



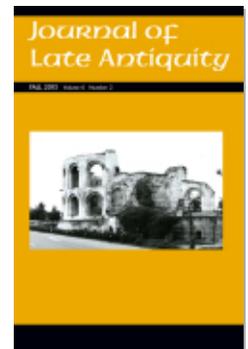
PROJECT MUSE®

From Stones to Myth: Temple Destruction and Civic Identity in the Late Antique Roman East

Aude Busine

Journal of Late Antiquity, Volume 6, Number 2, Fall 2013, pp. 325-346
(Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/jla.2013.0016



➔ For additional information about this article
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jla/summary/v006/6.2.busine.html>

From Stones to Myth: Temple Destruction and Civic Identity in the Late Antique Roman East¹

This paper aims to assess narratives of temple destruction by raising the issue of their etiology. It reexamines the famous destructions of the temple of Zeus Belos at Apamea (trad. circa 386) and that of Zeus Marnas at Gaza (trad. circa 402), both of which, though well known, have been neglected in recent interpretative studies on religious violence. Both accounts are first analyzed according to the different contexts in which they were written, then considered in terms of the development of episcopal hagiography. This approach opens questions regarding how such stories were actually elaborated in practice. Comparison of various similar discourses on ancient stones sheds new light on issues that extend beyond narratives of temple destruction to touch upon the construction of Late Antique civic identities.

The destruction of temples is probably among the most iconic and most widely studied phenomena of Christianization in the late antique world. During Late Antiquity, the devastation of the Serapeum at Alexandria, instigated by Bishop Theophilus in 392, became a prime example of the fate reserved for pre-Christian cultic places, and the iconicity of this act has endured up to the present.² Much has been said about the causes and the consequences of the destruction of temples, their prospective conversion into churches, and the meaning of these

¹ Portions of this essay were presented at the 16th Oxford Patristics Conference on 9 August 2011 and at the Conference “Espaces sacrés dans la Méditerranée antique” held at Poitiers on 14 October 2011. I am grateful to Natacha Massar and to *JLA*'s anonymous reviewers for providing valuable criticism on earlier drafts.

² On this event see Johannes Hahn, “The Conversion of the Cult Statues: The Destruction of the Serapeum 392 A.D. and the Transformation of Alexandria into the ‘Christ-Loving’ City,” in Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, Ulrich Gotter, eds., *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston, 2008), 336–367 (with previous bibliography).

acts for those who perpetrated them.³ The hostility of Christians toward pagan buildings has also been debated recently in terms of issues raised by religious violence.⁴ Starting with Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, numerous historical and hagiographical texts recount the downfall of pagan temples, variously attributed to zealous characters, imperial orders, or both in tandem.⁵ Recent scholarship has pointed out the unreliability of many of these sources, and more attention is gradually being focused on the hermeneutic role of such destructions in Christian works.⁶ Scholars have for instance recently emphasized the role played by discourses on temple destruction in attempts to legitimize political power.⁷

³ Suffice it to quote here Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, "Frühchristliche Kirchen in antiken Heiligstürmen," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 54 (1939), 105–136; Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), 47–61; Béatrice Caseau, "ΠΟΛΕΜΕΙΝ ΛΙΘΟΙΣ: La désacralisation des espaces et des objets religieux païens durant l'Antiquité tardive," in Michel Kaplan, ed., *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident: Études comparées* (Paris, 2001), 61–123, pl. I–XIB; Emmel et al. eds., *From Temple to Church*; Luke Lavan, Michael Mulryan, eds., *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'* (Leiden, 2009).

⁴ See Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2005); also Emily Albu, Harold A. Drake, et al., eds., *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot, U.K./Burlington, Vt., 2006); Maijastina Kahlos, *Forbearance and Compulsion: The Rhetoric of Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Late Antiquity* (London, 2009); Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009); Pedro Barceló, ed., *Religiöser Fundamentalismus in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 2010); Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge/London, 2011).

⁵ See Caseau, "ΠΟΛΕΜΕΙΝ ΛΙΘΟΙΣ"; Helen Saradi, "The Christianization of Pagan Temples in the Greek Hagiographical Texts," in Emmel, Gotter, Hahn, *From Temple to Church*, 113–134. On Constantine's alleged destruction of temples see Averil Cameron, Stuart G. Hall, trans., *Eusebius of Caesarea: Life of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999), 301–305, 319–320; Caseau, "ΠΟΛΕΜΕΙΝ ΛΙΘΟΙΣ," 86–90; Nicole Belayche, "Constantin a-t-il légiféré contre des pratiques rituelles à Héliopolis (Baalbek)?" in Sylvie Crogniez-Pétrequin, ed., *Dieu(x) et hommes: Histoire et iconographie des sociétés païennes et chrétiennes de l'antiquité à nos jours* (Mont-Saint-Aignan, 2005), 101–112; Martin Wallraff, "Die antipaganen Massnahmen Konstantins in der Darstellung des Euseb von Kaisareia," in Johannes Hahn, ed., *Spätantiker Staat und religiöser Konflikt. Imperiale und lokale Verwaltung und die Gewalt gegen Heiligtümer* (Berlin/New York, 2011), 7–17.

⁶ See Peter Brown, "Christianization and Religious Conflict," in Averil Cameron, Peter Garnsey, eds., *CAH* vol. 13, *The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425* (Cambridge, 1998), 632–664; Caseau, "ΠΟΛΕΜΕΙΝ ΛΙΘΟΙΣ," 67–70; Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, Ulrich Gotter, "Introduction," in Emmel, Gotter, Hahn, *From Temple to Church*, 1–22; Luke Lavan, "The End of Temples: Towards a New Narrative?" in Lavan, Mulryan, *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'*, xv–lxv.

⁷ See Johannes Hahn, "Tempelzerstörung und Tempelreinigung in der Spätantike," in Rainer Albertz, ed., *Kult, Konflikt und Versöhnung. Beiträge zur kultischen Sühne in religiösen, sozialen und politischen Auseinandersetzungen des antiken Mittelmeerraumes* (Münster, 2001), 269–285; Ulrich Gotter, "Rechtgläubige — Pagane — Häretiker. Tempelzerstörungen in der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung und das Bild der christlichen Kaiser," in Hahn, Emmel, Gotter, eds., *From Temple to Church*, 43–90.

The present study reassesses the function of some temple destruction narratives by considering their etiologies and thus exploring their meaning at the time they were composed. This method is applied, first, to accounts of the famous destructions of the temple of Zeus Belos at Apamea and of Zeus Marnas at Gaza, generally dated to 386 and 402. Surprisingly, these two events have been investigated mostly for documentary purposes; though well-known, they have been neglected in recent interpretative studies on religious violence. The analysis here first examines each text in the context in which it was written, then considers both accounts together within the perspective of the development of episcopal hagiography. Discussion turns next to the ways in which these spectacular stories were shaped as virtual narratives. It will be demonstrated that both texts constituted attempts to give a Christianized meaning to the destiny of a notable building highly visible in its city. From this perspective these narratives, similar to pagan accounts of the etiologies of a city's monuments, can be seen as means of creating new Christian civic identities, a crucial process in an era when Christians were committed to taking over their cities' landscapes and cultures.

Two Resounding Temple Destructions

Accounts of the destructions of the temples at Apamea and Gaza are repeatedly cited in literature, along with the devastation of the Serapeum, as being the most impressive attacks launched by Christian authorities against temples. Analysis here thus begins with descriptions of these accounts in terms of their similarities, their internal coherence, and their relation to reality.

The Temple of Zeus Belos at Apamea

Written in the mid-fifth century, the *Ecclesiastical History* of Theodoret of Cyrillus recalls at length (5.22) the story of the destruction of the temple of Zeus Belos at Apamea by the local bishop, Marcellus.⁸ Theodoret has inscribed the event within the context of a broader discussion of Theodosius I's repression of paganism (5.21),⁹ and the episode precedes a short description of the fall of the Serapeum in Alexandria (5.23).

