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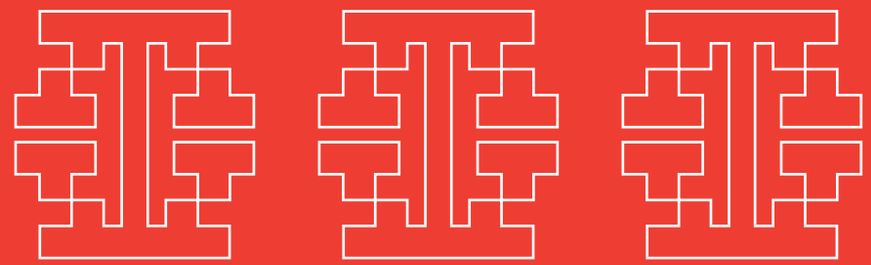

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Topography, Markets, and the Good End of Empire*

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With the opening of stable trade routes in the early Empire, Romans took a sustained scholarly interest in South Asian topography. The abundance and exoticism of the goods of the East provided a visual template for paradise, but, surprisingly, Roman writers ascribe prestige to indirect market transactions rather than direct military control. Distance heightened both what was desirable and forbidding about the East. I argue that the impossibility of a monopoly over the eastern luxury trade led to a rethinking of the hard and soft borders of empire: where direct control was impossible or impractical, the study of topography "confirms" that it was also undesirable. The topographers' defense of trade directly affects their choice and use of sources, and the result is a value-laden topography of extremity that affirms several foregone conclusions, notably the centrality and primacy of the Mediterranean and its "natural" limits. For Roman encyclopedists such as Strabo and Pliny, topography shows that caravans, not campaigns, define the ideal limits of Roman power so that markets, not fortresses, become the "good end of empire."

Roman Economy and Topography

Romans encountered India in waves of military and trade relations. The discovery of the monsoon winds by Hippalus around the first century BCE made it possible to sail from the Red Sea to India, and by the time of Augustus Roman ships were skirting the Malabar coast.[1] Overland trade persisted alongside the new route despite being comparatively arduous, and

* My thanks to Andrew Ollett and the anonymous reviewer for *Classical Antiquity*; remaining mistakes are my own. Translations follow the Loeb Classical Library except where noted.

[1] *Periplus* 57; G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring: In the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 24; J. Miller, *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire 29 B.C. to A.D. 641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), viii.

costly.[2] The maritime trade was direct—Roman vessels manned by Roman crews and insured by Roman patrons could organize a round-trip between Ocelis and Muziris in just under three months.[3] The Romans trafficked the Hippalus route heavily and regularly; Strabo reports up to 120 ships leaving for India from Myos Hormos annually.[4] The older land route (sometimes called the Incense Route) was significantly slower and consequently more expensive, handling less volume more seasonally: shipments sent along its length were subject to adulteration and theft by middlemen and bandits.[5] Despite the grandiose claims of diplomacy (e.g., *Res gestae* 31), the Roman military could not protect trade far beyond the empire's frontiers.[6]

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[2] E.g., the Sassanians deliberately increased export tariffs on the route in late antiquity; see T. Daryaee, "The Persian Gulf in Late Antiquity," *Journal of World History* 14 (2003): 5.

[3] Pliny, *Nat.* 6.96. Though, depending on the winds, the total length of the trip could vary widely; see Yu Huan, *Weilüe* 11, trans. J.E. Hill, "The Peoples of the West" (2004) online: http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/weilue/weilue.html#section11.

[4] Strabo, *Geogr.* 2.5.12.

[5] M.P. Fitzpatrick, "Provincializing Rome: The Indian Ocean Trade Network and Roman Imperialism," *Journal of World History* 22 (2011): 43; cf. F. Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East: Volume 3. The Greek World, the Jews, and the East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 294. On the adulteration of spices, see Miller, *The Spice Trade*, 58, 81; on the relative costs of the sea and land trades per shipment, see S.E. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa: 30 B.C.–A.D. 217* (Brill, Leiden, 1986), 76. Caravans remained viable in part because they could leave each fall while ships had to await the monsoon winds; P.F. Bang, *The Roman Bazaar* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008), 134. See also E. Heldaas Seland, "The Persian Gulf or the Red Sea?: Two Axes in Ancient Indian Ocean Trade, Where to Go and Why," *World Archaeology* 43 (2011): 398–409.

[6] The border fortresses of the Eastern Desert of Egypt linking Berenice and the Nile Valley have been thought to constitute its striking distance on land in the region; R.B. Jackson, *At Empire's Edge: Exploring Rome's Egyptian Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 167, 202. S.E. Sidebotham and R.E. Zitterkopf detail the trade routes of the area in "Routes through the Eastern Desert of Egypt," *Expedition* 37 (1995): 39–52. By sea, *Periplus* 19 implies coast guard units patrolled as far as the north end of the Red Sea in the first century, and a centurion was posted at Leuke Kome as a customs agent; see S.E. Sidebotham, "Roman Interests in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean," in *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity*, ed. J. Reade (London: Kegan Paul International in association with the British Museum, 1996), 293; G.K. Young, "The Customs-Officer at the Nabataean Port of Leuke Kome ('Periplus Maris Erythraei' 19)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 119 (1997): 266–68. On Rome's spotty oversight of Indian emporia, see M. Wheeler, *Rome beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (London: Penguin, 1955), 152.

As traders plied these routes, conflicts between the "local" land route and the "express" sea route emerge. The sea promised an unmediated encounter between Rome and the East, whereas the slower land route was very much mediated by the influence and demands of the communities it passed through and depended on as way stations. The guidebooks and manuals produced by sea travelers, such as the *Periplus Maris Erythrei* and the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, maintain the distinction by defining India, much like Diogo Ribiero's 1529 map of the New World, by its ports and trade goods. Because sea travel between the Mediterranean and India takes place on a vehicle, the experience of this route invites a stronger dichotomy between Rome and "the East," as sailors glance the shore only from afar, from a protected rather than an embedded space. Compared to land travel, many sea narratives are less ethnographic and more commuterly. Descriptions of land travel address precisely these gaps: the caravans that trafficked the land routes to India notice climatic gradients and cultural slippages that made it harder to maintain a Rome-East, inside-outside dichotomy. Rather, the experience of the overland route made travel itself an object of inquiry which offered surprises of a different order, like Apollonius of Tyana's discovery that cinnamon grows on trees.[7] Metropolitan intellectuals such as Pliny and Strabo attempted to reconcile the broad strokes of the maritime tradition with the fine work of the land travelers' observations, taking a special interest in the potential explanatory power of changes in nature and custom along the way to make sense of the shape and boundaries of the world in a way that would make sense of difference.[8] What results is a substantial historical and scientific discourse within the Roman empire on the relationship of topography to ethnography. The writers treating these themes both cite and attempt to adjudicate

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[7] Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 3.4.

[8] J.S. Romm sees this explanation as tantamount to conquest (*The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994], 99), but I see trade as a position equally supportable by the endeavor of "knowing the world." Cf. E. Gabba, "True History and False History in Classical Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981): 52, who sees rising interest in the exotic (e.g., Herodotus, Ctesias) as a reflection of broadened horizons relative to a diminished polis as well as evidence of plural audiences; what he calls "middlebrow culture" (53), in contrast to the "real" and "practical" history distinction of W. Schmitthenner, "Rome and India: Aspects of Universal History during the Principate," *Journal of Roman Studies* 69 (1979): 90–106.

between Hellenistic and Roman, literary and eyewitness accounts, and in doing so create a rationale for the extension of soft power far beyond the limits of Rome's striking power.

Heterotopic Historiography

If utopia is an ideal imaginary, heterotopia might be thought of as a real imaginary.[9] India was the latter to Rome. It did not fit neatly into the "ideological necessity for a negative image of the barbarian" noted by Shaw, or Gabba's socially critical ideal of a Golden Age, but remained stubbornly, substantively, ambivalent.[10] Foucault called such ambiguous places "counter-sites," real spaces placed by culture that, in contrast to utopias, are not just sites of perfection but objects of aversion and desire, "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[11] Utopias do not *exist*, they only signify. Heterotopias, on the other hand, are reachable, hence dual: they both exist and signify, and these perspectives remain essentially in conflict. Foucault considered the phenomenon of "emplacement"—the interpretation of space into place—to be a particular feature of medieval consciousness, but I argue it goes back much further, offering a chance to understand Roman perceptions of India beyond simple exoticism and instrumentality.[12]

Heterotopias are mirrored places: the heterotopic lens inverts and transvalues the qualities of real spaces, adapting them to the norms and

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[9] Gabba defines utopia as the site of "primitivist longings . . . combined with philosophical theories and egalitarian leanings . . . dressed up to suit contemporary taste" ("True History," 58).

[10] See B.D. Shaw, "Rebels and Outsiders," in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 11: The High Empire, A.D. 70–192*, ed. A.K. Bowman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 374–75. D.J. Mattingly considers this necessity "the main cause of the inability of Roman writers to provide a true picture of peoples outside the empire" (*Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010], 31).

[11] M. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. J. Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27. Cf. the "topographic other" of J.Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 236.

[12] "In the Middle Ages there was a hierarchic ensemble of places. . . . It was this complete hierarchy, this opposition, this intersection of places that constituted what could very roughly be called medieval space: the space of emplacement" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 22).

needs of an authoritative (metropolitan) gaze.[13] This is subtly different than Gabba's utopian "paradoxography" in that heterotopia does not simply package "extravagant fantasy" as an ideal-world foil to the reality subject to critique, but locates an ambivalent fantasy of an Other place in the real world, just barely within its boundaries.[14] For the imperial Romans India, like Germania to the late Republicans, was both a historical and a discursive space, a theater of collective memory and identity, and a real place with its own very vivid problems: where utopia derives its force from an absence of problems, heterotopia is educative both based on its virtues and vices. This mode of accessing the idea of India was made possible by barriers to entry that (in real terms) only a few vessels breached.[15] It is important to note that to the extent that Roman attitudes towards India were heterotopic, any analogy between Roman accounts and British imperial attitudes is false.[16] Roman discourse on the East, though exoticizing, was never orientalist in the sense of "static, despotic and irrelevant."[17]

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[13] "The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (ibid., 24).

[14] Gabba, "True History," 59. Cf. Dio Chrysostom's utopianism: "No men live more happily than you (the Phrygians), with the exception of the Indians, for in their country, 'tis said, the rivers flow not, like yours, with water, but one river with pellucid wine, another with honey, and another with oil, and they have their springs among the hills—in the breasts, so to speak, of the earth" (*Or.* 35.434).

[15] "If we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development . . . but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27).

[16] Imperial Rome being the core narrative for Britain would involve accepting Victorian progressive historiography which, accounts such as those of the New Right, to varying degrees, do; so R. Alson, "Dialogues in Imperialism: Rome, Britain and India," in *India, Greece, and Rome, 1757 to 2007*, ed. E. Hall and P. Vasunia, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Supplement 108 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2010), 54.

[17] E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993), 168, interpreting Hegel.

Roman India was a place where fear coupled with desire, but the fulfillment of desire could mean death. Strabo (d. 24 CE), for example, tells us in India there is a tree "which has large pods, like the bean, ten fingers long and full of honey."[18] Though sweetness is a feature of utopias—lands of milk and honey—the Indian sweet is fatal, and it must be. Roman writers had an anxious attachment to the idea of India: India had desirable commodities, luxuries, but it was also a country of illusions and terrors, a place at the topographic, intellectual, and aesthetic extreme that did not fit neatly into an ideology of simple barbarism: what was good in India was never unequivocally good, but often came at an absurd price. Further, Romans never perceived Indians as without culture, simple savages to be pillaged: not only were Indian gods given an *interpretatio graeca*, but Indian philosophers were treated with a sort of holy awe after the world-famous self-immolation of Zarmenochages in the Athenian agora and the travels of Apollonius of Tyana.[19]

Indians were widely respected, Indian goods valued, and yet India itself was feared: an attitude most easily visible in Strabo's consistent pairing of the delights of India with correspondent horrors. It is a place where "stones are dug up which have the color of frankincense, and are sweeter than figs or honey," again, indices of utopia, but also where large serpents "fly about by night and let fall drops of urine or sweat, which blister the skin of the unwary with putrid sores"—the sweet is tempered with the sour and bitter.[20] So too in the case of the gold of India, which was legendary, the danger of obtaining it a truism. It was a much-repeated story since Hellenistic times that raw Indian gold was a precious sand formed by the rising sun. However tempting this image might be on its own, it is always conjoined in the sources with a reminder that it is guarded by ants "smaller than dogs but larger than foxes" that would eat the flesh of would-be harvesters, which is not to say that it is impossible to obtain, just obscenely risky.[21]

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[18] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.21.

[19] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.73, Plutarch, *Alex.* 69 and Cassius Dio, *Hist.* 54.9. Philostratus claims Apollonius found Brahmins not only worshipping Greek gods, but "the most ancient of the Greek Gods, a statue of Athena Polias and of Apollo of Delos and of Dionysus of Limnae and another of him of Amyclae, and others of similar age" (*Vit. Apoll.* 3.14).

[20] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.37.

[21] Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.90, 102; Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.37; Pliny, *Nat.* 11.36.

These sweet-and-sour couplings suggest that imperial Romans perceived India as not simply an Other place, but an amplified place, a view whose roots can be found in Herodotus' "observation" that "the extremities of the inhabited world had allotted to them by nature the fairest things, just as it was the lot of Hellas to have its seasons far more fairly tempered than other lands."[22] The "middle place" of Hellas slips easily into the centrality of imperial Rome, facilitated by Rome's appropriation of Greek intellectual clichés, and the interpretive extremity that became Roman common sense regarding India built a useful ambivalence into the Mediterranean imaginary of the East. The Roman experience of the encounter was governed by the idea of extremity, which results in a rhetoric of paired oppositions: for each wonderful thing there is a(n equally?) terrible thing (there) so that desire is simultaneously, invariably, aroused and frustrated.[23] If the ends of the earth possess the fairest things, they are also intemperate; the same climate that produces wonders also produces horrors, and one who wants the former must face the latter. As long as conquest was impossible or unthinkable, a heterotopic idea of extremity recommends the status quo of market interaction as the safest mode of contact, a way for Rome to appropriate what is desirable while outsourcing the horrific, and perhaps the exaggerated accounts of danger also spoke to the incredible expense of eastern luxury goods. As Roman collecting practices visualized the relation of provinces to the empire, ambivalent accounts of the Indian trade suggested that the good end of empire was commercial, not military.[24]

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[22] Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.106. Cf. Megasthenes, who called India "the greatest of all nations and the happiest in its lot" (Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.30), that is, a straightforward utopia.

[23] This is true even of Trogus' otherwise relatively colorless account of Alexander's conquest (Justinus, *Epit.* 12).

[24] On the collecting habits of imperial metropolitans, see M. Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750–1850* (New York: Vintage, 2006) and K. Christian, *Empire Without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350–1527* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). On Rome, see L.M. Stirling, *The Learned Collector: Mythological Statuettes and Classical Taste in Late Antique Gaul* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005) and Bang, *The Roman Bazaar*, 290–91. On the origin of exotic collections in the Hellenistic kingdoms, see E. Dench, *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 284.

The eastern trade partners of Rome were civilized and affluent, strikingly unlike the northern "barbarian type."[25] This is surprising because, to a certain extent, Roman writers still treated the ethnic-moral package as geographically determined, though they never produced anything like a coherent racial theory.[26] Yet whereas accounts of northern barbarians owed much to conflict narratives such as Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, the Roman discourse of difference regarding India was filtered through Hellenistic accounts such as Megasthenes' and Nearchus' *Indicas* and regularly supplemented with trade knowledge. The legend of Alexander, which would prove so influential in the medieval Middle East and South Asia, was already deeply entrenched by Roman antiquity, and though vastly outdated, the narratives that grew up around Alexander's legacy were often preferred to the ongoing eyewitness accounts of traders.[27] Strabo writes, "As for the merchants who nowadays sail from Egypt via the Nile and Arabian Gulf as far as India, few have sailed as far as the Ganges, and even these are merely private individuals and are useless with regard to accounts of the places visited."[28] Interestingly, Strabo does not discredit eyewitnesses based on an a priori idea of the "unchanging East," but precisely because he perceives India to have a history such that "respectable" sources are to be preferred to the banausic. As Parker has observed, "differences of social status among the users of spatial information influenced or even created different registers of geographical thought."[29] These registers affected citation practices and the

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[25] E.g.: "Barbarians were synonymous with incivility" (T.S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 BC–AD 400* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003], 291). Cf. Strabo's respectful treatment of the Brahmins, summarized in R.K. French, *Ancient Natural History: Histories of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 127.

[26] For one inventory of national stereotypes, see Julian, *Against the Galileans* 1.347ff.

[27] E.g., Romm calls Pliny's Book 7 a "rough survey of Greek Indographic writings from the fourth century onwards, thrown together in the highly reductive fashion typical of the Natural History" (*The Edges of the Earth*, 104).

[28] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.4. Their dismissal may supervene on their low social and moral standing: J.H. D'Arms cites Juvenal (*Sat.* 14.205) to illustrate the high cultural sense that profiteering was incompatible with virtue (*Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981], 152), and Fitzpatrick notes, "at no time between 31 B.C.E. and the mid second century did any member of the Roman aristocracy personally sail to India to enrich themselves" ("Provincializing Rome," 40).

[29] G. Parker, *The Making of Roman India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 191.

knowledge they produced in turn. Strabo relegates the insights of traders based on their lack of social status within the Roman world—there lack of aristocratic education makes them useful observers in the present, but does not give them standing to challenge the received accounts.[30]

Roman knowledge about India was neither purely descriptive nor strongly ideological, but the result of a politics of writerly subjectivity that ranked the production of knowledge by Romans according to metropolitan standards of sensibility; true statements require correct education much more so than direct experience. Roman authors therefore portray the object of knowledge (India) in a way that establishes their authority as knowing subjects within their own intellectual milieu. Strabo's *Geography*, like Pliny's *Natural History* after it, attempts to represent the "state of the art," and the project established him as the encyclopedist of Roman geographical knowledge.[31] Strabo claims some authority based on his wide travels, but when he does so, he treats himself explicitly as a source while maintaining a separate "objective" voice.[32] When speaking as a philosopher and a scientist, Strabo stakes his authority on having the right sort of education needed to contextualize even his own observations as well as to weigh those of others.[33]

Strabo is much more than an epitomizer[34]: he establishes his objectivity and credibility by showily distancing himself from the exaggerated claims

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[30] Explicitly in 1.1.21: "those who have written the treatises entitled Harbours and Coasting Voyages leave their investigations incomplete, if they have failed to add all at mathematical and astronomical information which properly belonged in their books." Cf. 15.1.6–8, excluding "mythical" expeditions such as those of Kyros and Semiramis. N.B.: Pliny (*Nat.* 6.96–106) uses merchants and military sources to establish current affairs in India; cf. S. Carey, *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture: Art and Empire in the Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003), 37–40.

[31] On Strabo and Pliny as the premier mediators (collectors, cataloguers, and critics) of ancient Indographic traditions, see Romm (*The Edges of the Earth*, 94–109). On encyclopedism as the demarcation of world and empire, see A. M. Riggsby, "Guides to the Wor(l)d," in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, ed. J. König and T. Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104.

[32] "Now I shall tell what part of the land and sea I have myself visited and concerning what part I have trusted to accounts given by others by word of mouth or in writing" (Strabo, *Geogr.* 2.5.11–12).

[33] See *Geogr.* 1.1.1 for Strabo's understanding of his authorial voice.

[34] E.g., *Geogr.* 2.1.38, Strabo as a corrector of Eratosthenes and Hipparchus.

of previous writers who "do not describe [India] accurately, and because of their ignorance and of its remoteness magnify all things or make them more marvelous."[35] Against these, he suggests there are trustworthy authorities and that hearing is potentially "much more important than sight for the purposes of science," if the report is trustworthy.[36] Given the prevalence of false report, what is required is a listener with a finely tuned sense of rank, like the messenger of a general.[37] Strabo implies himself to be such a person, and the boundary of the fabulous is precisely where he stakes his claim to authority. Interestingly, he does not limit himself to trustworthy reports, but often indulges the reader with catalogues of wonders on a take-it-or-leave-it basis when discussing realms beyond his experience.[38] While he previously separated his voice qua source and encyclopedist, his lowering of the standards for the truth for reports on lands outside his experience indicates a caution, even a humility, about the capacities of his education to judge alone.[39] Yet when Strabo attempts to be "scientific" about the truth of his descriptions, he betrays a previous commitment to certain value judgments which he holds in common with other metropolitan topographers. A guiding motif of his *Geography* is the assumption that the further east one goes, the bigger, better, and (at the same time) worse things get. Pliny the Elder shared this intuition regarding the known world in his *Natural History* and saw it as almost infinitely extensible: if the Indians are more long-lived than the Greeks, and the Seres than the Indians, then Taprobane (Sri Lanka), which was "long regarded as another world," should be better still.[40] Likewise, if India's elephants are "better" than Africa's, then it should come as no surprise that "[Taprobane's] elephants are larger and

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35 Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.37.

36 Strabo, *Geogr.* 2.5.11.

37 Ibid.

38 E.g., Indians "are long-lived and that the term of life extends to 130 years"; the Seres "attain an age more than two-hundred years; Indian elephants are better, "larger and stronger" than African elephants; and that the rivers of India are larger than those of Asia (Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.34, 37, 43). Parker assures the reader, "The two separate genera of elephants, the Indian and the African, differ considerably in appearance" (*The Making of Roman India*, 127).

39 Contra Romm, who views the persistence of marvel catalogues as the failure of "Strabo's attempt at a revisionist Indography" (*The Edges of the Earth*, 103).

40 Pliny, *Nat.* 6.22, trans. B. Thayer, "Pliny the Elder: The Natural History," (2006) online: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Pliny_the_Elder/

more bellicose than those of India and that it is more productive of gold and pearls of greater size than India itself."[41] A second presupposition closes the general frame of reference Pliny and Strabo shared when studying the Far East. This is not so much a thesis as a consequence of the more often stated belief that the Mediterranean is both the central and the best place on earth.

The result of this explicit commitment is an implicit aversion to purely fabulous accounts of the East. We see this particularly clearly in analyses of ethnicity. If men seemed to become more like the immortals the closer they lived to the gates of the rising sun, they were emphatically not gods. Roman writers repeatedly insist that these borderlands were inside, if barely, the known world, and suffered in equal measure to any perceived benefits.[42] Grotesquery drives home the point: "Eudoxus informs us that in the southern parts of India the soles of men's feet are a cubit long while those of the women are so small that they are called Struthopodes [sparrow- or ostrich-footed]. The women conceive at five years of age and do not live beyond the eighth year, "while the men can live up to 130 years unimpaired by old age."[43] Aristotle's understanding of fertility and aging was that "the female animal," "when it is free from the mother, on account of its weakness . . . quickly approaches its maturity and old age."[44] If this was true in the middle of the earth (where Greeks and Romans lived), then the extreme version of this rule must hold at the extremes of the earth: not only is longevity affected, but secondary sex traits as well. In the East, men are more men, and women a caricature of womanhood. On a cultural level, Easterners play something of a Cyclopian opposite to Romans.[45]

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[41] Ibid.

[42] E.g.: "No one thinks Abaris the Hyperborean to be a god, though he had such power that he was carried along by an arrow" (Celsus apud Origen, *Cels.* 3.32, trans. H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], 148; cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.36; Porphyry, *Vit. Pyth.* 28–29).

[43] Pliny, *Nat.* 16.17. Cf. "In this country where Heracles' daughter was queen, the girls are marriageable at seven years, and the men do not live longer than forty years" (Arrian, *Ind.* 8.9).

[44] A. Rouselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 34, citing Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 775a.

[45] E.g., Indians eat when inclined rather than at mealtimes, though "[t]he contrary custom would be better for the ends of social and civil life" (Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.53), and they neither make contracts nor require securities (Aelian, *Var. hist.* 5.50.4.1). Both authors cite Megasthenes. Arrian was surprised that "all Indians are free, and no Indian at all is a slave" (*Ind.* 8.10).

Roman topographers saw the East not merely an earthly Elysium in the neighborhood of heaven, but a region within the known world, distorted in both beautiful and terrible ways, but very much subject to history and scientific analysis. Roman writers assure their readers that the extremity of the land also plays out on the bodies of its inhabitants; Mediterraneans are therefore not exempt from influence, but benefit from their moderate position to have access to the best overall quality of life. What they lack in the details (in luxuries) can be imported. Issues of economic inequality within the Mediterranean as they might affect access do not, in principle, challenge the overall phenomenon of geographic influence or the argument in favor of trade. India, Roman writers tell us, is treacherous in the extreme and visitors were liable to acquire local characteristics. The *Alexander Romance* tells us it is this fear of "going native" that turned back a third-century Christian mission to India, one member of which wrote: "But I merely reached the Akroteria of India a few years ago with the blessed Moses, the bishop of Adule, for, being distressed by the heat, which was so fierce that water which on gushing from its fountain was excessively cold began to boil when put into a vessel, I turned back when I noticed this, as I found no shelter from the burning heat."[46]

As a source, historian, scientist, philosopher, and encyclopedist, Strabo codifies the disparate strands of what was known about or imputed to the distant East into a paradigm of what could be known. The result is surprisingly undogmatic, incorporating a richness of detail drawn from luxury trade and resulting in what Almagor calls a spectrum rather than a simple dichotomy of barbarity.[47] Still, he implicitly clings to a few Roman intellectual apriorisms, the most significant of which is the organizing presupposition of the determinative value of extremity. For Strabo, "The extreme parts of the inhabited world somehow possess the most excellent products," including "animals, both quadrupeds and birds, [that] are much larger than they are in other countries," "an abundance of gold," "certain wild trees there bear wool instead of fruit, that in beauty excels that of

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[46] Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Hist. Alex. magn.* 3.7, cited in W.E. Clark, "The Importance of Hellenism from the Point of View of Indic-Philology II," *Classical Philology* 15 (1920): 21.

[47] On the last distinction, see E. Almagor, "Who is a Barbarian? The Barbarians in the Ethnological and Cultural Taxonomies of Strabo," in *Strabo's Cultural Geography: The Making of a Kolossourgia*, ed. D. Dueck et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52.

sheep," and "the soil producing two crops every year both of fruits and grain."[48] Any optimistic conclusions regarding the desirability or migration, conquest or even visitation are forestalled by the more negative implications of extremity. Roman descriptions of India are therefore both empirically-driven and fitted to a value-laden map of the earth that organizes but does not subsist on observation. The latter plays upon the former to evoke a land of exaggerated fertility and corresponding danger. Metropolitan writers such as Strabo and Pliny collected the fears, fantasies, and projections of Greek and Roman antiquity and enshrined them as geography and history. Implicit in these projects is a claim to authority based on the correct interpretation of "extremity" which required a specific intellectual formation as much as superior information, and a consequence of this interpretation is the distinct sense that interaction between the Mediterranean and India is best when mediated.

The Mythology and Science of Difference

From Rome to Taprobane, natural and biological characteristics do and must change predictably and are presumed to exist in an extreme form at geographical extremes. These imperatives are at tension with one another, and the question is then how the details of sight might be reconciled with the transmitted wisdom of trustworthy report, neither of which could be omitted by the objective author. Though the Roman "conception of the art of good living" generated a constant demand for eastern commodities, Romans nevertheless maintained a culturally ambivalent relationship with the luxury trade as both useful and desirable, but also morally culpable. Medicine and seasoning food, the main uses of spices in antiquity, were seen as completely normal and necessary, and at the same time superfluous, even depraved.[49] The Mediterranean labored under lack of local spices (as opposed to herbs) and the cost of obtaining them detracted from their respectability. Theophrastus tells us, "plants grow in different places but the

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[48] Strabo, *Geogr.* 3.106. On the commonplace that India did not know famine, see Strabo. *Geogr.* 15.20, citing Eratosthenes, and Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. hist.* 2.36, citing Megasthenes.

[49] See H. Huxley, "Greek Doctor and Roman Patient," *Greece and Rome* 4 (1957): 132–38; A. Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and Indulgence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2000).

most famous and the most fragrant come from Asia and places lying open to the sun. From Europe we have only the iris."[50]

Because of its tepid centrality, the Mediterranean had none of the commodifiable wonders of the East, whereas we are led to believe that luxuries were so common as to be without value in their native climate.[51] Considering Rome's unfavorable balance of trade with India, it seems slightly poor compensation that the middle zone of the earth "enjoys by far the best tempered climate."[52] But this claim is the key to understanding the nature of the Mediterranean's soft borders and imperial Romans' understanding of trade. The quantity and variety of eastern goods might dazzle Mediterranean sensibilities, but we are constantly reminded that the middle of the earth made its inhabitants moderate in the appropriate ways. Virgil is the pre-eminent exponent of Romans' presumptive specialization in virtue. In the second Georgic he maintains that geographic determinism applies to the goods of civilization: there is a genius of each native soil, "nor yet can all soils bear all fruits."[53] By this logic, the goods of each land exclude those of the regions with whom they trade. Though "India alone bears black ebony," Rome has superior intangibles which have allowed it to "become the fairest thing on earth."[54]

This is not just a valorization of scarcity, but a way of controlling the significance of contact that was occurring anyway, and of rationalizing its nature and bounds. The idea of difference had to be precise in the sense of verifiable, but did not need to be at all accurate in the sense of falsifiable. That is, details about India that verified that the region did have valuable exotics coexisted with theories of climate and topography that mitigated the appeal of direct control over producer regions. What the Mediterranean lacked in goods it made up in terms of The Good, and this in turn might be exported as a civilizing mission or, less strongly, understood as grounds

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[50] Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 9.2.2–7.3.

[51] E.g.: "Arabia, whose whole harvests were spices," therefore (must have) had "cooking fires were the wood of incense and myrrh trees" (Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures*, 183, citing the anonymous poem *Phoenix* 1–2, 31).

[52] Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.106.

[53] Virgil, *Georg.* 2.177, 109.

[54] Virgil, *Georg.* 2.109, 532.

for market contact in preference to military conquest.[55] Plutarch writes: "Those whom Alexander subdued would never have become civilized unless they had been brought under submission. Egypt would not have had Alexandria, nor Mesopotamia Seleukeia, nor the Sogdians Prophthasia, nor India Boukephalia, nor Kaukasos Hellenic cities in its neighborhood."[56] While this may seem to recommend imperium on the model of Alexander, the analogy recommends conquest less than one might think: having borne virtue, justice, and civilization east, Alexander created the preconditions for transaction, while the dangers of the land itself warn would-be imitators off anything more ambitious. Plutarch suggests, somewhat superfluously, that the Mediterranean profits less from trade with the East than the East from contact with the West. Rome obtains mere luxuries—tangible goods—through transaction, but in the process communicates the intangible Good.[57] Though the moral dilemma surrounding *luxuria* invites contrast, the difference between Rome and India to metropolitan intellectuals was not purely oppositional, but the symptom of a broader east-west continuum. This longitudinal discourse of difference does not link up neatly with the way Romans located themselves relative to Northerners and Southerners—different things were at stake—rather, it imagines a separate gradient defined by the relation of points on the ground to the course of the sun to motivate the unacceptable risks that recommend trade as the ideal relation with the East.

Received wisdom saw Easterners as peoples of the sun: "of all the peoples in Asia of which we know or about which any certain report is given, the Indians dwell furthest away towards the East and the sunrising."[58] This proximity produces the "observed" effect that the East suffers as much as it benefits by its extremity relative to the middle of the earth and the sun's course. The Mediterranean may suffer in material terms from its

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[55] E.g.: "At once foster-child and parent of all other lands . . . Italy was chosen by the divine inspiration of the gods . . . to bestow civilization on mankind" (Pliny, *Nat.* 3.39, trans. Carey, *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture*, 35).

[56] Plutarch, *Alex.* 15.

[57] For which embassies of Indians to Rome evidence a demand, e.g., Horace, *Carm. Saec.* 56; *Res gestae* 31; Aurelius Victor, *Epit.* 16.

[58] Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.98.

centrality, but does (and must) on balance benefit.[59] While natural historians and geographers do not rethink the centrality of the Mediterranean, they attempted to understand how center and periphery work within this worldview. This process is empirical insofar as it draws on experiential details to emplace known regions of the earth in a matrix whose horizontal boundaries were the legendary extremes of the earth, and whose vertical bounds mapped the path of the sun. In this way, it might be conceded that the extremes of the earth have more desirable goods, but are not desirable places in and of themselves. Because topography defines a place, extremity defines India not merely as a utopia ripe for conquest, but as an emporium best approached through a controlled and temporary breaching of barriers through trade.

To answer the questions of how and why local difference exists, and what makes a place the sort of place it is, Roman writers turned to the science of the sun. Strabo and Pliny attempted to understand the interactions of moisture and heat on local environments in a way that would make sense of the details borne by reports of the East. The process of solar coction therefore receives extended attention in Roman geographic accounts of the East. It is discussed as a kind of convection that bakes lands and people into what they are in proportion to the sun's inclination and intensity, providing a mechanism for geographic determinism. Solar coction is imagined to be the primary driver of regional difference, amplifying whatever it touches except when dampened by atmospheric and terrestrial moisture. The study of coction attempts to account for an already value-laden topography where space in an absolute or physical sense is paired with place relative to the sun and Rome. This is not a flat-earth geographic determinism, but a three-dimensional model that draws its predictive and explanatory power from the correlations it identifies between a limited set of relevant variables: solar heat, liquid, and gaseous water. This is not just the model of the heavenly spheres applied to the local case, but an inductive proof of the compatibility of regionality with a curved course of the sun. As such, the solar model offers a rhetoric that unifies the evidence of topography, ethnography, and

[59] E.g., Rome's "superiority in the arts, and the illustrious examples of genius which she has produced," are related to Italy's "situation, lying, as she does, midway between the East and the West, and extended in the most favourable of all positions" (Pliny, *Nat.* 37.77).

geography without holding itself to their disciplinary standards. Herodotus gives a sense of the model prior to the Roman ethnographic imperative:

> Amongst these people [sc. the Indians] the sun is hottest in the morning, and not, as amongst others, at mid-day, from the time that it has risen some way, to the breaking up of market; during that time it scorches much more than at mid-day in Greece, so that, it is said, they then refresh themselves in water. Mid-day scorches other men much the same as the Indians; but as the day declines, the sun becomes to them as it is to others in the morning; and after this it becomes still colder, until sunset; then it is very cold.[60]

India is other but not opposite to Greece here. At the eastern edge of the earth, India suffers from an extremely hot morning sun since it rises there first. Greece, relatively further west, experiences the same event as a more diffuse light. At midday the sun should be at a similar altitude with respect to both Greece and India, so that noon is similarly hot everywhere. In the evening, as the sun sets in the West, Greece receives the gentle heat of the declining sun while India, further away, grows cold. The model implies that peoples west of Greece experience a frigid dawn and a blazing sunset because of their proximity to the place of the setting sun.

This description is particularly interesting because it indexes the felt intensity of the sun partly to a point's location on the horizontal plane, partly to its vertical distance from the solar course, and partly to its azimuth. The sun itself is imagined to travel on a celestial meridian along which its energy is expended over the course of the day. Even if the sun were considered uniformly strong over its course, different points on earth would receive different amounts of solar heat depending on their altitude and position relative to the sun's route, which suggests that the sun, paradoxically, casts a shadow of light, the form of which some attempted to determine experimentally. Pliny describes experiments that found that the sun is "vertical" at both Hypasis (on the Beas or Vipasha River) and Syrene but that at the port of Patala "the sun rises on the right hand and shadows fall to the south," whereas "the shadows of the people living round the Tropic of Cancer fall northward at midday but westward at sunrise."[61] Where the sun is vertical, objects cast no shadow. This can imply one of two things: absolute or relative center. The absolute center, or the center of the earth, receives

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[60] Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.104, trans. T. Gaisford.

