mind back to earlier in this chapter and the brief discussion of Sumatar Harabesi, it becomes evident that this was a region steeped in a tradition of solar and lunar cults.

Figure 28.3 Crucifixion scene from the Rabbula Gospel; Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana Plut. I 56 (sixth century) fol. 13ʳ; © Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana

The Crucifixion scene in the Rabbula Gospels is part of a full-page illustration. The bottom third of the image depicts from left to right two women (one of them the Virgin Mary) approaching the tomb and being greeted by an angel, with a sepulchre with sleeping guards positioned in the middle of the page. On the right the risen Christ blesses the two women knelt before him. Above this the rest of the page shows the Crucifixion with Christ hanging from the cross between the two thieves. Christ and the thieves are larger than all the other figures in the picture except for the two figures piercing his body with lances. The onlookers, including the Virgin Mary, are significantly smaller and reflect attention toward the central figure who is distinguished from his neighbors by the fact that he wears a *colobium* rather than a simple white loincloth, as well as having a halo. The framing crosses are backed by gray mountains and Christ's slightly higher cross is outlined against the sky in the v-shaped dip between the mountains. Hanging in this sky are two roundels; to the left of the picture a crescent moon is visible within a dark disk and to the right an orange orb denotes the sun. This has been interpreted as being a reference to Mt 27:45 that talks of darkness descending in the day at the time of Christ's death, but given the clear Edessene links of the

manuscript another plausible explanation could be that earlier iconographi-
cal traditions made their way into the illustrations in a blending of imagery.
After all, as the Son of God, part of the Triune Godhead, Christ was also a
lord of the heavens like the "Lord God" or *Marelahê* invoked at Sumatar
Harabesi (Drijvers 1980: 127). This leads us on to our next consideration,
which is the question of how far early Christian ritual practice borrowed
from earlier traditions.

Agape to Eucharist: The Evolution of a Christian Architectural Identity

As mentioned above with reference to Dura Europos, Christianity in the
eastern Mediterranean quite naturally evolved in many places alongside dias-
pora Jewish communities. However as is clear in the New Testament book of
Acts, Jewish Christianity was only one strand of the new faith and the other
was firmly rooted in a non-Jewish Romanized context. Therefore, when the
faith was placed on a legal footing by Constantine and Licinius in 313 there
was a swift move toward openly acknowledged places of worship and the
abandonment of earlier, more modest meeting places of the type represented
by the Durene house-church.

This was in part because official acknowledgment of Christianity gave the
religion formal status for the first time and in turn this accelerated the profes-
sionalization of the clergy. With the transition from itinerant preachers
toward an organized system of provinces administered by bishops with a
hierarchy of auxiliary staff beneath them, the central rituals of the religion
evolved from prayer meetings and a shared meal, the *agape*, toward the
complex rite that we call the Eucharist today. With the elevation of this rite,
there came a move toward the sacralization of the space where the ritual was
to take place and therefore the architecture and function of Christian places
of worship was dictated by a rapidly crystallizing liturgical practice.

The choice of the basilica as the model for the majority of early church
buildings seems to have been based on the twin foundations of practicality
and a deliberate moving away from a "pagan" mode of worship. Civic basili-
cas had been built across the Roman empire as large meeting spaces where
the emperor or his proxy heard petitioners and passed judgment on a variety
of issues. Their longitudinal axes were intended to strike awe into suppli-
cants, who would enter opposite the apse where the emperor or governor sat
on a ritual chair, and would have to walk down the length of the building to
approach the dais and present their petition. This architecture was deliber-
ately designed to instill awe and impress the individual with feelings of

insignificance and it was these elements that now attracted the early Christian hierarchy in seeking to develop a ritual space. Roman temples were not suitable as they generally centered around a *cella* containing a cult statue and, aside from the taint of idolatry, Christians were seeking to distance themselves from all earlier forms of worship.

The basilica was a *civic* rather than a *religious* building associated with the enactment of power and justice and these associations were considered more desirable. In addition the fact that they had been designed to intimidate those coming before the dais with the power of the empire meant that this feeling of powerlessness could now be transposed so that those entering a basilica were awed by the power of God and his Son, Jesus Christ. The apsed end became the sanctuary and a ritual space reserved for the clergy, even though the liturgy in Late Antiquity was an interactive rite that entailed processions and readings utilizing much of the central nave and thus required more liturgical furniture than in later periods. A good impression of how these early basilicas may have looked inside can be gained by visiting the church of San Clemente in Rome. Although the current upper church dates from the twelfth century, it retains the earlier arrangement of a central enclosure in the nave (*schola cantorum*) that juts forward from the raised sanctuary area with canopied altar table, and includes two *ambons*. This is probably the clearest illustration of the late antique organization of ritual space in the west as most churches have been altered over time and their liturgical furnishings have been removed as the rites have changed. In the east there are a number of examples in Syria where a variant form of the early liturgy peculiar to Syria and Mesopotamia was practiced with a large nave-platform called the *bema* performing the same function as the *ambo* and *schola cantorum*. One of the largest and best-preserved examples of this is found at the basilica in Resafa that later became the center of the cult of Saint Sergius (see Figure 28.4).

This brings us to the parallel Christian architectural tradition that evolved using centrally planned spaces primarily for a commemorative function (in the case of Resafa, the relics of the saint were translated from a four-lobed *martyrium* to the basilica at a later period). This association of circular or polygonal spaces with a funerary or memorial purpose is believed to have developed from the architecture of the *Anastasis* Rotunda built by Constantine over the site of Christ's tomb in Jerusalem. It had the practical advantage of allowing pilgrims to circumambulate the central shrine, thus facilitating the movement of large numbers of visitors. Over time the central plan was adapted to accommodate the needs of the liturgy and by the fifth century centrally planned churches were no longer being built simply as *martyria*; this movement reached its apogee with Justinian's triumphant

Figure 28.4   View of the basilica at Resafa (Sergiopolis, Syria Euphratensis) looking east over the *bema* toward the apse; © Emma Loosley

rebuilding of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in the sixth century. Whether it was due to the influence of Imperial patronage or to the increasing divergence of liturgical practices in the east and west, or indeed something entirely unrelated to either event, one thing is clear: from the sixth century onwards centrally planned churches became increasingly popular in most parts of the eastern empire, but this form of architecture never really took off in western and central Europe.

End of an Era? The Seventh Century and the Coming of Islam

Defining the end of an era is a notoriously controversial and often arbitrary process and the assumption that the coming of Islam swept all before it and destroyed Christian culture in much of the eastern Mediterranean is an outdated and incorrect assertion. However there is an argument for the case that life in the Levant changed significantly in the seventh century and this is due to a whole range of inter-related events that coincided in the first half of the century. In 614 CE the Persians took the city of Jerusalem, inflicting a severe psychological blow on the Byzantine empire, which was unable to

regain the city until the campaign of the emperor Heraclius in 628. This was contemporary with the life of the Prophet Muhammad (570–632) and so while the Byzantines and Sasanians were fighting each other, his new religious movement was gathering followers in the Arabian Peninsula.

Society had been dramatically changed in the sixth century by an outbreak of plague that caused a widespread depopulation in both the Byzantine and Sasanian empires and, to add to this, it was from the time of Justinian (r. 527–565) onwards that the serious theological divisions created by the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) began to crystallize into entrenched positions. There was no longer one Universal Church speaking for all the faithful, and divisions became progressively deeper and more irrevocable. Therefore, the world during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad was a place in which old certainties were being swept away by significant geo-political and theological changes.