According to Theodoret, when the praetorian prefect and his troops had failed in their attempt to destroy the gigantic temple at Apamea, the divine Marcellus asked God to grant him the means to achieve it. A man in the

⁸ The redaction of the *Historia ecclesiastica* is traditionally dated between 449 and 450; see Hartmut Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Grossen zu Theodosius II. Das christliche Kaisertum bei den Kirchenhistorikern Socrates, Sozomenus und Theodoret* (Göttingen, 1996), 281–282; Annick Martin et al., *Théodoret de Cyr: Histoire ecclésiastique I, Livres I–II* (Paris, 2006), 31–37.

⁹ See Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Grossen zu Theodosius II*, 105–121.

crowd suggested they should undermine the bases of the columns and prop up the superstructure with olive timber, to which he would then set fire. The technique was ineffective, as a black demon would not suffer the wood to be consumed. Marcellus urged a deacon to make the sign of the Cross and to sprinkle the columns with holy water. After this, the demon fled and the fire resumed. As a result, the side of the temple that was connected to the columns collapsed. The multitude, alerted by the thunderous crash, rushed up to see the sight. When they heard about the flight of the demon, they burst into a hymn in praise of God. Theodoret ends by saying that he does not want to bother the reader by recounting the end of Marcellus' life (5.22).

This account, traditionally dated to 386, has been considered by many to be valuable evidence for the study of Christian policy against paganism.¹⁰ Historians have used this text extensively in studies of imperial legislation against temples, on action of the praetorian prefects at the local level, and, of course, in studies on the role played by bishops in fighting paganism.¹¹ In addition, the details provided by Theodoret regarding the building and the technique implemented in its destruction have been helpful to archaeologists seeking to discover what happened to Apamea's major temple.¹² Theodoret's comments on its size, decoration, and stonework have been used to flesh out the limited data provided by archaeological investigation, as nothing of the temple has been preserved except a huge skeletal concrete structure.¹³

It should be remembered, however, that Theodoret was the first to write about the building and its destruction, some sixty years after what supposedly happened. At this same later time, Sozomen reported in his *Ecclesiastical History* (7.15.13) that Marcellus, seeking to convert the pagans more easily, "destroyed the temples of the city and its villages,"¹⁴ but he does not explicitly mention the shrine of Zeus Belos. According to Sozomen (7.15.13–14), the

¹⁰ See, e.g., Garth Fowden, "Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire A.D. 320–435," *JThS* 29 (1978), 53–78 at 63–68; Frank R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization c. 370–529*, 2nd ed. (Boston/Leiden, 2001), 1.123–129; Pierre Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers Païens: La disparition du paganisme dans l'Empire romain, du règne de Constantin à celui de Justinien*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 2004), 65–68.

¹¹ For a review see Aude Busine, "Bishop Marcellus and the Destruction of the Temple of Belos at Apamea," *Studia patristica* (in press).

¹² See Richard Bayliss, *Provincial Cilicia and the Archaeology of Temple Conversion* (Oxford, 2004), 22–23, 146, who from this text draws an elevation of the burning temple (Bayliss fig. 6), with a representation of the wooden supports in flames and the undercut columns. Scholars have referred to Theodoret in order to analyze ancient techniques of demolition; see, e.g., Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1.125, 216.

¹³ See Jeanine Balty, "L'oracle d'Apamée," *L'Antiquité Classique* 50 (1981), 5–14; ead., "Le sanctuaire oraculaire de Zeus Bêlos à Apamée," *Topoi* 7 (1997), 791–799.

¹⁴ Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.13: τοὺς ἀνὰ τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὰς κόμας ναοὺς κατεστρέψατο.

bishop was captured and burnt alive at Aulon, south of Apamea, as the soldiers and gladiators he had hired attacked the main temple there.

There may be some historical basis to Theodoret's account, as the work was intended for a Syrian audience,¹⁵ whose elder generation probably had some recollection of what happened in Apamea. However, it is worth mentioning that despite its title, *Ecclesiastikē historia*, Theodoret's narrative is not a simple retranscription of historical truth (2.17.7). In fact, his conception of time in this work differs from secular and civil time in that history and hagiography are interwoven.¹⁶ It appears that Theodoret took considerable liberties in his treatment of reality and included miracle stories in his description of facts. He referred to political and military history only as a backdrop to the edification of the Church, which explains why he mentions almost none of the secular characters by name, including the anonymous prefect of the East at Apamea, identified by modern scholars as Cynegius Maternus, the Spanish dignitary who held that post from 384 to 388.¹⁷ By the same token, the attribution to Theodosius I of a legal measure ordering the destruction of temples is in all likelihood anachronistic:¹⁸ the discourse was meant to extol the virtues of the first Nicene emperor since Constantine.¹⁹ In this regard, Theodoret's much-debated description of Marcellus as "the first to use the law as a weapon" (5.22.1)²⁰ emphasizes the high level of the Syrian bishop's activity, as well as the congruence of his actions with imperial policy.²¹ In addition, this episode contributes to Theodoret's reconstruction of comprehensive lineages of Syrian bishops as well as to their exaltation in the context of the conflict between Alexandrian and Antiochene congregations. It is significant that the account of the temple destruction led by Marcellus (5.22) precedes a brief version of the story of the ruination of the Serapeum in Alexandria at the instigation of Theophilus (5,23). By comparison, Marcellus' deeds are presented as more successful and more miraculous than those of the Alexandrian

¹⁵ See Martin, *Théodoret de Cyr*, 1. 71–72.

¹⁶ See Martin, *Théodoret de Cyr*, 1.41–50. On the connections between the two literary genres see Arietta Papaconstantinou, ed., *Writing "True Stories": Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East* (Turnhout, 2010).

¹⁷ *PLRE* s.v. Cynegius 3, 235–236. See John F. Matthews, "A Pious Supporter of Theodosius I: Maternus Cynegius," *JThS* 18 (1967), 438–446; Neil B. McLynn, "Genere Hispanus Theodosius, Spain and Nicene Orthodoxy," in Kim Bowes, Michael Kulikowski, eds., *Hispania in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives* (Leiden, 2005), 77–120 at 108–119.

¹⁸ A. Martin et al., *Théodoret de Cyr. Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 2, *Livres III–V* (Paris, 2009), 427.

¹⁹ See Gotter, "Rechtgläubige und Häretiker", 50–51.

²⁰ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.1: Πρῶτος μέντοι . . . ὄπλω τῷ νόμῳ χρησάμενος. See, e.g., Fowden, "Bishops and Temples," 65; Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, 1984), 98.

²¹ See Busine, "Bishop Marcellus."

bishop. The aim was to construct Syrian counterparts to better-known figures and tales from other regions.

The episode of the fall of the temple of Apamea thus appears to play a significant role in establishing the primacy of the Syrian bishop's political power and holiness. In doing so, Theodoret refers to the Apamean event with little concern for telling the truth. Readers of this passage of his *Ecclesiastical History* would find it more rewarding to analyze the miraculous nature of Marcellus' deeds than to seek knowledge of reported "facts."

The Temple of Zeus Marnas at Gaza

The *Life of Porphyry of Gaza* relates the burning of the inner building of the great temple of Zeus Marnas, the so-called Marneion, most prominent of the eight temples of Gaza, as well as the construction of an enormous church upon the temple's foundations. The attack on the temple is supposed to have been made during the reign of Arcadius at the behest of Porphyry, bishop of the city.