[61] Pliny, *Nat.* 2.73, 2.8.3.

vertical light at the sun's zenith, while relative centers—places directly below the solar meridian—receive it at lesser altitude. Everywhere else to the north and south receives the sun's light at an angle. These places can literally be called benighted because there is a direct relationship between the intensity of the sun, fertility, and development. Pliny states, "We learn from Onesicritus that in those parts of India where there is no shadow the bodies of men attain a height of 5 cubits and 2 palms, and their life extends to 130 years. They do not suffer from the infirmities of old age but die as if they had lived only half their lifetime."[62]

The metaphors of the solar path or solar chariot make the sun a small thing, an object with a shadow whose intensity is local enough to be affected by altitude and inclination.[63] But in what way was the sun thought to convey its intensity? What sort of contract or transmission did solar coction imply? Drawing on Eratosthenes, Strabo suggests that solar heat is a kind of conduction: "water from the sky as well as that of the rivers is warmed by the rays of the sun. . . . What is called by other nations the 'ripening' [*pepsis*] of fruits and juices is called by the Indians a 'boiling' [*hepesis*], and this tends to produce a flavor no less agreeable than that produced by fire."[64] The heat of the sun is described in terms of the smelting of ore, digestion, and cooking all at once. Solar heat is conveyed by rays and interacts with water in the air and on the earth's surface, as well as that stored in the tissues of plants and animals. The more solar heat these receive, the larger and longer-lived they become. This is made plausible by understanding solar heat to work specifically on the water content of the affected substances:

> India, like Arabia and Ethiopia [produces] cinnamon and spikenard and other aromatics. It has a temperature like theirs in respect of the sun's rays, but it surpasses them in having copious supplies of water, whence the atmosphere is humid, and therefore more nutritious and productive, as is equally the case with the land and the water. On this account the land and water animals in India are found to be of a larger size than they are in other countries.[65]

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[62] Pliny, *Nat.* 16.17, seemingly derived from Ctesias' *History of India*.

[63] This was disputed, see Pliny, *Nat.* 2.8.3.

[64] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.20. Aristotle considered *pepsis* cooking "by a thing's own natural heat," and *hepesis* cooking with heat from water; see G.E.R. Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83.

[65] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.22.

For Strabo, the interactions of solar heat, liquid, and gaseous water are sufficient to determine local and regional characteristics. While moisture can come from either clouds or rivers, heat comes only from the sun.[66] The impartation of solar heat varies according to the angle and intensity of the sun in relation to the objects touched by its rays. Though this understanding builds additional flexibility into the action of the sun, it is the variability of water in particular that offers the necessary flexibility to accommodate details observed on the ground. The Nile, for example, was said to boil more easily than other rivers in the neighborhood of the Mediterranean because its waters flowed through many *climata* first, gathering heat as they went.[67] This is one of three ways water was thought to transport heat. It might gather heat by flowing through many climes, by lingering in a hot clime, or by evaporating from a hot clime before raining down in a cooler one. The implication that liquid water can transport the heat of the sun is a powerful explanatory tool that requires scientists to look to the details of local water systems in order to understand the aetiology of local ecology. While the broad framework is apriorist, in its application the theory of coction perforates the putative climes, weakening their determinative power.

Recognizing that humans and animals are capable of travel, to what extent does Strabo consider their phenotypic traits to be determined by their place of birth, and to what extent can they be changed by travel? Is anything preserved as innate or essential to individual species? In cattle, Strabo endorses a straightforward model of acquired characteristics; he says they change their color to resemble foreign stock when they drink local water.[68] He follows Onesicritus in specifying that it is rainwater that provides the heat that drives the acquisition of local traits. Though we have seen a pronounced fear of "going native" in some travelers' accounts, Strabo excepts humans from the danger of change through travel; humans, for reasons that are not clear, are biologically unlike other animals. Their window of opportunity for the acquisition of local characteristics is during

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[66] Though Philostratus (*Vit. Apoll.* 3.1) suggests that the Brahmans were able to extract or distill fire from the sun's rays like water.

[67] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.23.

[68] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.24.

gestation in the womb, during which local characteristics enter the individual by "seminal impartation."[69]

Strabo's cutoffs for the geographic determination of plant, animal, and human traits are required by the constraints of observed experience, but are otherwise somewhat poorly motivated.[70] If the reader accepts them, he is invited to combine the relevant variables—heat and water—in a way that will explain the observations. This is not an experimental, but a narrative method. In the case of humans, the displacement of difference to gestation, conception, or earlier takes the conclusions of ethnography as almost foregone. Still, Strabo attempts a consistent account. He treats the problem case of the Ethiopians—darker than Indians despite being closer to the Mediterranean on the Red Sea route—with the same variables.[71] He writes, "the sun is not equidistant from all," but that Apollo, driving his chariot "in close proximity to their borders, dyes with the dusky hues of smoke the skins of men and curls their hair, making it soft with the growthless shapes of fire."[72] Though Indians also receive strong solar heat, "on account of the humidity of the air their hair does not curl."[73]

Strabo's commitment to a small sun and a mythological understanding of its travel allows the sun to change altitude along its path. In the legendary past, the sun might be understood to have dipped up and down to account for regional discontinuities.[74] Though a Phaethon-style narrative of human difference to some extent essentializes ethnic difference between human groups, Strabo uses myth only as the past tense of science. In doing so, he implies an essential sameness to humanity which suffers difference only contingently, as the result of a remote but identifiable event. For Hyginus this was obvious: "when he [sc. Phaethon] was carried too near the earth, everything burned in the fire that came near. . . . The Indians became black,

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Though he suggests that this sort of criticism betrays an uneducated reader rather than his own fault: "if he have not learned even the seven stars of the Great Bear, or anything else of that kind, either he will have no use for this book, or else not at present—not until he has studied those topics without which he cannot be familiar with geography" (Strabo, *Geogr.* 1.1.21).

[71] On the location of Ethiopia, see *Periplus* 18.

[72] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.24.

[73] Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.13.

[74] Cf. Pliny, *Nat.* 2.21 for a large sun understood to be very far away.

because their blood was turned to a dark color from the heat that came near."[75] Ovid specifies that Phaethon strayed from the course prescribed by Apollo, a road which lies "on a wide slanting curve . . . within the confines of three zones."[76] The correct path is also vertically determined: "press not too low nor strain your course too high."[77] Because Phaethon drove low, "The Aethiopes then turned black, so men believe, as heat summoned their blood too near the skin."[78] In animals and plants Strabo suggests defining features are driven by ongoing climatic factors; differences in human physiology and culture he pursues on the mythological plane.[79] Humans are not substantially changeable in the present in the way cattle are, but this does not imply a racialized understanding of ethnic difference: humans *suffered* difference as the result of a cosmic event, but the quality of the difference is as small as the distance between blood and the skin, and it can be seen as overlaid on a prior, more essential sameness.

While the Saturnian age saw all races united under one king, the martial declaration of *Aen.* 8.685–688 is only possible in a Jovian age of division and difference. Still, Roman writers generally shied away from a direct endorsement of conquest and incorporation of the distant East on the model of Alexander and instead produced status quo geographies.[80] In the context of Roman encyclopedism, these works relate ethnicity to topography in a way that endorses commerce rather than conquest and attempts scientific justification of a political position which locates a *fines* of empire far beyond the formal *limes*, and by consequence maintains India as a heterotopia

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[75] Hyginus, *Fab.* 154. Cf. Arrian, *Ind.* 8.6 on the Indian sources of the Nile as it may bear on the "similar" appearance of Indians, Ethiopians, and Egyptians.

[76] Ovid, *Met.* 1.750–751.

[77] Ovid, *Met.* 2.135.

[78] Ovid, *Met.* 2.235–236.

[79] Pliny attempts to reconcile the two levels: "There can be no doubt, that the Ethiopians are scorched by their vicinity to the sun's heat, and they are born, like persons who have been burned, with the beard and hair frizzled; while, in the opposite and frozen parts of the earth, there are nations with white skins and long light hair" (*Nat.* 2.80).

[80] Even avowed imperialists, such as Horace, Vergil, and Lucan, admitted an uneasy association between India, necromancy, and toxic magical ingredients; see E.A. Pollard, "Indian Spices and Roman 'Magic' in Imperial and Late Antique Indomediterranea," *Journal of World History* 24 (2013): 11–12.

rather than ideal, equal, subject or Other.[81] The Roman reader is made to understand that however fascinating and enviable the East may be, "truck and barter" remain the ideal relation between the Mediterranean and the East; it is the market, rather than the direct extension of imperial power, which would in a sense be coming up against the natural laws if extended too far beyond its own zone, that allows the Mediterranean to enjoy the goods of the luxury trade while imagining an honorable end to empire.

Conclusion: Towards Utopia

It has often been observed that heaven is undertheorized relative to hell, which, while true enough for Dante and Milton, misses a robust ancient Christian discourse of heaven grounded in a very material image of India. It is not my intention here to go into the influence of Dionysiac parade on religious ideas of paradise, or the missionary history of Christians in the East, but only to note in conclusion that, though they had access to metropolitan Roman topographic and ethnographic narratives, early Christian writers worked with a significantly different conception of India. Though contemporary, early Christian writers departed from Roman intellectual "best practice" in that they tended much more towards purely utopian conceptions of the East than the tenuous line of heterotopy walked by Strabo and Pliny. Christian utopianism regarding India is singular compared to Roman Indographic ambivalence: Strabo and Pliny held a heterotopic line against the more traditionally imperialist imagination of the Augustan propagandists.[82] In imagining paradise through the commodities of the luxury trade, Christians in some sense returned to imperialist roots by re-creating the East not merely as a depot, a low-risk outpost of soft power, but as an object of evangelical desire potentially subject to precisely the direct control Roman topographers were so leery of.

The Christians of the high empire wrote what became their canonical books at a time when Pliny estimates the empire was spending 100 million sesterces on imported goods per year. Given the apocalyptic critique of Rome as a new Babylon, the materiality of the alternative, Christian paradise, is

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[81] On the *limes*-fines distinction, see S. Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 83.

[82] E.g., Sextus Propertius, *El.* 2.10 and Virgil, *Aen.* 6.2.788ff.

quite striking. Christians looked forward to the New Jerusalem as a city of jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, and other exotic luxuries even though Rome, the condemned, was defined by precisely these same goods.[83] If the opposition between the two cities is meant to be total, the heavenly city is still not the autarchic negative to Rome's cosmopolitan template; rather, the New Jerusalem is itself transfigured in surprisingly luxe and international fashion. This vision of heaven created a problem for theologians who saw Christianity as an intentionalist or belief-oriented religion as opposed to a consequentialist (ritual and reward-oriented) one. Yet rather than deny the appearance of heavenly luxury and insist on an ascetic vision of heaven, theologians pursued a rhetorical strategy of elaborating the heavenly hoard not as the ultimate cache of filthy lucre, but as representations to our carnal eyes of the "closeness to God" that every good Christian hoped for, as against "the outer darkness" they were to fear.[84]

Christians' engagement with the wonders of India departs from the heterotopic discourse of sweet-sour pairings through which some metropolitan writers rationalized the containment of Roman military power and the simultaneous expansion of Roman markets after Augustus. In contrast, Christians' preoccupation with exotic wonders as a stock imagery of heaven created India as a utopia—possibly an Eden—amenable to missionary activity and literal, as well as figurative, incorporation.[85] With the "opening" of India by the apostle Thomas, successive missions, such as that of Frumentius, sent by Athanasius as "bishop of all India," converted and reconverted India for generations to come.

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[83] See Rev. 21:18–21 (New Jerusalem); 18:3 (Rome). Cf. Pliny, *Nat.* 37.1.9: "The East, too, sends us crystals, there being none preferred to the Indian kind." The Christian heaven's dependence on jewel imagery alluding to India may refer to Solomon's importation of South Asian treasures to beautify his temple and court; see S.G. Darian, *The Ganges in Myth and History* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001), 283.

[84] E.g., John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 3 (on Rom 1:18); Augustine, *Hom. in Ps.* 48.

[85] E.g., Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis, saw the Ganges as the same river "which is called in Scripture the Phison, one of the rivers which are said to go out from Paradise" (Palladian interpolation to Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Hist. Alex. magn.* 3.7, cited in Darian, *The Ganges in Myth*, 182).

From Liminal Space to Specific Context: The Development of the Iconography of Alcestis in Roman Funerary Wall Painting*

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A common visual motif in Roman funerary art is the figure of Alcestis, a queen who sacrificed herself in order to save her husband's life. The myth, fully extant in Euripides' third-century BCE play Alcestis, tells the tale of Alcestis, the beautiful daughter of King Pelias and the wife of King Admetus.[1] When Admetus commits a sacrificial mistake requiring the ultimate retribution—his death—his wife Alcestis, a paradigm of wifely fidelity, offers to die in his place. She is rescued from the afterlife by Hercules and reunited with Admetus. The myth is visualized in a number of ways: Hercules appears leading Alcestis out of the underworld in some examples; Alcestis appears reuniting with Admetus in others. Some images depict her in the underworld, while others depict her death.

The imagery associated with the myth of Alcestis in wall painting lacks a comprehensive investigation. This article attempts to remedy the situation, providing both an analysis of the imagery on wall paintings and an interpretive framework that could be applied to other funerary images. This article suggests that the interpretive framework must take into account the physical position and context of the wall painting. Using images of Alcestis as a case study, this article will suggest that motifs depicting Alcestis were multivalent images that could be interpreted in a number of ways depending on the physical context in which it was displayed. I will argue that between the second and fourth centuries CE, the standardized visual representations of the Alcestis myth in wall painting transformed from motifs decorating large columbaria that focus on the transition between the earthly and

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1 See J.E. Thorburn, *The Alcestis of Euripides* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 1–43.

otherworldly realm, where Alcestis appears as a passive figure being led by Hercules, to a motif found in individual niches of columbaria and catacombs that highlight the role of Alcestis as exemplum, facilitating her integration into either the underworld or domestic context.

Representations of the myth of Alcestis in Roman art have received only sporadic attention. Scholars have referenced such representations in studies of specific tombs, e.g., Bernard Andreae discusses the representations of Alcestis in his study of the Tomb of the Nasonii,[2] and Beverley Berg, Antonio Ferrua, and Andre Grabar all discuss the juxtaposition of Alcestis imagery with Christian imagery in the Via Latina Catacomb.[3] Iconographic analyses of the imagery, however, are contingent on specific representations and do not take into account the broader repertory of Alcestis imagery.

Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais discusses Alcestis imagery as part of her study on wall-painting decoration in Roman columbaria. She provides a catalog that compiles extant wall paintings found in Roman columbaria, both figurative and decorative. Her analysis suggests that there is resonance between imagery found on immovable elements, i.e., in wall painting and in columbaria with movable decorative elements, such as sarcophagi. She further links the imagery found in Roman columbaria with domestic decoration that makes use of similar themes.[4] Her interpretative framework takes into consideration other decorative elements in the context of the columbarium, but it does not take into account the implications of the physical space itself on the choice of the iconography and its interpretations.

The most comprehensive study of Alcestis imagery was undertaken by Sonia Mucznik. She compiled a corpus of examples of the myths of Alcestis and Phaedra on various media ranging from sarcophagi and other relief carvings to wall painting in both funerary and non-funerary contexts. Her research addresses two elements: the identification and re-identification of figures and comparison of types across various media as well as an

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[2] B. Andreae, *Studien zur römischen Grabkunst* (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle, 1963), 121–22.

[3] B. Berg, "Alcestis and Hercules in the Catacomb of Via Latina," *Vigiliae Christianae* 48 (1994): 219–34; A. Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art, 200–395*, trans. S. Gilbert and J. Emmons (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967); A. Ferrua, *Catacombe sconosciute: Una pinacoteca del IV secolo sotto la Via Latina* (Florence: Nardini, 1990).

[4] F. Feraudi-Gruénais, *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est: Die Innendekoration der kaiserzeitlichen Gräber Roms*, Palilia 9 (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 2001), 221.

evaluation of the symbolism in reference to literary sources, namely, to Euripides' *Alcestis*.[5] However, her evaluation of wall paintings was typographic and cursory in comparison to her analysis of other media such as sarcophagi.[6] A few prominent examples of Alcestis imagery in funerary wall painting are also mentioned in passing in various studies, but not in a comprehensive manner.[7]

This study draws together the images of Alcestis found on wall paintings that decorate columbaria and catacombs and analyzes them in relation to their overall physical context. The majority of images are drawn from areas of the western empire and date from the second to fourth centuries CE, with one example from Tyre.[8] The examples are delineated into three distinct typologies that represent three distinct phases in iconographic development. Each phase was found in a specific physical context: the first phase originated in Roman columbaria and large family tombs; the second phase represents a phase of transition, where motifs illustrating the myth of Alcestis start to decorate individual cubicula within larger funerary complexes. The final phase is found in fourth-century catacombs in the city of Rome.

The majority of extant examples of the Alcestis myth in wall painting were produced in the latter half of the second century CE and are found in Roman columbaria. These examples represent the earliest phase in Alcestis iconography and almost exclusively depict Hercules leading Alcestis from the underworld.[9] The composition of the images is relatively standard, with

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[5] S. Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness: Alcestis and Phaedra in Roman Art* (Roma: G. Bretschneider, 1999), 26.

[6] There are a number of studies that analyze the representations of Alcestis on sarcophagi; see S. Wood, "Alcestis on Roman Sarcophagi," *American Journal of Archaeology* 82 (1978): 499–510; G. Gessert, "Myth as Consolatio: Medea on Roman Sarcophagi," *Greece and Rome* 51 (2004): 219–20; P. Zanker and B.C. Ewald, *Living with Myths: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi*, trans. J. Slater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 307–10.

[7] V.J. Platt, "Framing the Dead on Roman Sarcophagi," in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 61/62 (2012): 217–18.

[8] The concordance of imagery found on the examples from the East with the imagery common in columbaria of the West suggests that they can be included in an analysis of imagery.

[9] There is one example of a wall painting dating from the second century CE from the Tomb of the Nasonii that purportedly represents the figures of Alcestis and Mercury leading a small female figure towards an enthroned Pluto and Proserpina. The identification of the scene is not definitive; there are no inscriptions or iconographical attributes that could identify the figure. Platt ("Framing the Dead," 217–18) suggests that the image could depict the figure of

minimal modifications of gesture and stance. Hercules appears in the nude holding his club, often with a lion's skin draped over his shoulder, such as in the wall painting from Tyre.[10] Alcestis is generally portrayed in an idealized form, fully veiled with the garments completely covering her body. Hercules reaches towards Alcestis and either leads her by the hand or places an arm on her shoulder, leading her forward. The motif is often delineated from other images by garlands, flowers, architectural elements, or apotropaic images such as gorgon faces.[11] They can be integrated into a broader narrative program, or they can exist in isolation.

The image of Alcestis and Hercules has multiple levels of meaning. On the one hand, the rescue of Alcestis by Hercules highlights his role as savior.[12] Hercules rescues Alcestis from the afterlife and provides an antecedent for the potential salvation of the deceased housed in the columbarium. Alcestis takes on a passive role, while Hercules becomes the active agent of transition: a liminal role that provides potentiality for movement between two realms, the earthly sphere and the underworld. The motifs tend to lack indication of a physical context; many are presented as floating figures walking along garlands or with no architectural or geographic landscape. The negation of context emphasizes the liminal role of the figures. Some images imply a context that is earthly, depicting the passage to the underworld through which Alcestis and Hercules have already passed; however, this does not indicate any sense of temporal or historical contingency. Rather, the images blur the distinction between earthly and otherworldly contexts, reality and mythological temporal horizons. Such images of undifferentiated context are infinitely suitable for the funerary context, in which physical movement through the tomb seeks to break down temporal and physical barriers, blurring the distinction between the living and the dead and providing a space for contemplation of the transgression of the boundaries.[13] These images decorate large spaces that house the bodies of many individuals. The decoration and imagery must

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Laodameia rather than Alcestis. Due to this discrepancy in identification, I have excluded the image from this analysis. For tables compiling the images of Alcestis leading Hercules on all media, see Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 70.

10 See Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, pl. 8.

11 Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 34.

12 Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, 228.

13 Platt, "Framing the Dead," 218.

be sufficiently general to create a common liminal space that transcends temporal reality. Images of liminal figures resonate well in this context and provide hope for the transgression of boundaries, the potential of return or continued existence in the earthly realm.

The focus on the role of Hercules as a guide for the deceased and an implied passive role for Alcestis can be further emphasized by the juxtaposition of the image with other mythological images. The image of Hercules leading Alcestis found in Tyre appears near two other images: the rape of Proserpina and Tantalus.[14] The rape of Proserpina is a common motif used to symbolize both the sudden loss of life and the descent of the soul into the underworld,[15] while the image of Tantalus grasping for fruit that he can never reach and water that can never quench his thirst is a common image of afterlife punishment.[16] The juxtaposition of images focuses on the power of Hercules to guide Alcestis back from the afterlife and offers a powerful image of the potential of salvation from death. The image concludes the visual narrative of descent, the afterlife, and salvation.

The return-of-Alcestis motif depicts Alcestis being led by Hercules to a seated Admetus, such as the second-century example from the tomb of the Nasonii.[17] The image is incorporated into an elaborate decorative frieze depicting ten mythological figures.[18] In one motif, a figure identified as the veiled Alcestis is led by Hercules towards a seated Admetus. Hercules is depicted nude, but identifiable by his club and arrow. He turns his head towards Alcestis as he leads Alcestis to the right with his right hand behind her back. The figure of Admetus appears nude with only a cloak wrapped around his lower body. He sits with his head resting on his right hand in a gesture associated with mourning.[19] This representation provides a male exemplum for the appropriate display of grief in the context of heroic lamentation. Roman masculine cultural expectations provided no accessible

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[14] Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 33.

[15] Zanker and Ewald, Living with Myths, 384.

[16] The motif of Tantalus is described by many authors; see, e.g., Lucian, *Luct*. 2–9, translated by V.M. Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome: A Source Book* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 216.

[17] See Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, pl. 1.

[18] Platt, "Framing the Dead," 217; Feraudi-Gruénais, *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est,* 68.

[19] Corbeill suggests that this specific gesture form implies an inward reflexivity and contemplation, but can also contain connotations of repentance and lamentation; see Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 77.

public display of emotions; tears and other displays of grief were considered feminizing.[20] The representation of contemplative grief allows an appropriate exemplum for masculine grief within a funerary context that maintains male virtue and honour. However, the motif of the exemplary husband and wife is subordinated when read within the broader decorative context. The image is incorporated into an elaborate decorative frieze depicting ten mythological figures.[21] The myths depicted in the frieze highlight narratives of transition between the earthly realm and the afterlife, such as the return of Eurydice to Orpheus and Mercury as *psychopompos* leading the deceased. The power of divine guides as liminal figures to lead the deceased back from the underworld seems to function as an organizing mechanism within the frieze.[22] The image of Alcestis, Hercules, and Admetus is integrated into the frieze because of Hercules' role as a transitional figure. Despite the fact that the image presents the union of the couple, the iconographic focus subordinates the relationship in order to focus on transition between realms within the iconographic program that correlates the imagery with the function of the physical space.

A second phase in the development of Alcestis iconography represents a subtle transformation. The figure of Alcestis reunited with Admetus comes to be associated with the exempla of an ideal Roman couple. There is only one example of this type dating from the early decades of the third century in Mausoleum Phi on the Via Cornelia.[23] The image presents Hercules leading Alcestis towards the seated figure of Admetus and a standing female figure holding a shield. Hercules is portrayed in heroic nude holding his club in his left hand and leading Alcestis with his right hand towards two partly destroyed figures on the right. The identification of the seated figure as Admetus is based on comparisons with the example from the Tomb of the Nasonii, which presents a similar composition. The female figure on the right is variably identified as Athena or *Virtus*.[24]

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[20] Charles Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender, and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 62.

[21] Platt, "Framing the Dead," 217; Feraudi-Gruénais, *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est,* 68.

[22] Platt, "Framing the Dead," 217.

[23] Feraudi-Gruénais, *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est*, 53–56.

[24] Mielsch and Hesberg and Mucznik consider the figure to represent Virtus. Mucznik suggests that the iconography of Athena/Minerva was used to depict Dea Roma as well as Virtus in Roman art; see Harald Mielsch and Henner von Hesberg, *Die heidnische Nekropole*

The standardized depiction of the motif suggests influence of earlier examples. The motif appears in an undifferentiated space and time frame. The figures stand upon the ground, but there is no attempt to render a specific location. The scene is framed by the arches of the arcosolium niche rendering them isolated from any further context. They appear as tableaux in a context that is specifically mythological. Again, the motif focuses on Hercules as savior and as an agent of reunion. However, the motif is juxtaposed with an image of Mars and Rhea Silvia, the mythological couple associated with the founding of Rome, to nuance the nature of the relationship between Alcestis and Admetus. In this example, Mars looks upon the sleeping Rhea Silvia while Venus stands in the background.[25] When found on sarcophagi, the image of Mars and Rhea Silvia tends to suggest death as a form of sleep followed by the potential awakening[26]; however, the image also has connotations of divine love with Rhea Silvia becoming an object of desire.[27] The amorous divine relationship is juxtaposed with the image of Alcestis being led to Admetus and suggests that the relationship between Alcestis and Admetus also needs to be evaluated in relation to the divine couple. Alcestis and Admetus become an exemplum of love that parallels divine love, with the focus on Alcestis specifically as an object of attractiveness and desire. The role of Hercules as a divine intercessor is maintained, but the interpretive focus shifts to the nature of the couple's relationship.

The image is located in a mausoleum within a larger complex of the Via Cornelia catacomb. The mausoleum was commissioned in the early third century CE and owned by the Marcii family, likely a wealthy family of freedmen.[28] It held the cremated remains of family members in four niches.[29] Both the individuals interred in the mausoleum and the visitors to the tomb would be part of or intimately connected to the family and would likely have

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unter St. Peter in Rom (Rome: L'erma di Bretschneider, 1995), 254; Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 33–34.

[25] See Feraudi-Gruénais, *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est*, pls. 30–33. Mielsh and Hesberg (*Die heidnische Nekropole*, 254) suggest that this is the most complete example of the myth found in the Roman catacomb.

[26] Anna Marguerite McCann, *Roman Sarcophagi in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), 75.

[27] Zanker and Ewald, *Living with Myths*, 213.

[28] Feraudi-Gruénais, *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est*, 60.

[29] Ibid.

had direct experience of the deceased individuals. The decorative program of the mausoleum had a specific communicative function within this context. It was intended to impart specific status messages to the visitor about the Marcii family. The imagery of Alcestis and Admetus as the exemplum of the ideal couple becomes part of this communicative system and reflects the values of the commissioners. The commissioners of the tomb were freedmen, who held some wealth, but who lacked family lineage; only upon manumission would the individuals gain a *nomen*.[30] By associating themselves with the imagery of divine couples, the commissioners were casting themselves as the ancestral couple or originators of the *familia*. The Marcii family exploited the rhetorical potential of multiple images of exempla of divine love and fidelity within the matrimonial relationship, while at the same time providing images of consolation and reassurance for bereaved visitors. Alcestis no longer represented a liminal, transitional figure; rather, she became an exemplum of union. The focus on the exemplary nature of the motif adumbrates the final phase of the imagery found in catacombs, where Alcestis as an exemplum of wifely virtue becomes an organizing principle of decorative programs.

The final phase of the iconography dates from the fourth century and represents a compositional departure from the standardized motifs of the second and third centuries. The two examples of this type decorate the cubicula of catacombs. The motifs highlight Alcestis' status as a feminine exemplum and integrate her into a specific domestic or underworld context. Her role as feminine exemplum provides an organizing mechanism for these depictions. I will argue this focus is a result of the change in physical context from the columbaria to catacomb cubicula.

The first example depicts Alcestis in the context of the underworld where she accompanies the deceased in the underworld. In the fourth-century tomb of Vincentius and Vibia in the Catacomb of Praetextatus in Rome, the deceased, Vibia, is depicted with Alcestis in the underworld palace of Dis Pater and Aeracura, a version of Proserpina.[31] Alcestis and

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[30] The slave would take on the nomen and praenomen of their master. For a discussion of Roman naming conventions, see L. Keppie, *Understanding Roman Inscriptions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 20.

[31] See Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms* (Freiburg: Herder, 1903), pls. 132–33.

Vibia, both completely covered by their garments, are depicted on the right and led by Mercury Nuniatius, who holds his *caduceus* and wears a short *chiton* and *chalmis,* toward a high throne surmounted by the figures of Dis Pater and Aeracura. The three Divine Fates, *Fata Divina,* appear on the left side of the throne. The identification of the figures and the context of the scene is facilitated by inscriptions that name each of the individual figures. This image depicting Alcestis is part of a decorative cycle that portrays the death of Vibia and her journey to the afterlife.[32] The image of Alcestis and Vibia is juxtaposed vertically with a scene depicting a banquet. Vibia is led through a doorway by a figure identified as *Angelus Bonus*. A banquet simultaneously takes place in a meadow, with six reclining figures seated on cushions. A long inscription implores the reader to join the banqueting.[33]

The image of Alcestis in the underworld is a unique presentation of the motif. Alcestis is now an otherworldly figure; there is no connotation of transition, but rather she appears to be part of the landscape of the underworld. The scene is often interpreted by scholars as a depiction of the judgment of Vibia.[34] In this reading, Alcestis takes on the role of *advocata* on behalf of Vibia.[35] Alcestis presents the deceased to the underworld rulers; Vibia is judged worthy in reference to the exemplary nature of Alcestis, who

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[32] William Palmer, *An Introduction to Early Christian Symbolism, Being the Description of 14 Compositions from Fresco-Paintings, Glasses and Sarcophagi* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1859), 73–75; Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189–90; Zanker and Ewald, *Living with Myths*, 171–72.

[33] A chariot with four horses is driven by a male figure who carries off Vibia, depicted with her hair, arms, and robe flying back into the wind in the guise of Persephone. The inscription makes explicit the interpretation of the scene: *abreptio vibies et descensio*, the carrying off of Vibia and her descent. The final image presents a funerary banquet, which depicts seven men sitting at the table, the *septe*(*m*) *pii sacerdotes*; see Antonio Ferrua, "La catacomba di Vibia," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 47 (1971): 56–61. The cycle also includes a scene depicting Vibia's journey to the underworld. Heever suggests that the frescoes testify to adherence to the Sabazian mysteries. The owner of the property on which the catacomb was built, Praetextatus, held various priesthoods that included the cult of Sabazios, which appears to be named and venerated here; see Gerhard van den Heever, "Making Mysteries: From the *Untergang der Mysterien* to Imperial Mysteries – Social Discourse in Religion and the Study of Religion," *Religion and Theology* 12 (2005): 272–73; Ferrua, "La catacomba," 56–61.

[34] Van den Heever, "Making Mysteries," 272.

[35] Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 77.

stands as her companion. Vibia's worthiness is evinced by her proximity to the exemplary figure of Alcestis. However, the motif of divine judgment does not appear in any of the literary sources associated with the myth; the journey of Alcestis to the underworld is not presented in Euripides' play, nor are there references to scenes of Alcestis' introduction to the underworld. In the play, the chorus makes an entreaty to the god of the underworld and the oarsman Charon, so that they know the virtue of Alcestis, but the narrative focuses on the earthly implications of the death of Alcestis.[36] When afterlife judgment does appear in other literary contexts, the judges are not Dis and Aeracura, but rather Minos and Rhadamanthus of Crete, sons of Zeus, who would send the worthy soul to the Elysian Fields or hand the unworthy soul over to the Furies for punishment.[37] Pluto and Proserpina are presented as the divine rulers of the underworld and the sources of highest power, but not as judges.

I suggest that the scene depicting Alcestis and Vibia does not represent an explicit tribunal, but rather the visualization of the integration of Vibia to the underworld. The incorporation is predicated upon the equation of the two women with respect to their virtue. Visually the women are linked: they are depicted side by side, draped in their cloaks in a similar manner, and make the same gestures. Both women maintain relatively passive gestures; there is no indication that Alcestis is stepping forward to take on a role as *advocata* for Vibia, rather she is presented in relation to Vibia. I suggest this composition functions in a manner semantically similar to a number of funerary inscriptions that make the comparison between the deceased and Alcestis. An inscription written in the first person commemorates a woman named Callicratia:

> I am a new Alcestis, and died for my good husband
> Zeno, whom alone I had taken to my bosom. My
> heart preferred him to the light of day and my sweet
> children. My name was Callicratia, and all men
> reverenced me.[38]

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[36] Thorburn, *The Alcestis of Euripides*, 19.

[37] Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome*, 217.

[38] Trans. W.R. Paton, quoted by Andrzej Wypustek, *Images of Eternal Beauty in Funerary Verse Inscriptions of the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman Periods*, Mnemosyne Supplements, Monographs on Greek and Latin Language and Literature 352 (Boston: Brill, 2012), 26.

Callicratia envisions herself as a new Alcestis, who dies on behalf of her husband. The deceased woman does not directly take on the identity of Alcestis, but places herself in parallel to the mythological figure.

A second bilingual Greek and Latin inscription commemorates a woman named Pomptilla, who proclaims that she died on behalf of her husband. The Latin portion of the inscription describes how Pomptilla prayed to die in place of her ill husband.[39] The Greek portion of the inscription compares her to Alcestis and also Penelope, Evadne, and Laodameia. The inscription focuses on Alcestis in her role as a good wife, as a divine exemplum of wifely fidelity. The relationship established is semantically similar to the representation of the relationship visually articulated between Alcestis and Vibia in the tomb of Vibia. The deceased is presented in comparison to the figures, rather than taking on the explicit identity, creating a parallel rather than direct equation.

The parallel between Alcestis and Vibia in the tomb image functions to locate Vibia and Alcestis within the differentiated hierarchy in the underworld. The prominence of the rulers of the underworld is visually articulated by their placement above the other figures. Alcestis and Vibia are ushered in by Mercury and are placed within the hierarchy among assistant deities such as Mercury and the Divine Fates. The visual negotiation implied by the composition of the motif suggests both Vibia's integration into the landscape of the underworld as well as a place within the hierarchy. This prized place is negotiated in reference to Alcestis who is portrayed as Vibia's parallel. The Alcestis figure facilitates this integration into the specific otherworldly context. There is no narrative of salvation, but rather Vibia takes her place in the Underworld.

This narrative of Alcestis as an integrative figure is not found in the myth, but the focus on exemplarity resonates within the later literary representations. The Alcestis *Barcinonensis,* dating to the fourth century and probably originating in Egypt, represents a later interpretation of the myth. Here, the myth ends with the death of Alcestis. Hercules does not appear. There is no reunion between the couple. Rather, the focus of the poem is on the exemplary life of Alcestis and her decision to die on behalf

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[39] See: CIL X. 7563/7578. Zahra Newby, "In the Guise of Gods and Heroes: Portrait Heads on Roman Mythological Sarcophagi," in *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson (New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 196.

of her husband. She finds Admetus distraught at his impending death and agrees to die in his place; she understands the sacrifice she is making, but is cognizant of the eternal glory that awaits her as an example of a dutiful pious wife. There is no salvation; only fame through her memory. Similarly, the focus on the power of Alcestis as exempla appears in a third-century Virgilian cento. The centos represented verbal verse games in which authors would show off their ability to rearrange words and phrases.[40] They used a number of mythological personae: Alcestis, Hercules, among others. The Virgilian cento *Alcesta* presents the truncated version of the myth ending with an emotional speech by Alcestis and her death. In this version, Admetus makes a speech to Alcestis where he acknowledges his guilt and promises to be faithful to the memory of Alcestis. There is no reunion, no salvation narrative; rather the representation of pathos is associated with the untimely death of a female figure and the potential repercussions within the domestic context. As a female exemplum who could be elided with the deceased, Alcestis becomes useful as semantic tool; an appropriate rhetorical device that can be used within the catacomb context to discuss the ideal feminine.

Alcestis as an ideal wife is also found in the last example. The fourth-century Via Latina catacomb in Rome presents the myth in a series of wall paintings in cubiculum N.[41] The myth is presented in two images; a representation of the dying Alcestis[42] and a depiction of the reunion of Alcestis and Admetus facilitated by Hercules.[43] The unique presentation of the Alcestis myth is juxtaposed to a narrative cycle that includes a number of scenes from the labours of Hercules, including Hercules defeating the Hydra, Hercules in the garden of the Hesperides, and Hercules fighting a figure generally identified as Thanatos.[44]

The first motif of the decorative program depicts a dying figure on a *kline* surrounded by members of their *familia*. This image is heavily damaged to the point that a conclusive identification of the figure is not

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[40] Scott McGill, *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.

[41] Ferrua (*Catacombe sconosciute*, 110–31) provides the most complete description of the catacomb art; cf. Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, 225–28.

[42] See Ferrua, *Catacombe sconosciute*, pl. 124.

[43] See Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, 228, pl. 251.