Of course it is debatable whether those who lived through these events would have interpreted them in the same way and in many aspects of art and architecture it seems to have been very much business as usual. Garth Fowden's book on Qusayr 'Amra bears the subtitle *Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Fowden 2004) and this is an accurate observation: political and religious changes were taking place in the seventh century but that did not stop new buildings being constructed and decorated in a manner that took no account of this. However, there is an important caveat to this view: Islam did bring one significant change to material culture and that was a strict division between what was permissible in a religious context and what one could do in the privacy of one's home.

While the Christians had clearly delineated what kind of imagery was acceptable (or not) within a religious context in this pre-Iconoclastic century, the use of figurative imagery on church walls, as portable icons, or on the numerous personal items that signaled devotion to a particular Christian saint or the Virgin Mary had become unremarked upon elements of daily life. Naturally there was some defining of boundaries—explicit frescoes such as those famously found in a Pompeii brothel would not have been acceptable in a seventh-century religious or civic context—but at the same time a relatively relaxed attitude meant that pagan imagery such as the signs of the zodiac or the labors of the seasons was permissible on a church floor mosaic. The difference with Islam was that the strict division between what was *haram* (illicit) and *halal* (permissible) was closer to the prohibitions of Second Temple era Judaism than it was to Christianity.

What this meant in practice was that no figurative imagery was permissible in religious art. Early mosques took on classicizing motifs such as the vine scroll, acanthus, and palmette, and over time these elements became more

stylized and evolved into the abstract arabesques and interlace patterns widely associated with Islamic culture today (see Figure 28.5). The primacy of the Word of God, as revealed to the Prophet by the Angel Gabriel, was manifested in mosque architecture by the phenomenon of calligraphy as architectural decoration. This is first encountered on the earliest Islamic place of worship still extant, the Dome of the Rock (691–692), where inscriptions from the Qur'ān form a major element of the decorative scheme and are contemporary with the construction of the building (Grabar 1987: 58). The fact that this mysterious structure borrowed heavily from Christian sources but denounced Christian beliefs in its inscriptions is, according to Grabar, indicative of the function of the building:

Figure 28.5 The Jurjir gate, the only part of a tenth-century mosque in Isfahan still extant, perfectly demonstrates the evolution of Islamic art from natural vegetal forms toward abstract geometric motifs; © Emma Loosley

[T]he building's primary purpose was to be a monument for non-Muslims. With all the Islam-wide ramifications of its symbolism, it was an immanent building that served precise contemporary needs, the most crucial of which was to demonstrate to a Christian population (especially the orthodox church), which still often thought Muslim rule was a temporary misfortune, that Islam was here to stay. (Grabar 1987: 63)

Yet if there was a subvention of Christian architectural forms married to a wholly Islamic formulation of text as decoration in the religious sphere, at home the Muslim Arab aristocracy seem to have changed little from their Christian and pagan forebears. The fact that little early Islamic art and architecture had survived, apart from religious monuments such as the Dome of the Rock or the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, had led to wide-spread assumptions about Islamic art in general. However a series of discoveries from the late nineteenth century onwards in the deserts of what are now the countries of Syria and Jordan changed this perception, as it became increasingly apparent that private hunting lodges and bath houses did not make use of this new Islamic religious idiom and drew on earlier art forms for inspiration. Fowden has convincingly demonstrated that not only did the artists at Qusayr 'Amra draw on Sasanian kingly imagery, but they also had a working knowledge of the Greek myths (Fowden 2004: 257ff) and just as these two currents were common in Romano-Byzantine Syria, so this style continued into the Umayyad era. As more private imagery has emerged from sites such as Qusayr 'Amra and Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi and we can see images of the hunt, dancers, and musicians, and even in some cases stucco portrait sculptures, then the myth of Islamic culture being aniconic is dispelled, just as Dura Europos caused us to question our assumptions about Jewish art.

Conclusion

Naturally in a chapter of this length it is impossible to cover all the variant artistic and architectural currents utilized by the many religious groups who existed in the period under discussion. It is also inevitable that the discourse is, to a certain extent, dominated by the three monotheistic faiths. They have endured and continued to shape the world we live in today, whereas the others, with the exception of Zoroastrianism, have died out. What has been emphasized is the inter-dependence of all the faiths mentioned on the older current of Hellenistic culture that then mixed with Roman elements in the west and Persian ones in the east to create two complementary traditions

that came together in Late Antiquity to serve the needs of an increasingly cosmopolitan Romano-Byzantine *polis.*

All these faiths had common elements in that they all believed in foundational stories involving a Creator-God and all accommodated elements of solar and lunar imagery in their iconography, even if the monotheistic imagery stopped short of venerating heavenly bodies. There was also a continuity of architectural forms with each group borrowing from its neighbors and building on the traditions that had come before, even if in the case of the Christians this meant borrowing a civic rather than a religious building as their template.

Where the divergence from the Classical era was greatest was perhaps the increasing delineation of the boundary between the public and private and religious and secular spheres. These divisions were more strictly enforced as organized religion became an independent entity in society rather than part of the apparatus of the state as it had been in Imperial Rome. The Christian injunctions to preserve personal modesty and shun ostentatious display led to a move away from patronage *largesse* being distributed from the public rooms of urban villas leading ultimately to the private lives of the Umayyad princes. This in turn allowed Islamic material culture to evolve along two separate paths in which the sacred and the secular were never required, or indeed permitted, to interact with each other.

This parallel evolution is one factor that has led to the pervasive belief that Semitic peoples and the faiths that they espouse are disposed toward aniconic art and architecture. However, as this chapter has hopefully made clear, these assumptions were based on an argument of absence: no evidence remained so it was assumed that it had never existed in the first place. In actual fact throughout the twentieth century our picture was constantly expanding as more instances of Jewish and early Islamic figurative art were discovered by archeologists. Until the advent of the Arab Spring in 2011 these discoveries looked set to continue, but subsequent events have placed much of the cultural heritage of the Middle East and North Africa in danger and therefore new discoveries are sadly now much more unlikely.

There is still a great deal more research to be done in the comparative study of the ritual settings of late antique religions, particularly in regions outside the metropolitan centers of cities such as Rome, Constantinople, and Antioch, and it is to be hoped that in the future assumptions made on absences of evidence are treated with more caution. The evolution of Christian and Islamic art and architecture has thus far been privileged over the study of other faith traditions and these are fields ripe for future research.

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Religious Expression in Music and Dance

Clemens Leonhard

General Observations

Music and dance were integral elements of Roman and Greek religious expression. This observation points to questions that arise with the inclusion of Christianity and Judaism in an investigation of any aspect of this topic. On the one hand, Jews and Christians were and remained heavily indebted to the way of life of their neighbors. They did not, however, absorb and accept all aspects of Roman and Greek ways of life indiscriminately. Music and dance were part of the repertoire of typical behavior in a society whose religious tenets were rejected by Jews and Christians. More generally, dissident groups who opposed expressions of polytheism (like sacrifices on various levels of publicity), manifestations of power, and cruelty (like triumphs and shows in circuses and amphitheaters), and/or alleged licentiousness (as part of the meal culture of rather elevated social strata) found themselves faced with the choice of either rejecting music and dance altogether or declaring them independent of—and hence not tainted with—paganism. Steering a middle course, they could adapt the current repertoire to their own ideas. All three approaches were adopted in different epochs and to varying degrees.