The narrator, Marcus Diaconus, who purports to have been a follower of Porphyry, relates that, seeing the resistance of the Gazaeans to conversion to Christianity, the bishop went to Constantinople to ask the emperor for the means to destroy the great temple of Gaza (*VPorph.* 37–43). Thanks to his prophecy of the birth of a son—the future Theodosius II—to Empress Eudoxia (42–44, 46–49), Porphyry obtained a commission from the emperor, who ordered the closure and destruction of the temple and dispatched a military force to oversee these measures (51–54). Assisted by the Christians inhabiting the city, the soldiers set out to tear down the Marneion, but the attack failed because priests blocked the doors of the temple from the inside (65). Nevertheless, a seven-year-old child, inspired by God, revealed how to proceed: they were to burn the inner temple by applying to its bronze doors a mixture of raw pitch, sulfur, and lard. The child enjoined them to preserve the outer temple and its precinct, and subsequently to purify the place and build a church (66). The soldiers followed these divine instructions and, when the destruction was completed, undertook the construction of a gigantic church, named Eudoxiana in memory of the empress, who had made a generous contribution to the project (51, 92).

Although the account in the *Life of Porphyry* contains some unsolvable chronological inconsistencies,²² this picturesque chronicle has been widely used as a historical source in studies on paganism in fourth-century Palestine, on the Christianization of the area, and on the functioning of the imperial court

²² See Henri Grégoire, Marc-Antoine Kugener, *Marc le Diacre, Vie de Porphyre, évêque de Gaza* (Paris, 1930), xvii–xxxiii.

in that era.²³ The destruction of the Marneion by Porphyry has been considered as factual truth by most scholars, who have referred to this event, supposed to have occurred in 402, as one of the most symbolic attacks upon paganism by Christian authorities.²⁴ It is worth noting that Jerome, a contemporary of the events, mentions the fate of the temple on two occasions. Writing in 400–401, he observes that “Marnas, confined in mourning at Gaza, trembles with fear for the destruction (*eversio*) of his temple” (*Ep.* 107.2).²⁵ And ca. 407, he alludes to the conversion of the Serapeum and the Marneion into churches.²⁶ Yet no ancient source other than the *Life of Porphyry* ever mentions a Gazaeon bishop by that name, or, *a fortiori*, his embassies at the court and his destruction of the temple, or even the existence of a church named Eudoxiana. It must also be granted that on the site itself, nothing of the Marneion has been preserved. The location of the church built on its ruins remains unknown, and scholars are still wondering with which building it might be identified.²⁷

Actually, proponents of the authenticity of the *Life of Porphyry* and skeptics have clashed for centuries amid disputes between Catholics and Protestants, as the former defended at all costs the literalness of the *Lives of Saints*, and the latter were more likely to question their coherence.²⁸ Up to the present day, scholars still debate the historicity of the *Life of the bishop of Gaza*. Recently, T. Barnes has reiterated hypercritical arguments, claiming that the text has no historical basis and that the only information it can provide for the historian concerns the society in which its author lived, that is, the reign of Justinian at the earliest.²⁹

²³ See, e. g., Raymond Van Dam, “From Paganism to Christianity at Late Antique Gaza,” *Viator* 16 (1985), 1–20; Nicole Belayche, “Pagan Festivals in Fourth-Century Gaza,” in Brouria Bitton Ashkelony, Aryeh Kofsky, eds., *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston, 2004), 5–22.

²⁴ E.g., Fowden, “Bishops and Temples,” 72–77; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 1.207–222.

²⁵ Jerome, *Ep.* 107, 2: “Marnas Gazae luget inclusus, et eversionem templi iugiter pertremescit.” See Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 1.272.

²⁶ Jerome, *Comm. In Isaiam Prophetam* 7.17 (PL 24.249B): “Serapium Alexandriae et Marne templum Gazae in ecclesias Domini surrexerunt” (“The Serapeum of Alexandria and the Marneion at Gaza have arisen as churches of the Lord”).

²⁷ Until evidence to the contrary, the building known today as St. Porphyry’s Church does not seem to be a good match: dating from the Crusades, it appears that it was given its name only in the nineteenth century. See Victor Guérin, *Description géographique, historique et archéologique de la Palestine* (Paris, 1869), 2.183–184; Grégoire, Kugener, *Vie de Porphyre*, 146–147. C. Saliou suggested that the Eudoxiana church could correspond to the St. Sergius’ Church mentioned by Procopius of Gaza in the sixth century (*Or.* 1); see Catherine Saliou, “Gaza dans l’Antiquité tardive,” in Marc-André Haldimann, dir., *Gaza à la croisée des civilisations I, Contexte archéologique et historique* (Genève, 2007), 141–160 at 151.

²⁸ The history of these disputes is summarized in Grégoire, Kugener, *Vie de Porphyre*, vii–xxxiii.

²⁹ Timothy D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen, 2010), 260–283, who questions the very existence of Porphyry and his church (282–283); followed by Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford/New York, 2011), 799.

The present analysis, following that reserved interpretive current, assumes that the *Life of Porphyry* was written long after the purported events at Gaza and that it belongs to the genre of fictitious hagiography.³⁰ A seminal treatment by the Bollandist scholar H. Delehaye, firmly condemned by the Catholic Church, has explored the processes leading to the elaboration of other hagiographical legends: like historical novels, these works attribute imaginary facts to real characters, thus maintaining historical and/or topographical roots.³¹ Delehaye states that in most cases, “the name of the saint, the existence of the sanctuary and the date of his celebration day are generally the only data that can be derived with any certainty from these compositions, where imagination is given free rein.”³²

If we accept that the *Life of Porphyry* belongs to the genre of fictitious hagiography, we must acknowledge that its author has reconstructed the episode of the destruction of the Marneion with a very meager and approximate knowledge of the facts. Seen from the point of view of the hagiographer and his audience, the event belonged to a quite remote past and was open to fictionalized composition.

Besides the similarity of the facts they report—a violent destruction instigated by a local bishop during the Theodosian dynasty—the narratives of the temple destructions in Apamea and Gaza were conceived with distinctive authorial intentions. How closely they relate to actual historical fact differs, in part due to how close (or far) in time the narrators are to the events about which they are writing. That said, neither has much concern for reality: these literary reconstructions of local events aim mainly at extolling the miracles worked by prominent local bishops in their fight against paganism and idolatry.

Bishops as Holy Destroyers of Temples

Whatever the accuracy of the facts reported, the accounts of the miraculous acts of Marcellus and Porphyry can be analyzed together inasmuch as both narratives clearly contribute to the construction of the image of the ideal churchman. Like Theophilus in Alexandria, Marcellus and Porphyry have been counted

³⁰ On this literary genre see Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, 151–198.

³¹ Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, 4th ed. (Brussels, 1955). Note that the Bollandist ignores the *Life of Porphyry* in this study, probably because of the strong implication of the Catholic Church in the controversy. For the Catholic reaction, see Roger Aubert, “Le Père H. Delehaye et le cardinal Mercier,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 100 (1982), 743–780; Marc Van Uyt-fanghe, “L’hagiographie: un ‘genre’ chrétien ou antique tardif?” *Analecta Bollandiana* 111 (1993), 135–188 at 137–138.

³² Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, 108 (my translation from French).

among the most prominent characters embodying the fight of the Church against paganism. But although the role of bishops as holy destroyers of temples and idols has recently attracted more attention from scholars,³³ surprisingly little has been written in this context about the bishops of Apamea and Gaza.