[44] Berg, "Alcestis and Hercules," 224–25.

possible.[45] Some scholars identify the figure as the dying Admetus, while others suggest that the figure represents Alcestis.[46] If the figure is Admetus, this would represent the only example of a dying-Admetus motif. Mucznik suggests the figure is more likely a depiction of the dying Alcestis, which has precedence in second century antecedents in both wall painting[47] and on sarcophagi. I am inclined to follow Mucznik in identifying the figure as Alcestis, but ultimately, for the interpretation of the motif, the identity of the figure is superfluous. The essential interpretive element is the explicit rendering of the mythological figures within an explicitly domestic context. The dying figure is surrounded by a group of eight individualized figures that make various gestures of mourning.[48]

The composition of the scene parallels the representations of the death of Alcestis found on Roman sarcophagi of the second century. On the sarcophagus of Metilia Acte, a second-century example currently housed in the Vatican (Museo Chiaramonti, inv. 1195), the dying Alcestis reclines on a *kline* while Admetus approaches the foot of the bed in a composition that resembles the image from the Via Latina catacomb.[49] Alcestis' young children kneel at side of the bed while other figures including attendants, servants, and potentially her parents gather around the *kline*. The composition of the motif alludes to the effects of the death of Alcestis on the *familia*; however, further nuances in the depiction of Alcestis provide further interpretive cues. Alcestis is depicted with individualized portrait features and reclining with her clothing falling off her shoulder in a mode reminiscent of Venus.[50]

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[45] Beverly Berg (ibid., 221) suggests that the image depicts the death of a male figure. Her interpretation is based on the assumption that the tomb decoration was commissioned by a wife to commemorate her husband. There is no inscriptional evidence to suggest the gender of the individual interred in the arcosolium.

[46] Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 35.

[47] Mucznik (ibid., 32) provides a number of comparanda including the Vatican sarcophagus; cf. Feraudi-Gruénais, *Ubi diutius nobis habitandum est*, 55.

[48] There are a number of gestures associated with mourning, e.g., a figure standing slightly bent over with head held downward; see Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 32.

[49] See Wood, "Alcestis on Roman Sarcophagi," 500, fig. 1.

[50] Kleiner suggests that the image of the stola slipping off the shoulder represents a late fifth-century Aphrodite sculpture type that became popular in Rome as the Venus Genetrix. Diana E. E. Kleiner, "Second-Century Mythological Portraiture: Mars and Venus," *Latomus* 40 (1981): 520; Rachel Kousser, "Mythological Group Portraits in Antonine Rome: The Performance of Myth," *American Journal of Archaeology* 111 (2007): 685.

This representation of potential nudity alludes to Alcestis' feminine virtues, highly valued within the domestic sphere, both her beauty and her desirability. Although there is no way to make a conclusive link between the image of the dying Alcestis in the Via Latina wall painting and the image as it appears on sarcophagi, similar compositional features such as the depiction of children and mourners suggest that both scenes focus on the effects of the death within the domestic context. The representation of context makes the scene historically contingent and elides the funerary context with the domestic sphere. The viewer is intended to make the connection between the image of Alcestis, the dying pious wife, and the virtues of the commemorated individual. The image oscillates between the mythological narrative and the representation of the dying female figure that is historically contextualized and commemorated in the catacomb cubiculum.

Similarly, the representation of the reunion of Admetus and Alcestis from the Via Latina also locates the scene within a specifically domestic context. The motif draws on second-century antecedents depicting the reunion of Alcestis and Admetus. Hercules holding the three-headed dog Cerebus leads Alcestis through the entrance of the underworld. Admetus sits on a chair with a curtain draped in the background.[51] The artist attempted to render the palatial domestic context, rendering the context specific with an associated temporality that is earthly and can be connected to specific individuals. The motif can function as allegorical representations of historically contingent individuals or narrative mythological representations that evoke specific virtues. The image highlights the role of Hercules as a divine savior figure and the inclusion could represent personal religious adherence.[52] The function of the motif in funerary context has changed from the original function in columbaria. Rather than being part of a repertory of mythological figures that are incorporated into iconographic programs creating a generalized liminal space, the motif in catacombs establishes a parallel between historically specific individuals such as Vibia and the mythological exempla. The image oscillates between different temporal boundaries, mythological narrative, and historically contingent individuality. By focusing on the exemplary nature of Alcestis, the commissioner of the

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[51] Mucznik, *Devotion and Unfaithfulness*, 32.

[52] Josef Engemann, "Altes und Neues zu Beispielen der Katakombenbilder," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 26 (1983): 141–51.

wall paintings in catacombs was able to make direct connections between the deceased individual and the exempla.

To sum up briefly, the image of Alcestis in Roman wall painting was a multivalent motif that resonated in different physical contexts. The basic visualization of the myth could be modified and nuanced to highlight the role of Alcestis in specific situations and contexts. Early representations found in columbaria with spaces for multiple burials visualize the myth of Alcestis in a standardized manner, which highlights the role of Hercules as a savior figure and the role of Alcestis as a liminal figure. The exemplary status of Alcestis underlies the motif. Only through her role as the ideal wife is Alcestis deemed worthy of salvation by Hercules; however, her status is referred to indirectly in the visual material. A later representation illustrates the ability of the artist to nuance the motif by juxtaposing the standardized image of reunion of Alcestis and Admetus with other mythological couples in order to highlight their exemplary status. The artists of the fourth century take more artistic license with the representation of the myth in order to incorporate it into the context of Christian catacombs, where individuals interred in cubicula are elided with the divine exempla. The artist of the tomb of Vibia set Alcestis in parallel to representations of the deceased to visually suggest a relationship based on virtue. In doing so, Alcestis and the deceased are integrated into the underworld hierarchy. Alternately, the images of Alcestis in the Via Latina catacomb integrate the image of Alcestis into the domestic context, focusing on the impact of a death on the familial networks. The figure of Alcestis is elided with the deceased. The resonance between the physical context of the catacomb and the context in which the action takes place within the image becomes integral to the visual articulation of the myth. The figure of Alcestis had the potential to express multiple values, hopes, and beliefs of individual commissioners, *familia* members, and visitors.

The Canonical Deposition of Dioscorus of Alexandria (451): Marcian's Vindication

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Following a trial at Session I of the Council of Chalcedon (451), imperial officials declared Dioscorus, the archbishop of Alexandria, deposed from the episcopacy, pending the approval of Marcian, emperor of the eastern Roman Empire (r. 450–457). Officially, this was his punishment for his role in the unjust depositions of Flavian, deceased archbishop of Constantinople, and Eusebius, bishop of Dorylaeum, at the Second Council of Ephesus (i.e., Ephesus II) (449), which Pope Leo called the "Robber Council."[1] Dioscorus had chaired it, and five other bishops who played key roles there were also provisionally deposed on the same grounds.[2] Acclamations at the end of Session II indicate, however, that Dioscorus and the five were understood to be only suspended from the council, not deposed.[3] It later emerged that Marcian had given only tentative approval for the depositions pending the conciliar bishops' approval.[4] So, at Session III, the council held an exclusively ecclesiastical trial for Dioscorus; under the leadership of the Roman legates—no imperial officials were present—they decided to depose him for various disciplinary offenses.[5] At Session IV, they decided to restore

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1 Leo asserted this epithet in a letter to Empress Pulcheria (20 July 451). Cf. Document 11 in Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, ed. and trans., *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon,* 3 vols., Translated Texts for Historians 45 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 1:105–7. Subsequent references to these volumes will be cited in the abbreviated form Price-Gaddis, followed by volume and page numbers and then by session and paragraph numbers. Where session and paragraph numbers are absent, the references are to the commentary of Price and Gaddis, not to primary documents.

2 Price-Gaddis 1:364, Session I.1068.

3 Cf. Price-Gaddis 2:27–28, Session II.30, 34, 41, 44. This will be argued more fully below.

4 Price-Gaddis 2:66–67, Session III.78.

5 Cf. Price-Gaddis 2:38–116.

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to the council the other five who had been deposed; they had renounced Ephesus II at Session I, and later signed Leo's *Tome*.[6]

This is a basic outline of the events surrounding Dioscorus' deposition at Chalcedon, a council summoned by Marcian to resolve a series of problems stemming from Ephesus II.[7] Most importantly, the council bishops were mandated to "confirm the true and venerable orthodox faith."[8] The decision to call the council, moreover, was largely owing to Pope Leo's request, and among the decisions made prior to and at the Council of Chalcedon were a series of doctrinal and disciplinary matters upon which Leo had insisted. His doctrinal demands pertained to the approval of his *Tome*, which supported dyophysitism, as well as condemnations of Eutyches' monophysitism and Nestorianism. Of Leo's many disciplinary demands, one of the most important was the deposition of Dioscorus for his offenses at Ephesus II as president, but only if he did not repent; similarly, he urged the reconciliation of repentant bishops who had lapsed at Ephesus II.[9] Many of

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[6] Cf. Price-Gaddis 1:161, Session I.184 and Price-Gaddis 1:188, Session I.282–284. The acceptance of Leo's *Tome* was the official reason that the conciliar bishops called for their reinstatement at Session IV, to which Marcian assented (Price-Gaddis 2:146–47, Session IV.11–16).

[7] Most significantly, these included its declaration that the monophysitism of Eutyches, an archimandrite from Constantinople, was orthodox; its deposition of eight bishops affiliated with dyophysitism or Antiochene theology; and Dioscorus' refusal, as chair of Ephesus II, to allow Deacon Hilary, the legate of Pope Leo, to present the latter's *Tomus ad Flavianum* (i.e., *Tome*), which was anti-Eutychian monophysitism and pro-dyophysitism. These outcomes from Ephesus II had resulted in a schism between the East and the West as Leo and Emperor Valentinian III refused to recognize it. Cf. Price-Gaddis 1:31–33; Susan Wessel, *Leo the Great and the Spiritual Rebuilding of a Universal Rome* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 93; Boston: Brill, 2008), 271, 276–81. Despite Leo's requests to Theodosius, he refused, and supported Eutyches, whose "conservative Cyrillian position" had been re-established as "orthodox" at Ephesus II. The emperor also recognized that the latter's monophysitism had wide support in the eastern empire, and likely wanted to avoid further ecclesiastical changes at a time when the empire was expecting attacks from Attila the Hun. For these reasons, he did not want Ephesus II overturned; George A. Bevan, "The Case of Nestorius: Ecclesiastical Politics in the East, 428–451 CE," PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2005, 412.

[8] Cf. "First Letter of Marcian to the Council (September 451)" in Price-Gaddis 1:107 (cf. 2:2).

[9] In a letter Leo stated that if Dioscorus or anyone else recanted, they should not be deposed from the episcopacy (*Ep.* 95.4, cited in Wessel, *Leo the Great*, 175). Similarly, in a letter to the Council of Chalcedon, Leo mandated, "if, as we desire, all abandon error, no one need lose his rank" ("Letter of Pope Leo to the Council from June 26, 451" in Price-Gaddis

these demands also coincided with the imperial agenda. Firstly, it is probable that Marcian was a dyophysite[10] and that, as a condition of his marriage to Empress Pulcheria, also a dyophysite, he would endeavor to have Ephesus II overturned, along with its decrees in favour of Eutychian monophysitism.[11] Additionally, Marcian strove to appease Leo in ecclesiastical matters, in hopes that the western emperor Valentinian would recognize his elevation to the eastern imperial throne; Marcian hoped that Leo would advocate on his behalf.[12] In large part for these reasons, Marcian wanted Dioscorus deposed;[13] to this end, he supported his accusers[14] and enabled the processes so that it might occur. Knowing Marcian's sympathies, and based on procedural precedent from Ephesus I and Ephesus II, the bishops attending Chalcedon also likely anticipated that as part of their mandate to affirm orthodoxy, as Marcian had instructed them, they would be trying Dioscorus (and others) for alleged offenses.[15]

1:104). That Leo's intention had not changed was confirmed by Leo's legates at Session III: "We intended . . . to be lenient" (Price-Gaddis 1:70, Session III.94).

[10] The following argue that Marcian was a dyophysite: Wessel, *Leo the Great*, 270; Peter L'Huillier, "The Council of Chalcedon," in *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 195; Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting about God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 85. In contrast, Bevan ("The Case of Nestorius," 420) contends that Marcian's christological beliefs are unknown, and that there is no evidence to support the position that his religious beliefs affected his decision to call the Council of Chalcedon, nor to defend dyophysitism.

[11] Bevan, "The Case of Nestorius," 425; Richard W. Burgess, "The Accession of Marcian in Light of Chalcedonian Apologetic and Monophysite Polemic," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 86–87 (1993–1994): 65, 67–68.

[12] Marcian's imperial elevation was a significant deviation from precedent tantamount to usurpation. Since the reign of Diocletian, it was a consistent practice for a senior Augustus to have the right to appoint a successor when his senior Augustus counterpart died. Thus, when Marcian was acclaimed emperor of the east on 25 August 450, Valentinian III as emperor of the West was denied this right, and a schism was formed between the two parts of the empire until February of 452; cf. Bevan, "The Case of Nestorius," 416–417, 421.

[13] This was, after all, the verdict his imperial officials provisionally imposed at Session I (Price-Gaddis 1:364, Session I.1068), and which he later accepted.

[14] This is clear from Session I when Eusebius of Dorylaeum requests that his written testimony against Dioscorus be read aloud, "in accordance with the wishes of our most pious emperor" (Price-Gaddis 1:130, Session I.13).

[15] At Ephesus I and II, orthodoxy had been confirmed through the acceptance of particular doctrinal texts and the condemnation of heterodox views and persons (Price-Gaddis 2:2). In

Due to these imperial motivations, as well as analyses of the Acts of the council, many scholars contend that a key reason for Leo's demands being met at the council, in general, was unprecedented imperial influence.[16] Of those who address Dioscorus' deposition in particular, a significant number also allege that imperial officials imposed or otherwise ensured the outcome, with different theories of exactly how and why such occurred.[17] This paper offers a critique of this scholarly trend, which, in the case of

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Dioscorus' case, he would be officially condemned for disciplinary offenses, including offenses against the orthodox. It seems very unlikely, however, that the conciliar bishops foresaw the emperor *mandating* that "Dioscorus and other opponents of Leo" be "disciplined" (*pace* Price-Gaddis 2:2). As will be shown in this paper, not only is evidence to this end lacking, it seems more likely that Dioscorus especially, as the main leader of Ephesus II, would not have attended the council at all if he thought his deposition was certain. After all, this is what he did when he realized it was inevitable at Session III. Despite three summons, he refused to attend (cf. Price-Gaddis 2:43, Session III.7; Price-Gaddis 2:45, Session III.22; Price-Gaddis 2:48–49, Session III.36; Price-Gaddis 2:66–67, Session III.78). Bevan ("The Case of Nestorius," 453) agrees that this is why Dioscorus refused to attend Session III.

[16] While disagreeing on particulars, the following agree that the imperial agenda, or parts thereof, which coincided with that of Leo, were imposed on the bishops: Price-Gaddis 2:207; Burgess, "The Accession of Marcian," 62–68; Bevan, "The Case of Nestorius," 438–439, 443–444; Wilhelm De Vries, "The Reasons for the Rejection of the Council of Chalcedon by the Oriental Orthodox Churches," in *Christ in East and West*, ed. Paul R. Fries and Tiran Nersoyan (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 4–5; George A. Bevan and Patrick T. R. Gray, "The Trial of Eutyches: A New Interpretation," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 101 (2008): 653–57; Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1982), 214–16; Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, "The Council of Chalcedon," in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 318; Michael Whitby, "An Unholy Crew?: Bishops Behaving Badly at Church Councils," in *Chalcedon in Context*, ed. Richard Price and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 182; R.V. Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon: A Historical and Doctrinal Survey* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), 103.

[17] For example, Price and Gaddis argue that the imperial officials ensured Dioscorus was deposed at Session I for his offenses at Ephesus II. They then "stage-managed" (2:29) a second episcopal "show trial" (2:36) at Session III to convince more bishops following outcries for his rehabilitation at Session II (2:30). Ste. Croix ("The Council of Chalcedon," 274) is more particular and alleges that Dioscorus was deposed because of his strong opposition to the imperial will, which was to "crus[h] the Monophysites" (p. 279). Marcian and Pulcheria's will was ensured through "the diplomatic skill and doctrinal convictions" of "the great Anatolius," the lay imperial official who chaired the sessions (p. 318). Others who contend that Dioscorus' deposition was ensured by Marcian/Pulcheria and their imperial officials include Bevan, "The Case of Nestorius," 451; Bevan and Gray, "The Trial of Eutyches," 653–57; and Holum,

Ste. Croix at least, seems to be an overreaction to the apologetic in some writings, especially theological works, that Chalcedon's decisions were due to divine inspiration.[18]

More specifically, this paper will argue that, while Marcian and Pulcheria were opposed to Dioscorus and monophysitism, and the imperial officials did influence the proceedings in this respect, Marcian did not direct them to force Dioscorus' deposition: neither at Session I nor at Session III, and neither explicitly, as had occurred at Ephesus II, nor through subtle intimidation (*pace* Ste. Croix).[19] Rather, the imperial officials likely erred in declaring Dioscorus deposed without a complete ecclesiastical trial at Session I, which was why such was held and Dioscorus was formally deposed at Session III. That event, moreover, was largely due to the efforts of the Roman legates and other bishops opposed to Ephesus II, not the imperial officials. Thus, while Marcian and Pulcheria were surely satisfied with the outcome, they did not ensure its completion.

In order to demonstrate this, this paper will first address arguments pertaining to the organization of the council, viz., whether the imperial will to impose can be discerned from the prearranged seating plan for the council fathers, as well as the presence and function of the imperial delegation that led most of the sessions. Thereafter, pertinent events and discourses related to Dioscorus' trials and deposition, especially imperial involvement therein, will be analyzed. Ultimately, I hope to show that, while imperial officials did influence these judicial events in some ways, the only systematic effort they undertook was to ensure that sessions followed protocol, and were free from the disorder and violence that had gripped prior councils (e.g., Ephesus II).

Seating Arrangement: Symbolism or Pragmatism?

A number of scholars argue that the imperial agenda *contra* Dioscorus can be discerned through an analysis of the seating arrangement of the conciliar members. However, it will be shown that evidence to this end is limited. This seating plan was as follows: the Roman legates held the

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Theodosian Empresses 214. Whitby ("An Unholy Crew?" 182) and Burgess ("The Accession of Marcian," 65), while not explicit, also respectively imply this view.

[18] Cf. Ste. Croix, "The Council of Chalcedon," 312.

[19] Ibid., 273–74.

"formal" presidency of the council[20] and first place of honour, on behalf of Pope Leo, for which they were seated first on the imperial officials' left side. They were then followed by Anatolius, archbishop of Constantinople; Maximus, archbishop of Antioch; Thalassius, bishop of Caesarea; Stephen, bishop of Ephesus; and the other bishops of the Orient, Pontus, Asia, and Thrace, Palestinian bishops excepted. On the right side were Dioscorus, the archbishop of Alexandria who presided at Ephesus II, and Juvenal, bishop of Jerusalem, both of whom were accused of accepting Eutyches' monophysitism at Ephesus II, bishop Quintillus, legate of bishop Anastasius of Thessalonica; Peter, bishop of Corinth; and the other bishops of Egypt, Illyricum, and Palestine.[21]

This arrangement clearly divided most conciliar members between those who supported Leo's *Tome* on the left side of the imperial officials, and Dioscorus and his supporters on the right side.[22] This is similar to modern-day British (or Canadian) parliaments[23] in which, it is fitting to note, the government and opposition benches are separated by 3.96m or *just over* the distance of two out-stretched swords.[24] Marcian's concerns for Chalcedon were not wholly unlike those who designed the Westminster chamber; he too was highly invested in ensuring that proceedings were orderly and free from violence. Such is clear from his third letter to the council (22 September 451) in which he indicates he would not tolerate anyone, be it one "who share[s] the views of Eutyches, or someone else, . . . [to] try to sow

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[20] Price-Gaddis 1:42. Despite this, the Roman legates only chaired Session III. Otherwise, the imperial officials, led by Flavius Anatolius, were the *de facto* presiders.

[21] Price-Gaddis 1:128–129, Session I.4.

[22] There is one exception: Quintillus, who was seated on the right, but probably should have been seated on the left. His case is examined below.

[23] The analogy is noted by Richard Price, "The Council of Chalcedon (451): A Narrative," in Price and Whitby, *Chalcedon in Context*, 74. It should be noted, however, that in Parliament, the government benches are on the right side of the throne, while the opposition are on the left.

[24] House of Commons, Canadian Parliament, "The Physical and Administrative Setting: The Chamber," in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, ed. Audrey O'Brien and Marc Bosc (2nd ed.; 2009) online: http://www.parl.gc.ca. Accessed: July 25, 2016.

dissension [*stasis*] or disorder [*thorubos*]."[25] With this intention, therefore, he had the seating plan devised by his officials.[26]

Some have argued that this seating plan reveals Marcian's opposition to Dioscorus. For instance, as noted above, the first place of honour was given to the Roman legates, and the other seats of "seniority"[27] were given to Anatolius of Constantinople, and Maximus of Antioch. These bishops were both, moreover, also listed after the Roman legates in the various sessions of the Acts at which they were all present.[28] According to Price and Gaddis, this set-up with Dioscorus not in a seat of seniority was contrary to the protocol followed at the councils of Ephesus I and II at which the archbishop of Alexandria played leading roles. Dioscorus was not given such primacy here, they argue, because he was "lined up for condemnation."[29]

Certainly, Dioscorus was not given the presidency and first place of honour, which he had held at Ephesus II, because Marcian had granted that honour to Pope Leo,[30] in the person of his legates. Marcian not only agreed with Leo (and against Dioscorus) theologically, but, as noted above, was trying to endear himself to him for political reasons. However, in making this decision, Marcian does not seem to have violated any recognized norm. Granted, archbishops of Alexandria had presided at the two previous councils, Ephesus I (431) and II (449), but the presidency of other general councils was held by various sees with little consistency.[31] At Chalcedon, therefore, this decision was effectively left to Marcian's discretion.

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[25] Letter quoted in Price-Gaddis 1:110. For the Latin text, cf. *ACO* II.i.30: 21–9. Ste. Croix seems to interpret the phrase "the views of Eutyches, or someone else" to refer solely to those who supported Ephesus II. Given Marcian's broad efforts to maintain order at Chalcedon, however, it seems more likely that he was referring to *anyone* who might cause "stasis" or "thorubos".

[26] F.X. Murphy, *Peter Speaks Through Leo* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 27.

[27] Price-Gaddis 1:119.

[28] E.g., Price-Gaddis 1:123, Session I.3; Price-Gaddis 2:6, Session II.1; Price-Gaddis 2:38, Session III.2.

[29] Price-Gaddis 1:119.

[30] Cf. the letter from "Marcian to Pope Leo (22 November 450)" in Price-Gaddis 1:93.

[31] E.g., Prior to Ephesus I and II, the presidency of the First Council of Constantinople was held by three different bishops from two churches. Theodosius I first appointed Meletius of Antioch as president, but he died soon after the council commenced. Gregory of Nazianzus, the new archbishop of Constantinople, was then appointed to the position, and after he resigned the

With respect to the seats of seniority overall, it is noteworthy that the first three seats were held by three of the four primatial sees; with the absence of Alexandria, they were in the order established in the canons: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch.[32] That Dioscorus' absence from the third seat was more pragmatic than partisan (e.g., to keep order) is indicated by his placement in the Acts. Despite his seating on the right side, he was nonetheless listed third in the Acts of Session I—the only session at which he was present—after the Roman legates and Anatolius, and before Maximus.[33] Thus, the imperial notaries, along with the officials and bishops who would have reviewed them, were careful to respect Alexandria's hallowed thirdness.[34]

The side on which Dioscorus and his allies were seated has also been interpreted as signifying the imperial agenda on grounds that the whole left side was the "place of honour," favoured by the emperor, and that the right, which included Dioscorus, was the side of "relative debasement."[35] This is implausible, though; the seats of seniority—with their respective primacy

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bishopric, his successor at Constantinople, Nectarius, was appointed. Of course, the presidency of the Council of Chalcedon was held by the Roman legates, and later, at Constantinople II (553), the archbishop of Constantinople, Eutychius, presided; Cf. Norman P. Tanner, ed. and trans., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:21, 105. Based on this evidence, the compilers of the sixteenth-century *Centuries of Magdeburg* concluded that "the presidency of the Council was not the prerogative of any definitively nominated bishop" (Enrico Norelli, "The Authority Attributed to the Early Church in the Centuries of Magdeburg and in the Ecclesiastical Annals of Caesar Baronius," in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Backus [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 764).

[32] Cf. Canon 6 of the Council of Nicaea (325), and Canon 3 of the Council of Constantinople (381). By this time, Alexandria had accepted the latter, which had altered Canon 6 of Nicaea with the promotion of Constantinople to second in primacy, after Rome, thereby bumping Alexandria to third, and Antioch fourth; see F. Dvornik, *Byzantium and the Roman Primacy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 49.

[33] Price-Gaddis 1:123, Session I.3

[34] On the difficult role of notaries, see Richard Price, "Truth, Omission, and Fiction in the Acts," in Price and Whitby, *Chalcedon in Context*, 92–106.

[35] Quotations from Ste. Croix, "The Council of Chalcedon," 299. He reverses the sides (left and right) but his meaning is clear. MacMullen also contends that the entire left was the "side of favor and honor" (*Voting about God*, 84), which would make the entire right side the *de facto* seating of the unfavoured and unhonoured. Bevan ("The Case of Nestorius," 87) also implies the same.

of honour—were held by the aforementioned primatial sees but could not have been extended to the whole left side. After Rome, Constantinople, and Antioch, after all, only two other bishops are mentioned by name.[36] Then the seating list for the left side is concisely concluded with, "and the other most devout bishops."[37] Had the entire side truly been the "place of honour," surely these other prelates would have been individually named as well.

Moreover, had this been the case, one could expect to find in the Acts a series of objections. Surely Dioscorus and others on the right would have voiced discontent with such a slight, but there is no such indication from the Acts.[38] It is also noteworthy that Quintillus, bishop of Heraclea and legate of Anastasius, bishop of Thessalonica, was seated on the right side,[39] even though Anastasius was the vicar of Pope Leo in Illyricum, in good standing with him, free from accusations, and even praised by Leo for not having personally attended Ephesus II.[40] This church's importance, moreover, is exemplified by the fact that Quintillus was the sixth or seventh cleric cited in the Acts after the Roman legates and other patriarchs present.[41] His presence on the right side, thus, makes it highly unlikely that the seating plan as a whole reflected imperial favour. Putting the legate of Leo's vicar on the

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[36] Viz., Thalassius of Caesarea and Stephen of Ephesus (Price-Gaddis 1:128, Session I.4).

[37] Price-Gaddis 1:128, Session I.4.

[38] While holding that the outcomes of the council were predetermined, De Vries ("The Reasons," 4) argues that the seating plan conformed to formalities, and was a façade that made the pro-Eutychian and anti-Eutychian opponents appear to be equal and the outcome undecided.

[39] E.g., Price-Gaddis, 1:128, Session I.4.

[40] Price-Gaddis 1:28 n. 99. Pope Leo praised Anastasius for this reason in October of 449 (Wessel, *Leo the Great*, 120 n. 238.

[41] Quintillus was the sixth cleric recorded in sessions II, IV, and IX. He was seventh at Sessions I, V–VIII, XI, XIII–XVI, and the Session on Photius and Eutathius. Quintillus was not recorded as present at Session III; sessions X and XII do not begin with a list of those in attendance; and the Session on Domnus of Antioch simply records the patriarchs present followed by "and the rest of the holy council." Cf. Price-Gaddis 1:123, Session I.3; Price-Gaddis 2:6, Session II.1; Price-Gaddis 2:121, Session IV.1; Price-Gaddis 2:172, Session on Photius and Eutathius 2; Price-Gaddis 2:195, Session V.1; Price-Gaddis 2:208, Session VI.1; Price-Gaddis 2:246, Session VII.1; Price-Gaddis 2:252, Session VIII.1; Price-Gaddis 2:259, Session IX.1; Price-Gaddis 2:311, Session on Domnus of Antioch 1; Price-Gaddis 3:4, Session XI.2; Price-Gaddis 3:24, Session XIII.2; Price-Gaddis 3:36, Session XIV.2; Price-Gaddis 3:63, Session XV.2; Price-Gaddis 3:73, Session XVI.1.

side of disfavour and "relative debasement,"[42] after all, would have been a grave insult to Leo, but such was never recognized as having occurred. To the contrary, "thanks to the careful preparation made by the Imperial Commissioners, the whole assembly had been seated apparently without confusion or dispute over protocol."[43] Why, then, was Quintillus on the right side?

Likely indicative of his true sympathies, Quintillus would later attend Session III and manifest opposition to Dioscorus by assenting to his deposition.[44] This would be in contrast to the majority of the Illyrian bishops who supported the Alexandrian patriarch and would decide not to attend, realizing the all-but-certain outcome.[45] In the lead-up to the council, though, imperial officials only knew that Quintillus had attended Ephesus II and signed its decrees,[46] whether under duress or otherwise.[47] Almost certainly for this reason, they assigned him seating on the right side with his fellow Illyrian bishops who, along with Dioscorus, opposed Leo's dyophysitism.[48] This seating, therefore, while not due to formalities, was consistent with

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[42] Ste. Croix, "The Council of Chalcedon," 299.

[43] Murphy, *Peter Speaks Through Leo*, 27. There was, actually, one issue with the seating; the Roman legates protested that Dioscorus was seated among the bishops, and not in the centre as a defendant (cf. Price-Gaddis 1:129–30, Session I.5–14). This episode is discussed below.

[44] Cf. Price-Gaddis 2:94, Session III.97.

[45] Price-Gaddis 2:36.

[46] Price-Gaddis 1:358, Session I.1067.

[47] At Chalcedon, many who had signed Ephesus II's decrees claimed to have done so only under duress engendered by Dioscorus and others. Such assertions, while likely hyperbolic, had truth to them. This is discussed below.

[48] At the fifth session, "The most devout bishops of Illyricum" wanted the original draft of the dogmatic formula approved, which stated that Christ was "from (ek) two natures" (Price-Gaddis, 2:199–200, Session V.25). "Almost certainly, the draft used 'out of' in opposition to the Roman legates and Leo's *Tome*, which advocated 'in (en) two natures'" (Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars* [New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010], 209). The bishops of Illyricum said, "Let those who dissent make themselves known. The dissenters are Nestorians. Let the dissenters go off to Rome" (Price-Gaddis, 2:199–200, Session V.25). Despite this episode, however, just as the Roman legates were absent, so too the bishops of Illyricum were "conspicuous by their absence" at the session at which Canon 28 was approved (Price-Gaddis 3:68). That canon elevated the See of Constantinople's authority and was seen as a threat by Pope Leo to the Roman See's primacy. For information on the complicated ecclesiastical and political relationship between the Rome and Illyricum, see Wessel, *Leo the Great*, 114–21.

Marcian's pragmatism: to ensure order by grouping (*prima facie*) supporters together and keeping opponents apart.

Imperial Presence: Imposing an Agenda or Peace and Order?

In terms of attendance, the Council of Chalcedon was unprecedented. It was not only the largest gathering of bishops by that time with approximately 370 in attendance,[49] but there had never before been so many imperial officials in leadership positions at a Church council. Specifically, whereas only one imperial official had been present at Ephesus I,[50] nineteen attended Session I of Chalcedon, at which Dioscorus was first deposed by the imperial officials, eighteen attended Sessions II and IV, and thirty-eight attended Session VI when Marcian and Pulcheria were present. However, there were significantly fewer at the other sessions, notably, none during Dioscorus' ecclesiastical trial at Session III, and only three at the rest.[51] Most of these imperial officials were former or current senators, consuls, patricians, and prefects, and were present at the council as representatives of the senate.[52] Significantly, while Leo's legates held "formal presidency over the council," these officials *de facto* presided, Session III excepted.[53] And among them, the most important was Flavius Anatolius, a patrician, former consul and contemporary *magister militum*, whom Marcian had chosen to lead the imperial commission; it was chiefly he who decided on the agenda and led the discussions. This is clear from the fact that the imperial representatives were listed in the Acts of the council at each session prior to the bishops, and Anatolius was listed first.[54] Such imperial influence was in

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[49] Traditionally, this council was understood to have been composed of 500–520 bishops. However, based on an extensive analysis of the Acts of the council, a figure of approximately 370 bishops is more likely, although attendance at particular sessions varied. This discrepancy was due, in part, to the tendency among metropolitans to sign conciliar decisions on behalf of absent suffragan bishops (Price-Gaddis 1:43).

[50] Bevan, "The Case of Nestorius," 438–39.

[51] Price-Gaddis 1:41 n. 154. The three imperial officials present for the majority of the sessions were Flavius Anatolius (patrician, former consul, and contemporary *magister militum*), Palladius (*praefectus sacrorum praetoriorum*), and Vincomalus (*magister sacrorum officiorum*); Price-Gaddis 1:41; Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon*, 103 n. 2.

[52] Price-Gaddis 1:41; Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon*, 103 n. 2.

[53] Price-Gaddis 1:42.

[54] Price-Gaddis 1:41–42.

tremendous contrast to the councils of Ephesus I and Ephesus II where the councils were controlled predominantly by the conciliar bishops.[55]

Marcian's rationale behind sending such a large number of prestigious representatives to the council should be understood in the context of his other decisions. As shown above with the separation of opponents by seating-arrangement, and aptly put in his "Letter Three to the Council," Marcian expressly wanted this council to follow proper procedures, and be free from any disorder or violence. His large delegation was another measure he mandated to ensure it. This helps explain why there were more imperial officials present at the opening sessions, "where disorder was most likely to be expected."[56]

Moreover, Marcian and the bishops will have recalled the disorder that had occurred at both Ephesus I and Ephesus II, and wanted to avoid it happening again.[57] At the former, for instance, Theodosius II had sent an imperial official to ensure "order and tranquility," a goal that had failed; one person had clearly not been enough.[58] The outcome of Ephesus II eighteen years later would have been even more memorable in this regard: it had occurred more recently, concerned bishops and other clerics involved at Chalcedon, and had been more violent. Specifically, Eutyches, Dioscorus, and their allies reportedly exercised violence toward their opponents on that occasion. Eutyches had an aggressive personality: he was easily angered, often refused to compromise in matters important to him, and demonized his opponents. He was also an archimandrite and, thus, held influence over many monks. To this end, Eutyches utilized his authority and, with the help of monks, attacked his critics and those who were allies with Flavian.[59] Dioscorus, too, was apparently paranoid and had an "uncontrollable anger" which, it has been hypothesized, may have been the

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[55] Bevan, "The Case of Nestorius," 438–39.

[56] Price-Gaddis 1:41.

[57] According to Price and Gaddis, "This very practical concern outweighed any qualms they might have felt about such a blatant intrusion of secular power into the sacred affairs of the church" (1:42).

[58] Georg Kretschmar, "The Councils of the Ancient Church," in *The Councils of the Church: History and Analysis*, ed. Hans Jochen Margull, trans. Walter F. Bense (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 59.

[59] Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 176–77.

result of a personality disorder.[60] Regardless, Dioscorus, like Eutyches, was willing to use intimidation and violence to achieve his goals. For instance, when he traveled to preside at Ephesus II (449), he was accompanied by his Alexandrian *parabolani* "who intervened at will, bullying and beating."[61] Dioscorus also admitted to the council the Syrian archimandrite Barsaumas, who could be unscrupulously hostile toward anyone he considered to have remotely Nestorian views, even though he was not a bishop. At another point, a motion was made for Flavian to be deposed, which was followed by violence and pressure. About thirty bishops reportedly signed the decree under duress. The bishops of the Orient, Pontus, Asia, and Thrace later claimed that they were attacked and threatened with deposition if they did not sign blank papers, which were later filled-out with that to which they were supposedly agreeing. While testimonies of these events were surely exaggerated and in some cases invented, there was undoubtedly much truth to them.[62] Therefore, in order to avoid a reoccurrence at Chalcedon, Marcian ensured that influential imperial officials, as well as military forces, were present.[63]

The presence of the imperial officials proved helpful to this end, for there were heated situations during the Council of Chalcedon that required their intervention. For example, during the first session on 8 October 451, Theodoret of Cyrrus was granted a position among the bishops by the commissioners, as Leo had readmitted him to communion, and Marcian had ordered him to participate in the council. In response, Oriental bishops and others from Asia Minor greeted Theodoret, while Egyptian bishops anathematized him. "It was a storm that only the lay commissioners could have controlled, with their guards in support," the former of whom suggested that he sit in the nave, while retaining full rights as a conciliar bishop.[64]

Given the unprecedented imperial delegation tasked with leading the proceedings, many scholars have argued that Marcian used the imperial officials to ensure his goals were met.[65] Indeed, the Acts indicate that they

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60 Ibid., 184.

61 Ibid., 183.

62 Price-Gaddis 1:32.

63 Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 188, 190, 203; Murphy, *Peter Speaks Through Leo*, 9.

64 Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils, 325–1870* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1964), 89.

65 See notes 15 and 16 above.

sometimes directed and influenced the council in ways contrary to the bishops' express wishes, and in some cases, this was quite clearly to bring about an imperial goal, such as producing a new dogmatic formula.[66] During those parts of Sessions I–III pertaining to Dioscorus, the Acts also show the imperial officials imposing their will upon the bishops. Such imposition, however, with one major exception detailed in full below, was mainly to settle procedural matters, or in response to interjections from a minority of bishops,[67] scenarios seemingly within their purview to decide upon.