The study of ancient groups' approaches to music can be conducted on at least two levels, the second of which will be emphasized here. First, music and dance contain performative aspects of melody and movement that must

be reconstructed from diverse ancient sources, such as pictographic and archeological evidence. On a second level, especially music (but also dance) was combined with texts. Several scientific disciplines are interested in those texts as they seem to contain the most tangible remains of ancient music. However, whether or not liturgical texts are cast in poetic styles, they are hardly ever combined with musical notation. The musical performance of such texts remains a matter of conjecture. Furthermore, poetic texts were not only written to be performed as musical pieces, but also for reading. Likewise, narrative sources make literary characters sing certain pieces and dance, which need not be connected to any customary and ritualized behavior. Not unlike images, texts must also be read with circumspection.

Roman sacrifices were accompanied by musical instruments (especially wind instruments like flutes and horns/trumpets), dance, the singing of hymns, and the recitation of prayers. Several aspects of the performance of sacrifices can be reconstructed on a reliable basis of data. Apparently, ancient Romans regarded sacrifices as publicly performed expressions of their religion. In this case, the term "expression" must be taken in a very broad sense. The bodily performance includes texts. Such texts may or may not be heard, understood, or known by certain groups of participants. Hence, one cannot know whether or not performers imagined reasons and meanings that were assigned to elements of the rite by texts. Despite their conveyance of linguistic messages, ritual texts remain, moreover, ambiguous with regard to their contribution to the understanding of rituals. In this respect, they resemble musical elements and dance. Like gestures, music and dance also defy disambiguation and a straightforward transformation into scientific explanations. Religious meta-texts of antiquity implicitly corroborate this observation. Only very rarely an ancient text answers the question how and by means of which element of the ritual the widespread Roman animal sacrifice consecrates the beast to a god or goddess or how, when, and why it renders its meat sacred (to be offered to the deity) or profane (to be eaten by human beings) and whether or not such categories were important or widespread at all (cf. Prescendi 2007: 95–121). The same is true for texts of hymns (including the biblical Psalms) as parts of rituals. The extreme dearth of information regarding the musical, spatial, temporal, acoustic, etc. part of the performance of most hymns leave these traces of ancient religious expression to be studied and expounded by philologists and historians of religious texts. Nevertheless, this approach to the texts deemphasizes important aspects of the ancient liturgies like music, dance, gestures, odors, inarticulate sounds, light, etc.

In this context, it could be assumed that conventions cherished within smaller groups of Christians and Jews drew their inspiration from grand,

public performances of sacrifices in the cities. Generally, Christians and Jews did not, however, perform sacrifices. One must look for other institutions and customs of the surrounding societies in order to find models for groups who rejected sacrifices. Apart from the fact that a host could hold a symposium after the performance of a more or less publicly visible sacrifice, he would invite musicians and dancers in order to entertain his guests in the course of a symposium also independent of any sacrifice. He could also employ a flute player to accompany the most religious performance during the meeting, namely the prayers, hymns, libations, etc. between the meal and the drinking party. Thus, formal meals contained a kind of sacrifice *in nuce* established and distinguished from its context not only by the performance of certain acts and gestures, but also by means of music. Musical aspects of even less public performances like incantations and dedications of objects to certain purposes can hardly be discovered let alone analyzed any more.

Christians (including Manichaeans and so-called Gnostics)

Christianity—and to some extent also Rabbinic Judaism—becomes visible in the sources as soon as its groups entered a size of membership comparable to that of voluntary associations. These groups would emulate and modify modes of behavior of such official associations as far as such customs fitted to their position in the society of their cities. Even though the participation of Christians and Jews in public sacrifices could theoretically be regarded as innocuous, Christian and Jewish authors tried to prevent their coreligionists from taking part in such performances. However, music and dance may have remained part of sympotic events that were regarded as less tainted with paganism by most Jewish and Christian authors (for a nuanced view on Jewish attitudes, see now Friedheim 2012). While one should not expect to find religious expression in music and dance in forms that were regarded as typical for public sacrifices, the earlier historical record must be sifted with a heightened awareness for elements of behavior fitting to club banquets rather than to grand celebrations of larger groups.

Regarding Christianity, communal meals were Eucharists. These meetings could also be called *agapae* without any distinction with regard to their religious dignity or the rituals that were performed in their course (McGowan 1997). Perhaps in the third—and certainly in the fourth—century, the development of grand public performances of baptisms and Eucharists led to a marginalization of sympotic Eucharists in the Christian west and soon also in

the east (cf. Meßner 2006; Leonhard 2015). Christian interpreters of these performances did not claim that Christianity had invented a new category of social behavior *sui generis*. Instead, they claimed that Eucharists were actually public sacrifices despite the fact that their performance in no way resembled any kind of sacrifice. These performances could have inherited elements of music and hymns from sympotic customs and rites as they were performed in earlier Christian centuries. More likely, Christians created a new style of musical expression and manifestation of religious identity at that time. Ecclesiastical group sizes, social structures, types of locations, and specialists changed dramatically between the second and fourth centuries. The claim that the performance of the Eucharist should now be a public sacrifice and that Eucharists could not be regarded as meals any more has consequences for the modern assessment of its relationship to music and hymn singing. Even entrenched opponents of the cultic music of their polytheistic acquaintances (or intellectual adversaries) were compelled to adopt and adapt more elements of Greek and Roman culture than their forebears would have allowed them to do two centuries earlier. However, it is highly unlikely that Christian groups should have adopted musical expressions tied to the Roman sacrifices. The move from the Eucharist in the setting of a second-century club banquet to a fifth-century bishop's celebration of a Christian festive mass required many innovative changes, including different types of music.

Apparently, Greeks and Romans regarded musical performances between the meal and the drinking party as religious in contradistinction to music and dance at other times during the dinner party. Notwithstanding allusions to religious themes outside of this central religious activity at meals, such other performances (e.g. erotic) can be regarded as non-religious. The modern study of ancient Christianity tends to avoid reconstructions of non-religious musical performances in Christian groups, as, for example, the following Pauline remark: "When you assemble, one has a psalm, another an instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything should be done for building up" (1 Corinthians 14:26 NAB). There is a similar remark by Tertullian (d. ca. 220), in *Apology* 39, about the Carthaginian Christians' *agapae* meals, in which he polemicizes heavily against Roman meal customs. Tertullian here seems to point to performances during the *potos* (the Greek term for the drinking party after a meal). He does not discuss the transitional rites from the meal to *potos*. Nevertheless, they are interpreted as pertaining to the repertoire of religious expression (ANF 3, 47a):

As it (i.e. the Christian celebration) is an act of religious service, it permits no vileness or immodesty. The participants, before reclining, taste

first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the chaste. They (…) talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their auditors. After manual ablution, and the bringing in of lights (i.e. after the end of the meal and at the inception of the drinking party), each is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, (a hymn) to God, either one from the holy Scriptures or one of his own composing—a proof of the measure of our drinking. (Tertullian, *Apology* 39)

It is impossible to determine the contents or shape of these musical performances. Paul (in 1 Corinthians, i.e. a century earlier than Tertullian) and Tertullian point to the social context of the symposium as background for this performance of music. These ancient authors negate the above given presumption with regard to Christianity. Reviling Roman symposia, the apologist claims that the Christian symposium is not only decent and sober but that all of its parts are actually acts of religious service (*de religionis officio*). Thus, Christians are said to sing "to God"—probably also implying a contrast to other Greeks and Romans, who are used to singing any kind of song during their symposia.