It should be recalled that from the fourth century onwards, bishops tended to be presented as earthly representatives of the Church. Alongside apostles and martyrs, they were extolled for carrying on in this world the battle waged by Christ in heaven. As such, bishops Marcellus and Porphyry were presented as saints whose glorious acts were terrestrial manifestations of their holiness. Theodoret lauds the bishop of Apamea as having been “the best bishop in all respects” (*Hist. eccl.* 5.22.1), “fervent in spirit” [Rom. 12:11] (5.22.2), “who himself won the crown of martyrs” (5.22.12).³⁴ He also links Marcellus’ success to “the freedom of speech (παρρησία) he enjoyed with God” (5.22.1).³⁵ This *parrhēsia* is a key concept for understanding the role with which Theodoret endowed bishops: it allowed them to advise the Nicene emperors as well as to resist their Arian counterparts and, by consequence, ensured the independence of the Church.³⁶ By the same token, Porphyry of Gaza, presented as a “fervent lover of Christ” (*VPorph.* 2),³⁷ received a revelation about the way he should burn the temple, through a child endowed with *parrhēsia* and speaking in the name of Christ (68).³⁸

Beyond the technical aspects of the undertaking, both stories, as part of miracle literature, are wholly based on divine intervention. The Apamean temple is said to have been “so firm and solid that to break up its closely compacted stones seemed beyond the power of man” (*Hist. eccl.* 5.22.3).³⁹ Theodoret makes it clear that it was the sign of the Cross and the application of holy water that caused the escape of the demon and ignited the subsequent fire that consumed the temple (5.22.8–9).

³³ See Caseau, “ΠΟΛΕΜΕΙΝ ΛΙΘΟΙΣ”; Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*; Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2005).

³⁴ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.1, τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχιερέων Μάρκελλος ὁ πάντα ἄριστος; 5.22.2, ὁ θεῖος, ζέων τῷ πνεύματι; 5.22.12, αὐτὸς τὸν τῶν μαρτύρων ἀνεδήσατο στέφανον.

³⁵ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.1, τῇ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν παρρησίᾳ.

³⁶ On the importance of the *parrhēsia* of bishops see, e.g., Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992), 91–102; Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Grossen zu Theodosius II*, 189–193; Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, 67, 83–88, 220–221, 267–271; Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, 216; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose and John Chrysostomus: Clerics between Desert and Empire* (Oxford, 2011), 48–54. Note that *parrhēsia* is also presented by Theodoret as a capacity of the Syrian monks, see, e.g., Theod. *Philoth. hist.* 13.6–8.

³⁷ *VPorph.* 2: ἐραστής . . . θερμώτατος . . . τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

³⁸ *VPorph.* 68: ἐθαύμασεν . . . ἀκούσαντες τῆς παρρησίας τοῦ παιδός.

³⁹ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.3: ἀδύνατον ἀνθρώποις . . . διαλύσαι τῶν λίθων τὴν ἄρμονίαν.

A closer look reveals that the accounts of the destruction of the Apamean and Gazaeon temples fall in line with other hagiographical material depicting violence against idolatry. The scenario begins with the inefficiency of secular authorities in demolishing the temple. In Theodoret's history, it is the praetorian prefect of the East who serves as a foil to Marcellus. In the *Life of Porphyry*, several officials, among them the *consularis* and the *dux* of Palestine, are similarly criticized for failing to destroy the Marneion (27, 32–33, 63). Regarding the Serapeum at Alexandria, Sozomen points to the failure of the prefect and the *comes* of Egypt to repress the pagan riot triggered by Bishop Theophilus' attack upon the Serapeum.⁴⁰

Next in these accounts enters the saint, whose divine qualities—*parrhēsia*, prayers, faith—guarantee the kindling of the fire and collapse of the temple. Similarly, it was the holy conduct of Matrona of Perge that chased away the demons from the temple in which she was dwelling.⁴¹ In the *Life of Alexander Acoemetus*, the holy presence of the saint suffices to burn down a temple.⁴² At Apamea and Gaza too, fire clearly has a purifying function, as may also be found in numerous sources damned buildings.⁴³

Third, when they had to cope with material difficulties, Marcellus and Porphyry received a revelation concerning the technical solution through anonymous characters. In Apamea, an unskilled worker among the crowd suggests how the sapping of the columns can be achieved.⁴⁴ In Gaza, a child reveals both in Syriac and in Greek the components of the flammable mixture to be applied to the doors of the temple.⁴⁵ The similarity between the two episodes prompts speculation whether the author of the *Life of Porphyry* might have shaped his history after the text of Theodoret; this prospect becomes even more likely when we consider that the introduction of the *Life of Porphyry* is plagiarized from Theodoret's *Religious History*.⁴⁶

In the next stage of the story, the demolition is thwarted by fierce resistance from the demon inhabiting the temple. Numerous hagiographical texts convey the idea that temples housed demons and, thereafter, the Devil.⁴⁷ In this context it should be noted that Christians often reduced the complex

⁴⁰ Soz. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.2–5.

⁴¹ VMatron. 19 (*ActaSS Novembris* 3: 790–813). See Saradi, “The Christianization of Pagan Temples,” 127–128.

⁴² VAlex. Acoem. 9–10 (ed. de Stoop). On other fire miracles see Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, 185–188.

⁴³ See, for instance, Margaret Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion* (London/Rio Grande, Ohio, 1993), 291–301.

⁴⁴ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.44.

⁴⁵ VPorph. 68.

⁴⁶ See Grégoire, Kugener, *Vie de Porphyre*, xxxiii–xxxvii.

⁴⁷ Caseau, “IIOAEMEIN ΛIΘOIS,” 82–86; Saradi, “The Christianization of Pagan Temples.”

realities of pagan cultic places to the generic categories *templum* or *hieron*. Through this simplification, temples came to be viewed as symbolic of all the rituals condemned by the Christians, to the point where destroying the buildings became tantamount to wiping out the demonic powers.⁴⁸ In this manner, accounts of the sudden and violent collapse of a temple reflected the victorious outcome of Christ's heavenly fight against paganism. According to the Christians, the triumph of the church had not only been preordained but was also presented as instantaneous.⁴⁹ The fiercer the struggle against temples, the greater was the resulting liberation of the universe. In Theodoret's text (5.22.11), the crash of the columns and the flight of the demon loosened the tongues of the Apameans, who were finally free to celebrate the God of the Universe.⁵⁰ At Gaza, the burning of the temple led to the conversion of numerous pagans.⁵¹

All in all, the accounts of the temple destructions at Apamea and Gaza aim at revealing the pointlessness of paganism. This canonization of religious violence is linked to a long textual tradition derived from the Bible.⁵² The bishops' violent acts were viewed as legitimate as long as they partook in a demonstration of the power of God over all other gods.⁵³ As holy men, Marcellus and Porphyry were described as heroic demolishers of temples and idols. In this regard, Theodoret, though labeled a Church historian, produced a piece of episcopal hagiography; and his passage on the bishop, which probably inspired the author of the *Life of Porphyry* and was to be recycled in two later *Vitae Marcelli*, constitutes an early attestation of a literary *topos* that was to gain increasing popularity in the following centuries.⁵⁴

The Making of Local Legends

Let us now consider how eminent local characters, such as zealous bishops, could have been transformed into heroes depicted as holy destroyers of temples.

⁴⁸ Claire Sotinel, "La disparition des lieux de culte païens en Occident: Enjeux et méthode," in Michel Narcy, Éric Rebillard, eds., *Hellénisme et Christianisme* (Lille, 2004), 35–60 at 37–42.

⁴⁹ See Brown, "Christianization and Religious Conflict," 634–635; Gotter, "Rechtgläubige und Häretiker," 59–63.

⁵⁰ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.11: ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ τοῦ ἀντιπάλου δαίμονος ἔμαθον τὴν φυγὴν, εἰς ὑμνοδίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων τὴν γλώτταν ἐκίνησαν ("When they heard of the flight of the hostile demon, their tongues broke out into a hymn of praise to the God of Universe").

⁵¹ *VPorph.* 72.

⁵² For example, 2 Chron. 2:15.13; Deut. 7:1–26.

⁵³ See Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, 151–207.

⁵⁴ On this *topos* see Saradi, "The Christianization of Pagan Temples," 113–134; Hahn, "Tempelzerstörung und Tempelreinigung"; Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, 260–268.