Such decision-making is clearly shown at the beginning of Session I. At that time, Paschasinus, the papal legate, accompanied by the other legates, was the first to speak. He had instructions from Pope Leo, he explained, "Dioscorus should not take a seat at the assembly,[68] and that if he has the effrontery to attempt to do so, he should be expelled. This we are obliged to observe. Therefore, if it pleases your greatness [i.e., the imperial officials], either he must leave, or we shall leave."[69]

However, the imperial officials could not answer the request; it seems it was too vague. Was Paschasinus seeking Dioscorus' expulsion from the council altogether? Or from his seat as a bishop? So they sought clarification and specificity: "What particular charge do you bring against Dioscorus the most devout bishop?"[70] Paschasinus replied but was again vague, "His entrance makes it necessary to oppose him."[71] So the imperial officials asked the legates two more times: "As we have already proposed, let the charge against him be specified."[72] And then again, "You need to make

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66 Cf. Price-Gaddis 1:10–11, Session II.3–9.

67 E.g., at Session II, there were calls for Dioscorus and the five others to be restored to the council following their suspensions at Session I (Price-Gaddis 2:27–28, Session II.20, 34, 41). The imperial officials do not address the request but, as argued below, it is surely not a coincidence that Dioscorus was given an ecclesiastical trial at Session III.

68 The Latin reads: "Dioscorus should not sit in the council but should be admitted in order to be heard [i.e., as a defendant]" (Price-Gaddis 1:129 n. 49). The Greek text is more reliable, though. Given that the imperial officials request two more times and are only given an answer this clear the third time, this may be an addition to mask an embarrassing (and tense) moment for the Roman legates.

69 Price-Gaddis 1:129, Session I.5.

70 Price-Gaddis 1:129, Session I.6.

71 Price-Gaddis 1:129, Session I.7.

72 Price-Gaddis 1:129, Session I.8.

clear his specific offence."[73] Finally, the Roman legate Lucentius answered sufficiently, "We will not tolerate so great an outrage both to you and to us as to have this person taking his seat when he has been summoned to judgement."[74] The request was now sufficiently clear: the papal legates wanted to commence judicial proceedings against Dioscorus. As a matter of protocol, the imperial officials agreed with the legates[75]: Dioscorus would have to be seated in the centre if he was now to be judged; he could not sit among the bishops who were to judge his case.[76]

At least four points are notable from this tense exchange. First, since the seating plan was arranged by imperial officials, the Roman legates were implicitly criticizing the original decision to allow Dioscorus to be seated among the bishops. While the officials certainly knew Dioscorus would be tried for his offenses, until the council decided to commence proceedings, Dioscorus remained a bishop with full rights, which they knew ought to be respected. Secondly, it was not the imperial officials who began this process against Dioscorus, but the Roman legates. That they were not in cahoots is indicated by the fact that the imperial officials did not immediately side with the Roman legates against Dioscorus. Rather, even though Marcian also wanted Dioscorus tried for certain offenses,[77] the imperial officials, charged with keeping order, followed protocol to ensure that the legates' request was specific and justifiable. In the end, as another matter of protocol, they deemed that it was: Dioscorus had to sit in the centre, the designated area for defendants.

Session I. Dioscorus' First Trial: Imperial Imposition (Sort of)

After Dioscorus had moved, without any reported dispute, Eusebius of Dorylaeum addressed the council. In his written accusation against

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[73] Price-Gaddis 1:130, Session I.11.

[74] Price-Gaddis 1:130, Session I.12.

[75] *Pace* Ste. Croix ("The Council of Chalcedon," 300) who argues this was a compromise and that the Roman legates sought Dioscorus' expulsion from the council.

[76] Price-Gaddis 1:130, Session I.13; Hagit Amirav, *Authority and Performance: Sociological Perspectives on the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)* (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 109–13.

[77] Right after this episode, Eusebius of Dorylaeum requests that his written testimony against Dioscorus be read aloud "in accordance with the wishes of our most pious emperor" (Price-Gaddis 1:130, Session I.13).

Dioscorus which, he revealed, Marcian supported—it was not a secret that Marcian opposed Dioscorus—Eusebius alleged he had committed violence and bribery, accepted heresy, colluded with the heretical and deposed Eutyches, and that he had unjustly deposed him (i.e., Eusebius).[78] To fully address the allegation, both Dioscorus and Eusebius requested that particular segments of the Acts from Ephesus II be read to the council.[79] The vast majority of the session consisted of this presentation of evidence, along with other related documents, such as excerpts from the Acts of both Ephesus I (431), and the Home Synod of Constantinople (448).[80] Other bishops also made allegations against Dioscorus, such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus. He was admitted to the council by a directive from Marcian who would continue to help establish the case against Dioscorus. Theodoret, too, had been deposed at Ephesus II, and had testimony to offer.[81] By the end of this long and complex session, Dioscorus had been accused of a number of offenses, the most common being that, as noted above, he had used coercion and violence to attain assent and suppress his opponents.[82] He was also accused of unjust and uncanonical treatment of Flavian of Constantinople,[83] whom he had deposed at Ephesus II, and whom many bishops now affirmed had been orthodox.[84]

A number of Dioscorus' allies also began to assert Flavian's orthodoxy,[85] some repented of their involvement,[86] and the vast majority of Dioscorus' supporters, including four Egyptian subordinates, moved to the left side with his opponents.[87] Whatever motivated them, be it fear, guilt, or conviction, now the vast majority of the council was against Dioscorus. He,

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78 Price-Gaddis 1:130–32, Session I.14–16.

79 Price-Gaddis 1:132, Session I.18–19.

80 Price-Gaddis 1:173–78, Session I.240–45; 1:168–229, Session I.223–552.

81 Price-Gaddis 1:134–35, Session I.26–36.

82 Price-Gaddis 1:140–43, Session I.54–62; 1:269–71, Session I.851–861.

83 Price-Gaddis 1:144, Session I.71–72.

84 Price-Gaddis 1:187–88, Session I.273–280.

85 Price-Gaddis 1:187–88, Session I.272–280.

86 This included the Oriental bishops (Price-Gaddis 1:161, Session I.181, 183), Thalassius of Caesarea, Eustathius of Berytus, and Eusebius of Ancyra (Price-Gaddis 1:161, Session I.184).

87 Price-Gaddis 1:187–90, Session I.277–280, 282–298. Only the Egyptian bishops remained, the aforementioned four excepted.

for his part, maintained his innocence throughout,[88] and protested that others were also implicated at Ephesus II and should be investigated. In particular, he pointed out Juvenal of Jerusalem and Thalassius of Caesarea whom, he somewhat misleadingly alleged,[89] had been appointed co-presidents to that council with him.[90]

This lengthy and complex trial was concluded when the imperial officials announced their verdict. It was considered proven that Flavian and Eusebius had been unjustly deposed from the episcopacy. Therefore, on these grounds alone, they declared Dioscorus, who had presided at Ephesus II, provisionally deposed, along with five other leaders of that council: Juvenal of Jerusalem, Thalassius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Ancyra, Eustathius of Berytus, and Basil of Seleucia.[91] Dioscorus and likely the others were then arrested.[92] The imperial officials' decision, moreover, was contingent only on Marcian's ratification.[93] Stunningly, they never sought a vote from the bishops nor had a signatory list compiled, even though the vast majority had now expressed their opposition to Dioscorus. This certainly appears *prima facie* to be a serious imposition of imperial policy. What can be made of it?

It is notable that, after the imperial officials declared the provisional depositions, only the Oriental bishops are recorded as cheering the decision.[94] There is no record of any acclamations from the Roman legates, who had so adamantly opposed Dioscorus at the beginning of Session I, nor from his main accusers, Eusebius of Dorylaeum and Theodoret of Cyrrhus. This

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[88] E.g., Price-Gaddis 1:132, Session I.18; Price-Gaddis 1:143, Session I.65; Price-Gaddis 1:149, Session I.93; Price-Gaddis 1:159, Session I.168; Price-Gaddis 1:190, Session I.299.

[89] In a letter to Dioscorus included in the Acts of Ephesus II, Theodosius II, who had summoned it, gives the presidency to Dioscorus alone: "we . . . entrust the responsibility and presidency to your religiousness" (Price-Gaddis 1:140, Session I.52). He was correct, though, that others, while not co-presidents had held "authority at that council and directed it," viz., Juvenal, Thalassius, Eusebius of Ancyra, Eustathius of Berytus, and Basil of Seleucia (Price-Gaddis 1:364, Session I.1068).

[90] Price-Gaddis 1:140, Session I.53; cf. Price-Gaddis 1:149, Session I.95, 97).

[91] Price-Gaddis, 1:364, Session I.1068.

[92] Price-Gaddis 1:364 n. 515.

[93] Price-Gaddis, 1:364, Session I.1068.

[94] Price-Gaddis 1:364, Session I.1069, 1071.The Illyrian bishops "and those with them" are the only others whose responses are recorded and far from agreeing they appealed for clemency: "We have all erred. Let us all be granted forgiveness" (Price-Gaddis 1:364, Session I.1070).

silence, it seems, is significant. While these and other bishops must have been satisfied with Dioscorus' deposition, they were also surely piqued that the imperial officials had overstepped their role by declaring such without their explicit canonical approval.[95] After all, while they led the sessions, the officials "by no means held the official position of . . . judge[s]: the official 'judges' were the delegates themselves."[96] Given the circumstances, this conspicuous silence may suggest that some interventions from bishops were later omitted from the Acts by imperial officials out of embarrassment—it would not be surprising if some or even many bishops had voiced their resentment at the imposition.[97]

Granted it was technically within Marcian's purview to decide on episcopal cases himself.[98] But it had become standard practice for the emperor to direct appeals, such as the accusations against Dioscorus, to an ecclesiastical court, especially an ecumenical council when the case had significant implications for Christendom.[99] Given Dioscorus' status as the patriarch of Alexandria, the third most preeminent and influential see in Christendom, and president of Ephesus II, which had involved or impacted bishops from across Christendom, Marcian's unwillingness to depose Dioscorus himself prior to Chalcedon indicates his prudent desire to follow

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[95] Bevan similarly argues that some bishops very possibly did not accept "the authority of the imperial commissioners to depose Dioscorus" ("The Case of Nestorius," 451).

[96] Amirav, *Authority and Performance*, 113.

[97] While Acts of the proceedings are very detailed and include many objections and disagreements, some statements were "omitted or reordered" by the recorders and/or compilers. In some cases, this was to ensure that imperial agendas were not hindered in the official record. For example, objections issued during the reading of Leo's *Tome* are listed only after the whole document was recorded in the Acts, and Ste. Croix speculates that they "may well have been more vehement and protracted" than the minutes indicate ("The Council of Chalcedon," 266). Similarly, Price demonstrates that, at Chalcedon, "the category of omission is much more significant than that of fiction" ("Truth, Omission, and Fiction," 105). There were many meetings, e.g., committees, at least one session (on Canon 28), and of course private discussions, of which no minutes were taken. And when they were, "minute-takers had the unenviable task of distinguishing between remarks whose omission would offend and remarks whose inclusion would be equally unwelcome" (ibid., 94).

[98] Price-Gaddis 2:30.

[99] Price-Gaddis 3:18. Price and Gaddis note this in the context of appeals heard at later sessions of the council unrelated to Dioscorus. While they argue that it was only "advantageous" for the Emperor to direct particularly significant cases to an ecumenical council, surely no other ecclesiastical court would be suitable for Disocorus' case.

this precedent. Therefore, while Marcian must have wanted Dioscorus deposed, along with the other five bishops, he surely did not order the imperial officials to declare such without the council's approval. Such would be completely contrary to the point of bringing it to the council.

The imperial officials would have known it was technically within their purview to depose Dioscorus as representatives of Marcian, and that the latter could simply approve their verdict.[100] Also, after such a tumultuous session, perhaps they also wanted to demonstrate firmly their authority over the proceedings in order to ensure that future sessions were more orderly, peaceful, and protocol-abiding, as per their mandate. Whatever the motivation, the imperial officials seem to have overplayed their role, violating precedent, imposing Dioscorus' deposition (contrary to Marcian's wishes), and thereby upsetting bishops.[101] As will be shown, it is very likely that Marcian did not give his assent; he would keep Dioscorus (and the others) suspended, but the council fathers would be given a real, canonical opportunity to decide the case at Session III.

Session II. Dioscorus' Status is Clarified

Session II proceeded with theological matters: a directive from the officials to compose a dogmatic formula,[102] and the reading of creedal and theological texts, including Leo's *Tome*, which many of the bishops affirmed while others voiced objections.[103] After the imperial officials mandated that a drafting committee for the dogmatic formula would convene,[104] "the most devout bishops,"[105] likely the bishops from Illyria and the Balkans (except for Thrace and Palestine)[106] requested that "the fathers [i.e., Dioscorus and

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[100] Price-Gaddis 2:30.

[101] During ecclesiastical disputes at later sessions, while imperial officials continued to intervene and advise bishops, they did not impose decisions, but left them to the bishops' discretion. E.g., at Session XI, when there was a dispute between Stephen and Bassianus over the episcopal chair of Ephesus (cf. Price-Gaddis 3:1–17).

[102] Price-Gaddis 2:9–10, Session II.2.

[103] Price-Gaddis 2:24–26, Session II.23–26.

[104] Price-Gaddis 2:11, Session II.6; cf., 2:27, Session II.31.

[105] Price-Gaddis 2:27, Session II.30.

[106] In this section, calls for the restoration of Dioscorus and the other five were made by "the most devout bishops," as well as the Illyrian bishops and "those with them" (Price-Gaddis 2:28, Session II.41, 44), who were the bishops from the Balkans, Thrace and Palestine

the five others][107] take part in the examination."[108] Soon after, "the most devout bishops" again acclaimed similarly, "restore the fathers to the council. . . . We have all erred; forgive us all."[109] And then one more time, "We have all sinned, forgive us all. [Restore] Dioscorus to the council. [Restore] Dioscorus to the churches."[110]

What exactly was the nature of this restoration they were seeking? *Prima facie,* the Constantinoplitan clerics imply that Dioscorus had been deposed at Session I, saying, "God has deposed Dioscorus."[111] However, it seems this should be interpreted in the same way as when, at Session I, the Oriental bishops rejoiced, "Christ has deposed Dioscorus,"[112] even though the imperial officials' declaration was provisional and, thus, not official. In both cases, Dioscorus' opponents seem to have been less concerned with accuracy than with polemic.

The Illyrian bishops' acclamations indicate that Dioscorus and the other five bishops were just suspended; they twice acclaim for restoration "to the council" not restoration from deposition.[113] Similarly, it would

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excepted (Price-Gaddis 2:364 n. 517). It seems likely that these two designations refer to the same groups of bishops. Price and Gaddis imply support for this view by calling them simply "Dioscorus' supporters" (2:4).

[107] Price-Gaddis 2:27 n. 88.

[108] Price-Gaddis 2:27, Session II.30.

[109] Price-Gaddis 2:27, Session II.34.

[110] Price-Gaddis 2:28, Session II.41.

[111] Price-Gaddis 2:28, Session II.40.

[112] Price-Gaddis 1:364, Session I.1071.

[113] E.g., "Restore the fathers to the council" (Price-Gaddis 2:27–28, Session II.34, 44); "[Restore] Dioscorus to the council," (Price-Gaddis 2:28, Session II.41). At one point, the Illyrian bishops "and those with them" also state "[Restore] Dioscorus to the churches" (Price-Gaddis 2:28, Session II.41). This should not be interpreted to mean that Dioscorus was no longer the shepherd of the Alexandrian patriarchate (i.e., deposed). Rather, given the Illyrians' emphasis on restoration to the council, and since rehabilitation from deposition would be needed before restoration to the council, the Illyrians must have meant by this phrase that they wanted Dioscorus restored to the council so that he would be able to lead them *qua* leaders of the Illyrian churches again.

Price and Gaddis' view on this is not clear. In their discussion of Session II, they seem to agree with the view expressed here; they argue that the Illyrian bishops' acclamations "were a natural response to his [i.e., Dioscorus's] suspension at the end of the first session (I. 1068) but would have been inconceivable after his formal trial and deposition in the third" (Price-Gaddis 2:2). Hence, they later argue, the Illyrian bishops did not consider the six deposed

have been implausible for them to "request that the fathers take part in the examination"[114] if they had been deposed; such would have been impossible.[115] Clearly then, at the end of the second session, Dioscorus was only suspended from the council, not deposed from the episcopacy. There is no indication from the Acts of Session II, though, that this was a new, altered decision from Marcian; the bishops were not informed of it at Session II, but were already aware of it. Given this, and the evidence presented from Session I, it is most probable that Marcian did not put his officials' verdict into effect. As shown above, he had never intended to impose the deposition. He wanted an official and canonical verdict from the council. Thus, despite the imperial officials' overreach at Session I, bishop John of Germanicia explained in a summons to Dioscorus at Session III that the officials' decision was (now) tentative; it required the bishops' approval, and that was why he (i.e., Dioscorus) was being summoned to an ecclesiastical trial.[116]

Session III. Dioscorus' Ecclesiastical Trial: Imperial Absence

If the above analysis is correct, Marcian always intended to hold an ecclesiastical trial for Dioscorus before the end of the council. However, it is surely not a coincidence that such was convened following calls for Dioscorus' reinstatement to the proceedings at Session II, which Marcian refused to do. Not only did he want the Alexandrian bishop canonically deposed. While Dioscorus' refusal to reject Ephesus II's monophysite Christology may not have been particularly troublesome for Marcian in itself, coupled with Dioscorus' powerful influence, it jeopardized Marcian's primary aim for the council: consensus on a dyophysite Christology. That Session II had already commenced discussions on this matter demonstrates his eagerness for its completion. Before they could continue, Dioscorus' capacity to influence proceedings through his supporters needed to be stopped, which could be achieved in large part by his deposition from the

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but suspended; they sought only that "participation in the council be restored" to them (Price-Gaddis 2:4). In their discussion of Session III, however, they argue that Marcian had decided not to confirm Dioscorus' deposition but only suspend him *after* the Illyrian bishops' acclamations at Session II in support of Dioscorus (Price-Gaddis 2:30).

[114] Price-Gaddis 2:27, Session II.30.

[115] Price-Gaddis 2:27–28.

[116] Price-Gaddis 2:66–67, Session III.78.

episcopacy. Such would sever his canonical authority over the Egyptian bishops, and could help reduce his moral authority (e.g., over the Illyrians).[117]

Given these strong motivations, it is very surprising that no imperial officials were present at the ecclesiastical trial in Session III. This fact certainly bolsters the case that it was not forced or ensured by Marcian. But what was the reason for it? While imperial officials later claimed ignorance of the session and reprimanded the bishops for deposing Dioscorus without imperial knowledge,[118] this was patently a pretense; they were certainly aware.[119] Whitby has convincingly ruled out one possibility: that imperial officials were absent out of fear that association with Dioscorus' deposition could negatively impact imperial authority in Egypt (*pace* Ste. Croix). After all, imperial authority was already involved by suspending and provisionally deposing Dioscorus at Session I.[120]

Prima facie, imperial absence at Session III also seems contrary to Marcian's aim of ensuring order and proper procedures. Therefore, his concern must have been greater than that there not be any reason to doubt the canonical legitimacy of the outcome, such as accusations of undue imperial involvement or coercion, which could embolden Dioscorus' supporters and would be a great setback. This intention also explains why the officials later feigned ignorance of the trial.[121]

Ultimately, the officials were not needed to preserve order anyway. The trial proved quite orderly in part because it was not very well attended: while approximately 370 bishops attended Session I, just over 200 attended Session III. This was in large part because Dioscorus refused to attend, along with his supporters and most of the suffragans of the five other suspended bishops, who were still under arrest. This amounted to approximately 90 bishops.[122] This was not, however, because it was "obvious that a show-trial was planned" and operated by imperial officials (*pace* Price and

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[117] This is in partial agreement with Bevan ("The Case of Nestorius," 451) and Price-Gaddis (2:30), who argue that the ecclesiastical trial was needed, at least in part, to provide a more convincing case against Dioscorus so that his supporters would abandon him.

[118] Price-Gaddis 2:147, Session IV.12.

[119] It is clear from the second summons to Dioscorus that the imperial officials had originally planned to be present (Price-Gaddis 2:47, Session III.31).

[120] Ste. Croix, "The Council of Chalcedon," 282 (and Whitby's n. 58).

[121] Price-Gaddis 2:147, Session IV.12

[122] Price-Gaddis 2:36.

Gaddis).[123] Rather, Dioscorus' deposition must have seemed quite certain given the bishops who were involved. Most importantly, the Roman legates who opposed Disocorus led the session—appropriate given their official presidency—and, thus, they were formally responsible for deciding the verdict to which all in attendance had to assent.[124] Secondly, in addition to the Roman legates Anatolius, the archbishop of Constantinople, was also present and opposed to Dioscorus. As representatives of preeminent and influential sees, it was not unusual for bishops to follow their leadership.[125] In sum, Marcian simply had no reason to manipulate the outcome.[126]

The Acts also reveal the leading bishops' concern that the trial be canonical. Like Marcian, they surely did not want their decision to be dismissed later. Thus, evidence was produced: Eusebius of Doryaeum, who testified at Session I, again produced a plaint against Dioscorus who was called upon to respond to the accusations. In all, he was summoned to appear three separate times, as required by the canons.[127] When, following his second summons, Dioscorus demanded that the imperial officials be present,[128] Cecropius of Sebastopolis informed him, "A canonical examination does not require the presence of officials or any other

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[123] Ibid. (cf. Price-Gaddis 2:29).

[124] While disagreement could proceed the president's verdict, conformity to it was required once it was announced. Conciliar procedure required this consensus (Price-Gaddis 2:35).

[125] L'Huillier ("The Council of Chalcedon," 189) cites this as a contributing reason for Dioscorus' eventual deposition.

[126] Part way through the trial, four Alexandrian clergy and laymen conveniently arrived with plaints against Dioscorus (Price-Gaddis 2:50, Session III.38). As Price and Gaddis note, the imperial officials "had clearly gone to considerable trouble to produce these witnesses." Also, while their testimonies may have contained truth, it seems likely that a "common redactor" helped depict Dioscorus therein as an abuser of Cyril of Alexandria's relatives and supporters; an effort to distance Dioscorus from the pro-Cyrillian bishops (2:31 n. 4). If this testimony was manufactured, it is not evident that it was primarily intended to convince bishops to depose Dioscorus, although, of course, it could not have hindered it. As noted above, that outcome was virtually certain already with the Roman legates. Their official reasons for deposing Dioscorus, moreover, did not include the Alexandrians' accusations (cf. Price-Gaddis 2:69–70, Session III.94). They were not a common reason among the other bishops either, at least not officially (cf. Price-Gaddis 2:32–34). Given this, perhaps the accusations were to distance Dioscorus from his pro-Cyrillian supporters; while they were not present, the accusations were surely spread.

[127] Cf. Price-Gaddis 2:66–68, Session III.78–83.

[128] Price-Gaddis 2:48, Session III.36.

laymen."[129] After Dioscorus refused to attend upon the third summons, he was deposed from the episcopacy and automatically excommunicated, the canonical penalty for his refusals to attend.[130] The individual bishops, however, also provided other reasons for the penalty: his maltreatment of Flavian, deceased archbishop of Constantinople, at Ephesus II; his refusal to let Leo's *Tome* be read there, his excommunication of Leo just prior to Chalcedon, among manifold others.[131]

In sum, all of the bishops present[132] "agreed, explicitly or implicitly," that Dioscorus' offenses were deserving of the punishments.[133] When the session had concluded, the council sent news of their decision to Marcian[134] and Pulcheria.[135] Surely with satisfaction, Marcian confirmed it and exiled Dioscorus to Gangra in southern Paphlagonia.[136]

Conclusion

It has not been the intention of this paper to demonstrate that Dioscorus was truly guilty of the alleged offenses, nor that his trials at Sessions I and III meet modern norms of justice. It is, moreover, not being contested that Marcian wanted Dioscorus deposed, that the bishops were aware of this, nor that he and his officials supported Dioscorus' accusers and helped produce the case against him. It is even clear from the Acts of other sessions that Marcian was willing to use his imperial delegation to bring about particular

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[129] Price-Gaddis 2:49; Session III.36.

[130] Cf., Price-Gaddis 2:31; cf. Price-Gaddis 2:68–71, Session III.80, 94, 96.

[131] Cf. the bishops' individual verdicts and stated reasons at Price-Gaddis 2:69–93, Session III.94–96.

[132] Price and Gaddis note that the unanimity is deceptive. Since conciliar unity was so important, it was procedure that, after the president delivered his verdict, the only voting option was to affirm it (Price-Gaddis 2:35). However, this point should not be overstressed. After all, bishops would have known this fact, and that the Roman legates, opposed to Dioscorus, were presiding. Thus, it seems likely that those who attended were willing, at least in principle, to punish Dioscorus. Likely for this reason, only two bishops present gave indications that they were "less than enthusiastic" about the outcome, viz., Amphilochius of Side and Epiphanius of Perge, but assented to the verdict nonetheless (Whitby, "An Unholy Crew?" 192; cf. Price-Gaddis 2:74, Session III.96.22–23).

[133] Price-Gaddis 2:34.

[134] Cf. Price-Gaddis 2:110, Session III.98.

[135] Cf. Price-Gaddis 2:114–15, Session III.103.

[136] Hughes, *The Church in Crisis*, 91.

desired outcomes, such as the production of the dogmatic formula, which did not occur without strong episcopal protests. The evidence to these ends is strong. Rather, this paper has attempted a much narrower thesis, viz., that many of the arguments that have been presented to demonstrate that Marcian and his officials did, in fact, ensure Dioscorus' deposition are found wanting.

To this end, an alternative reading of the primary texts has been offered which, it is hoped, provides a more plausible interpretation of the events. Regardless of his particular reasons, Marcian thought Dioscorus should be convicted, but even though he technically could have declared it himself, he was unwilling to do so without a canonical ecclesiastical trial; such was in accordance with precedent and was, moreover, pragmatic given Dioscorus' primatial status. While his officials likely blundered at Session I by declaring their verdict without the consent of the bishops, Marcian accommodated his plan, giving only provisional assent until the bishops had the opportunity to adjudicate. Despite his concern with maintaining orderly proceedings, he was more concerned that the trial be clear from any suspicion of imperial imposition for which it might be disregarded. For this reason, and since he knew that the Roman legates chairing Session III and many other bishops present also thought Dioscorus worthy of deposition, he directed his officials not even to attend. Ultimately, a canonical ecclesiastical trial was held, and the council fathers deposed him as Marcian had expected. He and his officials may have stage-managed the prosecution, but they did not stage-manage a "show trial" (*pace* Price and Gaddis).[137]

[137] Price-Gaddis 2:29 and 2:36, respectively.

Eastern Soldier-Saints in Early Medieval Rome*

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In the late eighth century Pope Hadrian (772–795) had a new fresco added to the atrium of Sta. Maria Antiqua (**fig. 1**).[1] Here Pope Hadrian (on the far left) is presented entreating the Virgin and Child; four accompanying saints champion his case. Along with Rome's renowned Pope Sylvester and another pope of uncertain identity, Sergius and Bacchus are in attendance, two soldiers who, according to their legend were buried in Resafa/Sergiopolis

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AASS *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. Bollandisti: Anversa (Ianuarii I–Octobris III) 1643–1770; Bruxelles (Octobris IV–V) 1780-1786; Tongerloo (Octobris VI) 1794; Bruxelles (Octobris VII–Novembris IV) 1845: 2nd ed. Venezia (Ianuarii I–Septembris V) 1734–1770; 3rd ed. Paris (Ianuarii I–Novembris I) 1863–1897.

BHG *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, ed. F. Halikin, 3rd ed., Subsidia hagiographica 8a, (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1957).

BHL *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina: Antiquae et mediae aetatis*, 2 vols., Subsidia hagiographica 6 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–1901).

BS *Bibliotheca Sanctorum: Enciclopedia dei Santi*, 12 vols., ed. F. Caraffa (Roma: Società Grafica Romana, 1961–1970).

CBCR *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae: The Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV–IX Cent.)*, 5 vols., ed. R. Krautheimer et al., Monumenti di antichità cristiana, 2a serie, 2 (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1937–1977).

LP *Le Liber Pontificalis: Introduction, texte et commentaire*, 3 vols., ed. L. Duchesne (1886–1892; reprint, Paris: de Boccard, 1955), vol. 3 with additions and further commentary, ed. C. Vogel, 1957).

LTUR *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*, 6 vols., ed. E.M. Steinby (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1993–2000).

[1] J. Osborne, "The Atrium of S. Maria Antiqua, Rome: A History in Art," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 55 (1987): 194–96.

in Syria, after being martyred for refusing to sacrifice to the pagan gods under the emperor Maximian.[2] Also present is another saint dressed in a *chlamys* (a cloak pinned on one shoulder), the attire of soldiers and other Byzantine functionaries.[3] Why such prominence of eastern soldier-saints in conjunction with a Roman pope?

Rather than an anomalous choice or a personal preference, Pope Hadrian's fresco represents a much wider process by which, in the sixth to eighth centuries, an influx of eastern soldier-saints into Rome endowed the city with new forms of protection and heavenly prestige. Soldier-saints were only one of the many types of new saints promoted in Rome in this period; yet the scale of the phenomenon and the impact of these saints on Rome warrants study in its own right.[4] Supported by a wide range of individuals—from Byzantine soldiers and administrators to ecclesiastical officials, to more run-of-the-mill inhabitants of Rome—the cults of militant eastern soldier-saints imparted early medieval Rome's Christian topography and civic identity with a particular inflection of triumphal sanctity.[5]

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[2] Although the saints' names do not survive, the *maniakion*, a torc worn around the neck of one of the pair, identifies them: C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 152–55.

[3] G.M. Rushforth, "The Church of S. Maria Antiqua," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 1 (1902): 103–4, suggested that this figure was Pope Hadrian's name-saint, St. Hadrian, whose *diaconia* the pope renovated. Regarding the *chlamys* see K. Wessel, "Insignien, B. XI. Paludamentum-Chlamys," *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* 3 (1972): 424–28; Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 270.

[4] For a recent overview of the Christian transformations of Rome in this period see L. Pani Ermini, ed., *Christiana loca: Lo spazio cristiano nella Roma del primo millennio*, 2 vols. (Roma: Fratelli Palombi, 2000–2001). The present author is currently working on a larger study of the cults of saints from abroad promoted in sixth-ninth century Rome.

[5] This process was by no means unique to Rome; a comparison is beyond the scope of this discussion, but for the situation in Ravenna compare D.M. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), for Constantinople F.A. Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike: Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1996); C.A. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople, IVe–VIIe siècles*, Travaux et mémoires du Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, Monographies 2 (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1985).

The Soldier-Saint

By "solider-saints," I refer to saints who were believed to have lived, and died, as soldiers, never renouncing their military careers.[6] Contemporaries did not regard these soldier-saints as a category per se, but the fusing of military and Christian virtue that these saints embodied and the analogous roles they took on as protective patrons justifies the term.

Early Christianity was ambivalent at best on military virtue as a Christian virtue; Tertullian (late second/early third century), denied that any soldier could be a Christian.[7] By the later fourth century, in the context of a Christianized Roman Empire, military service was regarded with fewer reservations.[8] Indeed, that a celestial soldier, a *miles Christi/ miles Dei*, a term used to refer to any martyr, whatever his earthly career, had once been a terrestrial soldier, could underscore a martyr's courageous spirit.[9] Accordingly, the proliferating legends about Christian martyrs often portrayed their protagonists as soldiers. This was less a result of new saints,

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[6] For an overview of soldier-saints, see A.M. Orselli, *Santità militare e culto dei santi militari nell'impero dei romani (secoli VI–X)* (Bologna: Lo scarabeo, 1993). Regarding their individual cults in Byzantium, see Walter, *Warrior Saints*, who builds on the classic work by H. Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1909). For the Constantinopolitan contexts of many of these saints, see also R. Janin, "Les églises byzantines des saints militaires (Constantinople et banlieue)," *Échos d'Orient* 33 (1934): 163–80; 331–42. Regarding attitudes in the West see F. Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg im früheren Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zur Rolle der Kirche beim Aufbau der Königsherrschaft* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1971), esp. 37–72.

[7] Tertullian, *De idolatria*, 19.1–3 [60–62 Waszink-van Winden]. The modern scholarly debate on this controversial topic began with A. von Harnack, *Militia Christi: Die christliche Religion und der Soldatenstand in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1905). For an overview of the state of the debate see D. Hunter, "The Church's Peace Witness," in *The Christian Church and the Roman Army in the First Three Centuries*, ed. M.E. Miller and B. N. Gingerich (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 161–81.

[8] For this process see C. Odahl, "Constantine and the Militarization of Christianity: A Contribution to the Study of Christian Attitudes towards War and Military Service," Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1976; M. Whitby, "Deus Nobiscum: Christianity, Warfare, and Morale in Late Antiquity," in *Modus Operandi: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman*, ed. G. Rickman et al. (London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 1998), 191–208.

[9] Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 31. This term is derived from New Testament writers, especially St. Paul (Eph 6:10–17).

so much as new legends; most of the soldier-saints popular across the Mediterranean were believed to have been early Christian martyrs of Roman imperial persecutions—soldiers of the imperial army, who, as Christians, refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods and were correspondingly tortured and executed. Although the renunciation of a military life continued to be a hagiographical motif, the soldier-saint was there to stay.[10]

Soldier-Saints in Rome (Table 1)

In Rome, as throughout the rest of the Mediterranean world, there were few cults for soldier-saints prior to the sixth century. Among the epigrams that Pope Damasus wrote in the late fourth century in honor of Rome's martyrs, only one pair, Nereus and Achilleus, are described as soldiers.[11] Yet upon converting to Christianity, in Damasus' words, "they flee, they leave the impious camp of their general. They throw away shields, armaments and bloody weapons."[12] They are thus a model of the Christian rejection, not embrace, of military service.

Starting in the sixth century, concurrent with the increasing militarization of Roman society, we find a growing number of saints who died as soldiers, never renouncing their military careers.[13] By far the majority of these saints

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[10] In particular St. Martin of Tours, whose biographer, Sulpicius Severus, presented his renunciation of his military career as a turning point in his Christian commitment, offered a different model of sanctity: *Vita S. Martini* 4 [260–62 Fontaine]; B.H. Rosenwein, "St. Odo's St. Martin: The Uses of a Model," *Journal of Medieval History* 4 (1978): 317–31. At least by the seventh century a monastery was dedicated to St. Martin in Rome; by the time of Pope Leo III there were also two *diaconiae*. Similar attitudes are also found in the *passiones* of eastern saints; for example Anastasius the Persian (whose relics arrived in Rome by the mid-seventh century at the so-called monastery of "S. Anastasius ad Aquas Salvias") abandoned the Persian army when he became a Christian (although his *passio* does not emphasize this): C.V. Franklin, *The Latin Dossier of Anastasius the Persian: Hagiographic Translations and Transformations* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004).