Several passages of the New Testament have often been misinterpreted as quotations of liturgical hymns. Standard editions and translations keep printing them in (pseudo-) stichometric layout. In this corpus, two forms of alleged hymns must be distinguished.

First, literary figures "say" (Luke 1:46; 2:67; cf. Revelation 4:10; 5:12f; or "… they sing, saying" 5:9) texts some of which imitate the style of the biblical Psalms (Luke 1:46–55; 2:68–79). It took several centuries after the composition of the New Testament until these literary Psalms became the "Benedictus" and "Magnificat" to be recited in the Christian liturgy of the hours. Claims that the author of the Gospel of Luke should have lifted these texts from liturgical use at his time cannot be substantiated, because those alleged liturgies are pure conjecture.

Second, misconceptions of form and function of New Testament epistolary texts in the early twentieth century led to the inclusion of texts like Philippians 2:6–11 or Colossians 1:15–18 in the liturgy of the hours when the Catholic Church reformed its liturgy after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965; cf. Brucker 2014; cf. Leonhard 2014 together with Edsall 2015 and Cosgrove 2014). Christianity did not, however, preserve any trace of poetic or musical creativity—liturgical or otherwise—of the first century. Pieces of non-religious poetry might not have been preserved, because the religiously motivated (later) industry of book preservation and production was not interested in this genre. Religious hymns might have been lost for the same reason.

It is more likely, however, that Christian musical creativity worthy of the name only began to flourish in the fourth century when poets composed new hymns for the new formats of public celebrations at a significantly larger scale and with a likewise significantly different ritual structure to club banquets. While it should not be assumed that Christians refrained from singing for two centuries, the types of music performed did not lend themselves to be preserved in the literary record (cf. Leonhard 2014 and Cosgrove 2014). Furthermore, Charles Cosgrove (2014: 263–264) cautions against reconstructions of music as part of Greek and Roman meal customs on the basis of descriptions in ancient literary texts (like Plutarch or Athenaeus). Second- and third-century (non-Christian) authors may have had more interests in preserving the learned memories of a glorious past whose customs were already extinct in their own time.

Nevertheless, if small remnants and faint traces of musical creativity are taken into account, the history of ancient Christian music begins before the fourth century; but it faces a paradox. On the one hand, sources hinting at musical performances do not give any details regarding concrete texts, let alone melodies or other modes of performance. On the other hand, the extant literary hymns cannot be connected with a specific liturgical context or with any mode of presentation or performance. Thus, what was sung at Christian meetings cannot be reconstructed. As soon as the sources become more explicit, the extant literary hymns do not play any role in the liturgies until some of them—between the fifth and twentieth centuries—enter the religious performative repertoire as ancient texts, not as a continuation of living practice.

Even though texts without any indication of musical performance play a paramount role in the study of ancient Christian music today, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786 (from this ancient site between Cairo and Assiut in Egypt) must be mentioned here as a notable exception (Cosgrove 2011). The papyrus contains a fragment of an otherwise unattested Christian hymn with musical notation, probably from the end of the third century. It cannot be known for which kind of liturgical or congregational occasion this hymn has been written and furnished with musical notation (Cosgrove 2011: 146–150; Leonhard 2014). The Christian hymn was set to standard Greek music regarding tonal structure and notation. Thus, the only extant, explicit source pointing to Christian use of melodies (apart from texts) does not support the reconstruction of anything like "Christian music."

While approaches that read the extant literary hymns into the testimonies about musical performances take the risk of gross anachronisms, skepticism might forgo the chance to use the extant evidence for more comprehensive reconstructions. After all, the first non-Christian evidence

about Christian ritual behavior mentions the performance of a song (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96.6–8; Radice 1969: 288–289):

> Others, whose names were given to me by an informer, first admitted the charge and then denied it; (…) They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose (…). After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind (…)

Neither musical nor textual aspects can in any way be recovered on the basis of this text. The terms used are sufficiently ambiguous in order to defy any reconstruction of a performance. What is more, it is doubtful that all the information that was available to Pliny was accurate (cf. Thraede 2004).

Historical reconstructions of Late Antiquity assume that Melito of Sardis lived in the second century. He is said to have written a Greek prose tract "On Pascha" in the rhetoric style of his age promoting a most disturbing anti-Judaism. As these ideas found their way into the much later Greek *troparia idiomela* of the Good Friday liturgy, one could see a tradition of the rhetoric of *improperia* (of the Latin Church) attested in these parallels. However, these parallels point at most to a migration of concepts (Janeras 1988: 250–272), but not to a tradition of songs or poetic compositions. After Melito's *On Pascha*, one of the textual witnesses adds the fragment of a literary hymn:

> Hymn the Father, you holy ones; | sing to your Mother, virgins. | We hymn, we exalt (them) exceedingly, we holy ones. | You have been exalted to be brides and bridegrooms, | for you have found your bridegroom, Christ. | Drink for wine, brides and bridegrooms… (Fragment 17 Hall 1979: 85).

A century after Pliny, Clement of Alexandria's *Christ the Educator* (= *Paedagogus*) contains a short hymn at the end of its third book (Wood 1954: 276–278):

> Bridle-bit of colts untamed, | Thou Wing of birds not straying, | Firm rudder of our ships at sea, | Thou shepherd of God's regal sheep. || Thy simple children | Gather round Thee; | They would sing holily, | They would hymn truthfully, | With lips ne'er stained, | To Thee O Christ, their Guide. || O Thou King of saints, | Word of Father on high, | Thou Governor of all things, | Ruling e'er wisely, | Balm for all labors, | Source of endless joy, | Jesus, holy Savior | Of men who cry to Thee; | Thou Shepherd, Thou

Husbandman, | Thou Rudder, Thou Bridle-bit, | O Wing, heaven leading
| The flock of innocence; | Fisher of men | Drawn safely in | From ocean
of sin; | Snaring to spotless life | Fish unstained by Sea of hostile foe; | O
all-hallowed Shepherd, | Guide us, Thy children, | Guide Thy sheep safely,
O King! || The footsteps of Christ | Are pathway to heaven, | Of ages
unbounded, | Everlasting Word, | Light of eternity, | Well-spring of Mercy,
| Who virtue instills | In hearts offering God | The gift of their reverence,
| O Jesus, our Christ! | Milk of the bride, | Given of heaven, | Pressed from
sweet breasts— | Gift of Thy wisdom— | These Thy little ones | Draw for
their nourishment; | With infancy's lips | Filling their souls | With spiritual
savor | From breasts of the Word. || Let us all sing | To Christ, our King, |
Songs of sweet innocence, | Hymns of bright purity, | Hallowed grateful-
ness | For teachings of life; | Let us praise gladsomely | So mighty a Child.
|| Let us, born of Christ, | Chant out in unison, | Loud chorus of peace, |
We, undefiled, pure flock, | To God, Lord of peace.

While it is less important whether Clement composed (rather than merely
quoted) this text, there is no indication regarding its use. It did not, likewise,
enter the musical repertoire of churches after Clement's lifetime.