It is worth studying the context in which these legends of temple destruction were created, circulated, and used before their literary reutilization.⁵⁵

Very little is known about the temple and the cult of Zeus Belos at Apamea in Late Antiquity. In 363 Libanius wrote that Apamea still worshiped Zeus even though the cult had been made liable to penalty; but he does not mention the temple itself.⁵⁶ Almost no material evidence has survived to help trace the fate of the temple since, other than the concrete structure mentioned above, nothing has been found but a dumping ground containing fifth-century pottery.⁵⁷ Note that the deliberate and utter destruction of the “very big and so richly decorated” temple, as it is described by Theodoret (5.22.3),⁵⁸ is technically questionable and that other catastrophic scenarios, such as earthquakes, warfare, or accidental fire, could also explain the fifth-century decay of the building and its surroundings.⁵⁹ Whatever the cause of its fall, the temple was obviously in ruins when Theodoret wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*. At that time, some sixty years after the incident he narrates, its destruction by fire was interpreted as divine intervention.

The burning of the temple of Apollo at Daphne in 362 demonstrates that very soon after the event, a fire could be attributed to divergent causes, whether accidental or deliberate, human or divine. Libanius seems to link the destruction of that temple and its statue to a foreigner, depicted as the canonical

⁵⁵ On the importance of oral tradition in the shaping of legends see A. Busine, *Les Sept Sages de la Grèce antique: Transmission et utilisation d'un patrimoine légendaire d'Hérodote à Plutarque* (Paris, 2002).

⁵⁶ Lib. *Ep.* 1351. The sources from previous periods are listed in Balty, “Le sanctuaire oraculaire de Zeus Bêlos,” 791–794; Youssef Hajjar, “Divinités oraculaires et rites divinatoires en Syrie et en Phénicie à l'époque gréco-romaine,” *ANRW* 2, 18, 4 (1990), 2236–2320 at 2255–2257; Wiebke Friese, *Den Gottern so nah. Architektur und Topographie griechischer Orakelheiligtümer* (Stuttgart, 2010), 421–422.

⁵⁷ Balty, “Le sanctuaire oraculaire de Zeus Bêlos,” 797–798. On the difficulty of distinguishing between ideologically motivated destruction and the pragmatic dismantling of abandoned buildings for reuse of their architectural elements, see Laurence Foschia, “La réutilisation des sanctuaires païens par les Chrétiens en Grèce continentale (IVe–VIIe s.),” *Revue des Études Grecques* 113 (2000), 413–434; Sotinel, “La disparition des lieux de culte”; Bayliss, *Provincial Cilicia*, 23–25; Lavan, “The End of Temples”; Bryan Ward-Perkins, “The End of Temples: An Archaeological Problem,” in Hahn, ed., *Spätantiker Staat und religiöser Konflikt*, 187–99; Ine Jacobs, “Temples and Civic Representation in the Theodosian Period,” in Stine Birk, Troels Myrup Kristensen, Birte Poulsen, eds., *Using Images in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2014), forthcoming.

⁵⁸ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.3: μέγιστόν τε ὄν καὶ πολλῷ κόσμῳ πεποικιλμένον. For the dimensions of the remaining temple see Balty, “Le sanctuaire oraculaire de Zeus Bêlos,” 797–798.

⁵⁹ See Gareth Sears, “The Fate of the Temples in North Africa,” in Lavan, Mulryan, *The Archaeology of Late Antique “Paganism,”* 229–259 at 237–239; Jacobs, “Temples and Civic Representation.” On the hypothesis of an ignored earthquake, which occurred in Antioch in 387, see Busine, “Bishop Marcellus.”

barbarian, who had led an army against the city.⁶⁰ The emperor Julian tried to blame the fire on the Christians.⁶¹ According to Ammianus Marcellinus, also a contemporary, rumor had it that the conflagration at Daphne was due to a pagan priest who had carelessly left a candle burning.⁶² Nearby peasants would have argued that the fire did not come from below, but from heaven.⁶³ Unsurprisingly, all Christian sources of course considered the unexpected ruin of the temple as a sign of the victory of Christianity.⁶⁴ Less than twenty years after the event,⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, addressing an audience well aware of the facts, attributed the fire at Daphne to divine revenge in a manner reminiscent of Theodoret's account of events at Apamea: the destruction of the oracular shrine at Daphne is attributed to direct intervention of the martyr Babylas (3rd cent.), whose body had been brought to Daphne and buried in a chapel near Apollo's temple a few years before, and then removed from the shrine by Julian. Like Theodoret, John Chrysostom emphasizes the miraculous nature of the fire, stating that the saint came within the temple as if he were alive and that his prayers caused the roof and the great statue of Apollo to catch fire.⁶⁶ Note that this account of the blaze at Daphne seeks to explain not only the miraculous destruction it caused, but also the reason why the building was only partly destroyed and some columns saved by God, leaving it still visible.⁶⁷

Similarly, in the Apamean context, the shaping of Marcellus' legend must be understood as an attempt to provide a Christianizing explanation for the razing of the temple of Zeus Belos. Both Theodoret and his contemporary Sozomen recall Bishop Marcellus' deeds so as to show that relatively soon after his death, he came to be regarded as a leading figure in advancing the Christian cause, praised for his furious actions against pagan monuments. At the time their accounts were written, the memory of the falling columns of the temple, long ago, near the beginning of the reign of Theodosius II, could easily be linked to Marcellus' zeal to eradicate pagan cults. Several acts of bravery

⁶⁰ Lib. *Or.* 60.2–3. On Libanius' treatment of this event and his dependence on the Second Sophistic's canon of monody see Diane Johnson, "Libanius' *Monody for Daphne* (Oration 60) and the *Eleusinian Logos* of Aelius Aristides," in Thomas Schmidt, Pascale Fleury, eds., *Perceptions of the Second Sophistic and Its Time—Regards sur la Seconde Sophistique et son époque* (Toronto, 2011), 199–215 at 202–203.

⁶¹ Julian, *Misopogōn* 33; Amm. 22.13.2.

⁶² Amm. 22.13.3.

⁶³ Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 3.11.4–5.

⁶⁴ Joh. Chrys. *Homily on St. Babylas, Against Julian* 93 (see below); Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 3.11.4–5; *Artemii Passio* 56.

⁶⁵ The *Homily On Saint Babylas*, dated probably between 378 and 379, see Margaret A. Schatkin, Cécile Blanc, Bernard Grillet, eds. and trans, *Jean Chrysostome: Discours sur Babylas*, (Paris, 1990), 20.

⁶⁶ Joh. Chrys. *Homily on St. Babylas, Against Julian* 93–94.

⁶⁷ Joh. Chrys. *Homily on St. Babylas, Against Julian* 94, 96, 114–115.

were then attributed to the local churchman, who was transformed into a martyr and burnt at the stake for attempting to destroy the pagan temples of the Apamene.⁶⁸ It is worth noting that Theodoret in his youth spent seven years, between 416 and 423, in a monastery at Nikertai, near Apamea, and that parts of his *Ecclesiastical History* could have been composed while he had returned to the monastery during his exile in 449.⁶⁹ Quite likely it was on these occasions that he learned of the miracles worked upon the temple by the famous local bishop. The tale of the destruction of the magnificent poliadic temple by the valorous Marcellus furnished a grand history for its conspicuous ruins.