[11] A. Ferrua, *Epigrammata Damasiana* (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1942), 103 no. 8, line 1: *Militiae nomen dederant . . . .*

[12] Ibid. lines 6–7: *conversi fugiunt, ducis impia castra relinquunt, / prociunt clipeos faleras telaq(ue) cruenta.*

[13] For the rise of a military and ecclesiastical hierarchy in Rome, see T.F.X. Noble, "The Roman Elite from Constantine to Charlemagne," in *Rome AD 300–800: Power and Symbol, Image and Reality*, ed. J. Rasmus Brandt, Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia 17 (Roma: Bardi, 2003), 13–24 and, more generally, T.S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers:*

Table 1.
Evidence for the Veneration of Eastern Soldier-Saints in Rome

Saint	*Site of Martyrdom*	*Evidence for Cult in Rome*	*BHL/BHG*
Theodore of Amasea†	Euchaita (Pontos)	early 6th century: mosaic in SS. Cosma e Damiano late 6th/early 7th century (?): *diaconia* at foot of Palatine Hill (S. Teodoro): *CBCR* 4:279–88 relics in Theodotus' list	*BHL* 8077f.; *BHG* 1761 (Siegmund)
George†	Lydda (Diospolis) in Palestine	6th century (?): Porta Appia inscription 7th century (?): *diaconia* (S. Giorgio al Velabro): *CBCR* 1:242–263 Pope Zacharias (740–752) discovers head in Lateran (*LP*) relics in Theodotus' list altar in St. Peter's (*Notitia Ecclesiarum*) 9th century: relics in *sancta sanctorum* Evidence for a Roman translation of Greek *passio* into Latin (Type "Y" was likely originally translated from Greek into Latin in Rome, as versions thereof are found in passionaries based on Roman models: Haubrichs)	*passio* "Y" (*BHL* 3369–71; 3378–82; 3383b; 3384–5; 3393): Haubrichs, 474–99 (Appendix 2)
Mennas*†	Cotyaes (in Phrygia); Alexandrian cult	before late 6th century: church on via Ostiensis: Jost 2:82	*BHL* 5921f; *BHG* 1250ff. (Siegmund)
Demetrius*†	Thessalonica	late 6th to mid 7th century: fresco in Sta. Maria Antiqua relics in Theodotus' list	*BHL* 2122; *BHG* 496 (Anastasius); *BHL* 2124 (anonymous) (Siegmund)
Hadrian†	Nicomedia	Pope Honorius (625–638) dedicates church on *forum Romanum* (*LP*)	*BHL* 3744; *BHG* 27 (Siegmund)

Antiochianus, Gaianus, Paulinianus, Telius	Salonita	mid 7th-century mosaics in S. Venanzio oratory by Lateran: Mackie	
Forty Martyrs of Sebaste†	Sebaste (eastern Turkey)	7th/8th century: frescoes in Sta. Maria Antiqua	*BHL* 7537ff; *BHG* 1201 (Siegmund)
John (companion of Cyrus)†	Canope (near Alexandria)	7th century (?): translation of parts of Sophronius' hagiographical dossier by a certain *consilarius* Boniface at the request of Theodore, *primicerius defensorum ecclesiae Romanae*: Berschin early 8th century: fresco in Sta. Maria Antiqua relics in Theodotus' list	*BHL* 2079–80; *BHG* 476–479 (Sophronian corpus); *BHL* 2077; *BHG* 469 (*passio*)
Sergius and Bacchus†	Resafa/ Sergiopolis (Syria)	early 8th century: relics in *sancta sanctorum* before mid 8th century: *diaconia* in *forum Romanum*: Jost 2:264 before mid 8th century: *diaconia* by Vatican: Jost 2:255–56 mid 8th century: frescoes in Sta. Maria Antiqua late 8th century: frescoes in Sta. Maria Antiqua Evidence for a Roman translation of Greek *passio* into Latin (*BHL* 7599 included in the Weißenburger Legendar, Bruxelles 7984, was probably brought from Rome with the relics of Sergius and Bacchus that were translated there in the first half of the 9th century)	*BHL* 7599ff.; *BHG* 1624 (Siegmund)
Christopher†*	Antioch in Syria	relics in Theodotus' list	*BHL* 1764ff; *BHG* 309f (Siegmund)
Eustachius†	Rome	before late 8th century: *diaconia* in Campus Martius: Jost 2:316–17	*BHL* 2761; *BHG* 641 (Siegmund)
Isidore†	Chios	before late 8th century: church by *porta Tiburtina*: Jost 2:332	*BHL* 4478; *BHG* 960f (Siegmund)

† Latin passio translated from Greek.
* Some versions do not tell of saint as soldier.
Jost M. Jost, *Die Patrozinien der Kirchen der Stadt Rom vom Anfang bis in das 10. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Neuried: Ars Una, 2000).

are of eastern origins: saints who were believed to have served in the Eastern Mediterranean, whose posthumous cults developed in Asia Minor, the Levant, or Egypt, and whose legends were originally written in Greek.

The cult for these saints took different forms. Most straightforwardly, churches, monasteries, or other ecclesiastical foundations were dedicated to eastern soldier-saints. By the later eighth century we find six dedications to such saints: St. Mennas, St. Theodore, St. George, Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, St. Hadrian, and St. Isidore of Chios. To these we may add St. Eustachius; although the legend of St. Eustachius describes him as a Roman general under Trajan martyred in Rome, the *passio* of Eustachius is a translation from the Greek.[14] Relics of these saints were venerated even when this did not give rise to an ecclesiastical dedication; in particular, an extensive list of relics with which Theodotus, a Roman elite, dedicated a new church in 755 includes the relics of at least three soldier-saints: Theodore, George, and Christopher.[15] Mosaics, frescoes and other representations also attest to an interest in these cults. Furthermore, the translation of cults was often accompanied by the translation of the texts that explained a saint and justified his veneration. Between roughly the seventh and ninth centuries, texts related to most of these saints were translated from Greek into Latin.[16] In general it is difficult to pinpoint where and when these translations occurred, but there is evidence to point to the translation, in Rome, of texts

Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554–800 (London: British School at Rome, 1984).

[14] H. Delehaye, "La légende de Saint Eustache," *Bulletins de la classe des letters et des sciences morales et politiques de l'Académie royale de Belgique* 4 (1919): 175–210; A. Monteverdi, *I testi della leggenda di S. Eustachio* (Bergamo, 1910).

[15] For a transcription and discussion see F. De Rubeis, "Epigrafi a Roma dall'età classica all'alto medioevo," in *Roma dall'Antichità al Medioevo: archeologia e storia: Archeologia e storia nel Museo Nazionale Romano, Crypta Balbi*, ed. Maria Stella Arena et al. (Milano: Electa, 2001), 118–19 n. 110. Also included is Demetrius, who according to some versions of his *passio* was a soldier. The relic collection of the Lateran's *sancta sanctorum* includes eighth/ninth-century authentics of George, Sergius and Bacchus, and the archangel Michael (see below): B. Galland and J. Vezin, *Les authentiques de reliques du Sancta Sanctorum* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2004).

[16] A. Siegmund, *Die Überlieferung der griechischen christlichen Literatur in der lateinischen Kirche bis zum zwölften Jahrhundert*, Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Benediktinerakademie (München-Pasing: Filser, 1949): see **Table 1**.

related to Cyrus, a monk, and his companion, the soldier, John, Sergius and Bacchus, and George.

Not all of Rome's early medieval soldier-saints were of eastern origin. One of Rome's most popular saints, St. Sebastian, was, according to his legend, one of Diocletian's personal guards.[17] In contrast to the above-mentioned eastern saints, however, the legends and iconography associated with Rome's few "native" soldier-saints were generally much less focused on their identity as soldiers. According to one legend, the Roman saints John and Paul (believed to be buried in their former house on the Caelian) were soldiers, but other variants describe them as servants or private citizens.[18] Also on the Caelian Hill was a church dedicated to the Quattro Coronati, whom later legend identified as military adjuncts (*cornicularii*) martyred under Diocletian, who, in a rather circuitous turn of events, were commemorated with the names of sculptors martyred in Pannonia under Diocletian.[19] Yet the most "militant" of Rome's soldier-saints were, for the most part, imports from the east.

Soldier-Saints for Soldiers: The Byzantine Presence in Rome

Although the surviving sources present the formation of Christian Rome as a feat of the Roman popes, there is no doubt that the Byzantine presence in Rome and Byzantine cultural influences helped shape Rome's sacred topography.[20] In the mid-sixth century, under the emperor Justinian,

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[17] Although the cult of St. Sebastian dates at least to the later fourth century, the *passio* describing him as one of the personal guards of Diocletian dates to the fifth or sixth century: W. Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter. Vol. I Von der Passio Perpetuae zu den Dialogi Gregors des Großen* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1986), 74–82; Gian Domenico Gordini, "Sebastiano di Roma," *BS* 11:766–790.

[18] Gioacchino De Sanctis, "Giovanni e Paolo," *BS* 6:1046–49. The *passio* of Gallicanus (*BHL* 3236–37; *AASS* Jun. V. 37C–39F) which accompanies that of John and Paul in many versions, tells of him as a retired general; however there is no material evidence for his cult in Rome.

[19] J. Guyon, "Les Quatre Couronnés et l'histoire de leur culte des origines au milieu du IXe siècle," *Mélangés de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité* 87 (1975): 505–61. Regarding the *passio* see also Berschin, *Biographie*, 66–74.

[20] The bibliography is vast; for an introduction see: J. Herrin, "Constantinople, Rome and the Franks in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," in *Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum 1992). Especially helpful for my

Byzantine forces set out to conquer the Italian peninsula from the Ostrogothic kings. Although much of their conquests were rapidly swept away during the Lombard invasions of the late sixth century, Rome and the exarchate of Ravenna remained part of the Byzantine Empire.

With Byzantine soldiers came their saints. This process is most evident in a Greek inscription from the Porta Appia, one of the primary gates leading into Rome. Inscribed on the interior archway of the gate is a cross (**fig. 2**). Above the cross is written, in Greek "God's Grace" (ΘΕΟΥ ΧΑΡΙΣ); below is an invocation, also in Greek, to Sts. George and Conon (ΑΓΙΕ ΚΩΝΟΝ, ΑΓΙΕ ΓΕΩΡΓΙ).[21] This inscription likely dates from the sixth century and may be reasonably associated with the restorations of the walls undertaken by one of the Byzantine commanders, Belisarius or Narses, during or immediately after the Gothic Wars. As such we may see it as the expression of Byzantine soldiers from the East, Greek-speaking Romans or other Italians serving in the Byzantine army, who sought divine assistance in their task of restoring and defending Rome.

George, as a soldier himself whose *passio* told of his heroic fortitude in the face of horrific tortures, was well-suited for the soldiers entrusted with protecting Rome's walls.[22] His cult was well-known throughout the

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purposes is J.-M. Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne: milieu du VIème s.–fin du IXème s.* (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1983), and many of the contributions to *Roma fra Oriente e Occidente: 19–24 aprile 2001*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 49 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2002). Regarding the continued impact of the Byzantine administration see R. Coates-Stephens, "The Forum Romanum in the Byzantine Period," in *Marmoribus vestita: Miscellanea in onore di Federico Guiobaldi*, ed. O. Brandt and P. Pergola, Studi di antichità cristiana 63 (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 2011) and especially R. Coates-Stephens, "Byzantine Building Patronage in Post-reconquest Rome," in *Les cités de l'Italie tardo-antique, IV–VI siècle: Institutions, économie, société, culture et religion*, ed. M. Ghilardi et al., Collection de l'École française de Rome 369 (Roma: École française de Rome, 2006), 160–64, discussing ecclesiastical dedications to soldier-saints that may be associated with the Byzantine administration.

[21] I.A. Richmond, *The City Wall of Imperial Rome: An Account of Its Architectural Development from Aurelian to Narses* (College Park, Md.: McGrath, 1971), 107–8; H.W. Dey, *The Aurelian wall and the refashioning of Imperial Rome, A.D. 271–855* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 295–97.

[22] Originally written in Greek, George's *passio* survives in countless versions; for an introduction to the Latin texts, see W. Haubrichs, *Georgslied und Georgslegende im frühen Mittelalter: Text und Rekonstruktion*, Theorie, Kritik, Geschichte 13 (Königstein/Ts.: Scriptor,

Byzantine Empire and from an early date he seems to have developed a reputation for protecting soldiers.[23] Meanwhile, St. Conon "the gardener," martyred in Pamphilia, or in other versions, Cyprus, was an eastern saint particularly noted for his thaumaturgical powers over demons.[24] Together the eastern saints George and Conon thus offered protection over natural and supernatural dangers.

Similarly, fresco evidence from Sta. Maria Antiqua at the foot of the Palatine Hill points to the involvement of Byzantine administrators in introducing soldier-saints to Rome.[25] Probably converted into a church around the mid-sixth century, Sta. Maria Antiqua seems initially to have been associated with the imperial palaces on the Palatine Hill.[26] The church is filled with frescoes which show close affinity to contemporaneous Byzantine art and are labeled with Greek inscriptions. Two separate fresco cycles in Sta. Maria Antiqua depict scenes of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, a set of saints popular throughout Byzantium, who were sentenced to freeze to death in an icy lake on account of their refusal to sacrifice (**fig. 3**).[27] Both fresco cycles are located in side-chapels where devotional images sponsored by private donors were customary. In the so-called Oratory of the Forty Martyrs, an exterior chapel, located by the entrance to the church, a seventh-century fresco in the apse shows the saints standing semi-nude in a lake.[28] This scene was likewise depicted in a side chapel on the left aisle of the

1979), 205–305. For the Greek development, still foundational is K. Krumbacher, *Der heilige Georg in der griechischen Überlieferung*, Abhandlungen der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse 25.3 (München: Verlag der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1911).

[23] D. Balboni, "Giorgio, santo matire," *BS* 6:511–525; Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 109–44.

[24] J.-M. Sauget, "San Conone l'ortolano," *BS* 4:152–154.

[25] The scholarship on this church is extensive; fundamental are W. de Grüneisen et al., *Sainte Marie Antique* (Rome: M. Bretschneider, 1911); Rushforth, "Church," 1–119; P. Romanelli and P.J. Nordhagen, *S. Maria Antiqua* (Roma: Istituto poligraphico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1964); E. Tea, *La Basilica di Santa Maria Antiqua*, Pubblicazioni della Università Cattolica del Sacre Cuore 5.14 (Milano: Società Editrice "Vita e Pensiero," 1937).

[26] R. Krautheimer, W. Frankl, S. Corbett, "S. Maria Antiqua," *CBCR* 2.3:249–68; Coates-Stephens, "Byzantine Building Patronage," 155–58.

[27] *AASS* Mar. II. 19D–21F.

[28] J. Nordhagen, "S. Maria Antiqua: The Frescoes of the Seventh Century," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 8 (1978): 131–35.

church, dated to the mid-seventh to mid-eighth century.[29] The popularity of these saints among the Constantinopolitan elite suggests that their presence in Sta. Maria Antiqua may be traced to Byzantine officials in Rome.[30]

Charitable Patrons for Roman Diaconiae

Yet we should not think of eastern saints as obscure or exotic figures in Rome or their cults as the preserves of isolated groups of Byzantine soldiers or administrators. There is no evidence in Rome for resistance toward these new cults. Quite the contrary, the cults of many soldier-saints became familiar presences in Rome and came to be recognized as the heavenly protectors and providers of the Roman people. This is most apparent with regard to the role of soldier-saints in underpinning a new Christian charitable institution, the *diaconiae*.

The early history of Rome's *diaconiae* is shrouded in mystery: what is clear is that these were charitable institutions, initially associated with Rome's Greek-speaking community, which nourished and assisted the poor and travelers.[31] The model of the *diaconia* first developed in the eastern Mediterranean and spread to Rome by way of Constantinople and/or

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[29] L. Jessop, "Pictorial Cycles of Non-Biblical Saints: The Seventh- and Eighth-Century Mural Cycles in Rome and Contexts for Their Use," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 67 (1999): 255–59. Fragmentary remains of a Greek inscription suggest that the fresco was a votive image. See also K. Gulowsen, "Some Iconographic Aspects of the Relationship between Santa Maria Antiqua and the Oratory of the Forty Martyrs," in *Santa Maria Antiqua al Foro Romano: Cento anni dopo. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale Roma, 5–6 maggio 2000*, ed. J. Osborne et al. (Roma: Campisano, 2005), 187–97, regarding the relationship between the two frescos.

[30] R. Janin, "Les églises byzantines des saints militaires (Constantinople et banlieue)," Échos d'*Orient* 34 (1935): 64–70.

[31] The foundational work on Rome's *diaconiae* remains O. Bertolini, "Per la storia delle diaconie romane nell'alto medio evo sino alla fine del secolo VIII," *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 70 (1947): 1–145, following on that of L. Duchesne, "Notes sur la topographie de Rome au moyen-âge: II. Les titres presbytéraux et les diaconies," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 7 (1887): 236–43 and J. Lestocquoy, "Administration de Rome et Diaconies du VIIe au IXe siècle," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 7 (1930): 261–98. A helpful overview is provided by R. Hermes, "Die stadtrömischen Diakonien," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 91 (1996): 1–120. Most recently see H.W. Dey, "Diaconiae, Xenodochia, Hospitalia and Monasteries: 'Social Security' and the Meaning of Monasticism in Early Medieval Rome," *Early Medieval Europe* 16 (2008): 398–422.

southern Italy, probably sometime in the seventh century. Their particularity as ecclesiastical institutions was underpinned by their distinctive dedications. Of the 22 *diaconiae* that existed by the end of the eighth century, almost all were dedicated either to the Virgin Mary or to "foreign saints."[32]

Five of these *diaconiae* are dedicated to soldier-saints: Hadrian, Eustachius, George, Sergius and Bacchus, and Theodore.[33] Little is known about the origins of these *diaconiae*, with the exception of Sant'Adriano (discussed below). In the case of S. Teodoro and SS. Sergio e Bacco, their locations suggest that their communities were associated to some degree with the Byzantine administration (**fig. 4**).[34] SS. Sergio e Bacco is located on the *forum Romanum* where construction would have required imperial permission[35]; S. Teodoro was located near to the Palatine area. Meanwhile S. Giorgio was located in Rome's "Greek" quarter.[36] The choice of soldier-saints likely reflected these communities—including diverse groups of current or erstwhile Byzantine functionaries—who had chosen to devote themselves to Christian charity. More generally, however, soldier-saints provided these *diaconiae* with saints who buttressed the ideals of their communities and assisted them in their tasks.

All of these saints were early Christian martyrs; successful soldiers until martyred for their Christianity by pagan emperors. They provided role-models of charitable giving and patient fortitude, suitable for both the administrators and clientele of the *diaconiae*. For example, Eustachius, although a pagan, devoted himself to charitable deeds—clothing the naked, feeding the hungry and providing justice to the oppressed; so bountiful was his charity that God decided to reveal Christianity to him; his good works paved the way for his Christian conversion and salvation.[37]

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[32] Exceptions: Sant'Angelo in Pescheria and Sant'Eustachio.

[33] A *diaconia* was also dedicated to Nereus and Achilleus (see above n. 12), but their later *passio* tells of them as eunuchs of the imperial family; absent is any reference to their rejection of military service: *AASS* May III. 6E–13B (*BHL* 6058, 6059, 6061, 6062, 6063, 6064, 6066).

[34] Coates-Stephens, "Byzantine Building Patronage," 160–61.

[35] M. Bonfioli, "La diaconia dei SS. Sergio e Bacco nel Foro Romano. Fonti e problemi," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 50 (1974): 55–85.

[36] R. Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 76.

[37] *AASS* Sep. VI. 123B–137B (this is *BHL* 2760, not *BHL* 2761, which Siegmund judges to be the older version); Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 163–69.

A hallmark of all of these saints' *passiones* is their patient endurance and resilience in the face of countless tortures. Theodore, when imprisoned for his refusal to sacrifice, even refuses to accept bread from his pagan guards.[38] Sergius, after his companion Bacchus has been martyred, runs miles with nails in his shoes, but does not desist from praising God.[39] Meanwhile the *passio* of Eustachius, a successful general, vividly testifies to how God rewards his followers for their tenacity. After he converts to Christianity, many trials befall Eustachius, in the manner of Job: his servants and livestock perish, and robbers take his wealth. Eustachius then travels with his wife and children to Egypt, but a sea captain seizes his wife and a lion and wolf snatch his sons. Nonetheless Eustachius perseveres—and he is rewarded by God. The emperor calls him back to lead troops to victory against the barbarians and Eustachius regains his wealth and family—before he suffers martyrdom. Thus the *passiones* of these saints hold out the hope of salvation—and even material success—against all odds. Most distinctive about these saints, however, is their active military service in the context of these ideals and aspirations: a model of active Christianity in the world that sharply contrasts with late antique models of ascetic withdrawal.

Further evidence of the appeal of soldier-saints as patrons for *diaconiae* is found in the dedicatory inscription of the *diaconia* which would become Sant'Angelo in Pescheria.[40] Prominently included in this inscription, immediately after Christ and the Virgin Mary, are the archangels Michael and Gabriel.[41] Their prominent placement explains how the *diaconia*, which, according to the inscription, was dedicated to St. Paul, very quickly came to be known as the *diaconia sancti Archangeli*.[42] Although strictly speaking not a soldier-saint, Michael, as the commander of the celestial army, who, with his invincible sword had conquered the dragon, Satan, was in many ways the ideal figure of militant Christian goodness.[43]

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38 *AASS* Nov. IV. 29F–39D, here 5, 34D–35D.

39 *AASS* Oct. III. 863D–870F, here 23–24, 868A–868D.

40 See above n. 15.

41 The archangels are included on line 5, immediately after Christ and the Virgin Mary and before the apostles.

42 Already in the *Liber Pontificalis*' Catalogue of 806/7, that is, about fifty years after its foundation, the church is referred to as the *diaconia sancti Archangeli.*

43 Rev 12:7–9.

Their role as patrons of charitable institutions helped naturalize the cults of these eastern saints, propelling them to greater popularity in Rome. Rome's *diaconiae* increasingly came under papal supervision, and by the ninth century the "eastern" character of these institutions and their communities had dwindled.[44] Eventually, by the eleventh century, the *diaconiae* lost all traces of their earlier charitable functions; they became parish churches assigned to cardinals; their position was one of prestigious power. Nonetheless they retained their dedications, which are, with a few exceptions, still found today, perpetuating the cults of these soldier-saints in Rome.

Civic Support

Thus far we have seen how eastern soldier-saints could offer physical protection to soldiers, such as those guarding Rome's walls, or act as role-models of charity and patient fortitude for a *diaconia*'s community. Finally, let us turn from these more personalized forms of assistance to the civic implications of soldier-saints. As these eastern cults were imported and appropriated to Rome, many came to serve as integral nodes in the Christianization of Rome's monumental past.[45] Soldier-saints provided one way for Christian Rome to tackle spaces, such as the *forum Romanum*, saturated with memories of the pagan gods and imperial glory.

In the early sixth century, in the context of closer relations between Constantinople and Ostrogothic Rome, Pope Felix dedicated a church to Cosmas and Damian, located in the *forum Pacis*, but facing out to the *via Sacra* (**figs. 4–5**).[46] As the first church to occupy a site within the *forum Romanum*, SS. Cosma e Damiano involved a particularly delicate renegotiation of contested space—and the spectacle which the church offered its viewers further emphasized its juxtaposition of pagan past and Christian present.[47] From the *via Sacra* the exterior of the church seems to have maintained its pre-Christian appearance; the round vestibule was

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[44] See the works cited in n. 31, esp. Frutaz.

[45] Regarding this process see generally Pani Ermini, ed., *Christiana loca*; R. Meneghini and R. Santangeli Valenzani, eds., *Roma nell'altomedioevo: Topografia e urbanistica della città dal V al X secolo* (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2004).

[46] B. Brenk, "Zur Einführung des Kultes der heiligen Kosmas und Damian in Rom," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 62 (2006): 303–20.

[47] *CBCR* 1:137–143; S. Episcopo, "SS. Cosmas et Damianus, Basilica," in *LTUR* 1:324–25.

entered through a bronze door flanked by two porphyry columns topped by an entablature, an entrance that gave no indication of the building's Christian content.[48] Entering the vestibule, located at an angle to the main hall of the church, visitors would have begun to glimpse the mosaic that dominated the hall.[49]

Against a shimmering blue background with reddish clouds stands an enormous golden Christ. To his right and left stand Peter and Paul, introducing the thaumaturgical saints Cosmas and Damian, holding their crowns, into his presence. Accompanying the healing connotations of Cosmas and Damian is St. Theodore, portrayed on the far end of the mosaic and even labeled. Theodore's presence adds a more pugnacious anti-pagan spirit to the *forum* dedication.[50] According to his *passio*, when Theodore was given time to reconsider his refusal to sacrifice he took the opportunity to burn down the temple of the mother of the gods during the night.[51] Christian healing is complemented by the eradication of the pagan past. Together these saints cleansed the *forum* and introduced the "certain hope of health/salvation (*spes certa salutis*)," as proclaimed by the mosaic's inscription.[52]

By the late sixth or early seventh century a *diaconia* at the foot of the Palatine Hill had also been dedicated specifically to Theodore—further embedding his cult as a potent force for combating the pagan past in the *forum* (**figs. 4, 6**). All that survives of this church is its heavily restored apse mosaic, which presents Christ enthroned with Peter and Paul introducing two saints.[53] Most likely these are St. Theodore of Amasea, depicted in SS. Cosma e Damiano, and the closely related St. Theodore of Tiron.

In contrast to the blunt appraisal of Christianization offered by the cult of Theodore, the later churches for Sergius and Bacchus and Hadrian offer more nuanced reflections on the inversion of the past achieved by Christianity. At the west end of the *forum Romanum* along the *via Sacra* stood the Roman senate house—once the administrative hub of the expansive

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48 E. Papi, "Tempio di Romolo," *LTUR* 4:210–212.

49 This observation is made by Brenk, "Zur Einführung," 312.

50 Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 44–66.

51 *AASS* Nov. IV. 29F–39D, here 3, 32D–32E.

52 E. Thunø, "Inscription and Divine Presence: Golden Letters in the Early Medieval Apse Mosaic," *Word & Image* 27 (2011): 289–90.

53 C. Bolgia, "Il mosaico absidale di San Teodoro a Roma: Problemi storici e restauri attraverso disegni e documenti inediti," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 69 (2001): 317–51.

Roman Empire (**figs. 4, 7**). In the early seventh century Pope Honorius (625–638) had this building converted, with minimal changes, into a church.[54] It was dedicated to St. Hadrian of Nicomedia, an army officer and pagan convert whose *passio* reflects on the futility of material rewards and noble birth[55]—attributes whose temporal meaning was still readily legible in the interior of the church, where the walls and floor retained their Diocletianic marble revetment and even the benches where the Roman senators had sat remained *in situ*.[56] Rather than erase the senate house's past, the cult of St. Hadrian infused it with Christian significance.

Similarly the *diaconia* dedicated to Sergius and Bacchus, located at the other side of the Arch of Septimius Severus from the church for Hadrian, positioned Christian soldier-saints at a site saturated with the pre-Christian Roman past (**fig. 4**). The *diaconia* was located at the end of the *via Sacra,* famed for its triumphal processions, and right next to the *umbilicus Romae*, a complicated tangle of poorly understood monuments which had visually represented the center of Rome and Rome's centrality in the world.[57] As soldiers who had refused to sacrifice at the temple of Jupiter—in Rome the ruins of a temple of Jupiter remained visible and recognized as such throughout the Middle Ages on the Capitoline above the new *diaconia*[58]—Sergius and Bacchus confidently asserted the Christian triumph over pagan traditions.[59] Furthermore, these saints had acquired a reputation as urban protectors, having miraculously protected the city of Sergiopolis

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[54] *LP* 72.6 [1:324.10 Duschene].

[55] Boninus Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*, 2 vols. (Milano: Mombritius, ca. 1477–1478), 1:7–12; 2nd ed. (Paris: Fontemoing, 1910), 1:22–30.

[56] S. Episcopo, "S. Hadrianus, ecclesia," *LTUR* 3:8–9; A. Mancini, "La chiesa medioevale di S. Adriano nel foro romano," *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, Rendiconti*, serie 3, 40 (1967–1968): 191–245.

[57] F. Coarelli, "Umbilicus Romae," *LTUR* 5:95–96; Z. Mari, "Miliarium Aureum," *LTUR* 3:250–51.

[58] S. De Angeli, "Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus, Aedes (Fasi Tardo-Rep. e Imp.)," *LTUR* 3:148–153, here 153.

[59] *AASS* Oct. III. 863D–870F; Walter, *Warrior Saints*, 146–62; E.K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 28 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

from Persian attack.[60] Their presence provided Rome with a new source of heavenly protection in its ancient core.

Nor did this distinctive Christian topography disappear with the increasing "papalization" of the *forum Romanum.* In the late eighth century, Pope Hadrian, with whose fresco of soldier-saints in Sta. Maria Antiqua I began, claimed to have extensively renovated many of the churches in the *forum*.[61] In doing so he maintained their preexisting dedications, further consolidating the cults of these eastern saints as integral parts of Roman Christianity—and appropriating them for a papal Rome. Numerous liturgical processions further knitted the *forum* to Rome's growing Christian topography.[62]

Individually, each of these soldier-saints helped renegotiate the *forum*'s pagan past in Christian terms; altogether they furnished Rome with a constellation of triumphal militant sanctity. This effect may be appreciated in the so-called "Einsiedeln itinerary," which provides us with a snapshot of Rome in the latter half of the eighth century.[63]

The "Einsiedeln itinerary" lays out sites in Rome, according to itineraries leading through the city. Four of the ten itineraries pass through the *forum Romanum*, indicating that the space was by no means forgotten. One such example, leading from St. Peter's to the Porta Asinaria, by the

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[60] Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.28 [ed. A. Hübner; transl. M. Whitby, 228–29]. That a version of the legend travelled west already in the sixth century is indicated by Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, VII.31 [ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison].

[61] Sant'Adriano: . . . *et basilicae sancti Adriani a noviter simili renovavit aedes* (*LP* 97.73 [1:508.1 Duschene]); SS. Cosma e Damiano: *Pariter et basilicam beati Cosme et Damiani . . . noviter renovavit totam* (*LP* 97.76 [1:508.21–23 Duschesne]); SS. Sergio e Bacco: . . . *a fundamentis in ampliorem restauravit decore nimio statum* (*LP* 97.90 [1.512.22–23 Duschene]).

[62] V. Saxer, "L'utilisation par la liturgie de l'espace urbain et suburbain: L'exemple de Rome dans l'Antiquité et le Haut Moyen Âge," in *Actes du XIe Congrès international d'archéologie chrétienne: Lyon, Vienne, Grenoble, Genève et Aoste (21–28 Septembre 1986)*, 3 vols., ed. N. Duval, Studi di antichità cristiana 41 (Roma: Pontifico Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1989), 2:1000–1008 (Appendix VI–VII), 2:1016–19 (Appendix IX). For example the processions of the Marian feast days of the Purification (February 2) or the nativity of Mary began at Sant'Adriano.

[63] Codex Einsidlensis 326: F.A. Bauer, "Das Bild der Stadt Rom in karolingischer Zeit: Der Anonymus Einsidlensis," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 92 (1997): 190–228.

Lateran, provides a representative example of how profoundly soldier-saints had come to define the area (**fig. 8**).[64] Included in this itinerary is S. Sergio, identified as "where the umbilicus of Rome is" and shortly thereafter towards the right, S. Giorgio. Then, after passing through the Arch of Septimius Severus, we find Sant'Adriano, Sta. Maria Antiqua, SS. Cosma e Damiano and towards the right, S. Teodoro.

Embedded among Rome's ancient monuments, these eastern saints had come to define Rome's sacred topography. Furthermore, as the itinerary demonstrates, this Roman appropriation had ramifications far beyond Rome. Although based on materials that must have been written in Rome, the "Einsiedeln itinerary" was copied north of the Alps, in Fulda.[65] It was made for armchair travelers, most of whom would never set foot in Rome. The itineraries allowed them to visit the *urbs sacra* in the mind's eye. Moreover, the Carolingian fascination with Rome entailed not only studying the city's sacred topography, but even creating miniature Romes across Europe—and thus the cults of George, Sergius and Bacchus, Hadrian, and other eastern soldier-saints proliferated across Western Europe

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[64] ff. 82v–84r; G. Walser, *Die Einsiedler Inschriftensammlung durch Rom (Codex Einsidlensis 326)*, Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 53 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1987), 189–96 (Route no. 8).

[65] K. Gugel, *Welche erhaltenen mittelalterlichen Handschriften dürfen der Bibliothek des Klosters Fulda zugerechnet werden? Teil I: Die Handschriften*, Fuldaer Hochschulschriften 23a (Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1995), 60–61 (no. 326).

Fig. 1. Virgin Mary surrounded by saints and Pope Hadrian, Sta. Maria Antiqua, Rome, atrium (photo after Wilpert, 1917, fig. 195)

Fig. 2. Porta Appia, Rome (photo by author)

Fig. 3. Map of Sta. Maria Antiqua (after Rushforth, 1902, p. 18); Forty Martyrs, side aisle (photo after Wilpert, 1917, fig. 177.4); Oratory of the Forty Martyrs (photo after Wilpert, 1917, fig. 199)

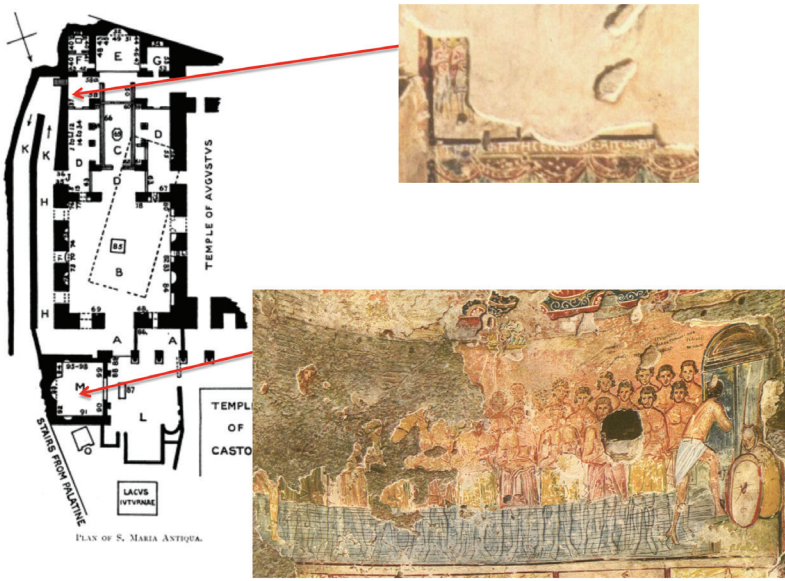


Fig. 4. Churches in forum Romanum (map after Nordisk familjebok, 1916, band 23, artikeln "Rom")

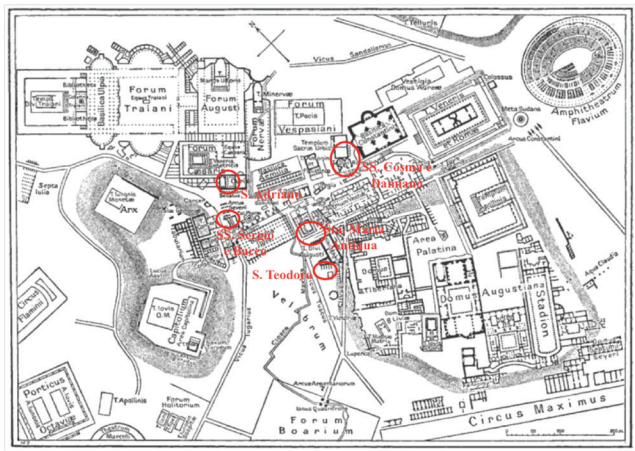
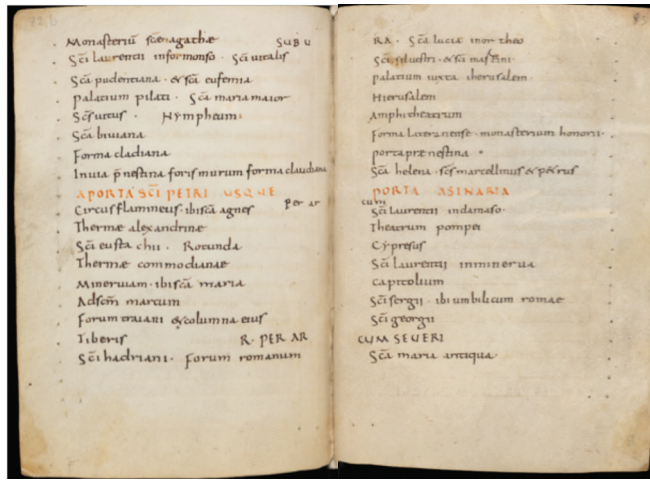


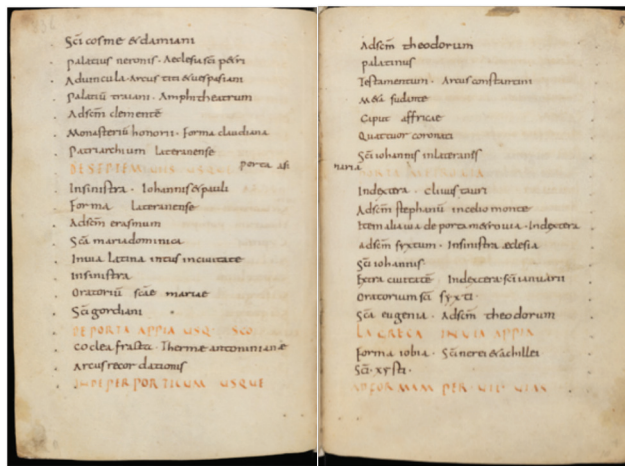
Fig. 5. SS. Cosma e Damiano, Rome, apse mosaic (photo by author)

Fig. 6. S. Teodoro, Rome, apse mosaic (photo from Jim Forest)

Fig. 7. Roman Senate House (Sant'Adriano), Rome, exterior (photo by author); reconstruction of interior (photo from ULCA Digital Forum)

Fig. 8. Codex Einsidlensis 326, fols. 82v–84r (photo from e-codices: http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/sbe/0326)





The Third Side of the Coin: Constructing Superhero Comics Culture as Religious Myth

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The claim that superhero comics culture is a modern religious and/or mythopoeic expression has been repeated so often by academic observers of pop culture over the years, it has assumed the dimensions of a modern myth in its own right. It has provided the driving thesis behind a chorus of academic works that has mushroomed steadily over the decades,[1] and inspired a considerable trend in teaching about religion in North American universities.[2] Critically evaluating this claim that superhero comics culture is in effect a modern religious or mythopoeic expression can, though, feel at times like reading comics produced by M.C. Escher, since superhero comics "mythology" so often includes elaborate homage to (and exuberant plagiarism of) real-world religions and myths, including the religions and myths held sacred by the heroes themselves.[3] To complete

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[1] From Umberto Eco's "The Myth of Superman," trans. Natalie Chilton, *Diacritics* 2, no. 1 (Spring, 1972): 14–22 to Andrew R. Bahlmann's *The Mythology of the Superhero* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016), such scholarly studies have grown steadily in terms of both quantity and sophistication. See Sections 1 and 2 below for representative works.