Composed roughly at the same time, Christian narratives contain hymns
and prayer texts that were certainly modeled on customary material. Examples
include the "Hymns of the Bride" and the "Hymn of the Pearl" in the
(originally Syriac) *Acts of Thomas* (6–7 and 108–113; Klijn 2003; Rouwhorst
2014). The first is called a "song" *zmīrtā*, while the second is called a
madrāšā—the same term that also designates Ephrem the Syrian's (d. 373)
hymns. The relationship of these poetic texts to the actual performance of
liturgies remains obscure.

Even less information about any liturgical context or musical performance is
available for the Syriac collection of the "Odes of Solomon" that was apparently
composed in the same epoch. The texts are not preserved in a context that
points to musical performance. This collection is not an ancient hymnal—imply-
ing musical performance and liturgical use. As other texts in this vein,
the Odes do not reappear in the repertoire of liturgical chant. Ode 19 avails
itself of similar images as Clement's hymn quoted above (Lattke 2009: 268):

A cup of milk was offered to me and I drank it in the sweetness of the
lord's kindness. The Son is the cup, and he who was milked, the Father,
and [the one] who milked him, the Spirit of holiness. Because his breasts
were full and it was not desirable that his milk should be poured out/
discharged for no reason/uselessly, the Spirit of holiness opened his
[namely, the Father's] bosom and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the

Father. And she/it gave the mixture to the world, while they did not know, and those who receive [it] are in the *plērōma* of the right [hand]. The womb of the Virgin caught [it], and she conceived and gave birth. And the Virgin became a mother in great compassion and she was in labor and bore a son. And she felt no pains/grief, because it was not useless/for no reason. And she did not require a midwife, because he [namely, God] kept her alive like a man. She brought forth by/in the will [of God] and brought forth by/in [his] manifestation and acquired by/in [his] great power and loved by/in [his] salvation and guarded by/in [his] kindness and made known by/in [his] greatness. Hallelujah.

Conversely, the hymn *phos hilaron* is first attested as a liturgical text in manuscripts from the ninth century (Plank 2001: 18, 23–38), although it stands to reason that the hymn was composed several centuries before that time (tr. Bradshaw *et al.* 2002: 159):

O joyous light of the holy glory of the immortal Father, | heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ! | As we come to the setting of the sun and behold the evening light, | We praise you Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of God! | It is fitting at all times that you be praised with auspicious voices, | O Son of God, giver of life. | That is why the whole world glorifies you!

It was chanted during the liturgical performance of a *lucernarium* (praising God at the occasion of bringing a lamp into the congregation at the beginning of an evening liturgy). However, the claim that exactly this hymn should have been part of the earliest Christian repertory is only based on older attestations of its liturgical context (the *lucernarium*). Again, older sources hint at an occasion and even point to some of the contents of the hymn. They do not give its text. Thus, Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) remarks in passing (because he is only interested in the question of the address of the Holy Spirit in prayer):

It seemed fitting to our fathers not to receive the gift of the light at eventide in silence, but, on its appearing, immediately to give thanks. Who was the author of these words of thanksgiving at the lighting of the lamps, we are not able to say. The people, however, utter the ancient form, and no one has ever reckoned guilty of impiety those who say 'We praise Father, Son, and God's Holy Spirit.' (*On the Holy Spirit* 73 NPNF II 8, 46b)

The (Ethiopic translation of the) "Apostolic Tradition"—a text of the fourth century that may contain bits of older material—likewise hints at contents of

a prayer (not a hymn) for this liturgical occasion (29C.7–9; Bradshaw *et al.* 2002: 156–159):

> And he (the deacon in the presence of the bishop) will pray in this way, saying: We give you thanks, O God, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom you have enlightened us, revealing to us the light that does not perish. After we have, therefore, finished the length of the day and have arrived at the beginning of the night, having been filled with the light of the day that you created for our satisfaction, now, since we do not lack the light of the evening by your own grace, we praise you and glorify you through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom you have glory, might, and honor with the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. Amen.

The basically non-datable text of "Acts of John" 94–97 contains a narrative in which Jesus sings a litany also mentioning a musical instrument. The literary story-tellers respond "Amen" dancing in a circle around him (McKinnon 1987: 25 no. 38):

> Before his arrest by the lawless Jews, who are given their laws by the lawless serpent, he gathered us all together and said: "Before I am given over to them, let us sing a hymn to the Father, and thus go to meet what lies ahead". So he bade us form a circle, as it were, holding each other's hands, and taking his place in the middle he said: "Answer Amen to me." Then he began to hymn and to say: "Glory be to thee, Father." And we, forming a circle, responded "Amen" to him. "Glory be to thee, Word, | Glory be to thee, Grace." "Amen." | "Glory be to thee, Spirit, | Glory be to thee, Holy One, | Glory be to thy Glory." "Amen." | (…) | "I wish to play on the *aulos*; | Dance, all of you." "Amen." | "I wish to mourn; | Beat your breasts, all of you." "Amen." | "The one octad sings with us." "Amen." | "The twelfth number dances above." "Amen." | "To the universe belongs the danger." "Amen." | "Who dances not, knows not what happens." "Amen" | (…) After dancing thus with us, my beloved, the Lord went out, and we, confused and asleep, as it were, fled one way and the other. (…)

This text is the only attestation of singing accompanied by dancing in the early Church. The description is closely related to a narrative situation. Its author could have been interested in the inauguration of a ritual. If this should have been among his intentions, it was not successful.

While dancing could have been part of communal religious expressions of Christian groups, sources that talk about dance, revile it. Clement of Alexandria rules out dance as part of the celebrations of Christian holidays in

the second Book of *Christ the Educator* (2.4, § 40) that discusses questions
of the Christian banquet, the Eucharist (Wood 1954: 129–130):

> In the feasts of reason that we have, let the wild celebrations of the holiday
> season have no part, or the senseless night-long parties that delight in
> wine-drinking. (…) They are brazen celebrations that work deeds of shame.
> The exciting rhythm of flutes and harps, choruses and dances, Egyptian
> castanets and other entertainments get out of control and become indecent
> and burlesque, especially when they are re-enforced by cymbals and drums
> and accompanied by the noise of all these instruments of deception.

Christian polemics against music and dance often accuse the respective others
for violating laws of decency rather than opposing them as a typical expres-
sion of polytheism. On the one hand, such rhetoric can be read as an attempt
to win over from the other side those philosophers who would readily share
the Christians' understanding of decorum. On the other hand, Christian
authors emphasize the non-religious character of dancing, "if it cannot be
avoided" (Basil of Caesarea; McKinnon 1987: 71 no. 145) due to social
pressure, for example. The canons of the Synod of Laodicea (perhaps from
the later fourth century) distinguish between clerics and laymen at this point
(McKinnon 1987: 119 no. 260): "Priests or clerics of whatever rank must
not look upon the spectacles at weddings, or at banquets, but they must arise
and depart from there before the entry of the musicians." To err on the side
of caution, one should not assign an important role to dancing and playing
(as well as listening to) musical instruments as *typical* media of religious
expression in early Christianity. Nevertheless, Christians in Late Antiquity
participated in performances involving dancing and the playing of musical
instruments (cf. for Clement of Alexandria, Cosgrove 2006: 259–261).