Writing about sixty years after the alleged events, Theodoret integrated the local legend of the fall of Zeus' temple into his *Ecclesiastical History*, but with a new agenda. Marcellus was an excellent candidate to embody the *parrhēsia* of Syrian bishops as well as their actions against paganism. Moreover, the description of the sudden defeat of the Apamean demon fit perfectly into Theodoret's own teleological vision of history. In the course of time, Marcellus' legend would be further enriched and developed, in the two *Vitae Marcelli*, mentioned above, that retrace the life of the Apamean hero.⁷⁰ As H. Delehaye has pointed out, these texts rely mainly on information provided by Theodoret, embellished with more or less insignificant details aiming to highlight the virtues and miracles congruent with the status of a saint.⁷¹

I would argue in a similar vein, that the *Life of Porphyry* was constructed as a foundation myth for the great church of Gaza, which stood in the middle of the city on ruins of the Marneion that the author of the *Life* and his contemporaries could still observe. Whatever the hagiographer's knowledge of the historical background, the various episodes in the story of the bishop, who is attributed the canonical qualities of a holy destroyer of idols, seem clearly intended to provide an etiology for the construction of the church, described as the trophy of Porphyry's victory over paganism.⁷²

In assembling the story of Porphyry and his destruction of the Marneion, the author first needed to explicate the link between the empress Eudoxia and the adjective "eudoxiana" (εὐδοξιανή) ascribed to the church building. To explain the involvement of the wife of Arcadius and mother of Theodosius II

⁶⁸ Cf. Soz. *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.13–14.

⁶⁹ See Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Grossen zu Theodosius II*, 281–282; Martin, *Théodoret de Cyr I*, 13–15, 24–26.

⁷⁰ Βίος καὶ μαρτύριον τοῦ ἁγίου Μαρκέλλου ἐπισκόπου Ἀπαμείας τῆς Συρίας, published in Basilius Latyšev, "Hagiographica graeca inedita," *Mémoires de l'Académie impériale des sciences de Saint-Petersbourg* 12 (1914), 119–125 and in the *Passion ὅτε Θεοδόσιος ὁ μέγας ὅτε Θεοδόσιος ὁ μέγας* published in idem, *Menologii anonymi byzantini saeculi X quae supersunt II* (1912), 276–278.

⁷¹ Hippolyte Delehaye, "Saints et reliquaires d'Apamée," *Analecta Bollandiana* 53 (1935), 225–244 at 234–236.

⁷² *VPorph.* 2.

in the foundation of this church, the author retraces the bishop's journey from Gaza to Constantinople that earned support from the empress and intervention from Arcadius himself. The author relates how Eudoxia, grateful for Porphyry's felicitous prophecy about the birth of a son, tricked her husband into agreeing to take measures necessary for the destruction of the Marneion.⁷³ Later, after the temple had been destroyed, Eudoxia sent a letter to Porphyry in which she announced having sent him marble columns for the prospective new church and also transmitted its plan, which was to be cruciform, as God had revealed to her.⁷⁴ Besides the general shape of the church and its columns, other architectural components are given their purpose via the narration, such as the square, which was paved with slabs from the Marneion,⁷⁵ as well as the reuse of the outer walls of the temple, which are said to have been kept standing in accordance with the prophecy uttered by the child present at the time of the fire.⁷⁶

An underexploited passage of the *Life* appears to be significant for our understanding of the construction of the church's etiological myth. In the last lines, we can read that:

Having entrusted all of the devout congregation to God, he fell asleep in peace with the saints, on the second day of the month Dystros, in the year 480 according to Gazaeon reckoning [420c.e.]. He had been bishop for twenty-years, eleven months, and eight days, and fought the good fight against the idol-maniacs until the day of his eternal rest.⁷⁷

Ch. Clermont-Ganneau had already noted that the wording of this passage is close to funerary inscriptions found in the region, which refer to the local era in the same way.⁷⁸ We can reasonably suppose that this passage derives from some epitaph, lost today, of a Gazaeon bishop deceased in 420. We actually know that other hagiographers composed their work from funerary inscriptions. The most telling example of such a recycled epitaph is the

⁷³ *VPorph.* 37–54.

⁷⁴ *VPorph.* 75.

⁷⁵ *VPorph.* 76.

⁷⁶ *VPorph.* 66–67.

⁷⁷ *VPorph.* 103: ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐκοιμήθη μετὰ τῶν ἀγίων, μηνὶ Δύστρω δευτέρα ἔτους κατὰ Γαζαίου ὀγδοηκοστοῦ τετρακοσιοστοῦ, ἐπισκοπήσας ἔτη κδ καὶ μῆνας ια καὶ ἡμέρας η, τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα τετελεκῶς πρὸς τοὺς εἰδωλομανεῖς ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς κοιμήσεως αὐτοῦ.

⁷⁸ Charles Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine 1873–1874 II* (London, 1896), 410, cat. no. 13, followed by Grégoire, Kugener, *Vie de Porphyre*, 145. For other examples see Carol A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Oxford, 1987), 120–135, no. 4–20.

second-century funerary epigram of a certain Abercius of Hierapolis.⁷⁹ This famous obituary, discovered *in situ*, was reused word for word two centuries later in the last paragraph of the *Life of Abercius* (see below).⁸⁰ At Gaza, the text of such an epitaph could have been placed next to the edifice of the Eudoxiana, just as the inscription honoring a Gazaeian presbyter deceased in 450 was found in the wall of a house adjoining a church.⁸¹ Assuming that Porphyry's epitaph was still visible to the hagiographer, the year of his death, which is the only absolute date mentioned in the *Life*, would have allowed the author to collocate the destruction of the Marneion and the construction of the church as in the twenty-four year episcopate of Porphyry and thus during the time of the empress Eudoxia at the dawn of the fifth century.

Even if it is possible that the *Life of Porphyry* records accurate reminiscences of the destruction of the Marneion at the beginning of the fifth century, it is still clear that the entire text must have been intended to give meaning to what the hagiographer observed about one of the largest churches in Gaza, namely its appellation, location, and architecture, as well as the epitaph of the saint who was buried there. Eudoxia herself had become unpopular soon after the time of Porphyry's supposed encounter with her,⁸² but the existing building, the Eudoxiana, could now be provided a namesake made venerable through her connection with the deeds of the holy bishop to whom the church was dedicated.

From all of this, it follows that the accounts of the destruction of the temples of Apamea and Gaza aimed to create Christian etiologies for what remained visible of these famous pagan shrines at some distance in time after their destruction. These two texts bear witness to different stages of the elaboration of such stories. While the text of Theodoret reflects an emerging legend inspired by an event known by a portion of his audience, the *Life of Porphyry* has been shaped as a proper foundation myth, recalling the origins of a prestigious church.

Interpretatio christiana of Stones and Civic Identities

Whether they were part of a pagan shrine cum stone quarry, the columns of a magnificent church, or the funerary inscription of a famous bishop, the

⁷⁹ See Wolfgang Wischmeyer, "Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 23 (1980), 22–47 = *SEG* 30 (1980), no. 1479 = Reinhold Merkelbach, Josef Stautber, eds. *Steinepigramme aus dem Griechischen Osten* III (Stuttgart, 1998), 16/07/01.

⁸⁰ *V*Aberc. 79–80.

⁸¹ Glucker, *The City of Gaza*, 121–122, no. 4 = *SEG* 37 (1987), no. 1483 = Yiannis E. Meimaris, *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia: The Evidence of the Dated Greek Inscriptions* (Athens, 1992), 124–125, no. 108.

⁸² See Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London, 2001), 17–18.

Apamean and Gazaeon stones were subjected to an *interpretatio christiana*. The process of mythmaking, as exemplified in the *Life of Prophyry*, displays parallels with fourth- and fifth-century hagiographical literature.