[2] See, e.g., Jeffrey M. Brackett, "Religious Studies 201: Religion and Popular Culture" (Class Syllabus, 2014; Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana); Ellen Kellman, "NEJS 176b: Jewish Graphic Novels" (Class Syllabus, 2015; Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts); Ken Koltun-Fromm and Yvonne Chireau, "Relg 144: Reading Comics and Religion," (Class Syllabus, 2016; Haverford University, Haverford, Pennsylvania); Salvatore Pane, "FYS 110 01: Superheroes or Supergods?" (Class Syllabus, 2013; University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana); Kevin Wanner, "REL 3111: Superhero Comic Book Religion" (Class Syllabus, 2015; University of Western Michigan, Kalamazoo, Michigan).

[3] On the use of religious and mythological materials in superhero comics, see Danny Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Society* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 13–16, 24–25; Greg Garrett, *Holy Superheroes! Exploring the Sacred in Comics, Graphic Novels, and Film* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), ix; Christine Hoff Kraemer and Lawton Winslade, "'The Magic Circus of the Mind': Alan Moore's Promethea and the Transformation of Consciousness through Comics," in *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, ed. A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer

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the picture of confusion, one needs only to note the fact that "religion" and "myth" are both notoriously difficult to define to begin with,[4] and the related fact that taking any given set of phenomena seriously as "religious data" effectively *makes it* religious data for the practical purposes of human cultures and their study—a further layer of recursivity pregnant with its own puzzles and problems.[5]

To avoid either further muddying these waters or imposing a convenient but false clarity upon them, this study promotes no definitive theory of religion or myth (vis-à-vis superhero comics culture or otherwise). Instead, I offer two "locker room" sections that summarily "try

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(New York: Continuum, 2010), 274–91; Roz Kaveney, *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders in Comics and Films* (London: New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 37–43; Christopher Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes* (San Francisco: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2007), 189–211; A. David Lewis, *American Comics, Literary Theory, and Religion: The Superhero Afterlife* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Paul Levitz, *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking* (Köln: Taschen, 2010), 48, 495, 539, 565, 611, 619, 630, 684; Don LoCicero, *Superheroes and Gods: A Comparative Study from Babylonia to Batman* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 163, 168; Saurav Mohapatra, "Echoes of Eternity: Hindu Reincarnation Motifs in Superhero Comic Books," in Lewis et al., *Graven Images*, 121–32; Angela Ndlianis, "Do We Need Another Hero?" in *Super/Heroes: From Hercules to Superman*, ed. Wendy Haslem et al. (Washington: New Academia, 2007), 2–3; Darby Orcutt, "Comics and Religion: Theoretical Connections," in Lewis et al., *Graven Images*, 93–106; B.J. Oropeza, "Introduction: Superhero Myth and the Restoration of Paradise," in *The Gospel According to Superheroes: Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. B.J. Oropeza (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 3–4; Thom Parham, "Superheroes in Crisis: Postmodern Deconstruction in Comic Books and Graphic Novel," in Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, 211; Richard Reynolds, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1992), 9–10, 53–60, 69; Scott Rosen, "Gods and Fantastic Mortals: The Superheroes of Jack Kirby," in Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, 113–26; Andrew Tripp, "Killing the Graven God: Visual Representations of the Divine in Comics," in Lewis et al., *Graven Images*, 107–20; Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up and Oy Vey! How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero* (Baltimore: Leviathan, 2006), 15–18.

[4] See Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84; Russell McCutcheon, "Myth," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: Cassell, 2000), 190–208.

[5] See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jamestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

on" common academic approaches to religion and myth, to establish how well they "fit" the superhero comics culture data most commonly identified (in both "positive" and "negative" terms) as religious and/or mythopoeic in nature, and then I close with an "on-ice" third section of conclusions about the ethics of scholarly participation in such an interpretive game. My three-step presentation of the state of the question thus offers a critical-appreciative review of the phenomenon of treating superhero comics culture as a religious/mythopoeic expression from the most basic kind of Religious Studies perspective. The overall thesis served by my review is that the most common ways of reading superhero comics culture as a religious/mythopoeic expression are, to date, unfortunately little more than self-serving and self-fulfilling prophecies, which thereby turn out in the end to be critically self-limiting.

Locker Room Section 1. The "Up" Side of the Coin: Promoting Superhero Comics Culture as a Modern Religious/Mythopoeic Expression

Academics who focus on the "up" side of the idea that superhero comics culture now does "what mythology used to, and if you get into that you can't avoid the question of religion,"[6] are an enthusiastic, even evangelical group, and their studies are characterized by hermeneutics of optimism and celebration. The common pop culture claim that superheroes do for moderns what gods used to do for the ancients is accepted in this literature,[7] and its scholarly promotion is justified in two ways: First, it is stressed that superhero comics culture constitutes a very big body of very widely shared and highly valued stories: it seems to be at work everywhere, these "up" side scholars point out,[8] and it seem to inspire in many people a "religious"

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[6] Dennis O'Neill, "Notes from the Batcave," interview with Roberta E. Pearson and William Urrichio, in *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, ed. Robert E. Pearson and William Uricchio (London: Routledge, 1991), 10.

[7] See, e.g., Anne Billson, "Men of Steel: Are Superheroes the New Gods?" *The Telegraph*, June 17, 2013; Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex*, 16, 189; Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (New York: Random House 1996), 14; Rob Salkowitz, "Marvel Universe Co-Creator Jack Kirby is Having a Moment," *Forbes,* January 18, 2016.

[8] Fingeroth, *Our Gods Wear Spandex*, 169; Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 3–5; Kaveney, *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders*, 46; Ndalianis, "Do We Need Another Hero?" 1–2;

kind of zeal.[9] These observations are treated as proof that the "cult of the superhero" is widespread and powerful.[10] Second, superhero stories are conceived as a resource capable of helping people better understand and engage the real world.[11] They are approached as a narrative-driven source of sublime and timeless truths,[12] imbued with the power to inspire people not only to wonder but also to the achievement of moral excellence and personal self-actualization.[13]

For these reasons, "up" side writers promote approaching superhero comics culture as a modern pop repository of "religious myth,"[14] often explicitly describing superhero comics culture as a "religious

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Oropeza, "Introduction: Superhero Myth," 2–3; Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 7.

[9] LoCicero, *Superheroes and Gods*, 163; Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 7–8.

[10] Fingeroth, *Our Gods Wear Spandex*, 24.

[11] Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 19–25; Robert G. Weiner, "Sixty-Five Years of Guilt Over the Death of Bucky," in *Captain America and the Struggle of the Superhero: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert G. Weiner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 90–91.

[12] Terry Ray Clark, "Prophetic Voices in Graphic Novels: The 'Comic and Tragic Vision' of Apocalyptic Rhetoric in Kingdom Come and Watchmen," in *The Bible in/and Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter*, ed. Philip Culbertson and Elaine M. Mainwright (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 142–43; John T. Galloway Jr., *The Gospel According to Superman* (New York: A.J. Holman, 1973), 19, 24–31, 141; Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, x–ix, 7–8 119–20; B.J. Oropeza, "Conclusion: Superheroes in God's Image," in Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, 269–271; C.K. Robertson, "The True Übermensch: Batman as Humanistic Myth," in Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, 49–65; Scott Rosen, "Gods and Fantastic Mortals," 124.

[13] Jamie Egolf, "Dreaming Superman: Exploring the Action of the Superhero(ine) in Dreams, Myth, and Culture," in Haslem et al., *Super/Heroes*, 139–51; Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 14–19, 172, 17–178; Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 117, 7–8 119–20; Oropeza, "Conclusion: Superheroes in God's Image," 269; Robert M. Peaslee, "Superheroes, 'Moral Economy,' and the 'Iron Cage': Morality, Alienation, and the Super-Individual," in Haslem et al., *Super/Heroes*, 37–50; Rosen, "Gods and Fantastic Mortals," 124; Ken Schenck, "Superman: A Popular Culture Messiah," in Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, 44; Weinstein, *Up, Up and Oy Vey!*, 15–18, 123–26.

[14] Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle, *Superman at Fifty: The Persistence of a Legend* (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 86.

phenomenon"[15] and/or a "modern mythology."[16] The notions that underwrite these descriptions—notions about what "religion" and "myth" are and do—are eminently understandable. Religious Studies scholars and other academics have, after all, often theorized and explored world-building and community-building functions in "religion"[17] and "myth."[18] Many have even tried to find in "religion" and "myth" coded messages about individual self-actualization.[19] The picture of "religious mythologies" as bodies of particularly widespread and valued stories of sublime suggestiveness and moral import is therefore not idiosyncratic to the "up" side writers who promote treating superhero comics culture as modern religious mythology. This popular conception of religious mythology is in fact actively at work in the academic study of religion.

If many academics and pop culture commentators have been quick to claim that superhero comics culture is a modern religious mythology, it bears noticing that comic makers and marketers have rushed to agree

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[15] Les Daniels and Chip Kidd, *Superman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 10; Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 24; Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 91; LoCicero, *Superheroes and Gods*, 163; Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 7–8.

[16] Bahlmann, *Mythology of the Superhero*, 3–24; Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 39; Clark, "Prophetic Voices in Graphic Novels," 146–55; Daniels and Kidd, *Superman: The Complete History*, 10; Egolf, "Dreaming Superman," 151; Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 173; Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 5, 7; Tim Lanzendörfer, "Superheroes, Social Responsibility, and the Metaphor of Gods in Mark Waid and Alex Ross's Kingdom Come," in *Comics – Bilder, Stories und Sequenzen in religiösen Deutungskulturen*, ed. Jörn Ahrens, Frank T. Brinkmann, and Nathanael Riemer (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 143–44; LoCicero, *Superheroes and Gods*, 176; Ndalianis, "Do We Need Another Hero?" 2; Oropeza, "Conclusion: Superheroes in God's Image," 270; Robertson, "The True Übermensch," 60–62; Schenck, "Superman," 44.

[17] See, e.g., Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), 37–41; Peter Mandaville and Paul James, *Globalization and Culture, Vol. 2: Globalizing Religions* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 27.

[18] See, e.g., Kees W. Bolle, "Myth: An Overview," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (2nd ed.; New York: Thomson Gale, 2005), 6361–69; Northrop Frye and Jay MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths: The Mythological Framework of Western Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 7–18, 275–278.

[19] See, e.g., Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (New York: MJF Books, 1949); Frye and MacPherson, *Biblical and Classical Myths*; Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Anchor, 1964).

that their products *should* be thought of as providing modern mythologies comparable to the ancient.[20] Such superhero comic makers and marketers agree that superhero comics culture is a true "mythology" because it is almost universally known in modern global society,[21] and because it speaks to the human condition,[22] showing "the way humans wish themselves to be; ought, in fact, to be."[23] It teaches the importance of "fighting evil," for example, world-famous superhero comics creator and promoter Stan Lee insists, which is "religious" in the putatively universal and non-confessional way of teaching the Golden Rule.[24] Comics companies are, then, naturally, from this point of view, venerable wellsprings of "modern mythmaking,"[25] and Superman is functionally speaking an "American Christ."[26]

Scholars who share this enthusiastic perspective often promote superhero comics culture as a positive moral force: "Superhero comics and films are not merely a vast narrative construct," Roz Kaveney insists, for example, "about men and women with bulging muscles and fetishist costumes; they are about the real meaning of truth and justice, and ways of living in the world."[27] Even the obvious super-heroic addiction to extrajudicial violence is seen as inspirational from this point of view, as it

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[20] Dooley and Engle, *Superman at Fifty*, 86; Adi Granov, "Foreword," in *Marvel: 75 Years of Cover Art*, ed. Alan Cowsill (New York: DK Publishing, 2014), 6; Stan Lee, "Foreword," in Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, xi–xii; Paul Levitz, *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking* (Köln: Taschen, 2010), 8; Paul Levitz, "Foreword," in *DC Comics: A Visual History*, ed. Alan Cowsill et al. (New York: DK Publishing, 2014), 6; Grant Morrison, "Interview," *Wizard: The Comics Magazine* 143 (August 2003), 180; Grant Morrison, *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), xvii; Joe Quesada, "Afterword," in *Marvel Year By Year: A Chronicle*, ed. Catherine Saunders et al. (New York: DK Publishing, 2014), 374; James Steranko, *The History of Comics*, 2 vols. (Reading, PA: Supergraphics, 1970–1972), 2:52.

[21] Granov, "Foreword," 6.

[22] Stan Lee, "Foreword," in Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 10.

[23] Elliott S. Maggin, "The New Bards: An Introduction," in Mark Waid and Alex Ross, *Kingdome Come* (New York: DC Comics, 2008), 6.

[24] Lee, "Foreword," in Oropeza, *The Gospel According to Superheroes*, xii.

[25] Levitz, *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking* (See Section 3 below).

[26] Morrison, "Interview," 180.

[27] Kaveney, *Superheroes! Capes and Crusaders*, 267.

stresses the importance of courage seeking justice, and redirects the worst of our own tendencies toward real violence.[28]

In the work of some doubly evangelical apologists, the modern religious mythology of superhero comics culture is said to deserve attention and respect because the transcendent ideals it expresses can inspire real people to lead more authentic spiritual lives in the real world.[29] Promoting superhero comics culture is not, therefore, limited to defending it from educated disdain. Superhero comics narratives can, from this enthusiastic point of view, also be treated as a source of "religious" and "mythic" cultural critique.[30] Terry Ray Clark, for example, applied Conrad Ostwalt's assertion that "[s]ecular fiction can operate as myth to offer insight [regarding] spiritual issues," and "critique a culture's ideologies, religious institutions, and moral codes" to the graphic novels *Watchmen* and *Kingdom Come*, in order to argue that they are "prophetic voices" revealing to the modern secular world the ultimate futility of violence.[31]

These, then, are the common reasons scholars give for treating superhero comics culture as religious myth, and they are indeed in line with a conception of "religion" and "myth" that is easy to find within both popular culture and scholarly culture. One can appreciate some of the good intentions of these scholarly reasonings without necessarily always agreeing, and add that sharing satisfying systems of emotion and imagination, finding new values in old things and vice versa, etc., can be seen as good things in and of themselves, however we may judge their use case by case. As we will see in the next section, though, the approving and optimistic popular conception of "religion" and "myth" promoted by the "up" side writers only supplies part of the scholarly picture.

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[28] Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 21, 119–37; Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 75.

[29] See, e.g., H. Michael Brewer, *Who Needs a Superhero? Finding Virtue, Vice, and What's Holy in the Comics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004); Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 117, 120; Galloway, *Gospel According to Superman*, 19, 24–31, 141; Oropeza, "Conclusion: Superheroes in God's Image," 269–71.

[30] Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 75–79.

[31] Clark, "Prophetic Voices in Graphic Novels," 142–43, quoting Conrad Ostwalt, *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 107.

Locker Room Section 2. The "Down" Side of the Coin: Interrogating Superhero Comics Culture as a Modern Religious/Mythopoeic Expression

Scholars who treat superhero comics culture as modern religious myth are not always positive and enthusiastic. Some express doubts about the likely moral influence of superhero mythology, or otherwise introduce hermeneutics of suspicion. Danny Fingeroth wondered openly, for example (in his otherwise optimistic work on superhero comics culture as a morally promising body of modern mythology) about the level of moral inspiration to be found in stories of vigilantes who solve every problem with miraculously powerful fists.[32] John T. Galloway Jr. argued in his explicitly Christian theological study that although Superman inspires people positively, and positively reflects a Judeo-Christian heritage, Superman's attractive image also raises the spectre of a "god of pop religion" who requires no meaningful commitment.[33]

Other scholars have criticized superhero religious mythology for its sexual politics, noting ruefully that, "like other religions, the world of superhero [pop culture] is a boys' club"[34]—as indeed the worlds of superhero comics[35] and Religious Studies[36] themselves often unfortunately still seem to be.

This last point about the need to interrogate the relationship of a society's mythology to its structures of power does indeed seem pertinent here. It is widely accepted, after all, by observers in and out of the academy that religion "acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations" in people,[37] and that religious mythmaking has always been implicated in the political construction of power,[38] very often in the

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[32] Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 21.

[33] Galloway, *The Gospel According to Superman*, 19, 24–31, 141.

[34] Anne Billson, "Men of Steel: Are Superheroes the New Gods?" *The Telegraph*, June 17, 2013.

[35] Kaveney, *Superheroes!*, 16–20; Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 79–83.

[36] Randi R. Warne, "(En)gendering Religious Studies," *Studies in Religion/Science Religieuses* 27 (1998): 427–36.

[37] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Book, 1973), 90.

[38] Bolle, "Myth: An Overview," 6360–69.

service of a real or ideal *status quo*.[39] It has also often been noted that comics and superheroes have proven themselves to be handy tools for all kinds of propaganda.[40] For these reasons alone, the phenomenon of superhero comics culture as religious myth has a serious built-in potential "down" side. Umberto Eco argued, for example, that "the Superman myth" might actually function to *obstruct* meaningful moral awareness and individual agency, since Superman invests his cosmic powers primarily into protecting local private property, and since "doing good" in his narrative world is essentially limited to charity by the fact that no big or permanent change is ever really allowed to happen.[41]

From this more suspicious point of view, the common boast that superheroes are largely immune to change[42] does indeed look like potential bad news. If every true "superhero has a mission to preserve society and not re-invent it,"[43] the promises of moral improvement and prophetic critique reviewed above in the analysis of the promoters of the "up" side of the story sound a bit hollow. It has, I note, been counter-argued that comic book superheroes are not *all* as supportive of the *status quo* as Eco's analysis of Superman might imply, since some heroes can be seen to oppose or protest a given *status quo*.[44] This tendency is indeed worth noticing and exploring, but its mere existence does not exonerate superhero comics culture of all charges of the worst kind of (capitalist) conservatism. Just as electrical resistors ultimately serve the stability of the circuits they modify, rebellious heroes blowing off steam in fiction can presumably serve the stability of repressive *status quo* systems. It has also been rightly noted that the hero worship and

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39 McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 33.

40 See, e.g., Annalisa Di Liddo, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009); Fingeroth, *Superman On the Couch*, 19; Frederik Strömberg, *Comic Art Propaganda: A Graphic History* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2010); Kate Netzler, "A Hesitant Embrace: Evangelicals and Comic Books," in Lewis and Hoff Kraemer, *Graven Images*, 218–29.

41 Eco, "The Myth of Superman," 17–19, 21–22.

42 Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 34; Levitz, *The Art of Modern Mythmaking*, 702.

43 Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 77.

44 Peaslee, "Superheroes, 'Moral Economy,' and the 'Iron Cage,'" 50.

muscular easy answers of *any* superhero comics culture is actively, seriously dangerous when imported directly into real-world politics.[45]

These are some risks that "down" side scholars have perceived in the putative phenomenon of superhero comics culture as religion and/or mythology. To these, one might add the basic observation that sales are one of the explicit controlling goals of superhero comics culture's production, which means that participation in the phenomenon of treating it as religious myth will usually amount to supporting one entertainment giant or another. Promoting the idea that special, powerful people fix problems with violence can also, it should be noted, encourage a hazardous social addiction to hero worship and "golden violence" that is already an epidemic in pop culture generally[46] and superhero comics culture specifically insofar as it relates to the interpretation and deployment of religious traditions about righteous victimhood and revenge.[47] As the next section suggests, though, the scholarly promotion and the critique of superhero comics culture as a modern religious/mythopoeic expression are both severely limited, as long as such boosters and critics ignore the fact that they themselves are engaged in actively constructing both "religion" and "myth."

On-Ice Section. The Third Side of the Coin: Constructing Superhero Comics Culture as a Modern Religious/Mythopoeic Expression

In 2010, thirty-eight years after Eco published his critique of "the myth of Superman," DC Comics partnered with Taschen Books to release *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking*, edited by Paul Levitz. The book's 721 pages and $490 CAD price tag conspire to encourage the impression that DC "mythology" is a serious, "weighty" business (the book itself weighs 14.5 pounds, or 6.5 kilos), and DC superhero comics culture is praised as "myth," "mythology," and "mythmaking" on the dust jacket alone.

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[45] Louis Krasniewicz, "'True Lies' Superhero: Do We Really Want Our Icons to Come to Life?" in Haslem et al., *Super/Heroes*, 12–19.

[46] See Robert Jewett, *The American Monomyth* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988); John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

[47] See Aaron Ricker, "The Devil's Reading: Revenge and Revelation in American Comics," in Lewis and Kraemer, *Graven Images*, 15–23.

"Superman is our version of Greek myth," the back cover proclaims, for example, in a quote attributed to Gloria Steinem, since he is "an inspiration to ordinary people," and such laudatory references to DC superhero comics culture as "myth/mythology" continue throughout inside.[48]

Of course, boasting about 75 years of mythmaking is itself mythmaking, and in this case also marketing. The claim repeated by Levitz in a later similarly glossy volume that DC is a source of "complex mythology" serves his claim on the same page of that volume that DC is "America's greatest and longest running comic publisher."[49] Joe Quesada's similar claim—made the exact same year, for the exact same publisher—that Marvel's "mythology" compares positively with classical mythology[50] similarly serves the claim made in that volume that Marvel is "the most captivating comic book company of all time."[51] Such claims about the status of superhero comics culture as a modern religious/mythopoeic expression do not, therefore, simply reflect a common modern experience or perception. They also feed a cultural money machine, and indicate something about the potentially self-serving motivations behind the invocation of religious myth in such a context. If superhero comics culture is a modern religious mythology (the logic of this rhetoric implies), then it deserves to be taken very seriously, and supported with all due critical attention, media buzz, and massive cross-media-platform sales.

The fact that promoting superhero comics culture as a significant modern religious mythological expression in a situation where its products are proprietary mass-marketable properties amounts to a highly interested and self-fulfilling claim does not only highlight the nature and relevance of the likely motivations of makers and marketers. It also points to a basic but unrecognized responsibility on the part of those playing the part of cultural observers. In his 2000 essay on understanding "myth" for the purposes of Religious Studies, Russell McCutcheon suggests, after reviewing the ways in which people (including scholars) commonly use myths and the word myth, "that myths are not special (or 'sacred') but ordinary means of fashioning and authorizing their lived-in and believed-in 'worlds,' [and] that a people's

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48 Levitz, *The Art of Modern Mythmaking*, 8, 9, 469, 508, 559, 587, 588, 627, 630, 637, 703.

49 Paul Levitz, "Foreword," in Cowsill et al., *DC Comics*, 6.

50 Quesada, "Afterword," 374.

51 Tom DeFalco, "Introduction," in Saunders et al., *Marvel Year By Year*, 8.

use of the label 'myth' reflects, expresses, explores and legitimizes their own self-image."[52] Following Roland Barthes in seeing myth as a "network" of "assumptions and representations," and Jonathan Z. Smith in seeing myth as a social "strategy," McCutcheon concludes that a given society's "myths" are in fact "the product and the means of creating authority."[53] McCutcheon's assessment recalls myth scholar Bruce Lincoln's conclusion that "myth is ideology in narrative form."[54]

From the point of view outlined by Lincoln and McCutcheon, if there is a danger in myth, it is not the long-feared possibility that it might spread useless lies.[55] The real danger of an insufficiently critical approach to myth lies in the possibility of participating without due care in a largely invisible and even unconscious way of manufacturing and supporting social structures of ideology and power. In the present case of the modern myth of superhero comics culture *as* modern myth, such ideological assumptions needing investigation would include the assumptions seen above that "self-actualization" is a religious/mythopoeic goal, or that the Golden Rule is "religious" in some universal, non-confessional sense. A person could review a lot of myths, for example, in Hittite tablets or Indian dance, without ever seeing individual self-actualization or the Golden Rule emerge as central messages. The identification of true myth and religion with such purposes and messages therefore seems to serve a very particular modern (post-)Christian point of view, rather than the timeless, universal spiritual needs of any particular putative *homo religiosus*.

A modern culture of "spiritual" consumerism can also be served by uncritical approaches to superhero comics culture as religious myth. According to Thomas Luckmann, the most successful new ("invisible") religion of the modern world is the cult of "self-realization"[56] that "supports the functioning of modern industrial societies . . . without explicitly

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[52] McCutcheon, "Myth," 200.

[53] McCutcheon, "Myth," 201–7.

[54] Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147.

[55] On the common elite intellectual expression of this fear, see Bolle, "Myth: An Overview," 6386; Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, ix–x; McCutcheon, "Myth," 190–91.

[56] Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 107–14.

legitimating them."[57] If Luckmann is right about the "invisible [capitalist] religion" of self-realization, it is important to notice that when superhero comics culture is held up by makers and marketers as an inspiration to moderns starved for "spiritual leaders"[58] their claim does not merely position them as moving into the inspiring, authoritative positions of those needed leaders; it also courts (and helps to construct) an audience willing to be "spiritual without necessarily being religious" primarily through its consumer habits. It is certainly true that the "Spiritual But Not Religious" demographic of North American society is large and growing,[59] and that one of its most obvious public manifestations takes the form of consumers seeking individual self-actualization from sources "selling spirituality."[60] By uncritically accepting common ideas of "religion" and "myth" in their approaches to superhero comics culture, scholars support makers and marketers in promoting this commodified spirituality. The common assumption, for example, that massive sales at the bookstore and box office are sufficient evidence of the importance of the religious myth of superhero comics culture[61] indicates how deeply such scholars are buying into the kinds of assumptions and values just discussed. Their own local imam or Quaker circle may not, for example, see a powerful ability to attract disposable money as the mark of a particularly representative or interesting religious mythic expression.

For these reasons, it should also be noted in closing that McCutcheon's observation that "people's use of the label 'myth' reflects, expresses, explores and legitimizes their own self-image"[62] applies to scholars as well. "If myth is ideology in narrative form, then scholarship is myth with footnotes," writes Lincoln: "Students of myth seem particularly given to producing mythic,

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[57] Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*, 116.

[58] Morrison, *Supergods*, xvii.

[59] See, e.g., Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–12; Cary Funk and Gregory A. Smith, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2012), 41–44.

[60] Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1–29.

[61] Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 24; Garrett, *Holy Superheroes*, 3–5; Oropeza, "Introduction: Superhero Myth," 23.

[62] McCutcheon, "Myth," 200.

that is, ideological, narratives, perhaps because the stories they tell about storytelling reflect back on them."[63] By choosing what to study as religion, scholars help define religion, and the ways in which we do this can often look lazy and (confessionally and/or professionally) self-serving.[64] For these reasons, when scholars choose what "religious myth" means by choosing what to study as religious myth,[65] they are as likely to make self-interested and self-fulfilling claims as the makers and marketers discussed above. A decision to read Superman as religious myth through the pop philosophy lens of Joseph Campbell[66] may therefore understandably be criticized as being too easy an answer to reveal much,[67] but it may also be criticized as constructing interpretive authority in self-serving and obfuscative ways, for example by promoting the implied office of a (post-)Christian universal culture interpreter whose expertise promises to reveal "the real underlying meaning" of any and all valuable human mythmaking.

Reading superhero comics culture as religion and myth in the (positive and negative) ways reviewed above may serve to justify and valorize the further pursuit of three topics that a certain kind of North American scholar already knows and likes, more than to discover anything widely or particularly useful. It is easy in such a situation for a scholar focusing on the intersection of religion, mythmaking, and comics culture to end up saying, in effect, "Look at how relevant these things are that I already know and like! The academic world ought to validate my attention to their theoretical intersections with middle-level publications and appointments." Jonathan Z. Smith's point that the "student of religion . . . must be relentlessly self-conscious"[68] is therefore well taken here, especially given the problems involved in trying to see and understand the most significant myths of one's own culture.[69] If it is not always clear which myths are most effectively at work in constructing and maintaining social structures of ideology and power—even to those people most actively and consciously involved in a

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63 Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 209.

64 McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 27–50, 127–57.

65 See also Bolle, "Myth: An Overview," 6369.

66 See, e.g., Reynolds, *Superheroes*, 60–66.

67 See Geoff Klock, *How to Read Superhero Comics… and Why* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 10.

68 Smith, *Imagining Religion*, xi.

69 See Bolle, "Myth: An Overview," 6369.

given system of mythmaking—the critical faculties of academic observers aspiring to intellectual and ethical integrity must be exercised at their maximum at all times, including the most self-critical modes and methods of investigation and awareness.

Whether the putative modern phenomenon of superhero comics culture as religious myth is being promoted or interrogated, then, its active *construction* is by definition always at work, and needs as much careful attention as any other aspect of the investigation. It is the forgotten, non-Euclidean third side of the coin that makes the two "up" and "down" faces possible. The decision to treat superhero comics culture as a religious mythology effectively *makes it one*, and whether it takes the form of "direct" (creator/marketer/fan) participation, the more reflective participation of observation, or the dizzying participation of observing the observers, its most common public expressions are, to date, far too unconsciously interested and uncritical to serve the best potential and the best ethics of careful critical reflection.

From Ghost to Goddess: The Reimagining of Cuḍel Mā in Contemporary Gujarat

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In Gujarati, the noun *cuḍel* refers to a "witch" or a female ghost (*bhūt*), usually the spirit of a woman who died prematurely or during childbirth. Haunting cremation grounds and roadsides, *cuḍel*s are imagined as grotesque but also seductive entities, and Gujarati folktales commonly tell of *cuḍel*s enticing men or kidnapping children. For those unfortunate enough to interact with them, *cuḍel*s are said to bring about any number of hardships, including possession-like trances requiring exorcism. Like other malevolent spirits in North Indian folklore, *cuḍel*s demand reverence, and for this reason small shrines of rocks or bricks would form at roadsides, trees and other sites to acknowledge their presence. Given the *cuḍel*'s fearsome reputation, it is perhaps surprising that a singular Cuḍel Mā has become the patron deity of an increasingly popular pilgrimage site in the Patan region of Gujarat, the so-called High Court of Kungher.

In gaining this rapidly elevated status and fame, Cuḍel Mā follows other Gujarati maternal goddesses bearing the title *mā* or *mātā* (meaning "exalted mother"). Village *mātā*s, such as Melaḍī, Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār, have become as ubiquitous in the urban middle-class milieu as they have traditionally been in the rural setting. Now these goddesses feature in public billboards, DVD movies and music videos, their *bhajan*s disseminated for the technologically proficient on social media sites like YouTube and Facebook.[1] Capacious *mātā* temples and shrines now appear with great frequency in and around Ahmedabad and other metropolitan areas. With this shift from tiny village shrines (or *derī*s) to temples, *mātā* worship has transformed as well, with ecstatic elements like animal sacrifice, possession, and alcohol oblations having been replaced by purely sattvic practices amenable to upper caste and upper class tastes. While many of these goddesses have

[1] Cuḍel Mā is herself no stranger to pop culture media. At least two feature-length Gujarati-language films have been released with the *cuḍel* as the central theme.

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been depicted in the village setting with minimal or aniconic representations such as *triśūl*s (tridents) and stones smeared with red lead, they now have taken on distinctive iconographies patterned after lithographs of Sanskritic goddesses like Lakṣmi or Sarasvatī—agreeable-looking young women with easily identifiable animal vehicles (or *vāhana*s). Now Melaḍī rides the goat, Bahucarā the rooster, and Khoḍīyār the crocodile.[2]

In terms of iconography, Cuḍel Mā contrasts with other Gujarati goddesses, for her main icon at the High Court of Kungher is simply a flame in an oil lamp. The flame is ubiquitous at Gujarati goddess temples, but for Cuḍel Mā and her devotees, this minimalistic symbol takes on maximal theological effect. Indeed, at Kungher, Cuḍel is figured as neither a ghost nor a witch but instead as the supreme goddess, the flame embodying the totality of Śakti. Drawing on colonial-era writings and ethnographic data from both physical and virtual sites, this paper will attempt to trace Cuḍel Mā's movement beyond her familiar haunts to become a singular, universalized mother goddess amenable to upwardly mobile, middle-class sensibilities of Gujarati devotees.

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[2] Gujarati goddesses have not been widely studied. For a discussion of Bahucarā Mata, see Samira Sheikh's "The Lives of Bahuchara Mata," in *The Idea of Gujarat: History, Ethnography and Text*, ed. Edward Simpson and Aparna Kapadia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 84–99. Sheikh has described how the wealthy Bahucarā temple at Becharji in Gujarat's Mehsana District has become popular among a growing variety of pilgrims, and how the goddess has been somewhat domesticated in the process, with animal sacrifice, among other potentially "unseemly" aspects of her worship, having been replaced with symbolic substitutes (96). For a discussion of Khoḍīyār Mātā, see Neelima Shukla-Bhatt's "Leap of the Limping Goddess," in *Inventing and Reinventing the Goddess: Contemporary Iterations of Hindu Deities on the Move*, ed. Sree Padma (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 177–97. Shukla-Bhatt links the rise of Khoḍīyār Mā's profile with a simultaneous Sanskritization and "vernacularization" undertaken by her *leuva* Patel followers. That is, Khoḍīyār worship has adopted Sanskritic, upper-caste practices, rendering her as an omnipresent great goddess while at the same time including popular vernacular forms of religious expression. The expansion of Khoḍīyār's glory, then, parallels the rise of her *leuva* Patel followers up the social ladder. Shukla-Bhatt's article builds upon earlier work by Harald Tambs-Lyche identifying Khoḍīyār's mythology as an expression of resistance by her upwardly mobile followers against established social hierarchies. See Harald Tambs-Lyche, *Power, Profit and Poetry: Traditional Society in Kathiawar, Western India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1997).

Middle-Class Religion in Contemporary India

Several scholars have taken up the topic of religious transformations and innovations brought about by the rising Indian middle-class after the liberalization of India's economy in the early 1990s. In South India, dramatic changes have taken place for Māriyamman̲, a popular smallpox goddess well-known in villages for her capricious character and appetite for blood sacrifices. Joanne Waghorne has termed Māriyamman̲'s reworking as a "gentrification of the goddess."[3] In contrast to her simple village shrines, Māriyamman̲'s urban temples now feature elaborate *maṇḍapa*s and *gōpura*s, hallmarks of "proper" South Indian Brahmanic temple construction.[4] The scope of this gentrification goes beyond architecture to encompass a "cleaning up and ordering all elements of religious life"[5] so that they correspond with middle-class sensibilities such as orderliness, tidiness, prosperity, and community involvement, among others. Related sensibilities also seem to inform modifications in the worship of Māriyamman̲, which has come to incorporate more and more conservative and Brahmanical components, such as the increased use of Sanskrit in proportion to the traditional vernacular Tamil.[6] Accordingly, many village aspects are "now set in a very proper temple context."[7] Ecstatic trances, for instance—a staple of village worship—are often downplayed in these urban temples.[8]

William Harman has observed much the same at Māriyamman̲ temples in the area surrounding Chennai.[9] At Māriyamman̲'s Samayapuram temple, worship "has developed an increasingly respectable, high-caste, Sanskritic character."[10] Here, Māriyamman̲ is still offered goats and chickens, but these animals are no longer sacrificed, instead being resold as consecrated livestock.[11] Māriyamman̲, meanwhile, is reimagined as benign and generous,

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3 See Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods: Modern Hindu Temples in an Urban Middle-Class World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 129–70.

4 Ibid, 132.

5 Ibid, 131.

6 Ibid, 168.

7 Ibid, 153.

8 Ibid, 166–68.

9 See William Harman, "Taming the Fever Goddess: Transforming a Tradition in Southern India," *Manushi: a Journal of Women's Studies* 140 (2004): 2–16.