Some interpreters of the polytheists' performances of music and dance do
not accuse them of indecency, but point to their rejection of the public sys-
tem of sacrifices. Thus, a text of the Jewish/Christian "Sibylline Oracles"
(8.113–121; McKinnon 1987: 26 no. 39) lists items of Roman society that
were to disappear in the course of Rome's future destruction:

> They pour no blood on altars in sacrificial libations, | The tympanum
> sounds not nor does the cymbal, | Nor does the much pierced *aulos* with
> its frenzied voice, | Nor the *syrinx*, bearing the likeness of a crooked ser-
> pent, | Nor the trumpet, barbarous sounding herald of wars; | Neither are
> there drunkards in lawless carousals or in dances, | Nor the sound of the
> cithara, nor a wicked contrivance; | Nor is there strife, nor manifold wrath,
> nor a sword | Among the dead, but a new era for all.

Many sources that oppose dancing and playing musical instruments tie in with other texts in their strong recommendation of vocal music. At this point, terminology becomes important. As a rule of thumb, one may assume that "hymns," "odes," "psalms," "songs," and other Greek or Latin terms do not correspond to exact rhetoric or musical forms of expression in the earliest Christian texts. Thus, the New Testament Texts of Ephesians 5:18–20 and Colossians 3:16–17 mention "psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes," which does not prove that Christians used the biblical book of Psalms in their liturgies.

Regarding the use of Psalms containing Alleluia as a refrain, Tertullian remarks that (*On Prayer* 27; Bradshaw *et al.* 2002: 159) "those who are more diligent in praying are accustomed to include in their prayers Alleluia and this type of psalms, with the endings of which those who are present may respond." The *Apostolic Tradition* describes an apparently sympotic meal including the performance of prayers and songs (29C.11–15; Bradshaw *et al.* 2002: 156):

> And when they have then risen after the supper and have prayed, the children and the virgins are to say the psalms. After this a deacon, holding the mixed cup of the oblation, is to say a psalm from the ones over which "Hallelujah" is written. After this, a presbyter, if he has commanded, (is also to read) in this way from those psalms. And after this, the bishop, when he has offered the cup, is to say the psalm that is appropriate for the cup, with all of them saying every Hallelujah. When they read the psalms they are all to say Hallelujah, that is to say, we praise the one who is God glorified and praised, who established the entire world with one word. And in this way, when the psalm has been completed, he is to give thanks (…)

Apart from the fact, that these prayers may not have been understood as music in ancient times, the translators remark about this passage that "the instructions about the psalmody seem a little too precise and detailed for a second- or third-century text, and have probably been subsequently expanded." This passage alludes to a well-known post-prandial, sympotic situation where different members of the club (in the *Apostolic Tradition* only members of the clergy in contradistinction to the earlier texts) sing a song or a strophe as their contributions to the musical and intellectual success of the respective dinner party (but see Cosgrove's 2014 caveat mentioned above and Cosgrove 2006: 264–266 for the terminology in Clement of Alexandria's works). In its extant form, the text also implies the performance of biblical Psalms.

On a larger scale, the performance of a liturgy of the hours on the basis of Psalmody—as celebrations that were independent from communal meals— begins only in the fourth century. Thus, it sets in at the same time when Christian hymns were composed abundantly. The collection of canons that is attributed to the Synod of Laodicea mentioned above contains rules for

the performance of psalmody in the church. The synod forbids the use of hymns (McKinnon 1987: 119 no. 261): "One must not recite privately composed psalms nor non-canonical books in the church, but only the canonical books of the Old and New Testament." In hindsight, this canon was either a futile attempt to stem the tide of poetic creativity or just a part of an introduction into a Christian canon of scriptural writings (a list of which follows in the subsequent paragraph in the collection of the canons of that Synod). Singing or reciting biblical Psalms *and* the creation of liturgical hymns thrive in the same epoch.

Beginning with the fourth century, this composition and performance of hymns together with biblical Psalms remains a central element of Christian religious expression in east and west. Despite their abundant use in much later liturgies of the hours, it remains unknown how and in which liturgical setting Ephrem the Syrian's (d. 373) metrical hymns were performed, although Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) mentions women's choirs in this context (Brock 2011: 145b). The liturgical compositions of *chazzanim* and *diakonoi* did probably not only develop in the same literary context (see below) but were also written and performed by functionaries that both Christians and Jews regarded as similar. For late fourth-century epigraphic (CIJ 805 mentioning "*Nemia*, *azzana* and deacon…") and literary sources identify the designation of the synagogue functionary who would perform liturgical texts, the *chazzan*, and the Christian *diakonos* (Yahalom 1999: 35–40; Epiphanius, *Panarion/Adversus Haereses* 30.11 (Ebionites) GCS NF 10/1 346.16). Composer-performers of Jewish liturgical poetry would call themselves *chazzan*. Ephrem the Syrian is known to have been a *diakonos*.

At roughly the same time, the young Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) observes what seems to be the introduction of hymn singing in the church of Milan during a politically dangerous time (*Confessions* 9.7 § 15; McKinnon 1987: 154 no. 351):

How much I wept at your hymns and canticles, deeply moved by the voices of your sweetly singing church. Those voices flowed into my ears, and the truth was poured out in my heart, whence a feeling of piety surged up and my tears ran down. And these things were good for me. Not long since had the church of Milan begun this mode of consolation and exhortation, with the brethren singing zealously together with voice and heart. (…) At that time the custom began that hymns and psalms be sung after the manner of the eastern regions lest the people be worn out with the tedium of sorrow. The practice has been retained from that time until today and imitated by many, indeed, by almost all your congregations throughout the rest of the world.

His remark does not, most probably, point to a change in the mode of performance, but in the adoption of an "eastern" custom to recite newly composed hymns. Subsequently, some of the great theologians of this epoch composed hymns that remained within the liturgical repertoire in the following centuries. Ambrose of Milan's (d. 397) and Augustine's poetic compositions were not only designed for liturgical use, but took the medium of music seriously using it for polemical purposes.

Similarly, an ancient narrator of the history of the Church used the stereotype of the poet-theologian who publishes his theologies (or heresies) through catchy songs. Regarding Jacob of Sarug (d. 521): "The *mēmrē* which he composed in order that through a pleasant composition of exciting expressions he could snatch the mass from the illustrious one." He added a remark about Narsai of Nisibis (died at the beginning of the sixth century): "What then did the elect of God [Narsai] do? […] he put the truthful thought of orthodoxy into the elaborate form of the *mēmrē* to pleasant melodies and he composed the sense of the Scriptures according to the holy fathers, in pleasant responses in the likeness of the blessed David" (cf. both quotations, Vööbus 1965: 66–67). Late antique and early medieval poets and performers could apparently understand hymns as media for the dissemination of theological truth. It is, of course, evident that one's theological convictions would influence one's texts. However, such statements surface in a highly polemical context. In these cases, religious expression in music is not an innocent realization of aesthetic visions, but a means of teaching the truth and fighting for its dissemination.

Christians were not the only ones to compose hymns. Even though one cannot know which of the extant texts were common currency among the fathers of the Synod of Laodicea, the idea to restrict liturgical hymnody to the canonical Psalms falls, nevertheless, in a time when "privately composed" hymns were indeed available. Christian intellectuals like Valentinus, who taught in Rome in the second century, composed and published poetic pieces (Markschies 1992: 218 and 218–259 for a commentary; translation: Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies* 7.37.7; ANF 5, 91a and n. 1): "I behold all things suspended in air by spirit, | and I perceive all things wafted by spirit; | the flesh (I see) suspended from soul, | but the soul shining out from air, | and air depending from Æther, | and fruits produced from Bythus, | and the foetus borne from the womb."