The ways in which existing stones were reused in practice are illustrated by a life of Abercius (2nd cent.), bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, written in the middle of the fourth century. The entire narrative, in part inspired by the Acts of Peter, has long been considered fanciful. Most scholars acknowledge that the composition of the *Life of Abercius* relied solely on biographical elements contained in the bishop's epitaph (see above), which were then freely elaborated by the hagiographer.⁸³ In an important article, P. Thonemann has demonstrated that some episodes in the *Life* were likewise taken from other epigraphical data, such as an imperial letter from Marcus Aurelius and a first-century inscription recording the names of two characters playing a subsidiary role in the *Life*. As Thonemann notes, "through creative readings of those second-century epigraphical monuments . . . , the author of the *Life* offers . . . a reconstitution of Hieropolitan history in a form designed to be palatable to a Christian audience."⁸⁴

For purposes here it is significant that this *Life* seems primarily intended to conflate into a common history a specific building and a local holy man who was buried there and honored by an elegant obituary.⁸⁵ The imaginary story of the saint, which presents striking similarities to the *Life of Prophyry*, offered its author a vehicle through which to invent a Christianized history for baths dedicated to Faustina the Younger at one of the city's hot springs. Fourth-century Hierapolitans could very likely still have associated the spring and its bath house with the pagan empress through an inscription. Regarding the spring located there, the hagiographer explains that its hot waters had burst forth from the earth at the very place where Abercius had prayed for the health of local residents.⁸⁶ The subsequent construction of the building is presented as the direct consequence of an exorcism performed on Faustina's daughter by Abercius.⁸⁷ In recognition of this miracle, the empress granted largesse to Hierapolis and sent an architect to build the bath house. Faustina's support toward the Phrygian city and its bishop is reminiscent of Eudoxia's

⁸³ *VAberc.* 79–80. See, e.g., William M. Ramsay, "The Tale of Saint Abercius," *JHS* 3 (1882), 339–353 at 347.

⁸⁴ See Peter J. Thonemann, "Abercius of Hierapolis: Christianisation and Social Memory in Late Antique Asia Minor," in Beate Dignas, Robert R. R. Smith, eds., *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2012), 257–282 (quoted, 277).

⁸⁵ Abercius' tombstone was discovered in a bath house; see Thonemann, "Abercius of Hierapolis," 258, with previous bibliography.

⁸⁶ *VAberc.* 40.

⁸⁷ *VAberc.* 65–66.

intervention to benefit the great church at Gaza notably by sending columns and the church's plan. Note that both stories concern buildings related to disputed imperial characters. Abercius' tomb, moreover, is said by his biographer to have been built from a marble altar carried, as a punishment, by the Devil from Rome to Hierapolis.⁸⁸ As suggested by Ramsay, this anecdote might have found its origin in features of the saint's tombstone that may have shown a peculiar resemblance to old pagan monuments.⁸⁹

All in all, much like the *Life of Porphyry*, *Abercius' Life*, while devoid of historical truth, reinscribes a magnificent building whose origins were all too visibly pagan within the parameters of a rising Christian hegemony. With this same end in mind, chapters of the legend of the local saint were compiled from actual inscriptions scattered throughout his city.

Other cases indicate a similar literary reutilization of ancient stones that had survived until the time when Christian legends began to develop. One of the miracles of Saint Colluthos (6th cent.) revolves around a rich bilingual merchant from Isauria who was residing in Antinoe.⁹⁰ One may safely assume that this passage was borrowed from a luxurious Graeco-Syriac funerary inscription of an Isaurian that was carved on the wall of the monastery at Deir Abu Hennis, in Middle Egypt, near Antinoe.⁹¹

Similarly, dating to the second half of the fourth century, the totally fictional *Life of Ariadne*, describing the fate of Ariadne of Prynnessus (2nd cent.), a Phrygian slave condemned under Hadrian for refusing to sacrifice to the gods,⁹² integrated an honorific inscription to a certain Tertullus into its narrative. According to Louis Robert, the text, now lost, summarized a second-century decree.⁹³ Although the reconstruction of the text as read by the hagiographer remains problematic,⁹⁴ it is generally admitted that the Tertullus honored by the

⁸⁸ *VAberc.* 66.

⁸⁹ Ramsay, "The Tale of Saint Abercius," 351.

⁹⁰ Leo Depuydt et al., eds., *Encomiastica from the Pierpont Morgan Library: Five Coptic Homilies Attributed to Anastasius of Euchaita, Epiphanius of Salamis, Isaac of Antinoe, Severian of Gabala, and Theopompus of Antioch*, 2 vols. (Louvain, 1993), I, 79, II, 61, quoted by Alain Delattre, "Les rapports entre la ville d'Antinoé et le monastère de Deir Abou Hennis en Moyenne-Égypte," in Colette Dufour Bozzo, ed., *Itinerari mediterranei fra IV e IX secolo: Città-capitale e deserto-monastico* (Genoa, forthcoming).

⁹¹ Gustave Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Égypte* (Cairo, 1907), no. 222 = Maurice de Fenoyl, "Une inscription funéraire bilingue," *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 17 (1963–1964), 57–61. A. Delattre is preparing a new edition of the inscription.

⁹² Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martirii di S. Teodoro e di S. Ariadne: Con un'appendice sul testo originale del martirio di S. Eleuterio* (Rome, 1901), 123–133.

⁹³ See Louis Robert, "La pierre phrygienne dans la passion d'Ariadne à Prynnessos," in idem, *À travers l'Asie Mineure: Poètes et prosateurs, monnaies grecques, voyageurs et géographie* (Athens, 1980), 244–256 at 250–255.

⁹⁴ Robert, "La pierre phrygienne," 255.

inscription inspired the homonymous character who plays a role in the trial of Ariadne's master.⁹⁵ Again, there is a fair chance that this episode of the story of Prynnessus' local celebrity was taken from a monument still on view in the fourth century.

Moreover, as with the stories of Porphyry and Abercius, some saints' lives can be read altogether as foundation myths created to give a new history to an existing building. In this regard, the *Life of Ariadne* of Prynnessus as a whole seems aimed at providing an etiology to the place where the saint was venerated, that is, where a rock supposedly swallowed her up and thereby saved her from her persecutors. Note that the literary *topos* of a virtuous woman saved into the depths of the earth was used again with a similar purpose in the later *Life of Thecla*, to justify the configuration of her famous sanctuary at Seleukia on the Calycadnos. The liturgical table, which was still visible to the hagiographer, was said to be erected on the precise spot where Thecla disappeared when the earth opened beneath her.⁹⁶

Similarly, the *Life of Theodotus of Ancyra* also seems aimed at explaining the presence of a chapel dedicated to Theodotus in Malos, a small locality in Galatia.⁹⁷ Some scholars, starting with H. Delehaye, have firmly condemned the authenticity of this story of an innkeeper persecuted under Maximinus Daia I (early 4th cent.).⁹⁸ The imagined narrative appears to have a specific purpose. Several miraculous episodes, such as the apparition of a donkey inspired by God, are adduced to show why the corpse of Theodotus was buried at its particular location. Viewed from this perspective, this entire *Life* should be considered as the foundation myth of Theodotus' martyrdom. It is worth adding that archaeologists have discovered, on a site that has been identified as ancient Malos,⁹⁹ two inscriptions mentioning respectively a saint named Theodotus and a church devoted to a victorious

⁹⁵ *Variad.* 1. See Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martirii di S. Teodoto e di S. Ariadne*, 105–112.

⁹⁶ *VThecl.* 28 (ed. Dagron).

⁹⁷ See Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martirii di S. Teodoto e di S. Ariadne*; Stephen Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus of Ancyra," *Anatolian Studies* 32 (1982), 93–113.

⁹⁸ Hippolyte Delehaye, "La passion de S. Théodote d'Ancyre," *Analecta Bollandiana* 22 (1903), 320–328; Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, 156–159. Arguing in favor of a historical value for the life are Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martirii di S. Teodoto e di S. Ariadne*, 11–16; idem, "Osservazioni sopra alcuni atti di martiri da Settimio Severo a Massimino Daza," *Nuovo Bollettino di archeologia cristiana* 10 (1904), 5–39 at 27–37; Henri Grégoire, Paul Orgels, "La passion de S. Theodote, œuvre du Pseudo-Nil," *Byzantinisch Zeitschrift* 44 (1951), 165–184; Mitchell, "The Life of Saint Theodotus of Ancyra."

⁹⁹ Malos is identified as modern Kalecik; see John G. C. Anderson, "A Celtic Cult and Two Sites in Roman Galatia," *JHS* 30 (1910), 163–167; Mitchell, "Life of Saint Theodotus of Ancyra," 95–99.

martyr.¹⁰⁰ As corroborated by former examples, the legend could have been wrought from such material evidence lying near the shrine and still visible at the end of the fourth century.