10 Ibid, 6.

11 Ibid, 7.

a goddess "concerned profoundly with the health and welfare of those devoted to her."[12] As such, middle-class devotees come to Samayapuram with this munificence in mind, depositing offerings quickly and efficiently in hopes of fulfilling very specific requests.[13] Harman attributes these changes to aspiring members of the middle-class attempting to re-establish connections with "traditional sources of security" as they relocate from the village to the city.[14]

In the North Indian context, Philip Lutgendorf has implicated middle-class values in the increasing popularity of Hanumān devotion and the proliferation of cheaply printed tantric manuals related thereto.[15] For a minimal expense, these texts provide the literate with easy access to Hanumān's veritable transformative power without need of an intermediary.[16] In this way, Hanumān devotion is pragmatic and efficient, meeting a demand for "quick-fix" solutions in a hectic modern world.[17] Consumption of such texts is no way undignified, however, as Hanumān very obviously participates in "Vaishnavization," a preference for the pan-Indic, Sanskritic and Brahmanic over the local, vernacular and folk, which carries with it respectable associations of dignity, self-limitation, and vegetarianism.[18] These values also fit comfortably with those of the middle-class.

As in South India, North Indian goddesses have likewise evolved according to middle class tastes. Fabrizio Ferrari has also drawn on the terminology of gentrification in characterizing major changes in the worship Śītalā Mātā, a goddess distinguishable by way of her donkey *vāhana* and, like Māriyamman̲, associated with smallpox.[19] Practices such as *bhar,* a

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[12] Ibid, 6.

[13] Ibid, 7.

[14] Ibid, 12.

[15] See Philip Lutgendorf, "Five Heads and No Tale: Hanuman and the Popularization of Tantra," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 5 (2001): 269–96.

[16] Ibid, 284.

[17] Ibid, 287.

[18] Lutgendorf, 286, 288. See also John Stratton Hawley's introduction, "Modern India and the Question of Middle Class Religion," in the same volume (219). For more discussion of Vaishnavization, see Peter van der Veer, *Gods on earth: The management of religious experiences and identity in a North Indian pilgrimage center* (London: Athlone Press, 1988) and Charlotte Vaudeville, "Braj: Lost and found," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18 (1976): 195–213.

[19] See Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Religion, Devotion and Medicine in North India: The Healing Power of Sitala* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2015).

form of Śītalā possession, are now generally regarded by Bengalis from educated, urban social classes as fanaticism or superstition of working class people, particularly women.[20] Meanwhile, a sanitized imagining of the goddess continues to soar in mainstream popularity, shaping Śītalā's ritual, iconography and narratives.[21] As Ferrari phrases it, the gentrifying Śītalā "is no longer the naked lady on the ass associated with Indian peasantry, but a richly decorated bourgeois young woman who acts as the bearer of the morality of twenty-first-century Indian middle class mothers."[22]

Similarly, Cynthia Humes has traced the development of the goddess Vindhyavāsinī from a tribal deity worshipped by the liquor- and sacrifice-offering peoples of the Vindhya mountain range into a singular, transcendent *Ādiśakti*—the "first goddess" from which other goddesses manifest.[23] Evidently, devotees and affiliates of her popular pilgrimage site at Vindhyachal came to believe that "the most authentic interpretation of Vindhyavāsinī was as a Vedicized, vegetarian, and universalist goddess, a view pleasing to her increasingly 'sophisticated' pilgrim clientele."[24] Humes labels this process of "Sanskritizing" and "sanitizing" as a "universalization."[25] At the same time, Humes anticipates the work of Harman and Waghorne when she identifies a proclivity towards universalized understandings of the goddess among Vindhyachal's more educated and more urbanized pilgrims, intimating that cosmopolitan, upwardly mobile values are at least partially responsible for the universalized image of Vindhyavāsinī.[26]

Comparable Gujarati examples have been less widely documented, this in spite of Gujarat's powerful middle-class which has burgeoned on account of the state's flourishing economy.[27] Countless *mātā* temples

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[20] Ibid, 98.

[21] Ibid, 160.

[22] Ibid, 99.

[23] See Cynthia Humes, "Vindhyavasini: Local Goddess yet Great Goddess," in *Devi: Goddesses of India*, eds. Donna Marie Wulff and John Stratton Hawley (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 49–78.

[24] Ibid, 73.

[25] Ibid, 51.

[26] Ibid, 74.

[27] The rapid development of Gujarat's economy is frequently attributed to the neo-liberal economic policies and the subsequent crystallization of a "neo-middle-class" realized under Narendra Modi, who served as chief minister of the state from 2001 to 2014. See Christophe

throughout the state exemplify this spirit of reinterpretation and innovation, and Cuḍel Mā would seem to have undergone one of the most pronounced transformations. Gentrification, universalization and a concern for the Sanskritic and Brahmanical not unlike Vaishnavization have all contributed in some measure to the recent reimagining of Cuḍel's folkloric character.

The *Cuḍel*s of Gujarati Folklore

Because so many of the details pertaining to *cuḍels* circulated through oral folklore, colonial-era materials provide some of the few written sources recording traditional imaginings of these entities. *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* lists the *cuḍel* as one among many names for female spirits, including goddess appellations like Śīkotar, Jogaṇī, and even Meladī, as well as Jhāmpḍī, another ghost goddess closely connected to some *cuḍel* sites.[28] The *Gazetteer* associates these capricious goddesses with "low caste Hindus who avert their evil influence by offerings."[29] These spirits are connected with the sacrifice of goats, fowl and even more transgressive nourishments.[30] Reports the *Gazetteer:*

> All these spirits live on phlegm, food-leavings, human excrement, urine, and human entrails and brains. Their favorite haunts are empty and tumbledown houses, cesspools, burning grounds, *pipal* or *babul* trees, wells, and other places for drawing water, the crossing of four roads, the roofs and thresholds of houses, and hills. They enter the bodies of those who annoy them by visiting their haunts with their hair hanging loose; by committing a nuisance in or otherwise defiling their abodes; by uprooting or otherwise destroying a *pipal* tree; by swearing falsely in their name; by leaping over a circle within which offerings are laid for them at the crossing of four roads, and by working with an exorcist for their discomfort or ruin.[31]

Jaffrelot, "Gujarati Elections: the Sub-text of Modi's 'Hattrick' – High Tech Populism and the 'Neo-middle Class," *Studies in Indian Politics* 1 (2013): 79–95.

[28] *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Vol. 9 pt. 1*: *Gujarat Population, Hindus.* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1901), 417.

[29] Ibid, 417.

[30] Ibid, 416–17.

[31] Ibid, 417.

Lower caste exorcists, also known as *bhūvo*s (or, alternatively, *bhuvā*s), are summoned to cast out these spirits.[32] *Bhūvo*s are believed to have gained the favour of one or more of the local goddesses, such as Khoḍīyār, Bahucarā or Meladī. Before a *bhūvo* engages in his "spirit-scaring performance," as the *Gazetteer* phrases it, he consults his patron goddess by throwing dice or counting grain seeds to determine whether the sickness is truly a possession.[33] In the most serious cases, exorcism involves the *bhūvo* entering into a trembling, trancelike state assisted by alcohol and rhythmic drumming performed by a member of the Vaghri caste. In this state, the *bhūvo* initiates a dialogue with the spirit that has taken hold of the afflicted person, interrogating it in regard to its demands. The *bhūvo* sometimes even beats himself with iron chains or burns himself with boiling oil, all in an effort to display his power to the possessing entity.[34] Once the spirit has been scared away, the exorcist sometimes captures it in a bottle or a lemon, which is then buried in the earth.[35] Variations of these practices are still undertaken by *bhūvo*s in rural and even urban areas of Gujarat today, especially during the Navaratri festival, or in the wake of untimely deaths. After a successful exorcism, the *Gazetteer* reports, offerings such as boiled rice, sweets, iron nails, and copper coins are made in order to satisfy the banished spirit's requests, as well as, "among blood offering Hindus, flesh and wine."[36]

In his 1914 monograph, *Folklore of Gujarat,* R.E. Enthoven, working from materials compiled by British Indologist Arthur Mason Tippetts Jackson (1866–1909), deals with *cuḍel*s in greater depth, positing three classes of the female spirit. Listed first are *pośi,* women who died unfulfilled and use their afterlife to "fondle children and render good service to their widower husbands."[37] *Tośi*s, women who bore strong attachment to their husbands in life, do much the same after their deaths.[38] More unnerving

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[32] The *Gazetteer* lists exorcists as coming mostly from the Barwad, Vaghri, Bhil, Bhoi, Khatri, Hajam, Savaria, Ghamta, and Dharala castes, though it also includes Brahmans among these (418).

[33] *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 418.

[34] Ibid, 422.

[35] Ibid.

[36] *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency,* 424.

[37] R.E. Enthoven. *Folk Lore Notes, vol. 1: Folklore of Gujarat* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1989 [1914]), 116.

[38] Ibid, 116–17.

are the *sośi,* women who were "persecuted beyond endurance" by family members before their deaths. In their spirit form, they create difficulties for their surviving kin, and are even capable of drying up men's blood.[39]

*Cuḍel*s were for the most part seen as malevolent. Enthoven characterizes a *cuḍel* as a bewitching yet deformed creature, her tell-tale marking being her lack of shoulders. *Cuḍel*s are notorious for asking male passersby to take them home. If an unwitting man agrees to their proposition, the *cuḍel* "spends the night in his company, and brings his life to a speedy end."[40] Enthoven also documents a number of folk customs for evading *cuḍel*s. In order to prevent such a spirit from escaping the cremation ground, mustard seeds or loose cotton wool were to be scattered along the road behind a dead woman's funeral procession, as it was thought that the *cuḍel* would become distracted gathering up the leavings.[41] Similarly, some people drew an iron nail into the end of the street after a woman's corpse had been carried past the village boundary, as this was also believed to prevent the *cuḍel*'s return.[42]

Because of their ability to enter drum-induced trance states and thereafter remove the threat of malicious *cuḍel*s, among other spirits, *bhūvo*s have enjoyed elevated status among villagers.[43] According to Enthoven, the *bhūvo* sees spirits not visible to ordinary eyes, and in this way becomes a medium between human beings and deities. While acknowledging that the practices of the *bhūvo*s may seem dubious to some, Enthoven speaks mostly admirably of their role:

> [A]lthough there may be some *bhuvas* who profit by imposing upon the credulity of the villagers, there are many *bhuvas* who do not work with the expectation of any reward, and are only actuated by benevolent motives. Many of them honestly believe that at the time when they are thrown into a state of trance, the *matas* or deities actually enter their bodies and speak their wishes through them as a medium.[44]

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39 Ibid, 116.
40 Ibid, 117.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid, 83.
44 Ibid, 84.

Beyond these British interpretations, Indian colonial-era commentators also frame the *cuḍel* as a nuisance or terror. In his prize-winning 1849 essay for the Guzerat Vernacular Society entitled *Bhut Nibandh,* Dalpatram Daya (1820-98),[45] famed Gujarati litterateur, reformer and educated Swaminarayan[46] convert, decries the irrationality and falsehood of popular beliefs in Gujarat related to demons, spirits and possessions thereby.[47] In doing so, he provides several examples involving the *cuḍel*, which he defines as a "female *bhūt*" named for its marriage armlet, a *cūḍo.*[48] So goes the account of one man terrified by a *cuḍel*, as recorded by Daya:

> Once upon a time, late at night, I went out for a necessary purpose. I saw two Chudels wearing golden armlets and covered with ornaments. They said only 'shall we come?' I made no answer but ran into my house and barred the door.[49]

Daya attributes this sighting to the trickery of shadow and moonlight.[50] In another case, a well in the city of Marwar was thought to be haunted by a *cuḍel*, who was seen coming and going from the site.[51] Many were allegedly possessed by this *cuḍel* and, thus, offerings were frequently made to the well. A much respected Brahman even reported seeing the *cuḍel* vomiting fire out of her mouth. Unconvinced, the Brahman enlisted the help of five soldiers with the local raja's permission and returned to the well at night.[52] Here he spotted the *cuḍel* and chased her into the well, at which point:

> The Chudel clapped her hands and cried "Hum! Hum!" to frighten him, and also cast stones at him and ejected fire from her mouth. However, the Bramin [sic], with the Sipahis [soldiers], followed, and dragged her out by the hair of her head, and began to beat her. She then cried that she was neither Bhut nor Pret but a

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45 For more on Dalpatram Daya, see Mansukhlal Jhaveri's *History of Gujarati Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1978), 72–76.

46 For more on the Swaminarayan movement, a Vaishnava sect that took shape in Gujarat in the early 19th century, see Raymond Williams, *Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

47 Dalpatram Daya (trans. Alexander Kinloch Forbes), *Bhut Nibandh: an essay, descriptive of the demonology and other popular superstitions of Guzerat: being the prize essay of the Guzerat vernacular society for the year 1849* (Bombay: Bombay Gazette Press, 1849).

48 Ibid, 14 ff.

49 Ibid, 14.

50 Ibid, 15.

51 Ibid, 31.

52 Ibid, 32.

> woman, and they she should die if they beat her in that way. She went on to say that she was the wife of such and such a Bramin [sic], and that she came thither to keep assignation with another man. Whenever any one saw her coming or going, she, for the purpose of frightening him, blew into a roll of paper containing a lighted composition, as to make fire appear.[53]

Although these accounts have been furnished with rational explanations, they nonetheless attest to the strength of traditional Gujarati folk beliefs regarding *cuḍel*s. *Cuḍel*s appear to present themselves more often in these stories in their *sośi* form as the malevolent, sexually unrestrained woman warranting patriarchal persecution. Daya's dismissal notwithstanding, belief in such spirits was evidently commonplace in the everyday lives of Gujaratis.

While connected with other spirit-turned-goddesses like Meladī, colonial era print sources suggest the term *cuḍel* signified more of a ghost or "witch" than a deity. A *cuḍel* clearly seems to have been imagined as more nefarious than helpful, and far removed from sattvic, Sanskritic sensibilities. These associations bear out in more recent ethnographic accounts. D.F. Pocock, for instance, drawing on fieldwork among the Patidar caste in central Gujarat, had the *cuḍel* described to him as a seductively beautiful woman whom a man might encounter by chance in the fields.[54] *Cuḍel*s could only be identified from their backwards-pointing feet, which easily went unnoticed given the long saris they wore. Men who engage in intercourse with *Cuḍel*s were said to suffer impotence for the remainder of their lives. Not all *cuḍel*s, however, are so vile—in fact, Pocock reports that some haunted sites had become permanent, and the female ghost associated therewith established as a *mātā*,[55] a phenomenon we will take up in our next section.

Contemporary *Cuḍel* Shrines

Throughout rural Gujarat, it is not unusual to find shrines dedicated to Cuḍel Mā. These are often identifiable by way of colourful cloths and garments draped in the trees lining roadsides or footpaths, which may represent a continuation of the Gujarati folk custom of attaching rags or

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[53] Ibid.

[54] David F. Pocock, *Mind, Body, Wealth: a Study of Belief and Practice in and Indian Village.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 34.

[55] Ibid, 36.

worn-out clothes to trees in which spirits were thought to reside.[56] These sites blend aspects of Cuḍel's folk identity as ghost with those of her more recently developed iteration as goddess.

I found one such shrine on a shady, tree-enshrouded road south of Ahmedabad on the way to Cambay. The spot jumps out on account of the hundreds—perhaps thousands—of saris in a variety of colours and styles intertwined with the trees for several dozen yards before the actual turnoff into the shrine (see **fig. 1**). Over the ten year life span of the temple, these garments, all donations given by devotees, have gradually stretched down the highway. Even more saris canopy the path leading to the little *derī*. Cuḍel Mā's is the leftmost among three conjoined niches, the others belonging to Jhāmpḍī Mā and Melaḍī. I observed this specific trio of divinities within family shrines and other roadside spots several times during my fieldwork. This particular set of niches sits very low to the ground, and the devotee has to kneel in order to glimpse the deities housed inside.

The Cuḍel shrine is affixed with women's cosmetic accoutrements such as kumkum, bangles, and mirrors. Numerous bottles of nail polish had been placed around the central oil lamp representing the goddess. The representative of the shrine to whom I spoke, a member of the Thakkor caste who functioned in the role of priest, explained to me that these accessories correspond with the sixteen *śṛṅgāra*s or adornments of traditional bridal beautification. Like the saris, all of these items had been gifted to the shrine by devotees, as they are thought to be pleasing to a deceased woman. Makeup and saris are the only items that may be offered, the priest explained, as monetary donations are not accepted at this shrine. The offerings are generally not to be consumed as *prasād* by women who frequent the temple, nor can they be sold or given away, as they are intended for the goddesses. This is especially true of the offerings to Cuḍel and Jhāmpḍī. While the *prasād* of these two goddesses could in principle be consumed by elderly married women, it was forbidden for unmarried girls to attempt as much

[56] Enthoven writes that "Some believe that both male and female spirits reside in the Khijado, Baval and Kerado trees, and throw rags over them with the object of preventing passers by [sic] from cutting or removing the trees. Some pile stones round their stems and draw tridents over them with red lead and oil" (1914, 85). Additionally, "holy trees that receive offerings of rags from travellers, are the abodes of gods or evil spirits, and are distinguished from other trees of the same species by the epithet of *chithario*. Some people hoist flags on such trees instead of offering rags" (86).

due to the risks involved. If they did so, Cuḍel could attach herself to them, creating major problems later on in married life.

Thus, this roadside Cuḍel Mā still bears some of the precarious, ambivalent power that the term *cuḍel* connoted in Gujarati folklore. However, the scope of her influence seems to have expanded. While the priest of this shrine characterized Cuḍel as a *bhūtrupi* or "ghost form" *mātā*, he also described her as a "power goddess," not to be taken lightly. She is the final power of justice, he concluded, not unlike the Cuḍel of Kungher whom we will soon meet. In addition, the ritual related to this roadside *cuḍel* diverges from that described in the aforementioned colonial accounts. While the priest accepts the title of *bhūvo* and performs some divining by way of a rosary, he told me he does not enter into trancelike possession states, a phenomenon referred to as "getting *pavan*" (or "wind") of the goddess. He lives a very strict, sattvic lifestyle, steering clear of meat and liquor, among other tamasic, or impure, habits. This being the case, getting *pavan* does not fit with his religious outlook. In his words, "There is no *pavan*, just good feeling for eight to ten years." By promoting transcendent, sattvic qualities of the goddess and her worship while still acknowledging her ghostly, capricious form, this tiny roadside *derī* marks both a contrast and continuity with the traditional, folk conceptualization of the *cuḍel*.

The High Court of Kungher

Located approximately ten kilometers from Patan City, the first and only major Cuḍel Mā temple in Gujarat is the "High Court" in the village of Kungher, which has earned its legalistic label on account of the exacting brand of justice offered to its pilgrims by its eponymous goddess. The temple's reputation has spread largely through word of mouth, as well as a Facebook page and a sleek website in both Gujarati and English—for many tech-savvy middle-class devotees the first line of contact with a temple. In 2008, the *Times of India* even covered the site, playing off the curious nature of Cuḍel's backstory with the title "Witch Temple is 'high court.'"[57] While the press may not have taken the temple particularly seriously, many among the Gujarati glitterati—and even out-of-state hoi polloi—certainly have. The temple has attracted Bollywood actresses and numerous politicians,

[57] Ashish Vashi. "Witch Temple is 'high court'," *Times of India* August 13, 2008.

including Sonia Gandhi. Some say a trip to the High Court of Kungher guarantees success for election candidates. With this in mind, former Gujarat Chief minister Anandiben Patel is said to have made a wish at Kungher before taking over leadership from Narendra Modi in 2014.

The temple is at present the core of the village, bustling not just on Tuesdays and Sundays as is customary for goddess sites, but all seven days of the week. The temple complex, with its large guest house (*dharmaśālā*), garden, mess hall, and aviary, sprawls throughout the town. Approaching the temple proper, one first encounters a large religious market, selling commodities such as goddess photos, coconuts, sweets, toys, CDs and DVDs of *bhajan*s, and cheaply produced Gujarati-language publications providing guidelines for *vrat*s, *ārthī*, *cālīsā*, and *stuti*s. At this market devotees can also purchase small pieces of red and yellow cloth called *cūndḍī* as gifts for the goddess. The main temple area, an unenclosed rectangular hall, is festooned with thousands of these identical *cūndḍī*, which sway lazily in the breeze (see **fig. 2**). The central *mūrti* itself, a single oil lamp, sits in a small but opulent niche decorated in elegant gold. Women in their finest saris and men in western clothes move about the main area carrying plastic bags of fruit and sweets as *prasād* to the *mūrti*. They have come from all over northern and western India, having heard of the temple's renown.

All this—the fame, the following, and the architectural elaboration—has developed in the past decade, temple trustees informed me, due in part to the financial support provided by a prominent jaggery merchant supplying to North Gujarat. The heavy Patel involvement with the site, both currently and historically, may also factor into its expansion. Patels, who form almost 20 percent of Gujarat's population, have climbed steadily to social and economic prominence throughout the state, the country, and abroad due to their agricultural and entrepreneurial acumen.[58] The Patel community is well represented among the temple management at Kungher,[59] and their continued prosperity likely plays a role in the temple's recent gain in eminence as well. The site itself, however, has had some degree of repute, at least in folklore, for more than 250 years.

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[58] Shukla-Bhatt, "Leap of the Limping Goddess," 190.

[59] http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/management_high_court_of_kungher.html

At this time, the origin story goes, a young man named Sri Raichand Das Patel was returning home to Kungher along with his new bride.[60] At the entrance of the village was a lake with a tamarind tree and a well, and Raichand stopped his bullock car here to rest. Years before, a young girl had attempted to climb the tamarind tree to eat its fruits, only to fall into the well, wherein she drowned. Her spirit took up residence in the tamarind tree from that point on. When Raichand's new bride ventured toward the lake, the atman of the *cuḍel* entered into her body. Upon returning home, "whenever the husband entered his bedroom instead of his wife he felt he saw a devine [sic] power,"[61] which left him petrified and caused understandable marital strife. When informed by their son of his aversion to his new wife, Raichand's parents confronted their new daughter-in-law, only to receive a reply from the entity possessing her: "I am a Spirit called Chudel." Hearing the word *cuḍel*, Raichand's parents joined in their son's terror. However, the *cuḍel* assured them that she had come not to frighten but rather to help—seeing the beauty of the bride, she had entered into her body to assuage her ongoing loneliness. All this *cuḍel* sought was the company of people, and so she promised to exit the body of the bride on the condition that Raichand's family would build her a simple shrine of five bricks underneath a *varakhadi* tree[62]—a tree in which benevolent spirits are thought to dwell—on the outskirts of the village and light a small flame within it. Once this shrine was constructed, the *cuḍel* vowed to thereafter "fulfill the wish of one and all."[63] Raichand's parents did as they were asked and, once the flame was lit, sat their possessed daughter-in-law in front of it. The spirit immediately departed her body and entered into the flame. "From then on," the Kungher website explains emphatically, "she was called The Chudel Maa!" In the years that followed, Cuḍel Mā recurrently showed her presence by finding lost or stolen articles, consistently providing justice to the people of the village. Faith in the goddess began to grow, and soon

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[60] This story can be found at http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/chudel_mataji_kungher.html

[61] Ibid.

[62] The *varakhadi* tree is considered by some to be the *vāhana* of Cuḍel Mā. Because it can grow in all terrain and bears leaves all year round, the *varakhadi* symbolizes the unconditional nature of the blessing of the goddess, which also lasts throughout the year and can be bestowed upon anyone. Further, the life tenure of *varakhadi* tree is 500–700 years, reiterating again for her followers the endurance of Cuḍel Mā.

[63] http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/chudel_mataji_kungher.html

enough Cuḍel Mā's fame moved outside the village limits. This origin story, then, is layered with mythemes about the *cuḍel*, including her ghostly past, the unfulfilled sexual tension with which she is persistently related, and also the typical trappings of the roadside ghost, such as the shrine of bricks or stones and the connection with trees. But the story also serves to solidify her character at this site as generous, benign and compassionate.

While temple trustees acknowledge that at one point in previous decades the small shrine "was considered evil and people were frightened to come near it,"[64] Cuḍel Mā of the High Court is no longer an object of dread. The *Cuḍelmānum Vrat,* one of the Gujarati-language booklets for sale at the temple market, dismisses any lingering trepidations: "Hearing the word *cuḍel* sends fear throughout the body, but it is not this way with Cuḍel Mā. Cuḍel Mā is not this kind of *devī*, but rather one pure *ātmā*."[65] People's reservations swiftly disappear, the author explains, once their requests are fulfilled.[66] The temple website provides further praise for Cuḍel's effectiveness in fulfilling wishes, promising every devotee solutions for all problems personal, professional, financial or health-related.[67] The trustees informed me that these difficulties involve legal matters, social injustices, and also issues of fertility, a common concern of *mātā* temples. I was told how one middle-aged woman, in the aftermath of her son's death, made a wish upon Cuḍel Mā and eventually had twin sons at the age of 55. Such miracles are not uncommon at Kungher, and a promotional pamphlet entitled *Jay Cuḍel Mā* produced by the temple dedicates several pages to recounting the stories of individuals spanning various caste groups like Patels, Thakkors, and Sonis, all of whom have experienced cures for the incurable, all of which they attribute to Cuḍel's grace.[68] Cuḍel Mā's power is benign, the trustees explained, in that she is both kindly and sattvic. If someone forgets their vow, she does not invoke her wrath, but rather provides devotees with a gentle reminder of their promise to her. In this caring capacity, her honorific of "Mā" seems well earned. The goddess's power is not just unanimously positive—it is also eminently accessible.

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64 Vashi, "Witch Temple," August 13, 2008.

65 Srimati Kokilabahen Patel, *Cuḍelmānum Vrat*, (Ahmedabad: Rashmi Prakashan, n.d.), 2.

66 Ibid, 4.

67 http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/index.html

68 See *Jay Cuḍel Mā*, (Kungher: Sri Chudel Mataji Mandir Vikas Trust, n.d.), 6–8.

I was told that the goddess is always ready to listen to difficulties of the devotee without, as one trustee put it, "a lunch break or a siesta." Moreover, Cuḍel Mā works quickly—the truly devoted are said to get benefits from visiting the temple after just one visit. Together, the efficacy, accessibility and benevolence of the goddess's power attest to her status as much more than just a roadside ghost.

At Kungher, Cuḍel Mā is framed as nothing less than the highest goddess, and the temple trust moves towards a decidedly neo-Vedantic vocabulary in order to convey this. Cuḍel Mā is frequently referred to in the affiliated pamphlets and online as "Ādyaśakti" —again, the "first" or "original" goddess. As the temple website's homepage proclaims: "In Kungher, [Cuḍel Mā] is known as Adyashakti of today's Kaliyug and is the first Shakti/Mahashakti, vast and majestic in a form of live Flame (Jyoti)."[69] The flame, then, is the goddess' singular form for this dark cosmic age. Trustees emphasized that the most unique feature of this temple is the absence of an icon or picture of the goddess. The central image is *not* an image, they explained, because there is no shape to the atman, and so too there can be no shape for the goddess. This way, the goddess was not the product of—and therefore limited by—a particular imagining, be it of a specific individual or a group. Rather, the simplicity and singularity of the flame, continuously burning since its installation by village elders in 1991,[70] connotes Cuḍel Mā's universality more strongly than any iconographical rendering.

Cuḍel Mā's universal benevolence is further underscored by the fact that everyone is welcome to share in her power. As the temple website explains: "The Shrine of Shree Chudel Maa is oozing with celestial love for all beings, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, race or religion."[71] Accordingly, trustees shared stories of Jains, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs, among others, who came to the temple to satisfy wishes or complaints, particularly if they felt they had suffered an injustice. Cuḍel Mā's power, then, transcends religious barriers, further accentuating the fair and democratic nature of the justice she provides.

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[69] http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/index.html

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

But this emphasis on instant, egalitarian access for all goes beyond the goddess's benevolent, universal power; it is just as much based in spurning religious activity mediated by the *bhūvo*. Numerous signs appear throughout the temple, as do graphics throughout the temple's website and Facebook page, to the effect of "no one is *bhūvo* at the place of the *mātāji*, only the *jyot* (flame) is the *mātā*." The website elaborates: "There is no place for blind faith in respect of this pious shrine, as there is no exorcist (Bhuva) in between. Nobody has to guide you for anything like, do this do that. Tell [Cuḍel Mā] what you want and decide what you will do for her, not a word informed or spoken."[72] The *Jay Cuḍel M*ā pamphlet chooses even stronger wording in the vernacular Gujarati: "There is no deceit of the bhuva here; there is no giving to such an idiotic person."[73] *Bhūvo*s who doubt Cuḍel Mā's power, meanwhile, are put in their place. A trustee shared with me a story of a *bhūvo* from the Rabari caste who came to Kungher to take *darśan* and make a challenge with the goddess: "if you are a real goddess," he said, "show me your power." The little flame instantaneously quadrupled in size, and the Rabari was left with no choice but to apologize to the goddess, needing no more proof of her power. This disdain for *bhūvo*-based religion, the temple trustees explained, had to do with their community's commitment to preventing cheating in the name of the goddess. Thus, they ensure that no agent comes between the devotee and the divine power—rather, contact with the goddess is direct, and apparently more efficacious on account of it. The website boasts that even "judgements [that] failed at government/ human courts are said to be given justice at the spiritual High Court of Kungher." Naturally, Cuḍel Mā outperforms the *bhūvo* when she is equal to or greater than the chief justices themselves.[74]

The pervasive anti-*bhūvo* sentiments are just one means by which the Kungher temple attempts to distance Cuḍel Mā from the ecstatic elements of her village roots. The website assures (prospective) visitors that "Shree Chudel Maa doesn't like any addiction including Liquor, Smoking, and

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72 http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/chudel_mataji_kungher.html

73 *Jay Cuḍel Mā*, 1.

74 Another compelling miracle story I was told involved a district judge from Mehsana who came to the Kungher temple, anxious over work that had gone unfinished even after six years of effort. He made a wish at the *Cuḍel* shrine with a time limit of five weeks, and as a result his work was wrapped up in ten days.

Tobacco etc. [These] are strictly prohibited in the precincts."[75] To this the *Jay Cuḍel Mā* pamphlet adds: "In this place of the auspicious Mata, wine and, in the same way, meat, have been prohibited."[76] This all gives the impression that a Brahman or Vaishnava sensitivity informs the Kungher temple's ritual grammar. It may or may not be significant to note that the current acting priest at the temple is a Brahman.

This cultivation of sattvic sensibilities dovetails amiably with—and quite possibly contributes to—the middle-class-friendly atmosphere of the High Court of Kungher. The page titled "Facilities" on the temple website promises visitors the tidiest of environs, praising the "cleanliness, hygiene and smiling faces of volunteers," as well as the "clean vegetarian dining hall, guest rooms, Rest-huts, parks and gardens as well as water fountains" in addition to "clean toilet blocks & a vast parking area for the benefits of the devotees and visitors."[77] On a closely related note, the temple assures its potential visitors of its orderly, tranquil confines: "Visitors pray without uttering a word in the quiet mode of there [sic] mind/heart/soul to Goddess Chudel Maa who listens and gives her Justice responding to the prayers which the concerned person only recognizes."[78] It was with orderliness in mind that an elaborate queue-control barrier system was installed at the temple entrance. Before this, a trustee explained to me, up to 100,000 devotees would queue in a line that stretched a kilometer long. Now, with the supervised barricade system in place, the website assures guests that "Visitors start pouring in at the temple every week from the midnight of Saturday through Sunday forming a disciplined queue. Villagers offer their free services as volunteers to the visiting men women [sic] and children guiding [them] through separate barricades."[79] This orderliness and tidiness has for the most part been realized, in my estimation—while the temple has a steady stream of pilgrims drifting through, it is also relatively laid-back, its ritual space and outbuildings comparatively pristine and uncluttered vis-à-vis the majority of other goddess sites I visited.

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75 http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/index.html

76 *Jay Cuḍel Mā*, 2.

77 http://www.highcourtofkungher.org/facilities_high_court_of_kungher.html

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

The middle-class, upwardly mobile sensibilities are also apparent in the ever-present signifiers of the Kungher temple's overall largess as well as its charitable involvement, which are themselves intertwined. For instance, an elaborate *prasād* comprised of dal, rice, vegetable *sabjī*, and *laḍḍu* sweets, is offered to the goddess on an ornate tray of silver. In addition, temple trustees estimate that pilgrims offer 600–700 liters of milk to the goddess every Sunday. Free tea and meals are provided for all visitors and virtually no one in the proximity of the temple, human or animal, goes unfed. Hundreds of rotis are cooked and fed to dogs in Kungher and surrounding villages. The aviary ensures that pigeons and crows are similarly sustained. Ten kilos of food are even provided periodically by the temple for the ants dwelling on the grounds. The trustees tell me that they are presently developing a gaushala for disabled cows who cannot feed. The temple trust evidently has the wealth necessary to expand their charitable enterprises, as they are also planning the construction of a library as well as a home for senior citizens.[80]

Thus, at Kungher we see not only a vast architectural elaboration of the worship space, but also a shift towards values amenable to middle-class tastes, cultivating an atmosphere of comfort and tidiness alongside prosperity, equality, and charity. This shift in values also involves an affirmation of the sattvic and the Brahmanic, and a concomitant eschewal of the *bhūvo*, as well as liquor and non-vegetarian offerings. With this comes a theological reorientation of the patron goddess Cuḍel, who moves beyond her station as a relatively minor spirit to become synonymous with Śakti. This affords her seemingly limitless, transcendent power, to which devotees are offered quick access, receiving prompt solutions for their problems in an economic world more and more demanding of their time. As such, for a prosperous Patel community in Kungher and the ever-burgeoning constituency of devotees visiting the site, Cuḍel Mā is no longer just a ghost or a witch, but the Great Goddess herself.

Conclusions

In the post-liberalization Gujarat of the twenty-first century, Cuḍel finds herself with something of a split identity. While she maintains elements of the ghost spirit of folklore with powers of a minor goddess in many site-

[80] Ibid.

specific contexts, she has also been sweetened and supercharged at Kungher to the extent she has assumed the station of the supreme, Sanskritic goddess in the form of the single flame rather than a predictable lithograph print. How can we account for this dramatic transformation in her divine personality, not to mention her movement from the roadside *derī* to the temple?

Many theoretical apparatuses present themselves. These include "gentrification" akin to that presented by Waghorne and Harman in the context of Tamil Nadu, "Vaishnavization" as suggested by Lutgendorf, and "Universalization" as described by Humes. Gentrification would seem applicable in this Gujarati context, as it accounts in part for the expansion and reorganization of Cuḍel Mā's worship space at Kungher, as well as the middle-class friendly atmosphere therein. This occurs alongside the dismissal of animal flesh, alcohol, and the *bhūvo*, which we have observed at both Kungher and at a roadside shrine, ritual reconsiderations consonant with the cultivation of dignity and self-limitation that mark Vaishnavization, or at least a conscious move toward the Brahmanic. (We might even be tempted to draw upon M.N. Srinivas' famous but antiquated theorizations and suggest a "Sanskritization of the goddess" here.[81]) Gone is the ghostly seductress personifying threatening aspects of femininity, a benevolent, all-powerful goddess emerging in her place. Cuḍel's amplification and ascendancy to the status of Ādyaśakti—the very same title given to Vindhyavāsinī at Vindhyachal—would appear, quite convincingly, to mark a universalization.

While all these theoretical approaches are helpful in elucidating the recent reimagining of Cuḍel Mā, not to mention that of other goddesses in Gujarat, no one of them proves entirely adequate in providing a complete explanation. In actuality, all of these processes interweave and inform one another. We are left to conclude, then, that Cuḍel's reinvention is multifaceted, involving a marked change in spaces of worship, ritual practices and theological understandings based on caste and class sensibilities amenable to the upwardly mobile. In Gujarat, as in much of the rest of post-liberalization India, spiritual and economic transformation go hand-in-hand, not only for devotees but for divinities as well, and goddesses like Cuḍel Mā write this process large.

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[81] For more on Sanskritization, the process by which lower caste groups adopt the customs and beliefs of upper-caste groups such as Brahmans, see M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952).

Fig. 1. Saris at the roadside shrine south of Ahmedabad (photo by author)

Fig. 2. *Cūndḍi* at the Kungher temple (photo by author)

Book Reviews

Negative Ecstasies: Georges Bataille and the Study of Religion. Jeremy Biles and Kent L. Brintnall (eds.). Perspectives in Continental Philosophy. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.
Reviewed by Scott Merrill, *Plymouth State University*

Georges Bataille (1897–1962) was a librarian at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris for most of his adult life. During this time he produced literary/artistic journals, novels, poetry, and a variety of philosophical books that draw on anthropological, sociological, economic, and political theory. He has been referred to as a "metaphysician of evil" as well as a "philosopher of excess and transgression" because his work explores violence, desire, the obscene, crime, sacrifice, the sacred, and (most importantly) the ways such phenomena enter life in the form of meaningful practices. Bataille insisted throughout his life that these phenomena involve transgressions which maintain the social order. His emphasis on excessive desire, ecstasy, and self-rupture, along with a transdisciplinary œuvre that remains on the fringes of traditional scholarship, has led to misunderstandings that have contributed to his marginalization in the realm of religious studies.