The finds of Coptic texts in the last century provide us with many poetic compositions that often survived only in a single version on one papyrus. Keeping the right intellectual and practical distance toward the material world and the salvation of mankind is the topic of the Providence Monologue in the (Coptic translation of a lost Greek original of the) *Apocryphon of John*

(NHC II, 30.4–31.8 Waldstein and Wisse 1995: 168–175 and cf. Waldstein 1995). It appears only in two of the four manuscripts of the work. Allusions to baptism and its rhetoric led to the hypothesis that it should be a baptismal hymn inserted into the *Apocryphon of John*.

Translated from Aramaic into Coptic, the Manichean *Psalms of Thomas* can be taken as an important example for the larger corpus of Manichean psalms. There are good reasons for the assumption of a third-century date of this collection. The earlier reconstruction of "Thomas" as a disciple of Mani (240–274/277) has been questioned by Church and Stroumsa (1980), who showed that a name "Thomas" as a prominent follower of Mani cannot claim a solid basis in the data. Poirier (2001) offered a philological explanation of *thōm* in (Coptic) *npsalmos nthōm* as referring to Mani's heavenly twin (Aramaic *t'ām*) or *alter ego* and hence claims Mani's authorship for these texts.

The following text summarizes the self-conception of the Manichean believer. Understanding his fate and destiny, and thus rejecting the world, he hopes to return to the light. The "young man" sings the hymn on earth anticipating the post-mortal admission into the light. "In the night" does not hence imply a liturgical rubric. It is a metaphor for the general assessment of the world on the part of the singer (*Psalms of Thomas* 17:10–15 in the collection Nagel 1980: 62, 120–122 = Allberry 1938: 223 lines 20–28):

The Little one makes music by night, | Matter answered him with a word: | O Little one that makest music | […] thou it is art not of this world. | [He said: I] indeed [am] in this world, | but I shall not dwell in it from henceforth. | I have tried the world and known it, | that there is not a tittle of life in it. | Since I have known the world | it has hated me, even the whole world; | when I saw that it hated me | I in my turn hated it, | […]

Rabbinic Judaism

Despite its origins in a similar, social—and presumably also musical—setting, Rabbinic Judaism did not follow the same path of development as Christianity, although it led to similar corpora of sources attesting to musical expression of religious tenets in roughly the same epochs. As one important difference, late antique meal customs, which vanished from the focus of religious attention in Christianity, remained important in Judaism. *Birkat ha-mazon*, the Rabbinic replacement for the Greco-Roman rites between meal and drinking party, entered into the scope of the liturgical poets' attention.

Still more importantly, the liturgy of the synagogue that had probably begun in the form of study sessions, attracting the performance of prayers over time, developed its own customs and styles of religious performance independent from Greco-Roman and rabbinic meal culture and the Christian post-Constantinian mass. The Rabbinic texts suggest that Jewish synagogue music remained vocal. The sources depict highly creative poetic activities that were by no means inferior to contemporary Christian liturgical music. Nevertheless, the musical shape of these performances cannot be recovered any more (cf. Rand 2014: 123; the oldest notation comes from the twelfth century, cf. Kligman 2015: 84–85 and 102 n. 1). Apart from the loss of material, it may be suggested that liturgical music was not written down, because it was still improvised by the specialists even after it had become customary to put the complex texts of their liturgical poetry into writing.

Both music and dance were of course parts of the social settings of Judaism, although ancient Jewish sources do not provide much information about religious expression in these modes of social behavior. Philo of Alexandria (first century CE) describes the liturgy of the *Therapeutae* and *Therapeutrides*, an otherwise unattested group of men and women who are said to live near Lake Mareotis in Egypt. They perform a kind of mimetic reenactment of Israel's dance after the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in a festival that they observe every fiftieth day. Philo does not indicate that this literary description reflects actual musical practice among Alexandrian Jews (Feldmann 1996: 524, 527). There is no want of theories that try to connect this group and its liturgical dancing to other movements in Israel's history. Yet, there are likewise good reasons to assume that Philo describes an entirely fictitious group, perhaps as an allegory of the ideal people of Israel. For this group's customs and behavior shine as brightly as their alleged counterpart in pagan Egypt bogs down in abhorrent orgies and depravity. Whatever other sources may be referred to in support of reconstructions of cultic dance in Diaspora Israel, Philo's *On Contemplative Life* cannot be counted as evidence in this regard.

Regarding Rabbinic Judaism, the authors of the Mishnah recollect and/or reconstruct bits of the rituals at the Temple in Jerusalem, which point to processions and dance (Mishnah Sukka 5.4; Danby 1933: 180):

> Men of piety and good works used to dance (… i.e. at the festival in the Temple of Jerusalem) with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises. And countless levites (played) on harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and instruments of music, on the fifteen steps leading down from the Court of the Israelites to the Court of the Women, corresponding to the Fifteen Songs of Ascents in the Psalms; upon them the levites used to stand with intruments of music and make melody.

Singing and instrumental music had been regarded as part of the repertoire of the Temple cult for centuries at the time of composition of the Mishnah. Rabbinic texts occasionally collect such retrospective remarks about the music—both vocal and instrumental—of the Temple. The Sages, who handed down those texts, did not, however, replicate this aspect of Temple rituals when they constructed the liturgy of the synagogue. Thus, the difference between activities of the rabbinic synagogue and the Temple led to the abandonment of instrumental music even without an outright ban (cf. McKinnon 1979/1980). In addition, playing instruments was regarded as violation of the Sabbath. Hence the Sages discuss the question of whether or not the necessities of the Temple cult override the Sabbath prohibition of work. The Talmudic polemics against musical instruments at banquets do not concern the liturgy of the synagogue but rather belong to an opposition against orgiastic behavior at meetings (cf. Talmud Bavli Sotah 48a: "Whoever drinks to the accompaniment of the four musical instruments brings five punishments to the world […]," cf. Jacobson 1998 for a list of source texts). The only instrument that reemerged in the liturgy of the synagogue after the destruction of the Temple, was the ram's horn, the *shofar*. It was, however, rather used in the ritualized function of a bugle than as a musical instrument.

The Sages were concerned with Torah reading, study, and exposition combined with prayer and its organization. However, the synagogues became filled with the performance of poetic texts at the same time as the Christian Churches. Thus, the emergence of liturgical poetry, *piyyut*, as well as its Christian counterpart in the east was conveniently explained as initiated by a trend in late antique rhetoric, the "Jeweled Style." *Piyyut* is poetic religious expression *par excellence*. The first (i.e. "pre-classical") specimens emerged as self-contained poems with biblical, mostly narrative contents organized in metric lines (Rand 2014: 114 and in general Münz-Manor 2010; cf. Genesis 1–3):

> You established | the world of old | founded the earth | and shaped [its] creatures. || Seeing the world | formless and void | You drove out darkness | and set up light. || A lump in Your image | You shaped of the earth | and of the Tree of Knowledge | gave him a command. || He forsook Your word | and was driven from Eden | but You destroyed him not | for [he's] the work of Your hands.