Hagiographers' reuse and interpretation of material evidence should not be seen only as an attempt to make their stories more authentic or credible. Within the context of late antique cities, Christian elaborations of the reasons for the existence of specific landmarks were also designed to shape new civic identities.

Much like mythography, hagiographical discourses can be aimed at legitimizing power as well as establishing new identities.¹⁰¹ For, from the fourth century onwards, Christians needed to find new local heroes able to personify the glory of their city and to replace traditional stories about the mythological or historical founders of the pagan city.¹⁰² This ambition to replace pagan legends with accounts of illustrious Christian figures was clearly voiced by John Chrysostom, who admonished Antiochenes not to pride themselves on the deeds of Seleucus, the historical founder of their city.¹⁰³ Quoting Acts 11, he states that they owe their virtues to the fact that it was in their city that the disciples were first named Christians.¹⁰⁴ To reinvent local history, Christians elaborated different strategies, notably by vaunting apostles and martyrs related to the past of their cities.¹⁰⁵ In some cases, as at Apamea and at Gaza, they resorted to more recent and less ecumenical celebrities, to whom glorious and often miraculous acts were then attributed. In this manner, the fabrication of deeds of local saints could also contribute to creating competing poliadic myths able to provide Christians with their own local history.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Stephen Mitchell, dir., *Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor (RECAM) II, The Ankara District: The Inscriptions of North Galatia* (Oxford, 1982), 179–180, no. 212: Ἁγιε Θεόδοτε βοῆθι αὐτον Ἀντωνίνου τεχνίτου Θεοδοτου ὑγία (“Saint Theodotus, help the craftsman Antoninus and Theodotus with health”). Church dedicated to martyr: RECAM 2, 180, no. 211 = Merkelbach, Stauber, *Steinepigramme aus dem Griechischen Osten* III 15/02/10: μάρτυρος ἀθλοφορήος . . . νηόν.

¹⁰¹ See Samantha Kahn Herrick, *Imagining the Sacred Past: Hagiography and Power in Early Normandy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007).

¹⁰² See Thonemann, “Abercius of Hierapolis”; Aude Busine, “The Conquest of the Past: Pagan and Christian Attitudes towards Civic History,” in David Engels, Peter Van Nuffelen, eds., *Religion and Competition in the Ancient World* (Brussels, 2014), 220–36.

¹⁰³ Joh. Chrys., *De Stat.* 21 (PG 49,217). This assertion should be understood as a reaction to the encomiastic passages devoted to the first Seleucid king by his pagan fellow citizen Libanius (*Or.* 11.77–104).

¹⁰⁴ Joh. Chrys. *De Stat.* 17 (PG 49,176): Ἐγένετο πρῶτον ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τοὺς μαθητὰς χρηματίσαι Χριστιανούς.

¹⁰⁵ See Busine, “The Conquest of the Past.”

¹⁰⁶ See Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge, 2007), 132–140; Gesa Schenke, “Creating Local History: Coptic Encomia Celebrating the Past Events,” in Papaconstantinou, ed., *Writing “True Stories,”* 21–30.

The association of the wonders of martyrs and bishops with inscriptions and buildings that remained from the civic landscape was yet another way to anchor civic communities in a Christianized history. Objects and sites were among the crucial foundations on which networks of ancient social memories were constructed.¹⁰⁷ According to Menander Rhetor, praise of a city included a review of its worthwhile buildings, their physical description, and the evocation of their legendary origins.¹⁰⁸ In this way, places were used to express links between the present and the past. In Late Antiquity, urban rhetoric still played a significant role in the formation of civic identities. For instance, Libanius' description of Antioch's monuments, notably of their legendary origins, conveys his own perception of the fourth-century city, whose history belonged to a secular sphere that could be shared by pagan and Christian Antiochenes.¹⁰⁹

Competition between pagans and Christians led to an instrumentalization of the local past through which each faction enforced its ideal of the city. From this perspective, it is worth noting that the origins of a building could sometimes be subject to conflicting explanations. For instance, it was said that the church Irene, in Gaza, owed its name to a place called "Peace" (εἰρήνη), because the fight started by Alexander the Great during the takeover of the city had ended at that point. The author of the *Life of Porphyry* adheres to another, more Christianizing, explanation according to which this church had been founded by an eponymous bishop, Irenion (Εἰρηνίων).¹¹⁰ These divergent stories for a single site in the city reflect the rivalries among the different religious communities committed to appropriating both civic space and history.¹¹¹

All this goes to show that in Late Antiquity as in former times, cities' landmarks were inserted into a past that helped define the civic community. Rooting stories in local topography was an age-old practice in the ancient world.¹¹² But the Christians used these traditional methods of storytelling to

¹⁰⁷ Simon R. F. Price, "Memory and Ancient Greece," in Dignas, Smith, *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World*, 15–36 at 17, 21–22.

¹⁰⁸ Menander Rhetor, 1.353–359. See Laurent Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain* (Paris, 1993), 209–210; Jean Bouffartigue, "La tradition de l'éloge de la cité dans le monde grec," in Claude Lepelley, ed., *La fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale* (Bari, 1996), 43–58.

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Saliou, "Antioche décrite par Libanios: La rhétorique de l'espace urbain et ses enjeux au milieu du quatrième siècle," in Eugenio Amato, ed., *Approches de la troisième sophistique: Hommages à Jacques Champ* (Brussels, 2006), 273–285; Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 160–169.

¹¹⁰ *VPorph.* 18.

¹¹¹ See Claire Sotinel, "La sphère profane dans l'espace urbain," in Éric Rebillard, Claire Sotinel, eds., *Les frontières du profane dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Rome, 2010), 320–349.

¹¹² See Simon R. F. Price, "Local mythologies in the Greek East," in Christopher Howgego, Volker Heuchert, Andrew A. M. Burnett, eds., *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces* (Oxford, 2004), 115–124.

a new purpose. By doing so, they strove to compete with pagans on their own terrain by creating alternative legends and myths for established places of interest. As such, the reuse and reinterpretation of visible stones, including temples, whether destroyed or converted into churches, can be seen as Christians' attempt to create their own local history and to shape new civic identities.

Conclusion

From all this, it follows that some accounts of temple destruction, besides their possible documentary value, partake of an attempt to provide emblematic monuments in late antique cities with a Christianized history. Discussion above has revealed different mythmaking processes, from the elaboration of a legend based on a historical event to the creation of foundation myths. In all cases reviewed, the destiny of existing buildings was linked to the lives of illustrious characters related to the past of the city. As the action involved the extermination of a demon from a site, these local heroes were depicted as holy destroyers of idols, whose violent actions were part of the divine plan.

The etiological reading of the hagiographical sources examined here prompted an investigation of the formulation and aims of local legends. To reinvent their local, albeit recent, history, hagiographers elaborated their own Christianized foundation myths. The deeds of local, sometimes lesser-known saints were thus created through recycling of material evidence from the past that was still visible in Christianizing cities. To this end, a wide range of ancient monuments, civilian and religious, pagan and Christian, were granted a new literary life. The *interpretatio christiana* of stones aimed at creating new local histories able to compete with deeply rooted poliadic myths; but it also provided new etiologies to a civic landscape that at that time was still imbued with Greco-Roman mythology and pre-Christian history.

In addition to the prevailing theme of religious violence that they convey, temple destruction narratives can also be placed alongside more positive and less tragic discourses on buildings. Seen from this angle, these texts provide new insights into the processes of the constitution of civic identities in the Christian Roman East. Recounting the tragic fate of magnificent civic temples was one way among many for Christians to adopt and appropriate the glorious past and the urban setting of the cities within which they hoped to take their place.

*Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS)
Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)*