Jeremy Biles and Kent L. Brintnall's *Negative Ecstasies: Georges Bataille and the Study of Religion* presents a collection of sixteen essays from a variety of disciplines that could help to improve the reception of Bataille's work in the field of religious studies. The collection includes contributions from experts in the fields of philosophy, comparative literature, religious studies, as well as women's studies and cultural studies, e.g., an essay by noted phenomenologist and translator Alphonso Lingis that explains Bataille's "contestation" of the sociology and anthropology of religion.

The non-utilitarian emotions generated by sacrifice and religious experience are connected to what Bataille referred to as the "general economy." This includes the heterogeneous realm of excess, waste, and other socially disruptive and disordering forces. The general economy is the opposite of the "restrictive" economy's emphasis on scarcity and accumulation. Empirical observations, like those made by the social sciences, fail to recognize the "sovereign" state of existence that extreme experiences generate. These experiences always take place outside the realm of work and reason. Lingis points to Bataille's commitment to such experiences and raises questions about the limits of empirical knowledge (152). Such ideas could be helpful tools for

anthropologists unfamiliar with Bataille who are seeking ways to relate excess and transgression to phenomena such as romantic love, charisma, as well as risk-taking behavior known as edgework.[1]

Allan Stoekl, the author of *Bataille's Peak* (2007), examines connections between Teilhard de Chardin's notion of the noosphere and Bataille's atheological pursuit of intimacy and communication through the breaking down of limits. Stoekl highlights Bataille's erotic fiction and his notion of the death of God in order to demonstrate how the "multiple user domain/dimension/dungeon" (MUD) is connected to notions of God as author, or author as God. As in Bataille's erotic fiction, the notion of a limitless (and limiting) author is disappearing today through pseudonyms and fictional personae in the realm of cybersex. "One communicates," he writes, "in and through the fictional, eroticized text, taking on and reshuffling personae." Stoekl views the eroticized and fictional world of cybersex as "the Omega Point." This refers to de Chardin's notion of noosphere, or the idea that the universe is "evolving" towards a higher state of consciousness. Stoekl argues that the possibilities for anonymity the internet provides "may be precisely the point of eroticism where the identity of the fictional 'author' . . . is the least knowable. In cybersex, Bataille's 'virtual' death of God has become planetary" (215).

The essays in *Negative Ecstasies* reveal the relevance and importance of Bataille's commitment to creating a myth of the sacred in a post-Nietzschean world while also addressing the difficulties his language and subject matter present. As Biles and Brintnall point out in the introduction, Bataille's ideas and subject matter have been marginalized because they present a challenge to the "aesthetico-moral sensibilities of many scholars of religion" (13). Despite this image, however, *Negative Ecstasies* undeniably presents the religious nature of Bataille's ideas and their ability to help address a variety of ethical and political problems today.

Bataille's challenge to "aesthetico-moral" sensibilities, and the misunderstandings his work has generated, is not limited to religious studies. Jean-Michel Heimonet refers to Jean-Paul Sartre's reading of Bataille's *Inner Experience* in "A New Mystic" (1947) as one of the "great literary misunderstandings," comparable to Gide as the reader of Proust.[2] Sartre's "A New Mystic," according to Heimonet, reveals a traditional and brilliant philosopher attempting to affirm his own system of

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1. Edgework is a sociological model that seeks to understand the various reasons why groups and individuals in Western culture voluntarily risk their lives, their sanity and general well-being. Unlike psychological models of risk-taking that focus on personality disorders, or on addiction to adrenaline, the sociology of edgework emphasizes the intersection between intense bodily experience and the social conditions leading some toward high-risk activities.
2. Jean-Michel Heimonet, "Bataille and Sartre: The Modernity of Mysticism," trans. Emoretta Yang, *Diacritics* 26 (1996): 59.

values by accusing another of perverting them with religious mysticism. The irony, he argues, is that in the process, Sartre also reveals *his own* mysticism.[3]

A fundamental difference between Bataille's so-called "mysticism"—which Michael Richardson likens more to the terrifying journeys and ordeals of the shaman than to the transcendence or unity with God associated with Christian mysticism[4]—and Sartre's, is that the latter's aim is to "sanctify" the subject while the former's is to negate it.[5]

Bataille was committed to exploring the ways in which competing emotions and moral attitudes expose our deepest concerns, desires, and fears, as well as the ways these binaries are reflected in our notions of the sacred. The combination of death and desire, horror and jouissance, often taking place at the same time, in the same individual, for instance, is precisely what "gives the sacred world a paradoxical character," Bataille wrote.[6] In "Movements of Luxurious Exuberance: Georges Bataille and Fat Politics," Lynn Gerber begins with this observation as she explores the reasons for America's fascination with body size, fatness, and weight loss. Beyond this, Gerber's larger aim is to apply Bataille's thought to examine what she calls "the many contradictions, problems, and possibilities of fatness, fat subjectivity, and fat politics in an age of the loudly trumpeted obesity epidemic and its increasingly powerful prerogatives" (20).

Gerber stresses the need to focus on Bataille's embrace of the "left-hand sacred," i.e., "filth, brokenness and dissolution," as opposed to the right-hand sacred, which stands for "wholeness, cohesion, and order," when addressing new possibilities for a fat politics. She believes the "left-hand sacred" provides a starting point for changing views regarding the "monstrous" nature of fatness in American society because the fat individual—whose body, Gerber believes, has become a symbol of death in American society—challenges the belief that society is ordered and whole. Bataille's notion of heterogeneity and the monster's potential to invoke an inner experience of self-disruption, she contends, could provide a new way of seeing fatness: fatness as a bodily manifestation of the sacred that challenges narratives seeking to reconsolidate fat subjectivity and personhood. "A Bataille-informed fat generosity," she concludes, "might resist the lie that death can be overcome by projects like weight loss by using our proximity to death to insist that everyone face its possibilities with the kind of glorious expenditure that our bodies represent" (37).

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3. Ibid.
4. Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London: Routledge, 1994), 114–16.
5. Heimonet, "Bataille and Satre," 59.
6. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volumes II & III*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 95.

Stephen Bush's "Sovereignty and Cruelty: Self Affirmation, Self Dissolution and Bataillean Subject" explores the paradoxical nature of Bataille's thought, as well as his emphasis on cruelty. By first examining Bataille's emphasis on self-negation and laceration over goal-directed activities, Bush, like Gerber, sees the potential for a Bataillean ethics that can foster intimacy and generosity. Yet, while self-negation may appear to be a good strategy for compassion towards others generally, Bush points out that not everyone can afford to expend themselves this way. "We can agree with Bataille," he says, "that self-negation is ethically important," because it "mitigates our tendency to assert ourselves at the expense of others" (40). The problem with self-negation, he argues, comes when we attempt to apply it across social hierarchies. For those at the bottom of such hierarchies, i.e., the poor, women who may already be living self-sacrificially, and other marginalized or oppressed groups and individuals, the idea of self-negation could be harmful.

Another objection to appropriating Bataille's ideas has been the amount of violence and cruelty that pervades his work. Bush asks, "Why does Bataille emphasize violence so much?" and then answers his own question, "For one thing, Bataille thinks it takes a jolt to get us out of our normal experience of ourselves as discrete, individuated things." But the more pertinent question he asks relates directly to cruelty: "Why is Bataille relatively uninterested in forms of violence that do not involve cruelty?" (41). The key to understanding the ethical significance of cruelty in Bataille, Bush argues, is the centrality of *sovereignty*, a key concept in Bataille's work. Sovereignty, as Bataille conceives it, involves being in the present moment, in rejecting authority external to oneself and of assigning a supreme value to one's own desires and expectations. Bush argues that self-affirmation and self-negation, in a context of sovereignty, operate together. The "shock of cruelty" expresses both self-negation *and* what Bush calls "the shock of beholding individuals who are subject to no constraints, who obey no norms, no conventions, and no authorities other than themselves" (47).

Bataille's ecstatic experiences, predicated on a breakdown of the subject are ends in themselves that could raise an awareness of the need for self-denial (interdependence) and self-affirmation (autonomy). This awareness, Bush argues, is connected to political and democratic ideals and could help to challenge other potentially *dangerous* ideals such as notions of invulnerablitity. While sovereignty in its purest form takes place in ecstatic moments, Bataille also finds continuities between ecstatic sovereignty and political sovereignty. "The primary refusal," Bush writes, "is the refusal to not be subordinated to others. This is an important ideal, a democratic ideal, even" (48).

Biles and Brintnall's collection of essays includes some of the leading scholars in the world of philosophy, cultural and religious studies, and comparative literature. These writings, as the limited selections above demonstrate, bring together an array

of ideas that draw out and explore the religious elements in Bataille's work. They also provide practical and philosophical possibilities for the application of Bataille's ideas to a number of contemporary political and ethical issues. Most importantly, these essays help to make sense of a challenging and paradoxical thinker. By demonstrating a thorough knowledge of Bataille's key concepts, the essays here provide a concise clarification of Bataille's ideas without dismissing their problematic nature. Finally, through careful analysis and imagination, the authors in *Negative Ecstasies* have broadened Bataillean studies by bringing his ideas out of those unfamiliar and ethically challenging shadows that have often been cradles of misunderstanding. The cumulative effect is both thought-provoking and hopeful. In an era in which a new myth of the sacred seems needed more than ever, this collection offers an important contribution not only for religious studies but also for the humanities in general.

Religion, Devotion and Medicine in North India: The Healing Power of Śītalā. Fabrizio M. Ferrari. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Pp. vi, 222.
Reviewed by Lisa Blake, *McGill University*

The North Indian goddess Śītalā is most often understood as the "goddess of smallpox," a fierce goddess who is both the cause and cure of disease. Scholarship on her worship, literature, iconography, and evolution has, for the most part, agreed with this assertion, with few acknowledging her simultaneous existence as a benevolent and protective mother. In *Religion, Devotion, and Medicine in North India: The Healing Power of Śītalā*, Fabrizio Ferrari aims to correct this imbalance, as he argues that the majority of scholarship on Śītalā has been complicit in the construction of the "myth" of the fierce smallpox goddess, when, in fact, she has always and only been a goddess of protection. Through a combination of ethnographic, textual, iconographic, and archival research, Ferrari traces Śītalā's history in North India, with the crux of his argument centering on the eighteenth-century Bengali Śītalāmaṅgalkāvyas, wherein she is portrayed as dangerous and disease-inflicting.

The volume consists of five chapters organized thematically on the topics of Śītalā's literature, iconography, contemporary worship, association with smallpox, and legacy, as well as four appendices with English translations of Hindi and Sanskrit texts. As much of Ferrari's argument is based on dismantling previous scholarship, each chapter (with the exception of chapter 5) attempts to take on a current understanding of Śītalā and dismantle it. Overall, while Ferrari's work is valuable for its analysis of historical texts and contemporary rituals, his main argument that the smallpox-bringing Śītalā is an inauthentic result of foreign influence is unconvincing.

Ferrari begins with textual sources, including *purāṇa*s and *dharmanibandha*s from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, tantric and āgamic texts from the twelfth to eighteenth centuries, and the Bengali Śītalāmaṅgalkāvyas from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Interspersed with ethnographic details of modern ritual practice, the texts are used to question the previously accepted notion that there are two distinct Śītalās; the fierce, disease-bringing Bengali version and the benevolent protective mother of Northwest India. He argues that the absence of an association with smallpox or other diseases within early texts proves that the fierce Śītalā of later texts is the result of "the interpolation of textual material associated with other, *ugra,* goddesses" (19). He continues this argument in his fourth chapter when he returns to the Śītalāmaṅgalkāvyas, within which Śītalā is portrayed as a fierce, disease-bringing goddess. Ferrari argues that these texts represent the beginnings of the smallpox myth and "shaped a new profile of the goddess that eventually impacted on renditions and understandings of Śītalā in colonial and post-colonial Bengal, in the rest of India and, eventually, abroad" (120). Ferrari clearly considers

these texts to be inauthentic with respect to Śītalā's true nature, arguing that they are the work of an elite group who were prejudiced against the lower classes. His literary analysis offers insight into textual conceptions of Śītalā and identifies a new text, the *Prabhāsakhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa*, as containing the earliest mention of the goddess. However, textual and lived traditions are often mentioned without distinction, with variations from the textual tradition attributed to colonial notions of Śītalā and their perceived unquestioned acceptance by devotees.

In other chapters, Ferrari utilizes what he terms "ethnographic vignettes" from his fieldwork at various North Indian temples in order to analyze Śītalā's iconography and contemporary ritual practices, including animal sacrifice, possession, and mortification of the flesh. The ethnographic components of these chapters are thorough and offer valuable information concerning patrons, practices, and iconography in specific temples. He denies any connection to illness, stating that associating ritual and possession with illness is a form of "disturbing cultural colonialism that [does] not correspond to beliefs and practices" (94), yet includes a Bengali informant's assertion that in response to feigned possession "Śītalā is likely to show her rage by heating up (*tāpāno)* and causing illness" (95).

Ferrari's final chapter appears almost as an afterthought, consisting of sections on Śītalā as an AIDS goddess, a comparison of Amitav Ghosh's 1995 novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* to Bengali *maṅgalkāvya*, and the modern "Durgāfication" of Śītalā in contemporary pop-culture. Each of the sections in this chapter would have perhaps been more suited to articles; there is no real cohesion between them or with the remainder of the work.

Overall, Ferrari's textual analysis and ethnographic research offer a valuable contribution to the field. However, he often seems unaware of his own biases; his dismissal of devotees for whom Śītalā is a fierce goddess as having been subject to "foreign influence" is similar to his criticisms of prior scholarship, in which "the voices of Śītalā's devotees, their texts and their material culture have been suffocated by the truth-claims of powerful, external door-keepers" (xxii). Although he convincingly shows a Śītalā that is a benevolent mother, his argument that this is the "real" Śītalā remains unproven and distracts from an otherwise well-researched volume.

Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th centuries). Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 386.
Reviewed by Henria Aton, *McGill University*

With the destruction of the Royal Academy of History, the House of India, and the Royal Palace in the 1775 Lisbon earthquake, an overwhelming amount of Portuguese archival materials disappeared forever. Historians Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov position their new monograph, *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th centuries)*, as an attempt to begin recovering early Portuguese knowledge, specifically related to India. In their prologue, the authors define Catholic Orientalism as "[a] set of knowledge practices geared to perpetuate political and cultural fantasies of the early modern Catholic protagonists and their communities" (xxi). The book's main argument is straightforward: through a variety of methods, imperial actors in India created a repository of knowledge which became "a social, cultural, and epistemological lubricant of the Portuguese imperial venture," and by the nineteenth century was subsumed into secular, national networks of "High Orientalism" (xxi). This argument is particularly engaging as it focuses on the geopolitical changes and cultural mobility that marked colonial experience in early modern South Asia.

The book reveals a small corner of the vast body of (often inaccessible) sources from this period, while examining how this knowledge was produced, by whom, and how it influenced European discursive practices about India. Divided into three major sections and eight chapters, the book follows the actions of Portuguese officials, missionaries, and Goan elites from the empire's beginnings in 1501 to its relative decline in the eighteenth century.

The first three chapters make up a section entitled "Imperial Itineraries."[7] The first chapter shows how early officials such as João de Castro and Tomé Pires deliberately cultivated "the first interpretative framework for Asia" based on the "scientific" mapping of the subcontinent's physical and cultural geographies. The second chapter takes the reader from Portuguese actors writing about India to the co-production of knowledge about India at the local level. The authors argue that

7. Scholars familiar with the authors' previous works will notice that several sections are based in earlier studies. The seventh chapter, for instance, borrows from Ângela Barreto Xavier, "Purity of Blood and Caste: Identity Narratives in Goan Elites," in *Race and Blood in Spain and Colonial Hispano-America*, ed. María Elena Martínez, Max S. Herring Torres, and David Nirenberg (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2012), 125–49. The fourth chapter reflects many of Ines G. Županov's previous arguments in *Disputed Mission* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Portuguese officials depended on pre-established "modes of knowing" (e.g., land registers) to collect information and develop their own Christianized systems of administration. In the third chapter, the discipline of natural history, or "bio-knowledge," is a case study for the transmission of knowledge. The authors argue that, using the empirical discipline of botany, rare "native" knowledge could be transformed into information coveted in Europe.

The fourth chapter, which begins the next three-part section, "Catholic Meridian," turns to the role of missionaries in the formation of Catholic Orientalism. Noting especially Jesuit experiments in conversion, the authors show that missionary modes of writing and reliance on Brahminic knowledge constituted "a major epistemic shift" which influenced the next waves of French and British Orientalisms (122). The fifth chapter moves to the writings of Franciscans in India, illustrating both the variety and breadth of scholarship, and the consistent plagiarism and reduction of their "creole perspective" in later European works (159). The sixth chapter shows how Portuguese missionary efforts in translating and transposing Christianity into the vernaculars (particularly Tamil and Konkani) produced an "engaged Orientalism" rooted in and shaped by local culture (238).

The final section, "Contested Knowledge," traces the transformation of the knowledge established in the previous chapters. In the seventh chapter, the authors explore how high-caste Goan "Christianized" elites adopted these Catholic narratives and modes of knowing to position themselves as legitimate actors in Portugal's Indian empire, and to claim their status at its head. The eighth chapter aptly ends the book by tracing the fragmentation of Catholic knowledge and its endpoint in the secularized, disembodied texts of the "High Orientalism" made famous by Edward Said.

The attention to texture throughout these chapters is perhaps the book's greatest strength. Given the liminal nature of Catholic materials from this period, the authors take great care to trace the complex movement of texts such as Garcia de Orta's *Colóquios* and Paula da Trinidade's *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*. They also examine a range of interdisciplinary materials, such as Codex Casanatense 1889, a picture album, and sixteenth-century property registers in Goa. These original, in-depth case studies illuminate the paths of Catholic knowledge, allowing the authors a bird's eye view on a fragmented archive. The breadth of research languages mastered by Xavier and Županov further contributes to this unique texture, as does their commitment to citing a vast amount of non-Anglo-American scholarship. Access to these sources, many of which are pertinent but overlooked by scholars who do not read Italian or Portuguese, is instrumental to their project.

Through this compelling methodology, the authors effectively demonstrate the existence, dissipation, and influence of Catholic Orientalism. By localizing Catholic knowledge *within* the Portuguese imperial project, the book contributes

to an important effort in recognizing the links between religious and colonial networks in Europe and South Asia. However, the use of the term "subalternity" (109) to position the marginalization of the Catholic archive by later scholarship is contentious. Although the authors certainly prove that this knowledge disappeared or was rewritten into new archives, the use of such a charged term fails to remind the reader that European Catholic actors still carried the colonial project of domination with them.

Because Xavier and Županov's sources and methods are both richly dense, the level of detail and analysis is more appropriate for graduate students and scholars of colonial history, Indian Christianity, missionary history, and archival studies, than for undergraduate students. For scholars of South Asian Christian mission, the chapter on the understudied Franciscans is particularly exciting.

Mind, Brain and the Path to Happiness: A Guide to Buddhist Mind Training and the Neuroscience of Meditation. Dusana Dorjee. New York: Routledge, 2014. Pp. 154.
Reviewed by Julia Stenzel, *McGill University*

The neuroscience of meditation is, at present, the most promising field within the arena of the Buddhism and science dialogue. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Buddhist scholars Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) and his wife Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids (1857–1942) inadvertently paved the way for this dialogue by construing Buddhism for their western audience as a "science of mind," praising the Abhidharma ("Buddhist psychology") for its sophisticated analysis of mind and consciousness.[8] The first serious attempt to bring scientists and Buddhist scholars to a roundtable took place in 1979 and turned out to be fraught with unforeseen problems of reciprocal misunderstanding: The late cognitive scientist Francisco Varela and others organized a conference entitled "Comparative Approaches to Cognition: Western and Buddhist,"[9] but recognized that the mutual understanding of, and respect for, these two investigative traditions needed a great deal of preparation. The strained conference was, nevertheless, ground-breaking in that it inspired an ongoing dialogue in the form of the Mind and Life conferences with the Dalai Lama, which began in 1987. Varela's aim was "to reinstate first-person experience as a source of scientific knowledge, and open scientific inquiry to methods such as meditation."[10] Meditation was to become the ultimate research tool.

The present work by Dusana Dorjee, cognitive neuroscientist at Bangor University in Wales, is a recent product of the interaction of science and Buddhism. The author is herself an embodiment of the science-Buddhism dialogue, as she self-identifies not only as a scientist, but also as a long-term meditation practitioner and teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of Dzogchen. Dzogchen (Tibetan *rDzogs Chen*, "Great Perfection") refers to a specific meditation tradition of the Tibetan Nyingma School, the first school to be established in the country of Tibet in the seventh century CE. This tradition teaches an approach to meditation that can be understood as nondual, since the practitioner is led to a state in which the dualistic subject-object structure of ordinary experience dissolves. Nondual forms

8. David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

9. Richard J. Davidson and Anne Harrington, "Appendix: About the Mind and Life Institute," in *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature*, ed. Richard J. Davidson and Anne Harrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 248.

10. Barry Boyce, "Two Sciences of Mind," *Lion's Roar: Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time* (September 2005).

of meditation differ in practice and goal from classical mindfulness traditions. To date, no scientific research has focused on the particularities of Dzogchen practice. Dorjee's book is therefore an interesting and welcome contribution to the dialogue. The author raises awareness for the breadth and richness of Buddhist meditation traditions.

The book's structure follows the progression of Dzogchen practice according to Dorjee's understanding. She describes a fourfold pyramid of mind training. Meditators start with the cultivation of the right intention (first stage), which demands a reflection on the meaning of happiness. Genuine happiness transcends the limitations of hedonism, embraces an awareness of impermanence and death, and is indissociably linked to a sense of purpose in life. At the second stage, meditators train in attention and "meta-awareness," i.e., in the capacity to sustain attention on an object while at the same time cultivating a monitoring element of attention which verifies and corrects the mind's activities. Practitioners then have to gain mastery in emotional balance (third stage) which Dorjee describes mainly in terms of developing "the four wholesome emotions" of loving kindness, compassion, rejoicing and equanimity. At the fourth level, the "stable and fairly balanced mind becomes a tool for exploration of the different notions of 'self' and the deepest self-transcending element of consciousness" (34). The path to happiness culminates in enlightenment, which in the Dzogchen tradition signifies the recognition of the clear light as the nature of the mind, which is pristine awareness, or, in Dorjee's words, "an exceptional state of mental balance" (129).

Dorjee attempts to straddle three approaches in her book: She introduces the scientific study of meditation from the point of view of psychology and neuroscience; she describes the theory of the Dzogchen path, and she gives practical instruction on how to put the stages of the path into practice. Her work stands out among the scientific studies of meditation in that she does not shy away from analysing the entire Dzogchen path, including a discussion of the motivations to embark on a spiritual path, and of the final result, enlightenment. She is right in criticizing the reductive, secular approaches that treat meditation solely as "a way to reduce stress and cope with or prevent illness" (ix). However, the grand approach of Dorjee's work is also its greatest weakness, since none of the three approaches is explored with the thoroughness it deserves. Her treatment of Dzogchen includes indiscriminately numerous teachings that are common to all Buddhist traditions, such as the four immeasurable attitudes, mind training, or mindfulness. Her explanations would benefit a great deal from John Dunne's detailed examination of different types of meditation.[11] Dunne distinguishes between classical mindfulness, including

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[11] John D. Dunne, "Buddhist Styles of Mindfulness: A Heuristic Approach" in Handbook of Mindfulness and Self-Regulation, ed. Michael D. Robinson, Brian D. Ostafin, and Brian P.

Śamatha, Vipassanā, and Tibetan mind training on the one hand, and nondual forms of meditation, including Dzogchen, Mahāmudrā, Chan, Seon, and Zen on the other. Dorjee's claim that Dzogchen is the only type of nondual meditation is untenable, and her treatment of common Buddhist practices as uniquely Dzogchen reveals her lack of a broader understanding of the complexities of Buddhist traditions. Dorjee's explanations pertaining to Buddhist concepts refer the reader sometimes to primary sources, but more often to contemporary, secondary literature by scholars of psychology and Buddhism. This lack of precision turns her book into a weak resource for all those who seek more than a rudimentary understanding of the philosophy and practice of Dzogchen.

The strength of this book lies in its accessibility. Dorjee has the ability to present psychological and Buddhist concepts in a concise and clear way, which is ideal for any interested newcomer to the material. She enhances the theoretical sections with practical guidance into the progressive stages of meditation practice. Given the fact that hers is a pioneering work, it is a courageous contribution to the field of scientific study of meditation, as she challenges the present limitations of reducing the study to secular forms of meditation. According to Dorjee, these are, at best, foundational levels of meditation. To understand the mind in all its facets, Dorjee proposes to expand the scope of research, and to recognize the value of examining all four stages of the fourfold pyramid of mind training.

Meier (New York: Springer, 2015), 249–70.

Hittin' the Prayer Bones: Materiality of Spirit in the Pentecostal South. Anderson Blanton. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Pp. 236.
Reviewed by Tucker Adkins, *Florida State University*

In *Hittin' the Prayer Bones* Anderson Blanton ethnographically investigates how the Holy Spirit is materially mediated, "even in a historically iconoclastic Pentecostal tradition" (3). Blanton, a research scholar in anthropology and religion at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic diversity in Gottingen, Germany, studies Pentecostal churches and related radio broadcast sermons throughout "southern Appalachia"—a geographical region he loosely describes as northeast Tennessee, northwest North Carolina, southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and part of West Virginia. He examines numerous examples of a "something else" behind material worship, including radio-listener interaction, prayer cloths, and "materialities of prayer" (22).

At station 105.5, WGTH, "The Sheep," Blanton notes an array of interesting events. In addition to the necessary recording equipment and furniture, the studio boasts an altar and pews. Much like traditional Pentecostal worship spaces, the station's building possesses an unsuspecting and naked esthetic. In order to "get a prayer through" for listeners, those inside the studio circumambulate and touch the microphone's wooden platform (30). Not to be left out, the program's listeners are implored, for the sake of their prayers, to interact with their material surroundings as well—an activity Blanton terms "radio tactility" (8). "Lay your hand on the radio," the host suggested, "as a point of contact and pray with us" (30). Put your skin to the apparatus and get closer to the Holy Ghost. Between the hosts, studio congregants, and the listeners, the Pentecostal radio broadcast encourages spiritual mediation through space.

Prayer cloths, an object of worship and healing for Pentecostals since the early twentieth century, similarly work as conduits for physical interaction and the Holy Spirit. Often passed between believers in an "exchange of hands," prayer cloths embody the participating congregation's prayerful needs and, as it moves between hands, the mobility of God (59). As the object moves throughout the body of people, so does God. During this process—the textile's sifting through the faithful's palms—"the force of belief, and thus the powerful efficacy of the Holy Ghost builds" to where it is able to "repel the devil himself" (84). In short, Blanton posits, prayer is no longer an abstract, invisible practice but instead highly tangible. Faith, in this scenario, is not an immaterial expression. Instead, this is where "belief emerges and seems to gain momentum" (84). Through the prayer cloth, the Holy Ghost is empirical and mediated.

Unlike the two prior examples of the radio experience and prayer cloth, Blanton's last chapter examines an animate object, the human body, as a mediator.

When the subject of a prayer or healing are not physically present for a laying of hands, the congregation can appoint a "stand-in" to conduct the Holy Spirit's power. The stand-in, thus, had dual roles in which "he or she provide[d] a physical substitute for an absent body while simultaneously providing a material conduit for the communication of divine healing power to the sick patient" (157). Another believer—an autonomous, living agent—could be a site of transfer for the Holy Spirit and a fellow congregant. Whether carried out on a studio pulpit or in traditional church setting, bodies were capable of carrying, and communicating, God's healing.

Blanton's creativity and mission—to provide a material study of belief—have to be appreciated. Though this comes roughly twenty years after Colleen McDannell's *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), and differs substantially in its content, it is quite similar in its effort to deemphasize intellectualism and doctrine in the study of religion. Such studies, importantly, challenge conventional method and push scholars and students to account for understudied spatial and behavioral realities of believers. Not to be ignored, either, is Blanton's contribution to studies in media and religion. In his attention paid to "radio tactility," or the process of listeners physically touching radio sets to increase the efficacy of their prayers, Blanton interestingly crosses paths with the "liveliness" posed by Jeffrey Sconce's *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence From Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000). Though Sconce's study is occupied with nineteenth- and twentieth-century entertainment devices as mediators of a "disembodied voice" or "electronic elsewhere" instead of the Holy Spirit, Blanton contributes a similar examination of media and mediation. However, *Hittin' the Prayer Bones* is not immune to concerns.

Between each chapter is an unexplained, excerpted sermon. It is assumed Blanton has a wealth of such source material from his ethnographic efforts, and they could certainly be used to augment his argument, but his purpose in (randomly?) alternating them between actual chapters is unclear and confusing. More perplexing is Blanton's comparison of Pentecostal prayer cloths and Catholic prayer beads. This leads him to a distracting discussion of sociological theory which postulates that Catholic "fingering" of prayer beads resembles the "manual stimulation of the sensation of defecation … and the prohibited desire to play with feces" (75). Why this section, with its highly questionable theoretical validity notwithstanding, was necessary to the study is difficult to understand. Even with its faults, Blanton's work is a useful resource for students and scholars of Southern religious practice, religion and mediation, and religious materiality. One hopes that *Hittin' the Prayer Bones* will be a launching-pad for further consideration of spatiality and behavior in American religion.

Paul and the Gift. John M. G. Barclay. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. xvi, 656.
Reviewed by Daniel A. Giorgio, *McGill University*

In *Paul and the Gift* John M. G. Barclay (henceforth JB) explores the language of gift in Paul and particularity how it is to be understood in the Letter to the Galatians and in the Letter to the Romans. The reading of Paul offered in this book, as the author himself presents it, "may be interpreted *either* as a re-contextualization of the Augustinian-Lutheran tradition, returning the dynamic of the incongruity of grace to its original mission environment where it accompanied the formation of new communities, *or* as a reconfiguration of the 'new perspective', placing its best historical and exegetical insights within the frame of Paul's theology of grace" (573). JB's proposition is to show that the notions of gift and perfection of grace found in the apostle Paul are best understood in terms of "incongruity," that is, the unconditioned gift of God-in-Christ to Jews and Gentiles without regard to superior ethnicity, status, or cultural prestige (360).

The first section of the book surveys multiple meanings of gift and grace throughout history, e.g. in the Greco-Roman World, Augustine, Luther, Barth, Sanders and recent discussions of Paul and grace. Starting with Marcel Mauss's famous work "Essai sur le Don" (1925), JB highlights that our modern western idea of gift (the Western "pure" gift), where the beneficiary is not required to give back, is completely alien to the ancient world where one can simply not think of the notion of gift without also having to give/receive something in return. Indeed, this concept of reciprocity is clearly found in the Greco-Roman World in both Roman patronage and Greek euergetism, for instance. As for the Jews, JB points out that although they do not appear to have adopted this "Mediterranean culture of reciprocity," the "Jewish ideology is undergirded not by the ethos of a 'pure', unreciprocated gift, but by an emphasis on the certainty of reciprocation from God" (44). In studying the concept of "perfection" (following the work of K. Burke, 1954), JB will go on to suggest six ways in which the gift/grace is perfected: superabundance, singularity, priority, incongruity, efficacy, non-circularity (66–75). To be sure, JB argues, they do not constitute a "package deal" since one may perfect one or several without perfecting them all.

In the second section of *Paul and the Gift*, JB analyses a variety of texts portraying different understandings of divine grace in Second Temple Judaism. According to JB, the Wisdom of Solomon shows that mercy cannot be extended to the undeserving to the point of undermining the justice that sustains the universe (194–211, 310), while *4 Ezra* maintains that God will reward the righteous with congruous mercy and that those who will be saved will be saved *qua* the righteous and the Torah-observant, "not on the grounds of sentiment or arbitrary preference"

(280–308, 313). Correspondingly, Philo presupposes that God's gifts are neither unjust nor random since God gives to those who are "worthy" of his benefits (212–38, 310). On the other hand, other texts perfect the incongruity of divine grace as we read in the Qumran *Hodayot* (1QH[a]), which calls a particular attention to the polarity between this divine kindness and the humans granted this grace who are physically and morally worthless (239–65, 311). Likewise, Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* portrays Israel's larger story as "permeated by a mercy incongruous with its persistent sin" (266–79, 312). Among these Jewish thinkers of Second Temple Judaism, Paul is perhaps to be placed in the middle of these arguments about grace; although Paul's voice is consistently distinctive due to the Christ-event and the Gentile mission, and the relation of both to the incongruous mercy of God (328).

What this grace/gift is and how it is perfected are the questions JB answers in his third and fourth sections, dealing with the Epistle to the Galatians and the Epistle to the Romans, respectively. In contrast to Luther's reading of Galatians, JB argues that rather than stressing the "subjective" individual conscience, this letter underscores instead the "objective" system of values (391). In this way, the divine gift—this incongruity of grace due to the Christ-event—is "neither coordinated with creation nor with Torah, but with a particular event endowed with universal significance" and it does "not correspond to the worth of its recipients, nor to any previously established system of worth" (446). Similarly, according to JB, in his letter to the Romans Paul underlines the "newness of life" arising from the Christ-event, which is the moral consequence of the gift (its reciprocity), located not only on the conscience of the individual believer but also of the whole community. Simply put, Christian "obedience" is the proper response to the incongruous gift of God in Christ (517).

In closing, I offer my evaluation of the volume as a whole. The reading of Paul that JB offers here is certainly well balanced, especially in that his project succeeded admirably in being "historically plausible, exegetically responsible, theologically informed, and […] hermeneutically useful" (7). The different texts from authors of Second Temple Judaism analysed by JB are very well documented, which enables him to show the relationship between these texts and what we find in the letters of Paul with respect to grace/gift. It is precisely this use/interpretation of grace/gift in Paul that is the great contribution of JB's book: the Christ-event is the unique hermeneutical key for understanding divine grace as an incongruous gift (an unconditioned gift expecting reciprocity). JB does a fantastic job in showing how Paul, in using language of antiquity, is not creating a new word, rather he is giving it a new content (by its relation to Christ): Paul is using a wide word (grace/gift) to which he attaches a theological meaning. Moreover, throughout the third and fourth sections of the book, the reader will certainly appreciate how JB portrays Paul as being radical about incongruity of grace, but not to its effect (perfection of grace).

Hence, a gift is fulfilled when it is received and responded to (to reach its *telos*); unlike Augustin, for instance, who believed that gifts from God cannot be rejected. The reader will also enjoy JB's constant dialogue with ancient and contemporary commentators of Paul (e.g. Augustine, Luther, Barth, Bultmann, Sanders, Dunn, Martyn, Kahl, Wright) throughout his book and his fair and informed conversation with the "different schools on Paul." In particular, the discussion JB carries on with Luther is enlightening. Indeed, what is distinctive in Luther is the "permanent state of incongruity" of grace, where "believers live perpetually from a reality outside of themselves," hence a gift-giving "stripped of the instrumental reciprocity" (116). JB will then point out Luther's excessive emphasis on the unconditioned grace of God and the individual transformation that happens in the conscience of the believer. JB will argue instead for the *reciprocity* that comes with God's gift/grace expecting a proper ethical response from those who are in Christ.

Overall, *Paul and the Gift* seems to me to be a milestone in Pauline theology studies, and it will most definitely stimulate further research. However, one may underline JB's silence on this Pauline notion of gift/grace in both the patristic (e.g., Origen) and the scholastic tradition (e.g., Thomas Aquinas), especially among the Church Fathers who lived in the Greco-Roman world, spoke Greek, and whose writings often represent an advance over Paul's construal. This is not a major critique, though, since JB's book provides the reader both interpretations of grace/gift prior or contemporary to Paul (e.g., Second Temple Judaism) and substantial interpreters of Paul on grace in church history (e.g., Marcion, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and several modern authors). Finally, in reading JB's book and his hermeneutic of Pauline theology and the Christ-event, one may also raise the question as to whether we are to think of the "Christ-event within the theological frame," or "the theological frame within the Christ-event."[12]

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12. This question was raised by John Barclay himself during Christof Landmesser's review session *Paul & the Gift* at the "Inhalte und Probleme einer neutestamentlichen Theologie" Seminar Group at the 71st General Meeting of the SNTS, 3 August 2016, held at McGill University, which I was delighted to attend.

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> 1. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 123.

2. M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jaqueline S. Palmer, "Millenial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from Silent Spring to Global Warming," in ed. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown, *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 21–45.

3. Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 18.

If a complete bibliographic reference has already been given in a previous footnote, use the following short form: author's last name, main title, page number.

4. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 124.

5. Killingsworth and Palmer, "Millenial Ecology," 34.

6. Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 25.

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