In a second (the "classical") phase, *piyyutim* were composed in order to replace the main parts of the regular benedictions of the liturgy. They respond to many traditional topics especially related to the festivals. As the creation of liturgical poetry was a typically Palestinian phenomenon at the beginning, only few pieces remained in the corpus of literary and liturgical texts. The

repertoire was expanded vastly after the discovery and gradual publication of the texts from the Genizah of Cairo (a treasure trove of manuscripts discovered in the late nineteenth century).

One of the early great poets of this epoch is Yannai, who composed *piyyutim* for the Sabbaths and festivals of the triennial reading cycle of Torah readings. One of the *piyyutim* for the Sabbath on which Exodus 12 was read was included as one of the post-prandial songs in the younger recension of the Haggadah of Pesach. It is an acrostic poem running along the Hebrew Alphabet. It uses the widespread poetic strategy of allusion to biblical persons, places, etc. by means of coined code-terms, like "Patros" for Egypt. As its lines end in "night," it is also rhymed (Leonhard 2006: 368–370).

At that time you accomplished many miracles in a wonderful way in the night. | Among all watches, this is the night. | You made the righteous proselyte (Abraham) victorious when a night was divided for him (i.e. in the middle of the night). | You judged the King of Gerar (Abimelekh) in a dream of the night. | You frightened an Aramean (Laban) "a day earlier" at night. | And Israel fought against the angel and overcame him in the night. | You crushed the offspring of the firstborn of Patros (Egypt) in the middle of the night. | You terrified Midian and his peers by means of the loaf of bread in a dream of the night. | You trod down the rush of the prince of Charoshet (Sisera) by means of the stars of the night. | The scoffer (Sennacherib) decided to waive (his hand in a threatening gesture) against the beloved one (Israel). You made his dead bodies dry in the night. | (The statue of) Bel and that one, who erected it, go to the wall in the middle of the night. | The secret of the vision of the night was revealed to the handsome man (Daniel). | That one who got drunk by (using) the holy vessels was killed in the same night. | That one who explains the (meaning of) dreams of the night (Daniel) was saved from the pit of the lions. | The Agagite (Haman) kept hatred (against the Jews) and wrote letters in the night. | You stirred up your victory against him when the sleep of the king fled in the night. | You will tread the wine-press according to the (appointed time expressed in) "Watchman what is (still left of) the night?" | He called like a watchman: "The morning is coming and also the night". | The day is coming which is neither day nor night. | An exalted one announced: "Yours is the day and also the night". | Appoint watchmen for your city (for) the whole day and the whole night! | Illuminate like daylight the darkness of the night.

Poets probably performed their own poetry themselves thus acting as cantors. Their successors would readily adapt older poetry to new liturgical requirements or write their own refrains. Despite the obvious prestige of some poets

whose works were copied and reused, liturgical poetry seems to have been part of a thriving culture of liturgical performance for quite some time.

The poets use several stylistic devices such as rhyme and acrostics and could have involved the precentor and the congregation in a stylized dialogue by means of alterations of strophes and refrains. Nothing is known about the mode of recitation of these texts. Thus, their subsumption in the category of music remains hypothetical. The group of artists who composed *piyyutim* is studied under the heading of "poets" today. If more about their performance were known, their activities might perhaps be classed as (musical) composition.

Regarding the biblical Psalms, the chronology of the liturgical development in Judaism and Christianity roughly converge. The recitation of Psalms was introduced into the system of Jewish statutory prayer as a latecomer—that is, after the epoch that one would identify as "Antiquity" in the west (cf. Maier 1983). The older texts dealing with the emergence of this system are concerned with Torah reading, the manifold blessings, and the recitation of the *Shema Israel* (consisting of Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41—understood as a reading and hence not set to music except for its first line) and the benedictions of the Amidah. The Psalms were added to this ritual after the statutory prayers had already acquired a high prestige as Israel's liturgy.

The performance of the *Hallel*-Psalms (Pss 113–118) at the evening of Passover was, however, regarded as part of the celebration from the earliest rabbinic texts—perhaps already from the second century CE—on (Tosefta Pisḥa 10.6–8; Neusner 1981: 164–165):

> He who pronounces the *Hallel*-Psalms (for others)—they come to him and read (alongside him), and he does not go to them. He who reads for his young sons and daughters has to respond with them at the very passage at which they respond. At what passage does he respond? (When) he comes to the words, "Blessed is he who comes." he responds with them, "In the name of the Lord." (When) he comes to the words, "We bless you," he responds with them, "out of the House of the Lord." Townsfolk who have no one to pronounce the *Hallel*-Psalms for them go to the synagogue and read the first part. Then they go home and eat and drink, and come back and complete the entire thing. And if it is not possible for them (to go home and come back), they complete the whole thing (the first time around). As to the *Hallel*, they leave nothing out of it, and they add nothing to it.

Being concerned with the proper recitation or singing of a group of Psalms, this text presumes that most people who are supposed to perform the recitation are not able to do so. Thus, it recommends teaching one's children the proper way of performance and meeting a religious specialist at the

synagogue. According to the narrative of the Mishna, the Levites were used to sing this group of Psalms in the Temple of Jerusalem at the time of the slaughtering of the Pesach animals (Mishnah Pesachim 5.7). Singing the *Hallel*-Psalms at the celebration of Pesach in one's house or in the Synagogue may have been established by the rabbis as a mimetic rite of this aspect of the Temple cult.

Conclusion

The legitimate wish to recreate the experience of religious music and dance as performed in ancient Christianity and Judaism is thwarted by the dearth and character of the extant sources. There is no reason to doubt that Christians and Jews engaged in the singing of hymns as religious practice. The rare examples of Christian hymns that were preserved as literary texts of the earliest period did not leave any trace in the history of the liturgy, although some of them were taken up and used within liturgies in much later epochs. The innovations of Christian liturgy in the fourth century established the background as well as the need for the creation of new musical pieces or of melodies for older literary texts. There is hardly any evidence for earlier periods. Ancient Christian hymnography is, thus, a question of texts and conjectures regarding their social context.

The shape of the performance of congregational religious music in Antiquity can at best be guessed on the basis of a few hints and careful comparisons with Greek and Roman sources, for example, about sympotic singing. Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786, which preserves a Christian hymn with musical notation, stands out as a rare document suggesting that the approach of Christians to their music was identical to that of their Greek neighbors.

The situation in Rabbinic Judaism resembles that of ancient Christianity with regard to the problems of finding data for the reconstruction of musical pieces or the shape of religious performances of music. Roughly at the same time when Christian poets began to write pieces that were preserved as literary texts or as part of the liturgies, Jewish poets produced, copied, and reworked huge corpora of highly complex religious poetry.

Nevertheless, the impressive production of texts of hymns and poetry among Christians, Jews, Manicheans, and other groups suggests prolific creativity in terms of audible and visible performances. Unfortunately, tunes, melodies, and movements are not audible or visible any more.

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Despite his interest in one ancient text, Cosgrove (2011) discusses many questions of general interest *en passant* (to which further papers of this author addressing particular questions like Cosgrove 2006 may be added). McKinnon 1987 remains a

very useful collection of source texts for the study of early Christian music. Leonhard (2014) revisits general assumptions about the possibility to reconstruct Christian music on the basis of the New Testament. The papers by Münz-Manor (2010) and Rand (2014) offer easily accessible surveys over ancient Jewish liturgical poetry (to be supplemented by McKinnon (1979/1980) for the question of the opposition against the use of musical instruments in Judaism). Hellsten (2016) briefly reviews the history of research regarding dance in Ancient Christianity.

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